

P. O. Box 485
Kingsburg
California 93631

2 March 1969

The Honorable Raymond J. Sherwin
California State Superior Court
Fairfield
California 94533

Dear Ray Sherwin,

I am in receipt of your letter to Ed Daubs, dated 28 January 1969, in which you asked for our recommendations regarding the west boundary of a proposed wilderness classification for the Minaret corridor.

Not having realized that such a proposal was contemplated, I had made no attempt to gather the information on which a recommendation should be based. However, our conservation committee has considered the matter and come up with a proposal which I feel is good as far as it goes. What we must do now is go into the area this coming summer and seek justification for our recommendations. This is not the ideal sequence of events, but this will certainly not be the first time that such a procedure has been followed. I was pleased by the amount of interest shown in conducting such a trip, and feel confident that there will be little problem in developing ample background material to use in "selling" the proposal.

We have four different proposals for the western boundary, and these are ranked below in order of our preference. Each proposal, in turn, is more conservative than the preceding one, and was arrived at by pulling back the proposed boundary in order to exclude certain potential problems. They are shown on the accompanying map in accordance with the following key:

Proposal "A"	(first choice)	is shown in black.
"	B (second ") " " " orange.
"	C (third ") " " " purple.
"	D (fourth ") " " " brown.

The existing Minaret and John Muir Wilderness areas are outlined in red.

2.
Proposal "A" (black line)

Meets the existing Minaret Wilderness boundary immediately west of Green Mountain and goes east directly up the crest (hydrographic divide) of Green Mountain to its summit.

Then turns southerly and follows the hydrographic divide all the way to Cattle Mountain, passing through points 8311, 7527, and 7675.

Goes over the summit of Cattle Mountain and continues south along the hydrographic divide, passing through points 7218, 7116, and 7126.

Descends to the San Joaquin River, and then ascends to the summit of Balloon Dome, following a natural line of ribs and buttresses on both sides of the river.

Turns easterly, following the hydrographic divide to point 5871.

Descends directly to the creek which drains Cassidy Meadows, meeting it at the 5040 foot contour line.

Follows the 5040 foot contour line southeasterly until meeting the major creek which lies just north of and roughly parallel to the Madera-Fresno county line.

Ascends this creek to the 5600 foot contour line, then follows this contour line southeasterly for approximately seven-eighths of a mile.

At this point the 5600 foot contour line intersects a small but prominent point which projects out from the canyon wall. The boundary goes directly up the canyon wall from this point and continues in a north and northeasterly direction directly up the prominent ridge which descends from point 9302 (VABM) near Rube Meadow, passing through points 7761 and 8000. It joins the John Muir Wilderness at point 9302 (VABM).

Of course the advantage of this proposal is that the line lies for its greater part along ridge crests. It descends into a valley at only one point, and at this point the valley is so narrow and the walls so precipitous that a natural barrier is formed. The only other point where the line does not follow a ridge crest is that section along the San Joaquin's South Fork. Here we have selected a line which can be precisely defined, and which traverses across a slope so rugged that human traffic across the line would be negligible. Here we have kept the line well above the South Fork, thus avoiding the problems which sometimes result from placing a line along a valley bottom.

We feel that the rugged gorge of the San Joaquin which is encompassed by this proposal constitutes a unique type of wilderness which has not yet been given statutory protection anywhere within the National Park or National Forest systems. The gorge of the main river is of a character different from that of the North Fork and Middle Fork, and it would not be sufficient merely to set aside the upper canyons.

There are several factors which might make it difficult to obtain approval of this proposal. One of these is that the Sierra National Forest is planning a timber sale in the area between Green Mountain and Cattle Mountain, and it would apparently extend eastward across the hydrographic divide in the area north and east of Indian Meadow. Another factor is the presence of jeep roads extending both north and south to the summits of Green Mountain and Cattle Mountain; we do not know the exact route of these roads, but it seems quite likely that they do not follow the hydrographic divide but lie, at least in part, to the east of it. Still a third factor is the presence of a copper-silver mining claim (not patented) which lies on the bench half way down the slope to the east of Green Mountain's summit; there is an access road down to it. This claim is being worked during the summer months, but is apparently not a paying proposition. My understanding of the Wilderness Act is that the presence of this mining claim does not disqualify the area for inclusion in wilderness; also, since the claim is not a paying proposition, it would appear that the access road could be construed to be "temporary", and thus permissible in wilderness. However, the operators of the claim would undoubtedly oppose wilderness classification because of the prospect of increased regulation and pressure to vacate the claim.

Proposal "B" (orange line)

is intended to eliminate these potential problems, and is as follows:

Meets the existing Minaret Wilderness boundary at Cora Creek, and descends Cora Creek to the 7200 foot contour line.

Follows the 7200 foot contour line southerly until it meets the boundary line of proposal "A" just below point 7218, approximately three-quarter of a mile south of Cattle Mountain.

Is identical to the boundary line of proposal "A" for the remainder of the way to point 9302 (VABM).

Although not as desirable as one along a ridge crest, this line is still easily defended in that it can be precisely defined and lies, for its greater part, along a slope steep enough that human traffic would be minimal except on established trails.

It is difficult to conceive of any legitimate objection to the inclusion of the main San Joaquin River-Balloon Dome-Cassidy Meadows area in this proposal. To our knowledge this area is free of any developments, claims, inholdings, uses, etc. which would disqualify it under the terms of the Wilderness Act. It lies entirely within the Motor Vehicle Restricted Area established by the Sierra National Forest, and consequently motor vehicles are prohibited even on trails; there are no Approved Vehicle Ways within this area.

However, it is possible that there might be some objection on the grounds that this would encompass "too much area", "lock up" land which "might be needed for some other purpose", etc.

4.

Proposal "C" (purple line)

is intended to eliminate this potential problem, and is as follows:

Is identical to the boundary line of proposal "B" as far south as the north boundary of Section Two (within which Junction Butte lies).

At this point the proposal leaves the 7200 foot contour line and follows the section line east until it meets the northwest ridge of Junction Butte.

The line then goes up the northwest ridge of Junction Butte to its summit.

It then proceeds southeasterly in a direct line to the summit of point 9302 (VABM), where it joins the existing John Muir Wilderness.

It is possible, for reasons that we cannot conceive, that there might be some objection to inclusion of the west slope of the North Fork canyon even below the 7200 foot contour line.

Proposal "D" (brown line)

is intended to eliminate this potential problem, and is as follows:

Meets the existing Minaret Wilderness boundary at Chetwood Creek, and descends Chetwood Creek all the way to the North Fork of the San Joaquin.

Descends the North Fork to a point immediately below the foot of the northwest ridge of Junction Butte.

Ascends the northwest ridge of Junction Butte until meeting the section line referred to in proposal "C".

Is identical to the boundary line of proposal "C" for the remainder of the way to point 9302 (VABM).

This would obviously be a "last ditch stand", and there would hardly seem to be any point in talking about anything less than this.

We know of only two objections which might be raised to this final proposal. One of these is the presence of a patented iron mining claim half a mile west of Iron Mountain. The other is the possible existence of a Federal Power Commission withdrawal. (We have received conflicting stories as to the existence of this withdrawal, both versions being from sources which should be authoritative!) The California Department of Water Resources has put forth a proposal which would involve a diversion dam near Hemlock Crossing on the North Fork, and a dam at Miller Crossing on the main San Joaquin which would back a reservoir beyond the confluence of the North and Middle Forks. However, the local (Fresno) office of the Department of Water Resources states that the proposal would no longer be economically feasible, and the possibility of development is remote.

In any event, our understanding of the Wilderness Act is that neither the presence of patented mining claims nor power withdrawals excludes an area from consideration, and that in National Forest areas it would actually be possible to build the dams even if the area had been dedicated as wilderness under the act.

Of course a fifth proposal would consist of a combination of proposals "B" and "D". It would be possible to use the North Fork as a boundary in the northern portion, but then connect this to proposal "B" in the southern portion by following the section line referred to above.

As for which of these various proposals we believe should be advocated, it would appear that proposal "A", although the most ideal, would be subject to too much opposition. Proposal "B" seems to us to offer the best chance of actually obtaining a boundary which, while not ideal, still encompasses most of what we want. The best we can say for the "C" and "D" proposals is that they would help stop the road, but beyond that they would definitely be disappointing. The decision as to which one to ask for seems to be one which should be made at higher levels since it involves political considerations of which we have no knowledge.

I hope this is of some help to you, and look forward to corresponding further with you.

Sincerely,

George Whitmore

George W. Whitmore
Conservation Committee Chairman
Tehipite Chapter
Sierra Club

end. - marked topo maps

- Forest Service map "Approved Vehicle Ways"

P. O. Box 485
Kingsburg
California 93631

29 Sep 69

Jonathan P. Ela
Assistant to the Conservation Director
Sierra Club
1050 Mills Tower
San Francisco
California 94104

Dear Jonathan,

Thank you for your letter of 26 September.

I note with much interest, and also very great concern, your information regarding the status of the Minaret corridor wilderness proposal.

It is encouraging to learn that the proposal may be introduced in Congress.

On the other hand, we are very alarmed over the proposed name. We are in very definite agreement with you and Mike over the desirability of avoiding any "connotation of (being) simply a road-stopping proposal", as you so aptly put it. This is why we, too, are definitely opposed to the use of "Minaret Corridor Wilderness" as a name.

But this is also why we feel it would be a serious mistake to use the "Minaret Summit Wilderness" name. Good grief! Mention the name "Minaret Summit" to the informed layman and his immediate reaction will be "Oh, yes. That's the new highway the Sierra Club is trying to block." With all the publicity this thing has had over the years it is inevitable that people will make this association in their minds.

And Minaret Summit, as a geographic location, is completely outside the proposed wilderness area!

In a phone conversation with Ray Sherwin on July 2nd, I discussed this problem of nomenclature. My impression was that he was in agreement regarding the principles involved, and he asked what name we thought would be appropriate. At that time I told him that, locally, we had discussed the matter and had arrived at the name of "San Joaquin Wilderness." Although I don't recall that Ray endorsed the proposal right then and there, he nevertheless reacted agreeably and indicated that he thought the name might have some merit.

The big argument in favor of "San Joaquin Wilderness" as a name is that it characterizes the area. Just as you and Mike do, we also feel that the wilderness proposal must be promoted on the basis that this area has merit in its own right, and that it would be a mistake to try to add it onto either of the adjoining established wilderness areas. We have been researching

the area from this point of view, with the idea that the canyons of the North and Middle Forks of the San Joaquin River are probably the most outstanding features which characterize this area, and that the preservation of these canyons in a wild state is one of the primary reasons for seeking statutory protection for the area.

Another name we considered was "Balloon Dome Wilderness". This is a commanding bastion which dominates much of the area proposed, and serves as a major landmark for the boundary we proposed. To quote the rough notes of one of our field workers, "Small planes shuttling from Fresno...to Mammoth...use Balloon Dome as a central visual beacon for Sierra overflights. This is perhaps the least visited of all the great granite monoliths which monument the confluences of the main Sierra rivers... Its summit commands the entire upper basins of the San Joaquin River as Half Dome does the Merced watershed." After considering this name, we finally decided against it because of the chance that Congress might delete that portion of the area from the wilderness. If we could be assured that Congress would not do this, then we would still think the name to be a good one, but we assume that such assurance would be impossible. This is why we settled on "San Joaquin Wilderness"; if the corridor is to be closed, Congress must include at least a portion of the San Joaquin River.

We have accumulated considerable information on this area during the past summer, and are in the process of compiling it into a coherent report. You might find it desirable to hold off further action a couple weeks until we can get this report into your hands. Congressman Waldie and Senator Cranston might find the information of value in introducing wilderness bills, and I am sure it would help them to field questions which they will surely be asked.

To summarize, we feel that it would be just as serious a mistake to use the name "Minaret Summit Wilderness" as it would be to use the name "Minaret Corridor Wilderness", and for exactly the same reason. We think our name of "San Joaquin Wilderness" is a good one, but are open to other suggestions; at least it avoids the strategic errors inherent in the other names.

Sincerely,

George W. Whitmore
Conservation Chairman
Tehipite Chapter

cc. Mike McCloskey
Ray Sherwin
Anthony Chasteen, Tehipite Chapter's project chairman