

## Table Mountain back in wilderness bill

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With the Eastern Sierra/Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act scheduled to go to the Senate on Thursday, the bill's co-authors have reincorporated Table Mountain into the mix.

At the request of the U.S. Forest Service, Table Mountain has been added back into the Wild Heritage Act by co-authors Senator Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-Santa Clarita). The addition of Table Mountain, which was removed from the bill earlier this summer as part of a compromise that allowed for the 9,000-acre White Mountain proposed wilderness, has some on edge, as recent maps include several cabins in the proposed wilderness area.

The residents who lease property that includes nine cabins near Table Mountain worked feverishly Monday to contact local legislators and express their concerns about the inclusion of the cabins and the relatively short time-frame in which they had to submit comments.

That work paid off, with the Forest Service reporting Monday afternoon that it was in the process of re-drawing the wilderness map for Table Mountain.

Table Mountain was added to the Wild Heritage Act sometime around July 16, but maps were not made available to the public until the week of July 21 and the U.S. Forest Service, which leases the cabins to private individuals, did not receive the updated maps until last Thursday, leaving only three days for that entity to comment before the Sept. 8 comment deadline.

Those maps showed six or seven private-use cabins inside the wilderness designation. At least three of the cabins that are located inside the wilderness addition are only 50-150 feet from the boundary, which Bishop resident Bob Klug, who leases property and one of the cabins from the U.S. Forest Service, said didn't follow any geographic or topographical line.

"A friend of mine who owns the pack station showed me the maps on Saturday," Klug said. "The maps had been changed on the 25th of July, and none of the cabin owners who could be losing their cabins were notified."

With comments regarding the Wild Heritage Act due Monday, Klug spent a busy weekend tracking down the lease-holders of the eight other cabins in the area to warn them of the comment deadline and encourage them to speak up on the issue.

He was able to speak with Boxer Legislative Aid Tom Bohigian, who said the inclusion of the cabins may have been an oversight. "He tried to reassure me that they have no intent of shutting down anyone's cabins or any roads," Klug said. But he added he won't rest easy until he sees something in writing that protects his cabin.

Klug said that when he contacted McKeon's staffers, he was told to submit any comments or questions via e-mail.

McKeon Press Secretary Lindsay Mask, however, told The Inyo Register that the inclusion of the cabins "was a mapping error. Mr. McKeon is 100 percent aware of it, and

private land will not be included.”

“The remapping they’re having done right now excludes the cabins, the water systems and the electrical,” said U.S. Forest Service Public Information Officer Nancy Upham. There has been much discussion regarding the inclusion or exclusion of Table Mountain since the Wild Heritage Act was proposed in June. The scenic area was initially proposed as an addition to the bill, then tabled in favor of 9,000 acres of wilderness in the White Mountains, then ultimately included in the wilderness in July at the behest of the U.S. Forest Service.

“During the meetings in Bishop (held in early July to gather citizen input about the Wild Heritage Act) they had dropped Table Mountain from the wilderness to appease the anti-wilderness people,” said Klug.

“Table Mountain was an area that was added in later on a Forest Service recommendation,” said Paul McFarland of the Friends of the Inyo. “We certainly didn’t push to have anyone’s cabin included in wilderness,” he added, speaking for the Friends. McFarland said the inclusion of the cabins could have been an easy mistake to make.

“Things like this are going to come forward more and more, and they need to be changed,” said McFarland.

If the Wild Heritage Act was passed into law including the Table Mountain cabins, the dwellings would have most likely been taken over by the Forest Service.

“Historically, you cannot have a private dwelling in the Wilderness,” Klug said.

According to McFarland, “I don’t know if there are any leased cabins in wilderness, but I do know there are ranger cabins.”

Phone calls seeking comment from Boxer’s staffers and the Advocates for Access to Public Lands were not returned as of press time Monday.

Members of the Inyo County Board of Supervisors were unavailable for comment on Monday, as they were in budget hearing meetings.