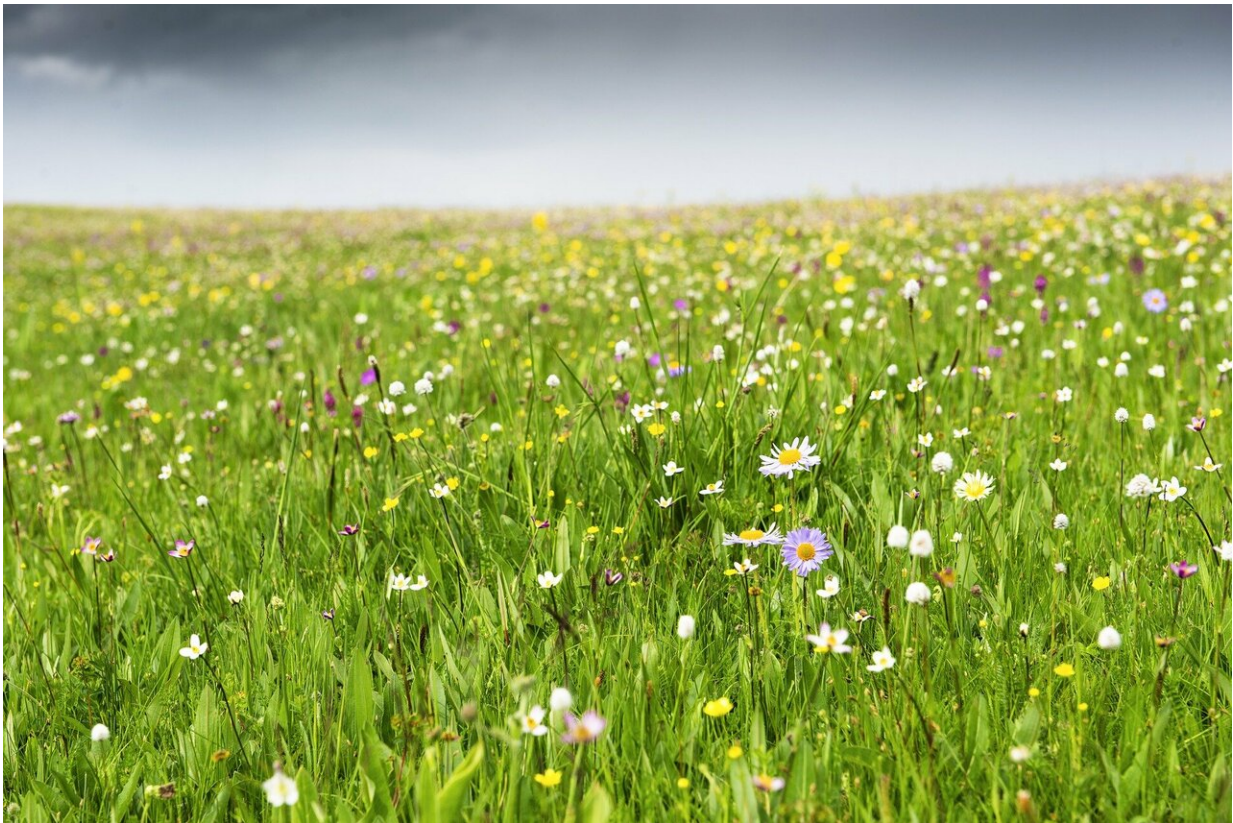


California could get 600,000 acres of new federally protected wilderness

May 4 2021, by Alex Wigglesworth, Los Angeles Times



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California could get 600,000 new acres of federally protected wilderness under legislation introduced in the U.S. Senate on Monday. The designation would ensure the lands remain free of development, vehicles

and commercial activity.

In total, the package introduced by Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., and co-sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., would expand protections for more than 1 million acres of public land in the state, officials said.

"Our [public lands](#) and [natural spaces](#) are indeed our nation's greatest treasures," Padilla said Monday at a news conference at the Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area in Irwindale. If the legislation is successful, the site will be the center of a new 50,000-acre national recreation area covering foothill areas of the San Gabriel Mountains and portions of the San Gabriel River and the Rio Hondo.

"These lands are not just precious for their stunning scenery but also for their important biodiversity and the role that they play in keeping our environment strong and resilient," Padilla said.

The package, which consists of three bills approved by the U.S. House in February, would add more than 109,000 acres to San Gabriel Mountains National Monument and designate 30,000 acres of wilderness, roughly half of it in a region at its western end that was left out when then-President Obama designated the monument in 2014.

It would also designate more than 583 miles of river—including 45 miles of San Gabriel River tributaries, as well as Little Rock Creek—as "wild and scenic rivers," a protection that prohibits dams or new mining.

About 17 million people—or one in 20 Americans—live within a 90-minute drive of the San Gabriel Mountains, yet for many communities of color, such open-space areas remain inaccessible, said Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis.

"A staggering 82% of communities of color in the county lack green

space and many suffer from air pollution, from asthma, childhood obesity and other ailments," Solis said. "The San Gabriel Mountains make up 70% of L.A. County's open space and offer a critical open space for all of these impacted communities."

The additions to the protected lands will ensure these resources are expanded and preserved for generations to come, she said.

The package of legislation would also designate as wilderness about 262,000 acres of public lands in northwest California and 288,000 acres of land in the Los Padres National Forest and Carrizo Plain National Monument, as well as establish a 400-mile-long Condor National Scenic Trail stretching from Los Angeles to Monterey County.

The legislation advances a goal endorsed by President Joe Biden and supported by California Gov. Gavin Newsom to conserve 30% of the nation's lands and waters by 2030, said Wade Crowfoot, California's secretary for natural resources.

He noted that the protection of 1 million acres of California land equates to one out of every 100 acres in the state.

"Simply put, this is a big deal," he said.

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Citation: California could get 600,000 acres of new federally protected wilderness (2021, May 4) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-05-california-acres-federally-wilderness.html>

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