

# Monarch Wilderness Addition Potential Recommended Wilderness Area Sierra National Forest

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*This recommendation was derived from Wilderness Evaluation Polygon #1378*

## **Number of Acres**

Approximately 25,800 acres.

## **Location and Description of Recommended Boundary**

The potential recommended wilderness is an inventoried roadless area located at the southern end of the Sierra National Forest adjacent to the Sequoia National Forest. The north, west and east boundaries of the area are identical to the boundaries of the Sierra National Forest portion of the existing Kings River Special Management Area. The southern boundary excludes Road 12S01 along the Kings River and road 12S01A. East of the end of Road 12S01, the boundary follows the Kings Wild and Scenic River. The area is bordered on the east by the Monarch Wilderness.

- 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 and follows the existing Monarch Wilderness, Kings River National Recreation Area, and proclaimed Sierra National Forest boundaries that the public can locate both on maps and on the ground.
- Lands adjacent to the recommended wilderness are managed by the Forest Service.

## **General Geography, Topography and Vegetation**

The area generally slopes downward from Rodgers Ridge south to the Kings Wild and Scenic River. The area is characterized by steep and rugged terrain. Elevations range from 1,000 feet below Rodgers Crossing to over 10,000 feet at Spanish Mountain on the current boundary of the Monarch Wilderness. Overall vegetation includes brush and wooded slopes rising steeply out of the river canyons with vegetation transitions from chaparral through oak-conifer to mixed conifers at higher elevations.

## **Current Uses**

The area contains approximately 14 miles of non-motorized trails lightly used by day hikers, hunters and anglers. The Kings River National Recreation Trail may occasionally be used by mountain bikers. The majority of the area is not currently being grazed with the exception of the Garlic Meadow area, which is part of the active Collins Allotment, currently grazed by 130 cow-calf pair from June through September.

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

This potential recommended wilderness area is significant in that it protects connectivity between very low elevations to the west and the high country of the Monarch Wilderness and Kings Canyon National Park to the east. The large elevational gradient facilitates species migration and encompasses a variety of ecological zones that are less common in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The area is manageable for preservation of wilderness characteristics due to its larger size and rugged terrain. This area retains undeveloped, natural, untrammled, solitude and primitive recreation qualities sufficient to constitute adequate wilderness character if designated as wilderness by Congress. The overall character of the area appears natural and has ecological integrity. Hydrologic, soils, riparian, stream and meadow conditions are good. The area is important for habitat connectivity for the Pacific fisher, several species of slender salamander, mountain yellow-legged frogs and the soon to be reintroduced Kern River rainbow trout. Given the steepness of the topography, there is minimal off-trail recreational use. The area has high opportunities for solitude due to its large size, although most public use is focused on the few existing trails and the Kings River. There are good opportunities for challenge and self-reliance in this area.

This area presents an opportunity to protect low-elevation ecological groups that may be minimally represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Such groups include California Central Valley mixed oak savanna, California lower montane blue oak-foothill pine woodland, Mediterranean California mixed oak woodland, Mediterranean California mesic mixed conifer forest and woodland, and Northern and Central California dry-mesic chaparral. The area also contains a rare plant, the Kings River buckwheat (*Eriogonum nudum* var. *regirivum*) on limestone and marble outcrops (Forest Service sensitive species). The area was noted for its significant old-growth forest in the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project Report.

This area is culturally sensitive and is considered a special interest area from tribes in the area including: Cold Springs Rancheria of Mono Indians, Big Sandy Rancheria of Mono Indians, Dunlap Band of Mono Indians and Tule River Indian Reservation and the Haslett Basin Traditional Committee (Holkoma Mono).

The proposed area is moderately manageable due to its relatively large size and the prominent geographic boundary largely defined by Rodgers Ridge and the Kings River. Little non-conforming use and the overall ruggedness of the area increase the feasibility of preserving wilderness qualities. However, the area has the potential for large fires that are likely to be aggressively suppressed due to the proximity to hydropower infrastructure on the North Fork Kings River. This potential recommendation excludes portions of the original evaluation polygon where the manageability of the area would have been compromised by the difficult configuration of the evaluation polygon boundary. Additionally, portions of the original evaluation polygon that are outside of the Sierra National Forest proclaimed boundary have been excluded.

## **Summary of the 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 Sierra National Forest in selecting this area to analyze as a potential recommendation as wilderness.

- This area retains undeveloped, natural, untrammeled, solitude and primitive recreation qualities sufficient to constitute adequate wilderness character if designated as wilderness by Congress.
- Little non-conforming use and the overall ruggedness of the area increase the feasibility of preserving wilderness qualities.
- The potential recommended area is manageable as wilderness due to its relatively large size and the prominent geographic boundary largely defined by Rodgers Ridge and the Kings River.
- The area is significant in that it protects connectivity between very low elevations to the west and the high country of the Monarch Wilderness and Kings Canyon National Park to the east. The large elevational gradient facilitates species migration and encompasses a variety of ecological zones that are less common in the National Wilderness Preservation System.