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Testimony of

George W. Whitmore

on behalf of

Fly Fishermen for Conservation (Fresno, California)
Committee to Save the Kings River "
Golden Valley Ecological Society "

Before the Subcommittee on Public Lands
of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,
House of Representatives

Re: H.R. 5578 and H.R. 5586

15 November 1979

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, the organizations for which I am speaking hold diverse views and represent a broad spectrum of interests. But one ideal which they share in common is a belief in the value of preserving our lands and waters in a natural state.

Fly Fishermen for Conservation and the Committee to Save the Kings River are primarily concerned about preservation of the San Joaquin and Kings River ecosystems, while the Golden Valley Ecological Society is concerned with preservation of all areas which still remain in a natural condition and which provide habitat for native flora and fauna.

These organizations believe that addition of these lands and waters to the National Wilderness Preservation System is an effective means of achieving such preservation, and they therefore support the concept and the approach of the Burton bill -- H.R. 5578.

Because these groups favor preservation, they vigorously oppose the "release" clause in the Johnson bill -- H.R. 5586. A Congressional mandate which would legally "lock in" the extremely deficient Administration RARE II recommendations is simply too high a price to pay in return for the small amount of Wilderness which would be gained.

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Statement of George W. Whitmore on behalf of
TEHIPITE CHAPTER, SIERRA CLUB

Before the House of Representatives
Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs
Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

On H.R. 799 to designate the Kings River
and H.R. 317 to designate the Merced River
as components of the National Wild and Scenic River System

5 March 1987

KINGS RIVER

We support H.R. 799.

Most of our concerns have ^{been} or will be addressed by others. I will address only a few additional points.

The Kings River canyon, of which a free-flowing river is an inseparable part, provides a unique, remarkable, and extremely valuable recreational resource within 1½ to two hours of a major population centered in the Fresno area.

In addition to recreational uses described by others, I would like to point out the opportunity for hiking and backpacking. There are very few areas on public land where one can hike or backpack during the fall, winter, and spring months when snow restricts access and activity in most of the Sierra.

The inner reaches of the canyon provide opportunities for very high quality wilderness experiences. Many a trip I have reveled in the Garlic Falls area and beyond.

But even if one does not wish to go that far, the first three miles of trail are remarkably attractive, taking one through oak glades and open grassy areas, always with the sight and sound of the unfettered river ever present.

Little wonder that the U.S. Forest Service designated the first three miles as a National Recreation Trail, thus recognizing it as one of "the most outstanding trail opportunities" which incorporate "significant natural and cultural features of the area."

In 1940 Kings Canyon National Park was established. In 1965 the Tehipite Valley and Cedar Grove areas were added to the Park. And in 1984 the Monarch Wilderness was established, thus bringing protection of the South and Middle Forks down to their confluence.

The Sierra Club's concern for these areas, and our extensive and intensive involvement in the protracted struggles, is well known.

What is less well known is that our "founding father," John Muir, advocated as far back as 1891 that National Park status be given to Kings River lands considerably farther west, as far as Mill Flat Creek.

H.R. 799 would protect the final remaining portion of the Kings which John Muir dreamed of.

It would cap the many decades of struggle over resource allocation on the Kings. Protection of the upper Kings would provide a fitting counter-point to the destruction of Tulare Lake and the degradation of riverine values which has occurred on all the rest of the Kings.

Gentlemen, please enact H.R. 799. In John Muir's own words, "Let our law-givers then make haste before it is too late to set apart this surpassingly glorious region for the recreation and well-being of humanity, and all the world will rise up and call them blessed."

MERCED RIVER

We support H.R. 317.

Most of our concerns have been or will be addressed by others. I will address only a couple points.

One is that the Sierra Club has a long-standing interest in the Merced, looking upon it as "Yosemite's river."

John Muir's writings of his experiences in the 1860's and 70's clearly show his appreciation of the lower country he traversed on his way to Yosemite, and his concern for these lands and rivers has continued with us to the present.

This includes a concern for the section below Briceburg, and we would like to see the bill improved by inclusion of that portion of the river.

Our other point is that the Sierra Club is an intervenor before the

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on Mr. Keating's proposed project at El Portal.

We are adamantly opposed to the project, and trust that intervention by the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund is one indicator of the depth of our concern.

We also feel that the brazen nature of this project, coming as it does right on the doorstep of Yosemite National Park, and affecting the experience of huge numbers of Yosemite visitors, provides a perfect illustration of the need for passage of H.R. 317.

Undoubtedly "all the world will rise up and call (you) blessed" if you enact a good Merced bill too, as well as the Kings.

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