

**Final Report 2013 California Wildlands Grant Report:
Expanding Eel River Wilderness and Protecting Existing Ones**



2013 Final Report



For
Rose Foundation

By
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ERRP Volunteer Coordinator

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Acknowledgements

The Eel River Recovery Project (ERRP) is extremely grateful to the Rose Foundation for the award of the 2013 California Wildlands grant that has provided us with an opportunity to clean up a marijuana grow site in the Red Mountain Wilderness in the South Fork Eel River watershed. In addition, the grant has enabled us to get fully coordinated with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service, which sets the stage for a basinwide clean up over the next few years and has opened discussion on possible Wilderness expansion.

Our thanks are extended to our federal partners in this project including BLM Area Manager Linda Rousch, BLM Law Enforcement Jeff Knisley, Fire Management Officer Tim Jones, BLM Fish Biologist AJ Donnell, BLM Botanist Christan Cole, SRNF Public Affairs Officer Lynn Wright, and SRNF Mad River District Ranger Christine Hill. Support and participation from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife was also appreciated and thanks are extended to Steve Burton of their Lands Division and Wildlife Biologist Scott Koller.

From the community surrounding the Red Mountain Wilderness, ERRP extends thanks to Jeff Daniels of the Bell Springs Volunteer Fire Department, Marcus Green of the Leggett Volunteer Fire Department, Lee Richter of the Leggett American Legion, and local merchants in Leggett. In addition, we are appreciative of the Mendocino Sheriffs Department consultation and assistance.

Our ability to draw volunteer support provided service delivery many times the grant award and we are always thankful for the generosity of people in the watershed and our membership.



ERRP Wilderness Committee Co-Chairs Bruce Hillbach-Barger (l) and Jeff Hedin (center) talk to retired Game Warden and ERRP Volunteer Larry Bruckenstein at annual Retreat at Briceland. 11/10/13.

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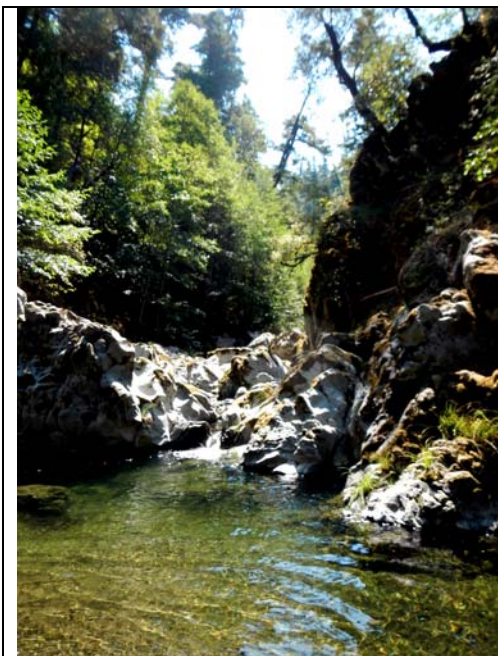
Executive Summary

ERRP has met expectations and accomplished all of the objectives laid out in our 2013 California Wildlands Proposal *Expanding Eel River Wilderness and Protecting Existing Ones*. We have been able to clean up one industrial marijuana grow site in the Red Mountain Wilderness; however, the relationship we have built with BLM, the USFS, other agencies, local civic groups, and the surrounding community will allow us to clean up all the grow sites in the Eel River watershed within the next few years.

The ERRP team included Bruce Hillbach-Barger and Jeff Hedin, who lead the clean up and expansion efforts, respectively. They met with BLM and USFS staff at the outset of the project and then continuously over the last year. Arcata Office BLM Manager Linda Rousch was immediately receptive to organizing a clean up in the Red Mountain Wilderness Area, and was also open to discussion of expansion. Therefore, ERRP worked with BLM on numerous occasions to identify all grow sites on their holdings in this region and to clean one up. (See Attachment #1 letter from BLM Area Manager Linda Rousch).

Work with Six Rivers National Forest (SRNF) also took place under this grant; however, USFS law enforcement is separate from line staff and coordination of clean ups will require a longer gestation needed for internal coordination. SRNF are receptive to clean up efforts in the Lassics and North Fork Wilderness Areas and more effort will be expended under the next grant cycle to increase the convince law enforcement that volunteer clean up of grow sites can be low risk, expand USFS capacity, and help the break the vicious cycle of industrial marijuana grows on public land.

Support for Wilderness clean ups was also secured from nearby community groups, including the Piercy Watershed Association, Leggett Volunteer Fire Department, Bell Springs Volunteer Fire Department, Leggett American Legion, and Leggett small business owners. Seventeen volunteers who were previously trained participated in the clean up and many more are lined up to additional similar projects, if funding can be acquired.



Wilderness expansion ground work under this grant was also extensive. Jeff Hedin and ERRP Volunteer Coordinator and fish biologist Pat Higgins went into the field with BLM Fish Biologist AJ Donnell and BLM Botanist Chrtian Cole to determine aquatic habitat values in proposed expansion areas on the East Branch South Fork Eel River. Jeff engaged in extensive discussions with the Coombs family that has widespread holdings adjacent to BLM Wilderness areas in the South Fork Eel River watershed and is in discussion with them regarding acquiring some of their holdings for expansion. He is also networked with a coalition of conservation partners working on legislation to expand Wilderness. Preliminary discussions with SRNF staff suggest that the Lassics and North Fork Wilderness Areas are too small to fulfill biodiversity functions and acquiring a corridor between them might be considered.

Coordination Meetings

ERRP Volunteer Coordinator Patrick Higgins arranged kick off meetings with BLM (Attachment #2) and SRNF (Attachment #3) on June 13, 2013 in Arcata that were attended by Bruce Hillbach-Barger and Jeff Hedin, who then became leads for the clean up and expansion discussions with the respective agencies. Attached minutes from the meetings indicate that BLM had experience in grow clean ups, had identified more need, and was open to use of volunteers. They did request, however, that clean up activities not be publicized in advance, so outreach envisioned in the 2013 California Wildlands grant was not possible.

SRNF staff had not identified marijuana grows in Wilderness Areas within their ownership in the Eel River basin. USFS law enforcement is in charge of dealing with these problems and does not have an open line of communication with SRNF staff. Therefore, additional time and internal communication within the USFS is necessary to build trust and acceptance of grow site clean ups. ERRP has continued to follow up with SRNF and line staff has now identified Wilderness industrial marijuana grows as a problem and are open to ERRP assistance.

Variation of Implementation From Grant Application

The Rose Foundation requests that final reports address the changes in how the grant was performed versus how performance was anticipated in the application. BLM was our primary partner in the grant and Area Manager Linda Rousch said her agency was not comfortable with publicity in advance of marijuana grow sites because of security concerns. Consequently, publicity planned in the grant application was not appropriate. Similarly, Linda said it would be several years before we could promote Red Mountain Wilderness use by hikers because they had to abate grow problems first and planned outreach on that subject was ill-timed.

ERRP thought that there would be several grow sites previously identified by BLM that we would be able to proceed with clean up on immediately. Instead ERRP made several trips into the Red Mountain Wilderness and surrounding areas to scout out grows and line them up for clean up. The best location that could be cleaned up by volunteers immediately was new to the agency and it took several months for clearance BLM Law Enforcement staff and Mendocino County Sheriff's Office said that clean up could proceed. The delays associated with identification of grow sites and the time needed to win acceptance of agencies pushed project implementation to February 21, 2014, which will be after this report is filed. Consequently, proceeds for the 2013 California Wildlands grant awarded to ERRP was spent on planning and the implementation of the project will be all-volunteer, including the coordinators.

The institutional barriers to grow site clean up using volunteers on SRNF were much greater than anticipated. Law enforcement within the USFS has a different chain of command than line staff and there was little communication of the issue of grows in Wilderness. As a result more missionary work is needed to be able to clean up the Lassics and North Fork Wilderness Areas that are with SRNF jurisdiction. ERRP engaged SRNF and USFS law enforcement in late January 2014 to explore whether they were receptive to acquiring a National Forest Foundation Wilderness Stewardship grant to organize volunteers to clean up Wilderness Areas. Line staff, including Supervisor Tyrone Kelly and Mad River District Ranger Christine Hill, wanted us to go forward, but law enforcement blocked the opportunity. ERRP has learned that a directive from upper levels of the USFS may be coming that would instruct Law Enforcement to be more cooperative with marijuana grow clean up efforts.

Wilderness Grow Site Clean Up

The Arcata Office of BLM had previous experience with marijuana grow site clean ups where contractors had joined staff in performance and use of volunteers seemed feasible and desirable. At the kick off meeting, all agreed that clean ups needed to take place in fall or winter to avoid putting volunteers at risk and that close coordination would be needed with BLM law enforcement and Mendocino County Sheriffs Department.

ERRP worked in cooperation with the BLM Arcata Field Office over the summer and fall of 2013 and identified 14 industrial marijuana grow sites in or adjacent to the Red Mountain Wilderness Area, however, only one was targeted for immediate volunteer cleanup. Jeff Daniels of the Bell Springs Volunteer fire department assisted in many ways, giving time, gate access and logistical support to allow pre-scouting of a safe route for volunteer cleanup. His local knowledge allowed us to find clear paths both into and out of the targeted grows. The largest of these grow sites straddles California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Ecological Preserve lands (which have an even greater level of protection than wilderness, specifically for endangered species). Steve Burton of CDFW Lands obtained authorization for access to state lands and CDFW wildlife biologist Scott Koller assisted us in scouting those sensitive areas. Clean up of this site is planned for late 2014.

All sites are in difficult terrain with steep slopes and dense vegetation and have limited access through dedicated BLM routes. Our investigations revealed damage and threats at many sites that might limit safe access for volunteers in the immediate future. ERRP also produced accurate mapping of historical paths and previously undiscovered illegal grows that will help BLM and State land managers to reduce the threat of future destructive trespass grows in that area and assist with clean up planning.



Typical grow site trash from large scale marijuana grow in the Red Mountain Wilderness.

The logistical problems and perceived high risk for volunteers prevented clean up under this grant cycle with one exception. BLM Law Enforcement Officer Jeff Knisely and Jeff Hedin both knew of grow sites in the Big Dann Creek drainage of the Little Red Mountain compartment of the Wilderness Area. This site is easier to access, has been scouted, and there are grow materials, trash and water diversions to be removed. BLM Law Enforcement, BLM Resource Management, and Mendocino County Sheriff's Department have all been scheduled in an operations plan to provide security and support for a volunteer cleanup. An enthusiastic crew of 15+ volunteers has been recruited and the actual clean up will be conducted on February 21, 2014. The Rose Foundation California Wildlands grant funds have been expended for planning, which was more protracted than anticipated in advance of the clean up. Consequently, the clean up itself will be 100% volunteer effort, including coordination.

Wilderness Expansion

Agency Staff Coordination and Cooperation: Jeff Hedin was a seminal force in creation of the BLM South Fork Eel River Wilderness Areas and has a long history of communication with BLM regarding management. He introduced the topic of expansion at the June 13 meeting at BLM and the agencies Fire Management Officer Tim Jones asked that there be a buffer area around any Wilderness so that fire prevention and fire fighting there could protect adjacent private lands. BLM staff is not supposed to play any role or take a position on Wilderness expansion, but they are receptive and cooperative. BLM and CDFW staff are helping ERRP forge practical solutions to fragmentation, boundary, protection, and access problems affecting Wilderness Areas.

Field Assessment of Proposed Additions: Jeff Hedin arranged for a September 10, 2013 field assessment of the East Branch South Fork Eel River in an area he believes has high quality aquatic habitat that serves as an important refugia for ESA-listed steelhead. The field trip included BLM Fisheries Biologist AJ Donnell, BLM Botanist , and ERRP Volunteer Coordinator and fisheries biologist Patrick Higgins. Despite an extremely dry preceding winter, flow in the East Branch was robust and that water temperatures were cold enough for juvenile steelhead to thrive. Underwater observations found multiple age classes of steelhead, with one year and two year old fish present. This means that winter habitat conditions remain suitable for rearing, which is often not the case streams flowing from altered watersheds.



Young of the year juvenile steelhead feed in the back of a pool while an older age steelhead feeds from the surface further upstream in the EBSF Eel. 9/10/13.

Work with Community: In addition to working with the agency, Jeff also pursued discussions with the Coombs family that has large ranch and timberland holdings adjacent to BLM Wilderness. The family is currently considering sale of these properties and seems receptive to Jeff's overtures. Jeff has also arranged meetings with civic groups, merchants, and rural fire departments in the Leggett area to win support of Wilderness expansion. This insures community political support for expansion, should an opportunity arise in upcoming Wilderness legislation.

Jeff Hedin has also been a conduit for other citizens actively trying to expand South Fork Eel Wilderness. He has been in contact with Ethan Bartz and Susan Dill who want to purchase Eel River Saw Mills timberland and add to the Red Mountain Wilderness, also within the East Branch South Fork watershed.

Wilderness Coalition Coordination: On November 15 in Arcata and on December 15 in Willits, Jeff Hedin met with the California Wilderness Coalition members who are working on a regional plan for Wilderness expansion. Ryan Henson, Allison Sterling, Warren Alford, and David and Ellen Drell of the Willits Environmental Center participated in the meetings. These are large scale players who are cultivating local grassroots contacts and receptive to adding Wilderness expansion areas within the Eel River basin to their campaign. The Coombs Tree Farm property adjacent to the BLM Red Mountain Wilderness is 4000 acres and could be suitable for inclusion in legislation.



Internal ERRP Coordination: Both the wilderness protection and wilderness expansion aspects of the project were presented to the attendees of the ERRP Fall Retreat in Briceland. There are many Wilderness advocates among those active in ERRP and several signed up to serve on a Wilderness Committee with Bruce and Jeff serving as co-chairs. Membership spans the entire Eel River basin and a wide age range, but all are willing to either help clean up these precious areas or to work collaboratively on expansion. ERRP is particularly fortunate to have recruited Lynn Ryan, who has been active in past, successful Wilderness expansion efforts.

Committee members are: Bruce Hillbach-Barger (co-chair), Jeff Hedin (co-chair), Lynn Ryan, Catherine (Cat) McAdams, David Weitzman, Patrick Higgins, Dotti and Graham Russell, Maureen McIver, Larry Desmond and Proud Savage.

The ERRP 2014 Action Plan and a complete record of discussions at the meeting are provided as Attachment #4.

At left: Lynn Ryan addresses ERRP Retreat attendees to explain the organized effort for Wilderness expansion legislation.

Work with Land Trust: In the event that parcels of high biodiversity value not far from existing Wilderness come up for sale, Jeff Hedin envisions the need to protect them with the help of a land trust until the area available for expansion meets federal legislation criteria. He and Pat Higgins have approached Greg King of the Siskiyou Land Conservancy to potentially assist with this aspect of Wilderness expansion. SLC assisted with acquisition and manages a large parcel within McCoy Creek in this area under a perpetual easement that prevents logging or development.

Six Rivers National Forest: Although never the intended target for the 2013 California Wildlands grant clean up efforts, ERRP felt it was important to cultivate SRNF staff and to find out agency policy regarding potential Wilderness expansion. In addition to initial meeting with SRNF staff Lynn Wright (Attachment #3), Pat Higgins contacted Mad River Ranger Tom Hudson to open discussions in June 2013. ERRP maintained contact with Acting Ranger Curtis Cross, who was appointed when Tom Hudson transferred to another Forest. In January 2014, Pat contacted the new Mad River District Ranger Christine Hill and found her extremely receptive to future partnerships and ideas about expanding Wilderness to better meet intended function and use.

Conclusion

The pilot scale 2013 California Wildlands grant has allowed ERRP to build a solid working relationship with agencies in authority over Wilderness Areas, helped identify grow sites, and facilitated communications between the agency line staff and law enforcement. This sets the stage for ERRP to bring a wave of volunteers to clean up all 14 identified grow sites on the Red Mountain Wilderness Area and all others on National Forest lands within the Eel River basin. Larger scale grant funding will now be pursued for volunteer coordination at this scale.

Fiscal Accounting/ Matching Resources

Hundreds of volunteer hours were expended in performance of this grant, including by ERRP contractors Jeff Hedin, Bruce Hilbach-Barger and Pat Higgins. Substantial amounts of agency time were expended on doing reconnaissance for grow sites, scouting possible clean up access routes, and determining resource values in areas considered for expansion. When the worth of the volunteer clean up crew is included, grant funds were leveraged at a rate of 5:1. Grant expenditures are listed in Table 1 below and the matching services and their worth follow in Table 2.

Table 1. Grant Funds Disbursed

Date	Service Provider	Task	Amount
	Trees Foundation	Administration (7%)	\$245.00
06/06/13	Patrick Higgins	Kick Off Meetings	\$300.00
06/13/13	Bruce Hilbach-Barger	Agency Coordination	\$247.10
12/24/13	Bruce Hilbach-Barger	Coordination/Scouting	\$728.50
02/04/13	Bruce Hilbach-Barger	Final Clean Up Planning	\$1,716.67
02/10/13	Jeff Hedin	Travel to Meetings	\$262.73
	Total		\$3,500.00

Table 2. Matching Contributions.

Item	Contributor	Match Worth	Detail
Mileage	Jeff Hedin	\$41.24	\$303.97 (total)-\$262.73 (reimbursed)
Hours	Jeff Hedin	\$1,875.00	75 hrs x \$25/hr
Hours	Pat Higgins	\$2,122.04	50 hrs x \$40/hr, 216 miles x 56.5/mile
Citizen Participation	BLM Neighbors, Wilderness Advocates Event Attendees	\$2,250.00	100 hrs x 22.50/hr
Agency Support and Participation	BLM(incl LE escort) Forest Service Cal DF&W	\$2,000.00 \$400.00 \$600.00	20 hrs x \$50/hr 8 hrs x \$50/hr 12 hrs x \$50/hr
Other Nonprofit	High Sierra VTC Environmental Rec Team	\$100.00 \$120.00	Supplies/Equipment Technical Advice 3 hrs x \$40/hr
Volunteer Time	15 Volunteers Scheduled 02/07/14	\$2,700.00	8 hrs x 15 volunteers x \$22.50/hr
	Post Grant Project Completion		Scheduled 02/21/14- weather permitting
Hours	Bruce Hilbach-Barger	\$625.00	25 hrs x \$25/hr
Hours	Jeff Hedin	\$400.00	16 hrs x \$25/hr
Agency Support	BLM Law Enforcement Mendocino Co Sheriff	\$800.00 \$355.00	16 hrs x \$50/hr \$350/day Deputy Overtime
Volunteer Time	15 Volunteers Scheduled	\$2,700.00	8 hrs x 15 volunteers x \$22.50/hr
	Total	\$17,088.28	