

South Sierra Additions (West) Potential Recommended Wilderness Sequoia National Forest

This recommendation was derived from Wilderness Evaluation Polygon #1391

Number of Acres

Approximately 4,240 acres.

Location and Description of Recommended Boundary

This potential recommended wilderness being considered for further analysis as additions to the existing South Sierra Wilderness consists of 4 areas that are contiguous with the western, southern and southeastern boundary of the existing South Sierra Wilderness, and primarily consists of areas that are in inventoried roadless areas. The potential additions include:

- An area to the northwest of the existing South Sierra Wilderness that is bordered by the wilderness on its east side and from the wilderness boundary at the north end follows ridgelines south, beginning at Beck Meadows traveling the 8,000 foot contour, including Broder Meadow to Jackass Peak, where the boundary meets the existing wilderness boundary again on the south end near Jackass Peak.
- An area beginning at the existing South Sierra Wilderness boundary just south of Jackass Peak, bordered on the east by the existing wilderness. The north end of the western boundary follow from the existing wilderness south along a 75-foot setback from the Jackass National Recreational Trail to a 100 foot setback from Forest Service Road 21S29 to a 200 foot setback from the Sherman Pass Road (Forest Service Road 22S05). The southern end of the area cuts back east to the existing wilderness boundary from the Sherman Pass Road in the area on the 9,000 ridgelines extending from the existing boundary to the borrow pit and corrals at Sherman Pass Road across from Rodeo Flats.
- An area adjacent to the southern boundary of the South Sierra Wilderness. The boundary of the potential addition begins just south of Rodeo Flat and follows a 200 foot setback from Sherman Pass Road, south and then east to the Kern Wild and Scenic River.
- An area east of the existing South Sierra Wilderness. The boundary on the western side is the existing South Sierra Wilderness boundary. The boundary on the eastern side of the potential recommended area follows a 100 foot setback from the road to the Kennedy Meadows Campground and includes a 500-foot setback around the Kennedy Meadow Campground. From there, it continues north to the existing wilderness boundary.

The boundary supports management of the area as potential wilderness because of the following:

- Visitors would be able to locate the boundary on both a map and on the ground.

- The boundary minimizes the potential for motorized incursions into wilderness because the boundary is offset from roads the public can locate both on maps and on the ground.
- The boundary excludes existing motorized trails.
- The potential new boundary would be a combination of the existing wilderness boundary, natural features and setbacks from roads.

General Geography, Topography and Vegetation

The western additions include ridgelines running north to south and reaching 9,000 feet in elevation forming a geological barrier for the existing South Sierra Wilderness. Jackass Peak is a distinctive granitic landmark over 9,000 feet in elevation. The northernmost potential addition would include a portion of Broder Meadow, a high elevation wet meadow which spreads out under a ridgeline reaching over 8,000 feet. The vegetation cover type is predominately conifer/mixed conifer with wet meadows.

The southern boundary is a narrow strip between Sherman Pass Road and the existing wilderness, including Bitter Creek, and traveling to Kennedy Meadow at the southeast corner. The South Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River shapes the boundary extensions to the east. Here the elevation drops to 6,000 feet and the desert influence changes from mixed conifer to pinyon juniper and shrubland with wet meadows and annual grass. The topography is characterized as Eastern Sierra escarpment with steep slopes and forested canyons.

Current Uses

Current primitive recreation activities in this area include hiking, backpacking and horseback riding on several forest system trails that cross the polygon and access the South Sierra Wilderness. Deer hunting in the fall and fishing on the South Fork Kern River are also primitive activities in the area.

The western portions of the area are within the Fish Creek Grazing Allotment, which extends into the existing South Sierra Wilderness, and the Monache grazing allotment on the Inyo National Forest. A small portion in the southeast along the South Fork Kern River is also within the Fish Creek Grazing Allotment. Grazing-related improvements within the area include boundary fences, erosion and meadow rehabilitation structures at multiple meadows. The Wildrose area was historically grazed and has several improvements, but is not currently in use for grazing (Inyo National Forest).

Wilderness Characteristics and the Ability to Protect and Manage the Area so as to Preserve Wilderness Characteristics

The area in the east has high ecological integrity reflecting conditions that would normally be associated with an area absent of human intervention. There are minimal impacts to plant communities. There is some cheatgrass. The area west of the South Sierra Wilderness has moderate ecological integrity with moderate impacts to meadows from grazing and off highway vehicle use in adjacent areas along roads and motorized trails. The area moderately reflects conditions that would normally be associated with an area absent of human intervention.

Fire regimes are mixed and fires appear to be occurring within natural fire regime. Mixed conifer tends to have frequent return, low intensity fires, while pinyon tends to burn infrequently at high intensity in wind driven events. There have been recent fires, but not too large or severe. Several were allowed to burn for resource benefit. There is very little impact from humans within this area on wildlife. The area does provide contiguous wildlife habitat.

The addition contains true Mojave Desert ecosystems which are largely intact including Joshua trees, cholla cactus, creosote, healthy canyon live oak ecosystems and pinyon-juniper.

The potential for encounters with other visitors is low to medium, with most of the use focused around adjacent roads, trails and the river corridor. Current primitive recreation activities in this area include hiking, backpacking and horseback riding on several forest system trails that cross the polygon and access the South Sierra Wilderness. Deer hunting in the fall and fishing on the South Fork Kern River are also primitive activities in the area. There are opportunities for wildlife observation, photography and enjoying nature. The potential for encounters with other visitors is low, based on the low number of current visitors to the South Sierra Wilderness. Roads and off highway vehicle use in surrounding areas reduce opportunities for solitude in portions of the areas, however, the topography and elevation, and the proximity to the extensive existing wilderness, provide opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation. The degree of challenge is similar to the adjacent wilderness.

Other features of value include cultural resources consisting of multiple tribal village sites that form a continuous network approximately a quarter mile wide from Kennedy Meadows to Monache. Historically, Monache, Broder and other associated meadows were also extensive trading and summer village sites.

The area could be manageable as wilderness because the potential new boundary would be a combination of the existing wilderness boundary, natural features and setbacks from roads and would make wilderness boundaries easy to locate on a map or in the field using identifiable points in the landscape.

Summary of Factors Considered in the Selection of this Area

Forest staff considered the presence and extent of wilderness qualities, manageability and the significance of the area in the context of the entire Sequoia National Forest in selecting this area to analyze as a potential recommendation as wilderness additions to the existing South Sierra Wilderness.

- The potential new boundary would be a combination of the existing wilderness boundary, natural features and setbacks from roads, and would make wilderness boundaries easy to locate on a map or in the field using identifiable points in the landscape.
- Potential permanent protection of this unit as wilderness would leave only the Forest Road 22S0 corridor, with 200-foot setbacks on either side, between the South Sierra Wilderness and Domeland Wildernesses. Establishing nearly contiguous wilderness protects movement of wildlife and the quality of visitor experiences in the area.
- This potential addition to wilderness would support conservation efforts within Southern Sierra Fisher conservation area and in the Fish Creek South Fork Kern critical aquatic refuge.
- The area would protect high ecological integrity in true Mojave Desert ecosystems which are largely intact. This polygon presents an opportunity to protect over 3,500 acres of ecological

groups that may be minimally represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The many intact and unique vegetation features contribute to the area's wilderness characteristics.

- These areas potentially, if designated, could extend the opportunity for solitude and the opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation from the adjacent existing wilderness.