

Wilderness Stewardship Projects & Partnerships – From Designation to Stewardship A Success Story on the Mendocino National Forest

The Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act was enacted in 2006. This legislation included designation of approximately 95,000 acres of additional wilderness and wild and scenic rivers on the Mendocino National Forest. The California Wilderness Coalition (CWC) helped pass this legislation and was the primary organization behind the Act.

CWC Policy Director Ryan Henson grew up in Mendocino County and is very familiar with the newly designated wilderness areas. When funding was removed from the Act, Ryan made a commitment to the FS and BLM that he would help raise money and recruit volunteers to implement the Act. In 2008 CWC submitted a successful NFF grant application, marking the first time that the CWC itself had applied for a grant to accomplish restoration and management work. This was the first step in a multi-year effort to follow-through on a commitment to help the Mendocino NF with wilderness stewardship activities.

In addition to CWC and numerous Forest and District staff, major partners in both the 2008 and 2009 NFF grants included the Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) through their Preserving Wild California Program, the Student Conservation Association (SCA), and the BLM.

The 2008 NFF grant provided a total of \$45,000. The focus of the 2008 grant was the Yuki Wilderness. The 2009 NFF grant will provide a total of \$44,000. The focus of the 2009 grant will be the Yuki, Sanhedrin and Snow Mountain Wilderness additions.

Accomplishments achieved through the 2008 NFF Grant:

SCA Intern/Volunteer Coordinator – Recruited and coordinated volunteer stewardship activities in the Yuki wilderness. The Grant provided funding for the Intern, and the FS contributed living quarters, office space and equipment, and a vehicle. Volunteers participated in all projects listed below, except development of the map.

Boundary Signing – With the Forest Lands Officer, key locations were identified and wilderness boundaries were signed using carsonite markers with customized “Yuki Wilderness Boundary” stickers.

Recreation Site Inventory – A complete Recreation Site Inventory was conducted, and included documentation, information collection, and mapping of a total of 19 recreation sites.

Invasive Plant Inventory – Volunteers were trained to identify invasive plants, although fires burning in Northern California during the summer of 2008 precluded this activity from being completed.

Installation of Vehicle Barriers – Vehicle barriers were installed at locations where vehicle intrusions have been observed.

Construction and installation of Information Kiosks – Information Kiosks were constructed and installed at five informal trailheads/access points.

Trail GPS – Although there are very few trails (and no FS system trails) within the wilderness, informal trails with potential for future designation were gps'd and mapped.

Map – An 11” X 17” tear-off style map tablet will provide the public with a free map of the Yuki Wilderness showing key features, and will include informational text on the back side.

Accomplishments planned through the 2009 NFF Grant:

Yuki Wilderness:

- Hire a full-time intern to serve as a wilderness ranger for six months. This person will:
 - Maintain signs, kiosks and vehicle barriers that were installed in 2008;
 - Educate visitors to the Yuki about wilderness-use ethics;
 - Develop a wilderness education plan for all of the wilderness areas on the MNF;
 - Expand upon partnerships developed through the 2008 NFF Yuki grant;
 - Complete a non-native plant inventory and treating invasive plants in selected plots.

Sanhedrin Wilderness and Snow Mountain Wilderness Additions:

- Hire a full-time intern to serve as a volunteer coordinator for six months;
- Conduct an inventory of areas damaged by illegal off-highway vehicle (OHV);
- Conduct a recreation site inventory;

- Conduct a non-native plant survey;
- Post boundary signs;
- Erect educational kiosks at key points;
- Design and distribute educational materials such as free maps;
- Recruit and train volunteers to become stewards for the area.

Benefits of Hiring a Wilderness Manager

A note on the Mendocino NF Wilderness Manager position: Due to the large amount of wilderness on the Covelo Ranger District, Forest Leadership agreed to fill the vacant District Recreation Manager position with the key focus to be on wilderness management. Filling this position will allow the Forest to continue the successful efforts that have occurred within the past two years working with partners on wilderness stewardship in newly designated wilderness areas, as well as provide more focused attention on management of all other wilderness areas on the Forest. Applications are being reviewed for this position, in anticipation of filling the vacancy in the near future.