WILDLANDS AND WILDERNESS TEAM

EIGHT STEP GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING AND REVIEWING WILDERNESS LEGISLATION

With law, words matter. Our allies and opponents are all working hard to claim the authority of legal sentences. Hopefully you’re at the ground floor of those conversations but wherever you enter them we hope this guide will help maximize the Sierra Club’s contribution.

All wilderness legislation begins with the Wilderness Act (THE ACT). Contemporary bills usually contain modifiers most of which serve to weaken the conservation potential of the law. This guide will help you apply Sierra Club policy and practice to the development of wilderness legislation and let you know what the Wildlands Team will be looking at when/if it reviews your bill as part of the Sierra Club’s process to determine an official position -- yea, nay, or in between -- on the bill affecting the land and habitat you are striving to serve.

We are influencers in the Congressional process, not deciders. Though subject to influence until voted upon, Congress writes the law (see number 4, below).

Success is more likely with a coordinated approach involving Chapters, national volunteer leaders, and field & policy staff. The Wildlands Team is prepared to do its part.

APPLICABLE SIERRA CLUB POLICIES

1) Strive to assure the proposal is in compliance with Sierra Club’s wilderness related policies:

   a) Wilderness Management;
   b) Fixed Anchors in Wilderness;
   c) Fire Management on Public Lands;
   d) Climate Resilience especially Section 7 “Wildlands and Natural Environment Climate Adaptation”.

2) Strive to act consistently with the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing as mandated by the Board of Directors. The Sierra Club strives to build power through grassroots organizing and movement building as guided by these principles which should be an element of efforts to get the strongest possible Wilderness legislation.

   Public Lands in general, indeed the entire United States, are traditional lands of indigenous Nations. It is a fundamental element of justice to ensure that Tribal Nations, for whom the land in question lies within their traditional areas, be included in the development of wilderness and public lands legislation. See the Wildlands Team’s Guidance on the Jemez Principles. Other helpful documents include the Wildlands Teams’ Wilderness Advisory and Sierra Club’s Movement Organizing Manual.

3) Remember to review other Sierra Club Policies that may be pertinent. Wilderness legislation is often embedded in proposals involving other aspects of public lands use and management. Is the proposal in compliance with Sierra Club’s related policies:

   a) Grazing on Public Lands;
   b) Land Exchanges;
c) **Off-Road Vehicles**;  
d) **Off Road Use of Bicycles**;  
e) **End Commercial Logging** and its accompanying implementation guidance;  
f) **Carbon Policy for Forest, Wild Areas, and Other Lands**;  

4) Sierra Club’s decision making process on Federal Legislation is subject to the [Jurisdiction Policy](#) and the WILD Campaign’s Decision Making Protocol whereby Chapters, pertinent G.N. Team(s), and national staff make recommendations to the V.P. of Conservation and staff equivalent who determine the final position.

**LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS TO SCRUTINIZE**

5) Make sure Wilderness Study Areas are not negated. BLM Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are an agency management designation protecting wilderness character which can only be undone by an act of Congress. WSAs should be considered the floor of acreage designations in any wilderness legislation. WSA acreage should be excluded from legislation only if:

   a) It **can** be demonstrated that it no longer retains wilderness character and  
   b) It is replaced in the legislation with an equal or greater amount of acreage.

6) Be sure to review the “House Report” references within the bill to insure it is in compliance with Sierra Club Policy before agreeing to its inclusion in the legislation. It’s preferable not to include such language but it’s unfortunately become fairly standard. One in particular to look out for is House Report 98-40 the fire management sections which authorizes various pre-suppression activities including the possibility of road-building in wilderness.

7) Carefully scrutinize management language so as to:

   a) avoid granting agencies exemptions from the [minimum tool standard](#) of wilderness management including the use of vehicles for management purposes;  
   b) avoid enabling Fire pre-suppression activities not in compliance with Sierra Club’s Fire Management Policy;  
   c) assure that provisions giving special exemptions to the Act for particular recreation activities are not included.

8) Work to avoid special provisions adding to or diverting from the Wilderness Act. These may seem appropriate for a particular locale but too frequently become precedents for other legislation in other locations where those provisions are less appropriate. If it is politically necessary to incorporate structures for wildlife management or fire pre-suppression provisions into legislation due to proximity of proposed wilderness to centers of human population, you may want to consider alternative protective designations for some portion of the area.