



The proposed legislation would protect this spot on Horse Mountain in Six Rivers National Forest, one of dozens of ecologically significant areas within the 326,000 acres slated for conservation. **James Adam Taylor**

[CALIFORNIA FORUM](#)

Rep. Jared Huffman wants to save California's redwood country – by logging some of it

BY JANE BRAXTON LITTLE
jblittle@dyerpress.com

March 01, 2018 08:00 AM
Updated March 01, 2018 02:12 PM

California's northwest corner is home to some of the world's most stunning landscapes: towering stands of redwoods shrouded in fog; the craggy snow-capped peaks of the Trinity Alps; rushing rivers that pause in limpid pools.

[U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman](#) wants to protect all this. A former staff attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, he has crafted a bill that has the enthusiastic support of environmental and backcountry recreation groups. It will, however, need more than that to pass.

Huffman's [Northern California Conservation and Recreation Act](#), which he plans to introduce this spring, would increase wilderness areas by 363,000 acres and add 480 miles of [designated wild and scenic rivers](#).

It proposes developing a regional trail plan, including a 360-mile Bigfoot National Recreation Trail, and establishing a 700,000-acre special restoration area in the South Fork Trinity River watershed.

It's an audacious proposal given the current political climate. The Trump administration has opened protected lands across the country to mineral, gas and oil development; slashed the size of national monuments in the southwest; rolled back habitat protections for endangered species; and endorsed an amendment to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that would give industries a free pass to kill birds with impunity. A contingent of legislators, including [U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa](#), is advocating the transfer of public federal lands to state or private ownership.

At a time when the momentum is toward shrinking protections for public lands, Huffman's bill to expand them includes an innovation that sets it apart from conventional wilderness bills, and may be the key to its success: Jobs, a component as counter-intuitive as the timing of his environmental legislation.

This wilderness bill proposes logging and reintroducing fire in the area surrounding the Mad and South Fork of the Trinity rivers. Although remote and hard to access, the place is anything but pristine. Around 100,000 acres are pines planted in clear-cut blocks where the trees are all the same age. That makes them vulnerable to wildfire and insect infestation. Pot growers have infiltrated these forests, punching in illegal roads, diverting spawning streams for coho salmon and spewing pesticides and other poisons across the landscape.

Under Huffman's legislation workers would log trees around homes and within 300 feet of roads. Deeper in the forest, they would remove some trees to develop stands that eventually re-establish old-growth forests. Perhaps the most pioneering proposal would manage a section of [Redwood State Park](#) for the very long term by removing younger trees to allow ancient stands to develop. In areas damaged by marijuana farms, a partnership of local, state and federal agencies would clean up and restore the habitat for wildlife and fish.

Along with protecting the habitat of hundreds of species found nowhere else on Earth, Huffman's legislation is a response to the economic stagnation that has left his timber-dependent constituents with half the sawmills that were providing jobs in 2000, and unemployment twice the national average. Despite its promise of desperately needed jobs, it faces an uphill slog.

Wilderness legislation has never been popular in California's rural counties. It prohibits logging and other commercial activities, and limits access to federal lands local residents consider their back yards. Some of Huffman's constituents are still grouching about the Wilderness Act of 1984.

Anything that curbs the economic use of public lands [makes officials wary in Del Norte County](#), where 80 percent of the land base is federal. Trinity County Supervisor Keith Groves is skeptical about what his constituents will gain in exchange for more wilderness. "We get promised things for tying up our lands and they never get delivered," said Groves, board chair.

Huffman has the rare opportunity to demonstrate that a pro-conservation congressman can also get chainsaws moving in a way that benefits local communities. To do that he needs to spend more time in the woods kicking the dirt with rural residents, particularly in Trinity County, where two-thirds of the new wilderness would be located.

The challenge for Huffman is to deliver for small towns as well for as his district's spectacular landscape. He has promises to keep to both.

Jane Braxton Little, a freelance writer, covers science, natural resources and rural Northern California from Plumas County. Contact her at www.janebraxtonlittle.com or on Twitter @JBraxtonLittle.



Northern California's public lands, like this stretch of the Redwood Creek Trail in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park near Orick, need to be protected, but also need to be managed, and the communities nearby need jobs. That's where U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman's plan comes in. (AP Photo/The Eureka Times-Standard, Michael Hughes, File) **Michael Hughes** AP