

NORTHWEST CALIFORNIA WILDERNESS, RECREATION, AND WORKING FORESTS ACT

Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act of 2025 Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CA) Frequently Asked Questions

Economic impacts

Q: How would this legislation benefit tourism and our local economies?

A: While every county has its own set of unique opportunities, numerous studies show that protected federal lands, such as wilderness, national parks, or national monuments are important economic assets that attract people and businesses as well as new jobs and income. For example, Western counties with permanently protected federal lands see above-average rates of job growth and are correlated with higher levels of per capita income. Outdoor recreation is a \$1.2 trillion economy nationwide, generating \$92 billion in consumer spending, 691,000 direct jobs, and \$6.2 billion in state and local tax revenue in California each year. In the 2nd Congressional District alone, residents spend \$1.93 billion on outdoor recreation each year. The areas proposed for protection in this bill would become recreation destinations, contributing to our local tourism and recreation economies by promoting local lodging and spending.

Q: How would the bill affect tax revenues that fund local government?

A: Because there is no new federal land created by this bill, there is no loss of property tax revenues to local government. The bill is expected to have a positive impact on local tax revenues because of increased economic activity and sales tax revenues associated with recreation, tourism, logging, restoration projects, and the potential construction of a visitor center in Trinity County and lodges in or near Redwood National Park.

Q: Would the public land protections in this bill result in less logging and timber production in our region?

A: No, this bill would actually benefit the forest products industry in California. That's because the bill prioritizes fuel reduction projects (including logging) for forest health, fire resilience, and restoration on more than 232,000 acres of federal land in Trinity and Humboldt counties in strategic locations like along roads and in the wildland-urban interface. This would result in the production of lumber and other forest products.

Q: What about the Wilderness designations – won't that mean less logging?

A: The bill's wilderness designations largely avoid lands that are actively managed for timber or realistically expected to be logged. The overwhelming majority of the areas proposed for wilderness are already unavailable for commercial logging under existing law, planning decisions, or on the ground conditions.

As a result, these designations do not meaningfully reduce current or future timber supply. Instead, the bill leaves existing timber management unchanged while protecting backcountry areas that are unsuitable for commercial timber production. Some additional detail:

- **The proposed Chancelulla wilderness area** has not been proposed for logging since 1989, when a portion of it was salvage logged in 1989. The logged portion is not included in the proposed wilderness additions.
- **The proposed Trinity Alps wilderness additions** have not been proposed for logging since 1996, and no logging resulted from that proposal.
- **The proposed Siskiyou wilderness additions** have not been proposed for logging since 1989. While some logging occurred, the logged portion is not included in the proposed wilderness additions.

Q: How would mining be impacted?

A: Existing mining claims could still be developed under the legislation, but the staking of new mining claims would be prohibited in areas designated as Wilderness or as Wild & Scenic rivers.

Environmental Benefits

Q: What does Wild & Scenic River status mean?

A: Federal land management agencies must develop management plans along protected river segments only on public lands. The Wild & Scenic designation also prohibits the federal government from licensing, permitting, or funding new hydroelectric dams or major diversions on protected stream segments.

Q: What are the benefits of Wilderness? Why protect these places?

A: Designating an area as a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System recognizes the unique values of a place and ensures that development will not take place there. Instead, with Congress' approval, the watersheds, wildlife, ecosystems, and cultural values in these places will remain protected and available for the public to enjoy.

The areas proposed for wilderness possess a range of unique characteristics, including California's largest, most intact swath of unprotected ancient forest in the proposed Chinquapin Wilderness; habitat for rare and endangered plant and animal species such as the northern spotted owl, goshawk, fisher, and marten of the proposed Chancelulla Wilderness additions; and the extensive recreation opportunities in the proposed English Ridge Wilderness, to name a few.

In Congressman Huffman's Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation and Working Forests Act of 2025, wilderness designation provides the following:

- Places to see the splendor of California's natural places and get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life
- Old-growth forests, healthy streams, intact ecosystems, and other rare features protected in perpetuity
- Scenic vistas
- Clean water
- Outstanding plant and wildlife habitat ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}
- Numerous recreation opportunities, including hiking, hunting, and fishing
- Opportunities for solitude ^{[[L]]}_{SEP}

Q: Does the proposal address trespass marijuana grows?

A: To address degradation of public lands and waters impacted by trespass marijuana grows, this legislation creates a local, state, federal, and tribal partnership to coordinate activities and to provide resources and expertise.

Q: How would this legislation help fish?

A: The bill would protect the watersheds, headwaters, rivers, and streams that fish rely on, preserving the clean, cold water they need to survive. It also contains provisions to restore water quality and aquatic habitat within the South Fork Trinity River watershed, a vital fishery.

Fire Safety

Q: How would the bill impact fire management?

A: It would help protect communities by creating a network of roadside shaded fuel breaks in the South Fork Trinity-Mad River Restoration Area, including strategic thinning of neglected plantations. The bill would also require the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to work with local residents to create a new coordinated fire management plan for all of the designated Wilderness Areas in the region.

Q: How would the bill help protect communities from wildfire?

A: The bill would increase community and firefighter safety by prioritizing projects that reduce fuels by selective harvest, especially roadside shaded fuel breaks and plantation thinning. The bill also ensures that all fire-suppression tools remain available to land managers.

Q: Does designating wilderness lead to increased fire risk?

A: Fire suppression is allowed in wilderness areas, including the use of heavy equipment and aircraft if necessary for community safety. In fact, most fires ignited in Trinity County are associated with roads, trails, campgrounds, and human habitation. Numerous studies have found that most large fires—including the tragic 2025 Los Angeles fires—were started by humans and were not naturally occurring.

Q: Does Wild & Scenic River protection affect fighting wildfires?

A: No, federal and state fire agencies may do whatever is necessary to protect life and property.

Property Rights and Public Access

Q: Would the bill create more public lands or affect private property?

A: This bill does not create any additional public lands; it deals entirely with lands already owned by the federal government and would have no practical impact on private property.

Wilderness designation only applies to federal public lands. The legislation would protect existing federal public lands from all development, including the construction of new roads. The right to use and access private land will not be impacted. and existing, legal landowner road access will not be impacted.

Wild and Scenic River designation gives no federal authority over private land use or local zoning of private lands, and there is no practical impact on private property. Federal protection does provide an indirect positive impact as it typically increases private property values and contributes to the local economy by attracting tourists and recreational visitors. While California state forestry regulations establishes a 200-foot-wide “special treatment area” on private lands along state and federally designated rivers to protect riparian habitat and water quality, the intensity of logging proposed for the special treatment area is entirely up to the registered professional forester that submits the timber harvest plan.

Q: Does the bill impact water rights?

A: Existing water rights on federal waters will not be impacted by wilderness designation or Wild and Scenic River designation. The state's authority to regulate water rights remains. In practice, none of the federally protected rivers in California have affected the operation of upstream and downstream dams and other water facilities. If you have a right to draft water now from a river, that right remains after Wild and Scenic River designation. Some existing federal management plans place restrictions on water draft to ensure that no more than 50% of the stream flow is removed from the river.

Q: Would the bill close any roads to the public?

A: No. All legally open roads would remain open. The proposed wilderness areas do not currently have any legally open roads included in them.

Q: Are you locking-up federal lands and reducing public access?

A: No, just the opposite. Hunting and fishing are regulated by the State of California. Wilderness or Wild and Scenic River designation do not change these rules.

In addition to not closing any currently open roads, the bill preserves access for recreational uses—including hunting, fishing, bird watching, horseback riding, hiking, backpacking, camping, swimming, rafting, kayaking, and canoeing—in areas where those activities are currently allowed. The bill expands and improves recreational opportunities by requiring a recreation trail study, mountain bike trail study in Del Norte County, a Trinity Lake trail study, and by authorizing visitor centers in Del Norte and Trinity Counties.

Q: How would off-highway vehicle (OHV) use be impacted?

A: No roads or trails would be closed to OHV use by the legislation. OHV users would benefit from several aspects of the bill, including the required recreation trails study that would investigate both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Other questions

Q: Why protect more land when we can't take care of the parks and wilderness areas that we already have?

A: Congressman Huffman believes the underfunding of public lands is a serious problem that must be addressed by Congress—with or without this bill. As Ranking Member of the House Natural Resources Committee, he's advocated for policies that invest in our public lands and waters and help to fully staff federal land management agencies to steward those lands. He has also repeatedly advocated for increased investment, especially through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, which both made historic investments in our nation's public lands.

This legislation would help invest in the restoration of degraded areas, restoring ecosystems and permanently protecting unique public lands. The outdoor recreation economy is a \$1.2 trillion industry, and investing in public lands protections has proven to be a wise long-term investment time and time again.

Q: How would the bill affect Native American Tribal uses of public lands?

A: Native American cultural practices, such as the holding of ceremonies and the gathering of basketry materials, are fully protected by the bill.