

County prefers North Palisade as is

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What's in a name?

When it comes to renaming a prominent Eastern Sierra peak after an environmentalist icon, that question comes into play a lot. Should the name remain the same? Should it be named after someone who wanted his legacy and namesake associated with another peak? Should the posthumous honor go to a mountain without a moniker?

Hundreds have weighed in on both sides of the issue, and locally, Inyo County has chosen to reject the idea of renaming North Palisade Peak, west of Big Pine, after conservationist and former Sierra Club member David Brower.

The Inyo County Board of Supervisors decided on Tuesday to send a letter to Senator Dianne Feinstein officially opposing her proposal to rename the peak after Brower in recognition of his conservation work throughout the nation.

"I think there are plenty of other people we could honor, Cpl. (Wayne) Geiger for instance," said Fourth District Supervisor Jim Bilyeu on Tuesday. Geiger, a native of Lone Pine, died in combat in Iraq on Oct. 18, 2007. "If they want to rename this mountain, rename it Geiger Mountain."

Bilyeu also suggested the possibility of honoring all service personnel if the peak is to be renamed.

But the board, as a whole, agreed that North Palisade should remain as is, and said that any honors for individuals or groups should be considered for one of the hundreds of Sierra Nevada peaks that have not already been named.

"I'm against this," said Fifth District Supervisor Richard Cervantes. "The present name has stood for a long, long time" and renaming it would require the federal government to correct thousands of maps, books and pamphlets, which could cost millions of dollars. The Board of Supervisors is not alone in its opposition of naming North Palisade after Brower.

"I probably wouldn't support something like that ... I would prefer it not to be in my district," Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Visalia) told the L.A. Times. "The radical environmentalists' agenda is hurting my constituents."

In fact, the discussion regarding the renaming of North Palisade has reached far and wide, with hundreds of bulletin boards cropping up on the Internet.



Bishop resident Rose Smiley takes a break from hiking under North Palisade (left of center spire). Senator Dianne Feinstein is currently seeking to rename the mountain after former Sierra Club Executive Director David Brower. Photo by John Smiley, courtesy Rose Smiley

There are posts both for and against the proposal.

One submission, on summitpost.org, claims that Brower himself had a suggestion for his namesake before he died in 2000. According to the post, Brower wanted an underwater peak to bear his name.

“Brower is rolling in his grave. He knew there was talk about naming a peak after him, so he suggested a currently submerged massif in Lake Powell,” said Ksolem, a climber from Monrovia in a post on supertopo.com. “Renaming North Pal is a joke.”

Another post claims that, though Brower was an experienced mountaineer who summited a number of peaks in the Eastern Sierra, he never had any great love or affinity for North Palisade, so dedicating another peak in his honor would be a practical compromise.

Brower did make the first winter ascent of the peak back in 1940, but by that time the mountain had already been given several different names.

The Palisades were discovered and named by the California Geological Survey in 1864. North Palisade had been known as Mt. Winchell, Dusty Peak and Mt. Jordan, before the name North Palisade was given to the peak by Joseph LeConte after his first ascent in 1903.

Still, there are those who hail Brower as an environmental hero, and feel that he deserves to have one of California’s 14,000-plus peaks named after him.

“Naming the North Palisade Peak after David Brower is a fitting tribute to a man who loved the High Sierra and all of America’s wilderness,” Sen. Barbara Boxer, who is backing Feinstein’s proposal, said in a statement.

Yvon Chouinard, owner of Patagonia Inc. clothing company, has registered his support of the name change, along with popular climber Fred Beckey, Patagonia Vice President of

Environmental Initiatives and Special Media Projects Rick Ridgeway and climber, mountaineer and author Conrad Anker.

Brower became the first executive director of the Sierra Club in 1952 and held that post for nearly two decades, dramatically increasing the club's membership before being ousted by the club for financial mismanagement in 1969.

As head of the Sierra Club, Brower spearheaded campaigns to keep giant dams out of Dinosaur National Monument and the Grand Canyon. His advocacy led to the establishment of nine national parks and seashores, including Kings Canyon National Park, Redwoods National Park, and Point Reyes National Seashore.

Most notably, he played an instrumental role in passing the Wilderness Act of 1964.

After leaving the Sierra Club, Brower founded the League of Conservation Voters and Friends of the Earth. He led Friends of the Earth for 10 years before moving on in 1984 and creating Earth Island Institute.

In recognition of his conservation work, Brower was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Many of those who are against renaming North Palisade say advocates for the name change are going about it the wrong way and should appeal to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, which is made up of a group of civil servants from federal agencies. That board was formed to handle the naming, or renaming, of natural landscape features. "Renaming something is always a very difficult task," said First District Supervisor Linda Arcularius, before the board unanimously voted to send a letter to Feinstein outlining their concerns and opposition to the name change.