



Long-Awaited Ventana Wild and Scenic River Legislation Introduced to Congress

The VWA joins state and national conservation groups in praising Congressman Sam Farr's (California 17th District) introduction of critical legislation to assure the protection of biological and recreational resources on federal lands in the Ventana Region and Big Sur Coast. The VWA worked closely with Farr's office and other conservation organizations to frame and develop this legislation. **The Big Sur Forest Service Management Unit Act** would implement multiple measures to protect public lands in the northern Santa Lucia Mountains, including:

- Designation of over 90 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers including portions of the Arroyo Seco, San Antonio and Carmel Rivers, as well as Big Creek
- The designation of the Horse Canyon and Horse Pasture additions to the Ventana Wilderness Area, along with several technical boundary adjustments, resulting in a net increase of approximately 2,000 acres of federally designated Wilderness
- Establishment of the Jeff Norman Botanical Area, a plant community rich in endemic maritime chaparral on National Forest lands immediately south of Pfeiffer Beach
- Establishment of the Big Sur Management Unit (BSMU), which would replace the Monterey Ranger District and provide greater management and budgetary autonomy necessary to address concerns unique to the

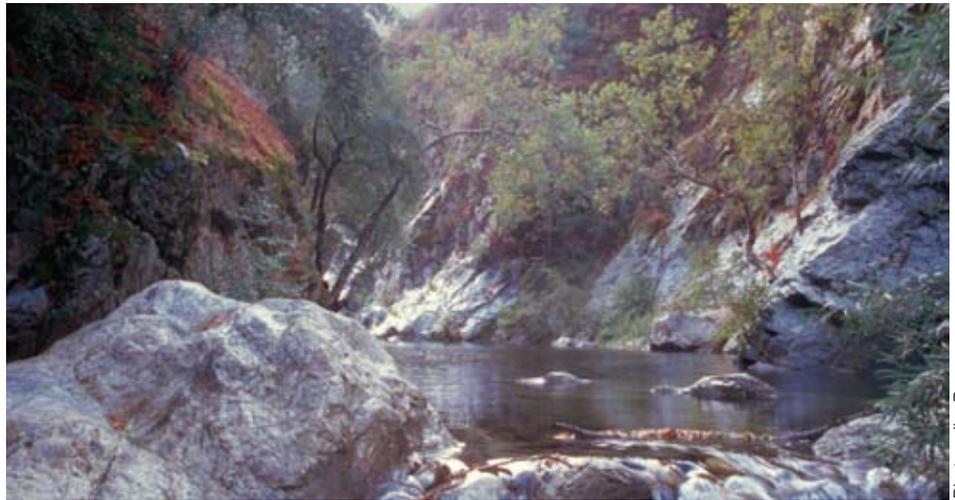


Photo: Jim Rose

Farr's legislation would protect portions of four Ventana region rivers including this section of the Arroyo Seco River.

- disjunct northern unit of Los Padres National Forest
- Designation of the BSMU as a Wildland Urban Interface Special Study Area with the requirement that a Fire Management Plan be created within one year, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act
- Conversion of the closed Arroyo Seco - Indians Road to the Arroyo Seco - Indians National Recreational Trail, a public thoroughfare offering unparalleled opportunities for hiking, equestrian use, bicycling and other forms of non-motorized recreation

Ventana Wilderness Alliance President Tom Hopkins provided this statement upon learning of the introduction: "This legislation will provide permanent protection for several of the last free-flowing wild rivers in the Ventana Region and implement other safeguards to protect these public wild lands and rivers for future generations. We all thank Congressman Sam Farr for his visionary leadership to protect the Big Sur Coast and Ventana backcountry."

Thinking about joining the VWA? Why not today?

You may have noticed the remittance envelope enclosed in this edition of the VWA newsletter. While grant support directly funds many VWA stewardship projects, we depend on members like you for day-to-day operations. More members also means a greater voice of advocacy for the future of healthy wild lands here on California's central coast, so please don't hesitate to begin or renew your VWA membership today. You can also join or renew online at www.ventanawild.org/join.html. Tell a friend!

The mission of the

Ventana Wilderness Alliance

is to protect, preserve, and restore the wilderness qualities and biodiversity of the public lands within California's northern Santa Lucia mountains and Big Sur Coast.

VWA Welcomes New District Ranger and Thanks John Bradford For His Service

John Bradford retired from his post as District Ranger of the Monterey Ranger District of the Los Padres National Forest in July 2009. John was a 31-year veteran of the Forest Service and served as District Ranger on the MRD since 2001. He is rumored to be enjoying his retirement as a gentleman farmer, with his wife Julie, on their spread outside Auburn, California. The Ventana Wilderness Alliance extends its appreciation to John for his years of service and cooperative efforts managing competing interests on the MRD.

Sherry Tune has been appointed new Monterey District Ranger. Sherry's most recent Forest Service position was as Deputy District Ranger on the Santa Catalina District of the Coronado National Forest in southeast Arizona where she also served as Assistant Fire Management Officer. The Ventana Wilderness Alliance welcomes Sherry to her new position on the Monterey Ranger District and looks forward to working with her on our common goals.

A Special Gathering at Hastings Reserve

More than 70 people gathered at the Hastings Reserve in Carmel Valley on October 24 to celebrate the conservation efforts of the VWA. Reserve Director Mark Stromberg kicked off the day's events with a guided natural history walk and a tour of the facilities.

After a delightful potluck lunch, VWA member Chris Lorenc offered a fascinating presentation on the historic Carrizo and Gamboa trails. Chris's presentation was augmented with vintage photographs of native Salinan families and the field notes of renowned ethnographer J.P. Harrington. The afternoon program then transitioned from the past to the present with Mike Heard's overview of the challenging Cone Peak Trails Project. Mike conveyed the project's many successes with "before and after" photos of specific trail sections and he provided up-to-date information on the ravages of the significant storm of October 13th.



Hastings Reserve Director Mark Stromberg graciously hosted the VWA Gathering.

The VWA would like to thank the following Santa Cruz businesses for donating door prizes for the Gathering: Down Works, Patagonia Outlet, Staff of Life, The Flower Shack and The Buttery.

Please join us for the next VWA Gathering on January 30th. Details will be announced via a postcard and the VWA List Serve.



Jon Libby announced door prize winners at the Gathering.

Twin Peak Summit Cleanup

On Friday, September 4, Steve Benoit, Dan Thompson, Dave Lautzenheiser and Mike Heard dismantled an illicit dry camp on the summit of Twin Peak and packed out four backpack loads of trash.



Dave, Steve and Dan packed up and ready to move out.

A "laundry list" of rubbish removed that day includes a 5-gallon bucket and its contents which served as someone's equipment cache. The bucket contained water bottles, flashlights and head nets. The intrepid cleanup crew also removed a collection of plastic tarp remains and a wooden box full of junk that they found stashed in a hollow tree. The day's work included the removal of the stump of a T-post and some wire. Finally, the guys broke up a fire ring and naturalized the site. While most of us may never get to the summit of Twin Peak, it is comforting to know the location has been returned to a wild state devoid of man's refuse.

Upcoming VWA Trail Crew Trips

Volunteers are always welcome to join the VWA Trail Crew. Here's a list of upcoming trips. Please contact Betsy (betsy@ventanawild.org) directly if you want to sign up or need more information.

Date	Leader	Location
November 28-29	Betsy MacGowan	Trail Spring to Ojito
December 5-6	Betsy MacGowan	Trail Spring to Ojito
December 12-13	Betsy MacGowan	Pine Ridge Trail

Cone Peak Trails Project Update

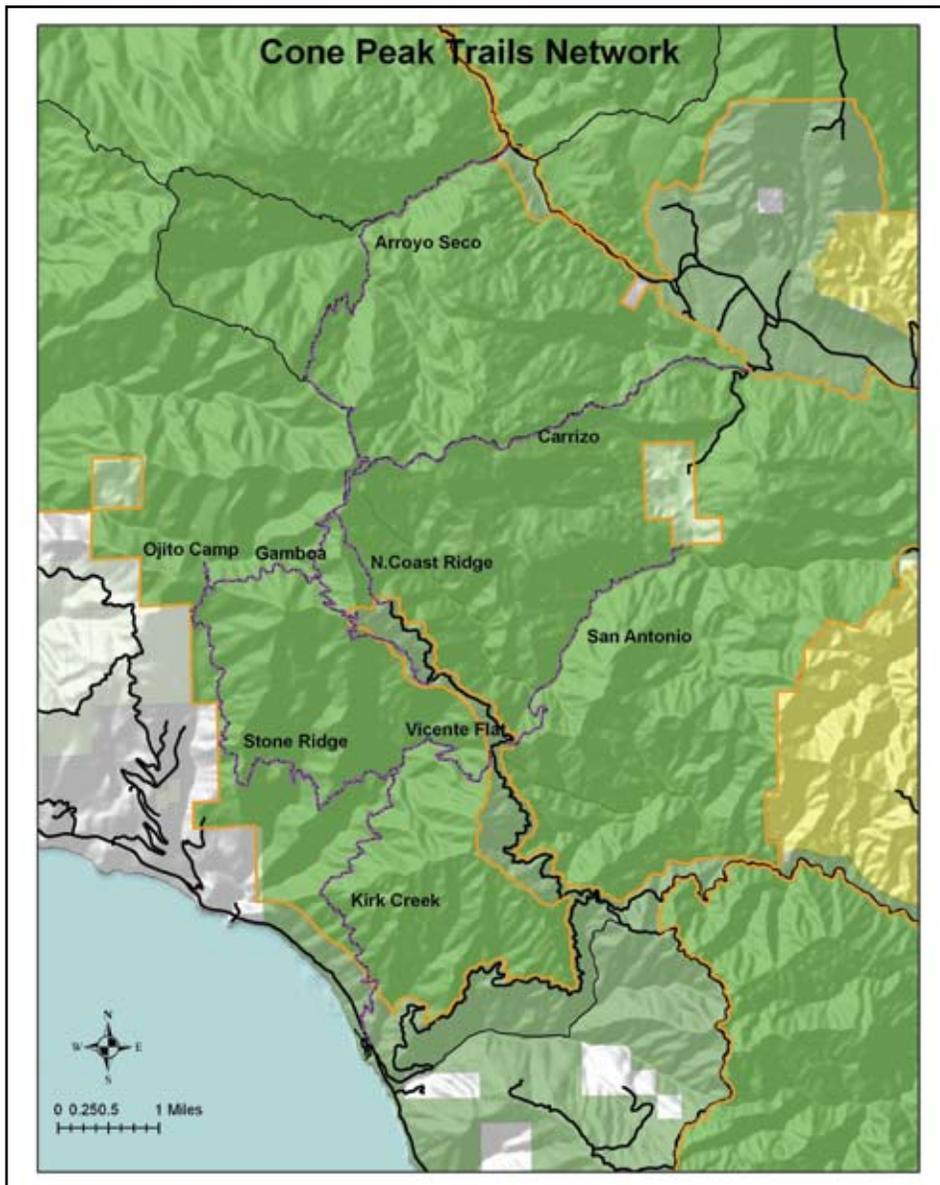
The Cone Peak Trails Project is a multi-year project spearheaded by long-time VWA Trail Crew Leader Mike Heard. The project goal is to clear and re-establish the popular Cone Peak loop and the surrounding network of trails that are in disrepair due to lack of maintenance compounded by wildfire and storm damage. See the map on this page for an overview of the area and the trails being rehabilitated.

Mike recently presented a comprehensive overview of the project at the VWA Fall Gathering. Mike's PowerPoint slides from this presentation can be downloaded at the VWA website at www.ventanawild.org/trails/trailssuccess.html. The slides dramatically illustrate the successes achieved via "before and after" photographs of



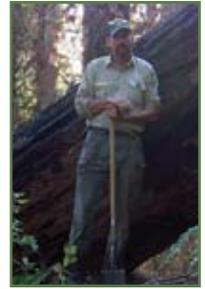
Mike Heard was honored as Volunteer of the Year at the 6th Annual Chuck Haugen Conservation Fund Picnic in September.

specific sections of trail. Much work remains and we encourage your support of this project by volunteering hours or by donating dollars to the VWA earmarked for the trail crew.



VWA Volunteer Profile: Steve Benoit

A wide variety of people volunteer with the VWA. Our volunteers offer a diverse range of talents and experiences. In this issue of Ventana Wilderness Watch, we talk with Steve Benoit.



The skills Steve developed as a California Department of Forestry firefighter and a Forest Service backcountry ranger and trail builder are a great benefit to many VWA projects. Steve lives with his wife Beth in Del Rey Oaks and their son Nathan lives in Monterey.

How did you come to love and appreciate the Ventana region?

I come from a long line of campers. My parents and grandparents and extended family would camp for a month every summer in Yosemite from the time I was a toddler. My first trip in the Ventana Wilderness was at age 8 when my family took a pack trip into Barlow Flats. I was lucky growing up because the Ventana was out my back door. Before I had my driver's license my mom would drive me and my friends to a trail head and drop us off for camping trips.

Please tell us about your Boy Scout experience.

Our assistant scout master was a larger-than-life fellow who loved to backpack and was always up for a challenging hike. He loved campfires, amazing camping food and the latest gear. That would be my dad. George St. Claire and Jeff Norman were two enthusiastic survivors of many of these lively backcountry adventures. I have to say that Pico Blanco, the scout camp in the heart of the Ventana, was a perfectly magical place to spend one's youth.

What have you learned about the northern Santa Lucias as a firefighter? What have been some of your most memorable experiences as a firefighter?

After the 1977 Marble Cone fire the USFS in Washington decided to pull firefighting funds from Los Padres with the logic that the forest couldn't possibly burn again anytime soon. Needless to say, the forest was ready to burn the very next year. As we all know, the brush grows back phenomenally fast. I've learned that bulldozers create irreparable damage

when making fire breaks. Blue Rock Ridge was destroyed by bulldozers in the Marble Cone fire and is now gone forever. I would like to see bulldozers banned from the interior of the Wilderness.

My scariest experience as a firefighter came in a flat field of thick brush in the southern Los Padres when a wind shift pushed a fire burning 6,000 acres per hour with fire plumes 20,000 feet into the air. We had just enough time to clear a safety zone and set a fire around our perimeter to increase the size of our safety zone before the fire could engulf us.

What led you to work for the USFS? What is your current role with the USFS?

I retired in 2002 from Cal Fire after 33 years. Of course, I had been hiking all that time in the Ventana Wilderness and saw how much work needed to be done in the Forest. I learned about the USFS Volunteer Wilderness Steward program and signed up as a volunteer in 1987. One thing led to another and in 2007 I was asked to do my volunteer work for pay with regular hours and in uniform. My biggest challenge is to educate people about "Leave No Trace" camping.

I currently work 5 days a week, 40-90 hours a week (often overnight in the backcountry) for 3-6 months in the spring and summer. Some might think I am a typically lazy and overpaid government worker. My worn out equipment and broken down body will tell a different story.

Why do you volunteer with the VWA?

I remember the trails in the 1960's and 1970's as being wide and clear and easy to follow. Nothing brushed against you or your pack. The trails have suffered terrible neglect since the 1970's. I've been clearing trails with my friends for years. The work is even more satisfying with the VWA equipment and organization ... plus a body of willing and enjoyable volunteer workers. In addition, I became hooked on crosscut sawing after my first trip with Robert Parks and I am now a USFS certified sawyer.

How do you like to spend your time when you are not in the backcountry?

I like to clear fallen trees from my wife's walking trail in Jacks Peak and clear my dad's walking trail in Pebble Beach. I have volunteered for 25 years as a window-cleaning scuba diver at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. I was a rescue swimmer/diver for the Pacific Grove Ocean Rescue until the organization went belly up.

VWA Launches Youth in Wilderness Program



Photo: Greg Meyer

Students from CSUMB at Silver Peak camp on the Cruikshank trail.

With generous start-up funding from the Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation, the VWA is set to launch the Youth in Wilderness program in 2010. Our goal is to provide overnight backcountry wilderness experience for up to 75 area youth in the first year. The program will partner with area schools, youth organizations, and community groups to serve economically and culturally disadvantaged youth who have had less opportunity for backcountry wilderness experiences.

Leading the VWA Youth in Wilderness program is naturalist and educator Greg Meyer. Greg has been hiking in the Ventana wilderness since 1975. He holds BA and MA degrees in Environmental

Studies and has been an instructor in the Outdoor Education and Recreation program at California State University Monterey Bay since 1996. Greg and some of his CSUMB students have previously participated in VWA trail maintenance and grow site stewardship projects.

Volunteers are needed to fully implement our Youth in Wilderness program. If you have experience working with young people in outdoor education or just a strong interest in the success of this program and would like to volunteer, please contact Greg Meyer at: greg@ventanawild.org.



Naturalist and educator Greg Meyer will lead the VWA Youth in Wilderness program.

Grantmakers Support an Extended Array of VWA Stewardship Programs

Despite an exceptionally difficult economic climate, the VWA has continued to advance its mission throughout 2009. Our operating costs, including outreach and development costs, are accomplished through the generous contributions of members. But most of our programs simply wouldn't be possible without project-specific grant support from a variety of sources. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank the following grantmakers who have made 2009 our most productive year yet. The Monterey Bay Aquarium Conservation Action Fund, The Rose Foundation's Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund, and Tides Foundation's California Wildlands Grassroots Fund provided the VWA with

grants sufficient to launch an comprehensive campaign to survey abandoned mine hazards in and near the Silver Peak Wilderness. Special thanks are in order to the Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation, which provided financial support for several projects, including Youth in Wilderness and Cone Peak Trails restoration. The Community Foundation for Monterey County was also kind enough to match Fernandez funds ear-marked for a much-needed server and software upgrade in the VWA office. And most recently, a grant for restoration of the Turner Creek Trail was awarded to the VWA by the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District.

3 Ways to Support the VWA

Individual Retirement Accounts

If you are age 70½ or older, you can make a direct charitable gift to the Ventana Wilderness Alliance of up to \$100,000 from your IRA without having to pay federal taxes on the withdrawal. If your spouse has a separate IRA account, each of you can make up to \$100,000 in gifts. This special provision is available at least through the end of 2009. Charitable gifts from IRAs in 2009 are not subject to limitations on your itemized deductions. Furthermore, such a gift will qualify for the "required minimum distribution" from your IRA.

Gifts of Stock

The Ventana Wilderness Alliance is now accepting gifts of stock through Charles Schwab or your preferred broker. The benefit of donating stock is that you receive an immediate income tax deduction for the fair market value of the securities on the transfer date to VWA, no matter what you originally paid for them. You also pay no capital gains tax on the securities you donate. Further details regarding a stock gift transaction are available on request.

Planned Legacy Giving

Gifts to the VWA through your will or living trust will help insure that our mission to protect the wilderness qualities and biodiversity of the Ventana Region and Big Sur coast will continue for future generations. We would be pleased to provide you or your estate planner with further details.

As with all financial, tax and estate planning matters, it is recommended that you consult qualified advisors prior to concluding any transaction. For further information regarding stock, IRA and legacy gifts to the VWA, please contact Tom Hopkins at 831-429-9010.

Western Wilderness Conference Next Year in Berkeley

In May of 2000 wilderness lovers, advocates and activists gathered at Sacramento State University for the California Wilderness Conference 2000. Scores of local, regional and national wilderness and conservation organizations participated in the conference and thousands of wilderness activists attended the three-day event. The Conference was filled with cutting edge workshops, training sessions, panel discussions and public addresses by such wilderness luminaries as Dave Foreman and the late David Brower.

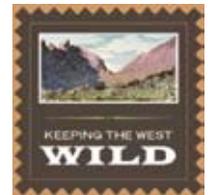
That 2000 conference was a seminal event for the Ventana Wilderness Alliance. All five VWA founding board members

(Gordon Johnson, Steve Chambers, Boon Hughey, Jon Libby and Tom Hopkins) attended the conference. In fact, the first VWA board meeting was held during the conference in a coffee shop across the street from the SSU campus where the VWA by-laws were ratified and the first slate of officers was elected. Relationships were forged at the 2000 conference between the fledgling VWA leadership and the larger community of wilderness activists that endure today and made possible many of the VWA's subsequent successes.

If you missed the 2000 conference, do not despair, you have another chance to participate in wilderness history in

the making. The Western Wilderness Conference 2010 is scheduled to be held April 8-11, 2010 on the UC Berkeley campus.

Mark your calendars now and for more information visit: <http://www.westernwilderness.org/>. These conferences are held only every ten years. The 2010 conference will be a powerful gathering of local, regional and national wilderness leaders and thousands of grass-roots activists to lay plans and craft strategies for the coming decade. If wilderness is part of your way of life – don't miss it!



VWA at the REI Store in Marina

The REI store in Marina hosted a "Get Involved!" Open House on Wednesday, October 21st. Our Bob Dawson was there along with other Monterey Bay area non-profits to inform the public about the VWA's stewardship initiatives.



Board member and Outreach Coordinator Bob Dawson at the REI in Marina.

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EVENTS

January 30, 2010

VWA Winter Gathering
at the MBEST Center in
Marina

April 8-11, 2010

Western Wilderness
Conference 2010,
Berkeley, CA



Photo: Jim Rose

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Join our new and improved Forum at the VWA website, www.ventanawild.org. Click on “Forum” in the toolbar.



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