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*America's First Climate Refuge

Siskiyou Crest Monument holds great promise for both mitigation and adaptation
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News outlets across the country last week took note of a leaked Department of Interior draft document that evaluated the potential for expanding the Nation's network of permanently protected natural treasures through the creation or expansion of National Monuments. On that short list of 14 high priority areas was the Siskiyou Crest, a mountainous land bridge at the Oregon-California border that links the Cascade Mountain Range to the Coast Ranges.

"Protecting irreplaceable landscapes for the future is exactly what the Antiquities Act was designed to accomplish. KS Wild applauds the Obama Administration for looking at how we can protect our natural resources in the looming face of climate change, and we think the Siskiyou Crest deserves to be at the top of the list," said KS Wild Executive Director Stephanie Tidwell.

While locals and outdoor enthusiasts throughout the West are familiar with the outstanding backcountry opportunities this visually stunning landscape provides, most are unaware of its crucial ecological role throughout the eons as a climate refuge. For the reasons outlined below, the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center encourages the Administration to continue to seriously evaluate making the Siskiyou Crest America's first Climate Refuge.

A Climate Refuge for Millennia

The Siskiyou Crest not only contains abundant, ecologically-diverse old-growth forest ecosystems that sequester carbon, it is also the core of an ancient climate refuge where many species once widespread across the continent were forced to retreat during past climate shift events and now persist as 'relic species,' found here and nowhere else on earth.

The Rogue Basin of southwest Oregon is one of the only areas of its size to have a site-specific, peer-reviewed report, based on the latest scientific data, to make concrete predictions and recommendations about the looming impacts of climate change to the local ecology and economy. The report, "Preparing For Climate Change In The Rogue River Basin of Southwest Oregon," prepared by the Climate Leadership Initiative at the Institute for Sustainable Development at the University of Oregon, and the National Center for Conservation Science and Policy in Ashland, makes many tangible recommendations for how land managers can best prepare for the startling changes to come. They include:

- Remaining intact habitats should be protected, including old growth, roadless areas and corridor connections for wildlife migration.
- Protected areas should be expanded longitudinally and latitudinally in order to

allow species to shift their ranges.

- Ecosystem structure, function and genetic diversity should be protected and restored to allow organisms to withstand and adapt to climate stressors.
- Land and stream reaches that provide critical support for ecosystem services should be identified, protected and restored.

Protecting these carbon-sequestering forests in the face of climate change is of even greater significance in the Klamath-Siskiyou region, as climate models increasingly predict that it will see a smaller average temperature increase (2-3 degrees within the next 50 years) than anywhere else in North America. As the impacts of climate change become more severe, the varied topography of the Siskiyou Crest could very well, once again, serve as an Ark for species struggling to adapt to a changing world.

“Protecting the Siskiyou Crest as a National Climate Refuge is one of the most tangible and immediate steps we can take to enact an effective strategy in response to the emerging climate crisis we face,” said KS Wild Grassroots Organizer Laurel Sutherlin, “and it doesn’t cost a dime.”

A Crossroads of Biodiversity

The Siskiyou Crest is exceedingly unusual among mountain ranges, with ridges that run west to east, while almost all other mountain systems in North America stretch north to south. This west-east orientation gives the Crest the qualities of a “Land Bridge” and offers one of the highest quality habitat corridors connecting wildlife between the Coast Ranges of California and Oregon with the massive cordilleras of the Cascade and Sierra ranges.

“The Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion of southwest Oregon and northwest California has long been recognized for its global biological significance and is considered an Area of Global Botanical Significance by the World Conservation Union, a global Centre of Plant Diversity, and has been proposed as a possible World Heritage Site. More recently, World Wildlife Fund US scored the Klamath-Siskiyou as one of their Global 200 sites reaffirming its global importance from the standpoint of biodiversity.”

- Stritholt J.R., R. F. Noss, P. A Frost, K. Van-Borland, C. Carroll, G. Heilman, Jr. 1999. A conservation assessment and science based plan for the Klamath-Siskiyou.

Community Economic Enhancement

The relationship between rural economic growth and protected federal lands is very strong. According to “Historical Economic Performance of Oregon and Western Counties Associated with Roadless and Wilderness Areas,” an economic analysis prepared by Southwick Associates, counties with, or near, protected lands are more likely to experience stronger economic growth than those that prioritize resource extraction over conservation. Protection of roadless areas is strongly and

positively connected to economic growth. Throughout the West, counties with more roadless and protected areas showed stronger economic growth from 1969 to 1997 than those without such lands. For the struggling rural communities of southern Oregon and northern California, enhancing the Crest's reputation as a worldclass recreation destination and ecological gem will provide much more needed economic stability than past short-term extraction priorities.

A comprehensive restoration plan for previously logged stands within the proposal area also promises to provide added security for forestry-related jobs through the commercial thinning of fire-suppressed forests and active aquatic restoration.

A PDF of the campaign profile, which further details the Crest's ecological highpoints, need for more comprehensive management, and steps for providing increased substantive protections was released today and is available for download at www.siskiyoucrest.org. You can also contact Stephanie Tidwell if you would like a hard copy or the report.