

## Fate of Mono County wilderness proposals up for grabs



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The Hoover Wilderness rises up behind Saddlebag Lake on the way up Tioga Pass.

MAMMOTH TIMES PHOTO/SUSAN MORNING

The proposal handed to Congressman Buck McKeon more than a year ago regarding wilderness issues in Mono County has been sitting in Washington with no movement. Until recently. “We knew that what we sent to Washington would end up with different language and different format,” said County Supervisor Hap Hazard. “The Hoover Wilderness Proposal has failed to move forward, but suddenly is now in negotiation between the staffs of Senator Barbara Boxer and Congressman McKeon.”

“I’m concerned that we are being used,” Supervisor Vikki Bauer said. “I’m concerned that they will say they have our Board’s approval when we haven’t approved anything that has come out of their office, because we haven’t seen anything from Washington.”

Three years ago Congressman Buck McKeon asked representatives from the Mono County Board of Supervisors to attend a meeting regarding current land use issues, specifically the Hoover Wilderness Proposal. The meeting took place in Death Valley and included representatives from Inyo County as well as Sally Miller from the Wilderness Society and Dick Noles, a civilian representative for Advocates for Access to Public Lands.

In that time, and even though Mono County Supervisors Hap Hazard and Byng Hunt did their due diligence and presented their findings to Congressman McKeon and his staff, in the world of Washington politics, nothing has been finalized.

According to Hazard, Wilderness Study Area (WSA) issues have been hanging in the balance since the 1980s. “Congressman McKeon suggested that with his help we could start to resolve some of the issues,” Hazard said. “He said if we came up with a local bill, he had the ability to carry it back to Washington for legislative resolution.”

At the May 13 Mono County Board of Supervisors meeting the supervisors seemed

concerned that they had been misled on what the meeting three years ago with Congressman McKeon was supposed to be about. "This issue is about motorized access vs. non-motorized access," said Supervisor Byng Hunt. Along with Hazard, Hunt spent close to a year pounding out the Hoover Compromise.

"We were directed to look at all the WSAs," Hazard said. "There are 13 in Mono County and another handful in Inyo County. Regarding the Hoover Wilderness Proposal, we discussed whether or not that area should be open or closed to snowmobile activity. So far, the U.S. Forest Service hasn't made a decision on it, so they closed it, pending their decision." Other organizations such as the Marines and the Pacific Crest Trail groups were asked to contribute to the discussions. "We asked them what their legal requirements were for them to manage the land as marines, and regarding the Pacific Crest Trail group we asked what mandates they had from Congress because the trail is mandated by the government," Hazard said.

The representatives came up with approximately 40,000 acres for wilderness and about 10,000 acres for snowmobile use. "We agreed on how to prevent violations in wilderness areas and discussed the snowmobiling season," Hazard said. "We took the proposal back to the Board of Supervisors in August 2005, had public hearings, and when we had consensus on both sides, it was approved by the Board 5-0 and then it was sent on to Congressman McKeon."

Supervisor Bill Reid received many calls asking him to support the wilderness bill. "I'm asked to support something I'm not clear about," Reid said. "But if Boxer gets her way at the election, there's a chance she'll 'gut the Hoover' that you (Hazard and Hunt) all worked so hard on."

Supervisor Hazard is asking McKeon's staff for highly detailed maps to see the areas they are talking about. They have also told representatives from Senator Boxer's office that the Board of Supervisors needs detailed maps as well. "There are many of the same issues lingering between the folks wanting to have motorized use and those wanting wilderness," Hazard said.

"I continue to support national recreation areas and working on how we can get the two sides to work together. We are trying to balance best protections and best use of our land in Mono County but know that Washington has the ability to create legislation that can override us and what is in the best interest in Mono County," he said. Hazard finished by saying that the Board has the responsibility to citizens of the county to have a final discussion before they get run over by Washington. A representative from Senator Feinstein's office wants to come to the board meeting on June 9 and speak before the Board about the wilderness issues in Mono County.

Natalie Ravitz, spokesperson for Sen. Boxer, concurred that representatives from Senator Boxer's office have been working with representatives from Congressman McKeon's office on the issue of wilderness areas. "We have been working on the wilderness issues for many years and there have been countless meetings with local officials," Ravitz said. "We are just having discussions as this time and we would never say we support legislation if we did not have the support of the people who run the county. We hope to put those concerns to rest."

In other county news

—Mono County Financial Director Brian Muir attended the Rural Connections meeting

in Redding which was sponsored by the California Emerging Technologies Fund. “Sixteen million dollars has been designated to get broadband into underlying areas and small towns,” Muir said. “They go to small towns to investigate the needs of broadband.” In talking with a representative from Verizon Muir told him of the recent problem with fiber optic lines being cut and the area being virtually cut off from technology. “They need to think not so much on a return of their investment but rather about a potential lawsuit when things happen like the lines getting cut and we lose 911 access.” “We’ve struggled with Verizon for years to get their attention but I think now we are finally getting their attention,” Supervisor Hazard said.

—Economic Director for Mono County Dan Lyster asked the Board of Supervisors to consider a recommendation from the Mono County Fisheries Commission (MCFC) to expend \$15,000 from the Fish and Game Fine Fund for the purchase of brown and rainbow trout to be stocked in various Mono County waters. Lyster told the Board that the fish would most likely be supplied by Tim Alpers. Supervisor Bill Reid brought up the fact that Tim Alpers already owes the county fish from last year which he has yet to supply into the waters of Mono County. When asked by Supervisor Hazard why the commission needs \$15,000 for more fish, Lyster said it was more of a reactionary response based on what has been said by fishermen, specifically those fishing in the Bridgeport Reservoir. “We’ve told the MCFC for years that we are not in the fish buying business,” Hazard said. “I see this as an industry bailout.”

Supervisor Reid rejected the claim that if people aren’t catching the fish, they aren’t there. “That is why this is called ‘fishing,’ not catching.”

Board decided to table the discussion for a later date.

—A resolution extending and re-establishing the Mono County Solid Waste Fee Program for FY 2008-2008 passed 5-0

—A resolution authorizing the implementation of a Solid Waste Fee Agreement with the Town of Mammoth Lakes for FY 2008-2009 passed 5-0.