

ERRP Grassroots Wildland Protection and Wilderness Expansion Strategy: Building Connection and Support in the Entire Eel River Basin From the Ground Up



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For: **Eel River Recovery Project Wilderness Committee**

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*"In the end we will conserve only what we love;
we will love only what we understand; and
we will understand only what we are taught."*

-Baba Dioum

ERRP Grassroots Wildland Protection and Wilderness Expansion Strategy: Building Connection and Support in the Entire Eel River Basin From the Ground Up

ERRP's Wildlands* Agenda:

Protect (from threats, like industrial MJ grows and industrial fire suppression),

Expand (via congressional and administrative designation),

Connect (via watershed and riparian corridors)

ERRP's Wildlands Strategy:

Inform citizens and youth about the many benefits of wildlands.

Involve citizens and youth in wildland experiences and stewardship

Increase citizen/community support for new and existing Wilderness

*As used by ERRP, Wildlands includes Congressionally designated Wilderness and other lands that retain wild character and have high conservation value, whether on public or private land.

Introduction

The Eel River Recovery Project's Strategy for Wildland Protection has been developed by the organization's Wilderness Committee. The Strategy has emerged from two years engaging Eel River Basin citizens and includes:

- Getting citizens and youth involved in wildlands recreation and stewardship activities, including cleaning up industrial marijuana grows, trail building, and trail maintenance.
- Working with U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and California State Parks on wildlands policies and stewardship needs both inside and outside Wilderness.
- Educating citizens and youth on the importance of the Basin's Wilderness and other wildlands in protecting streamflow, providing healthy outdoor recreation and protecting wildlife and biodiversity, as well as about what needs to be done to protect, preserve and enhance wildland ecological services and other benefits, including recreation.
- Consulting with the California Wilderness Coalition, Friends of the River and others on wildland, river and stream protection and designation needs.
- Working with Native American Tribes, such as the Round Valley Indian Tribes and Cahto Tribe, to insure that they are invited as co-managers of Wilderness and consulted on any expansion plans.



Looking east off the ridge near Spy Rock into the Yolla Bolla Wilderness. February 2016.

This Wildlands Protection Strategy that has emerged from the bottom-up. Taking to heart Baba Dioum's wisdom, ERRP recognizes that long term protection, as well as short term expansion of Wilderness and other wildlands, depends on the support of Eel River citizens and communities. The strategy stresses building that support from the ground up by directly involving citizens, and especially youth, in experiencing the wild directly and developing stewardship responsibility for those lands. This has included consulting with RVIT and Cahto Tribes.

Over the course of the past year the Wilderness Committee has recruited and involved more than 50 citizens in cleaning up Wilderness marijuana grows, recreation hikes into Wilderness, Wilderness trail building, and trail maintenance. This volunteer hours and a in-kind donations amounting to several times this grant. The Committee tabled and distributed information on the Basin's protected and unprotected wilderness at major events including the Round Valley Salmon Awareness Festival, and the Southern Humboldt Fire Day.

During the past year the ERRP's Wilderness Committee also held two outreach events for the specific purpose of engaging with citizens on which watersheds, roadless lands and streams need protection as designated Wilderness as well as how to best build support for protecting those lands and streams. These workshops were held at Grizzly Creek State Park in the Van Duzen Sub-basin and in Laytonville. In addition, the Committee met and engaged with contractor Felice Pace in the planning process that created this Strategy for Wildland Protection.



Jeff Hedin talks Wilderness to 2016 Salmon Awareness Festival attendees, including RVIT elder Ron Lincoln Sr (2nd from left), 10/21/15.

ERRP's Wildland Protection Strategy

1. Our Philosophy:

We believe an effective strategy to protect and expand wildlands in the Eel River Basin must be based on a strong foundation of citizen support, which itself is based on direct citizen involvement with and in wildlands stewardship and protection. Building that support through a wide range of public education, experiential and stewardship activities will assure that when the direct support of political bodies is required, ERRP will be able to fill the room with supporters.

We also believe that an effective Wildlands Protection Strategy must address both the major threats to existing wildlands and protect additional key wildlands through congressional Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers designation and/or administrative designation in federal and state land management plans and policies.

The current major threats to wildlands include direct and indirect impacts. Major direct threats including industrial marijuana grows, industrial fire suppression, and vehicular encroachment on wildlands and streams. Indirect impacts include fallout from nuclear disasters and those that come as a result of global climate change. ERRP is addressing marijuana grows directly by involving citizens in cleaning them up; the Wilderness Committee is engaging with Cal Fire, the USFS, BLM, State Parks, the Basin's Tribes, and others on fire suppression policies.

We will work through federal and state public land planning processes to secure policies which will allow fires to burn naturally within Wilderness and other wildlands when conditions are right. That is likely to include supporting prescribed fire within Wilderness to return these lands to a more natural and normal fire regime and collaborating with native communities to restore traditional practices to fire dependent landscapes. When wildlands are ready for fire, land and fire managers will be more likely to exercise restraint and the damage done by industrial fire suppression will be significantly reduced. Since fire was used to manage the Eel River landscape by Native Americans, we believe that allowing them to resume cultural practices is desirable, similar to the Karuk Tribe and the USFS.

The Committee will continue to work with Congressman Jared Huffman, Friends of the Rivers, the California Wilderness Coalition, and others to designate key unprotected Eel River wildlands as Wilderness and key river segments as Wild and Scenic. We will continue to work with landowners and agencies to convert private lands with high conservation value to protected public land. And we will continue to engage with federal and state land management agencies to protect wildlands and related environmental services via land management plans and policies. The expansion of Wilderness, combined with Wild and Scenic river designations and riparian protection will increase the resilience of Eel River Basin wildlands to climate change impacts.

2. Core Elements of the ERRP Wildlands Protection Strategy:

- Educate Eel River Basin communities about the value of the Basin's wildlands stressing ecological services, recreation, water quality and base-flow protection.
- Involve members of the community directly in Wilderness via pot grow clean-ups, trail building and maintenance and Wilderness recreation. Put special emphasis on getting kids to bond with wild places via interpretive work with State Parks and other organizations and schools.
- Partner with the USFS, BLM and State Parks on projects to involve community members in wildlands work (including trail building, pot grow clean-up, youth programs) and facilitate those government entities collaborating in order to integrate and coordinate wildland and biodiversity protection efforts.
- Continue developing working relationships with Tribal governments and Tribal communities of the Eel River Basin. ERRP will partner with Tribal governments and other native organizations on stewardship and public education projects, when invited. ERRP supports the aspirations of Indigenous natives to co-manage public lands within their ancestral territories under existing laws. We will also support efforts to restore traditional Indigenous burning practices to fire dependent landscapes.
- Participate in developing new National Forest, BLM and State Parks management plans. Work toward management plans for all three government land management agencies that take an integrated landscape approach to maintaining and restoring biodiversity via protection of core wild areas and riparian corridors linking those wildlands.
- Provide additional connectivity of core wildlands by protecting riparian corridors on private lands via conservation easements. Work to develop a process whereby small landowners can also obtain conservation easements for riparian and wildlands protection.

- Protect key wildlands and salmon streams through:
 1. Working collaboratively with the California Wilderness Coalition, Friends of the River and other partners to designate new Wilderness and Wild and Scenic streams in the Eel River Basin.
 2. Working with land trusts to identify, purchase and transfer to government ownership available large privately owned parcels which are of high conservation value.
 3. Working to create a process whereby small landowners of property with high conservation value can also receive buy outs and those parcels can be transferred to public ownership.
- Engage with local Congressman Jared Huffman with the goal of securing his support for the ERRP vision for wildlands protection in the Eel River Watershed. The top priority is to get Congressman Huffman or key staff out on the ground to experience first-hand what ERRP is doing to connect citizens to Wilderness and to advance community wildland stewardship.

3. Examples of how the ERRP, guided by its Wilderness Committee, has and will continue to implement the strategy:

Working through its Wilderness Committee, ERRP has already been implementing several aspects of the Strategy described above. Here are a few examples:

- The Wilderness Committee sets up an education booth and display at the annual Round Valley Salmon Festival that focuses on wildlands and the ecological services which they provide, including protecting baseflows in salmon streams that serve as refugia. The Committee also makes presentations at Round Valley Elementary School, including all grades K through 8. Round Valley is the location of one of California's major Indian Reservations and tribal governments; consequently there is a high percentage of folks with Indigenous natives ancestry in the local population.
- Over the course of the past four years, ERRP has involved more than 100 citizens in cleaning up 9 large marijuana grow sites within designated Wilderness and on other wildlands. A total of 670 cubic yards of trash and waste has been removed; 40% of the removed waste and trash was recycled. The Committee also regularly involves citizens in trail maintenance and construction. Through participation in wildland stewardship work, citizens form a bond with the land and realize that local people have critical roles to play as wildland stewards.
- During the past year the Wilderness Committee has been working with the BLM and the Western Rivers Conservancy on purchase of a large private parcel in the East Branch South Fork Eel River watershed. Protecting the 4000 acre Schmook Ranch as public wildlands would benefit salmon recovery, expand core wildlife habitat, enhance recreation opportunities, and help protect a major source of clean water.
- ERRP organized and conducted six outreach events over the course of the past year aimed at those who are growing marijuana in the Eel River Basin. The events were designed to raise awareness among growers of streamflow and salmon survival issues and why they need to conserve water and eliminate pollution. ERRP also stressed the importance of Eel River Wildlands in protecting baseflows in salmon streams and the importance of riparian protection to stream ecosystems and as a means of protecting water quality and providing wildlife habitat connectivity.



Wilderness Committee core group visiting the East Branch SF Eel River, which ERRP Wants to designate as Wild and Scenic.

- The Wilderness Committee has initiated a collaborative process with the Cahto Indian Tribe of the Laytonville Rancheria, a federally recognized tribe. Collaboration is focused on stewardship of the Cahto Peak Wilderness and other public lands within the Band's ancestral territory and on watershed restoration. The goal is to forge a partnership with the Tribe that will advance wildland protection, restoration and habitat connectivity and which will also advance the Tribe's desire to co-manage public lands within its ancestral territory.
- Through the Wilderness Committee, as well as in other ways, ERRP engages regularly with federal and state agencies which manage land in the Eel River Basin, including California State Parks, the USFS and BLM, on issues of wildland protection, restoration and recreation. For example, the Committee took BLM officials on two hikes during the past year to discuss trail development options. The Committee promotes trail development to provide wildland recreation, but also as a disincentive for future marijuana grows in these areas.
- The Committee is working with Friends of the River, the California Wilderness Coalition and others to promote new Wilderness designation for unprotected roadless lands and new Wild and Scenic rivers protection for key salmon streams.

A Living Strategy

Like the organization itself, the Eel River Recovery Project's Wildlands Protection Strategy has developed organically from the ground up. Residents who were already individually involved in various aspects of wildlands stewardship began supporting each others work and working together to develop shared projects and new understandings. Through outreach the circle has been expanded bringing in new residents and engaging them in thinking through the importance of wildlands and the stewardship needs of those lands.

What has been presented above is a snapshot of the Strategy at this point in time. We fully expect that it will continue to evolve and develop as the ERRP Wilderness Committee and Eel River Basin communities continue to engage together and with the land management agencies and tribes to address threats to wildlands and opportunities to advance wildland protection, connectivity, recreation and stewardship. For example, ERRP is only in the early stages of engaging with land management agencies, Cal Fire and the Basin's citizens on wildfire related issues, including the threat industrial-style fire suppression poses to wildlands, water quality and salmon and the need to allow fire to play a more natural ecological role in wildlands. In the years ahead we believe wildfire issues and initiatives will come to play a larger role in our work and this could lead to changes in our Strategy.

In order to provide for a living and evolving Wildlands Protection Strategy and program of work, once each year the Wilderness Committee will bring together those who have been involved in its various efforts to reflect back on what has been done, consider whether the Strategy needs to be changed or revised, and provide input for the ERRP's *Wildlands Protection Work Plan* for the coming year. In this way, ERRP will assure that its Wildlands Protection Strategy is appropriate, targeted and effective.



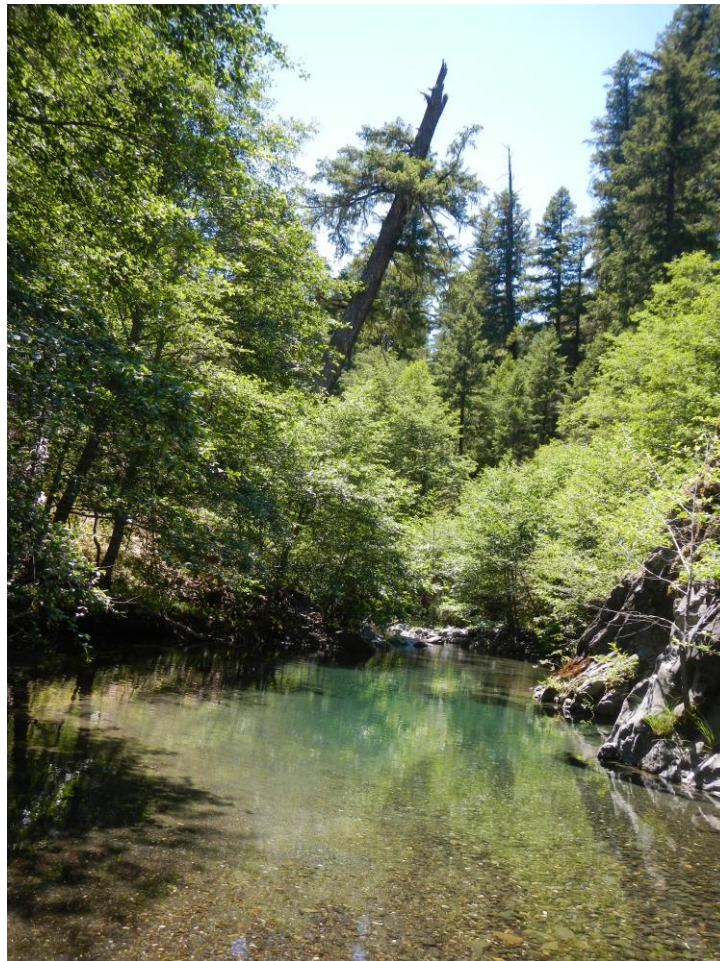
Jeff Hedin, second from left, gets (r to l) ERRP volunteer Amy Conway and ERRP Board members Vivian Helliwell and Barbara Sopjes informed about Wilderness during the coffee-bagel-mingle session before ERRP Action Plan Retreat. 1/10/16.

Summary and Conclusion

Through directly involving citizens and youth in experiencing wildland recreation, learning about the environmental service wildlands provide, and performing wildland stewardship work, the Eel River Recovery Project is building a strong base of support for protecting existing wildlands from threats, securing protection for additional key wildlands on public and private lands, and connecting wildlands via riparian and full watershed habitat corridors.

The Wilderness Committee is also developing working partnerships with the Basin's federal tribes and other Indigenous organizations that are focused on the need for wildland stewardship and the desire of tribal governments to co-manage public lands within their ancestral territories. These partnerships can be effective in directly addressing the well-known antipathy of federal tribes to formal Wilderness designation. By showing that stewardship and traditional Indigenous uses of the land are not precluded by congressional designation of Wilderness or by Wild & Scenic River status, ERRP hopes to secure tribal support for Wilderness and Wild and Scenic designation.

In the end, what we are promoting is love of the Eel River Basin's wildlands; a love that is based on direct relationship and which encompasses not just the idea but also the practice of stewardship. ERRP's Strategy for Wildland Protection is a tool for helping residents of the Eel River Basin recognize, value and become involved with the Basin's wildlands, that is, for developing wildland love, the key to sustaining wildlands in a changing climate and a changing world.



West Branch of the Van Duzen River below the Lassics Wilderness.

Rose Foundation Wildlands Grant Reconciliation

Rose Grant Amount: \$4500

Total Grant Payments

Trees Administrative Overhead (7%): \$315

Felice Pace - Consulting Services & Travel: \$1253

Bruce Hilbach-Barger for Volunteer Coordination/Meeting Planning & Facilitation: \$2932

Grant Match

Estimated Community Volunteer Hours:

Jeff Hedin 100,

Ethan Bertz 60,

Pat Higgins 40,

Ernie Merrifield 40+,

Samantha Kannry 40,

James Hagan 20

Heron Hilbach-Barger 20,

Susan Rudich 20,

Steven Day 20,

Proud Savage 15,

Maria Savage 15,

Charles Nummelin 15,

Casey O'Neill 15,

Nonae Sears 15,

Andrew Hedin 15,

Eme Haas 8,

Val Nordeman 8,

Martin Mitchell 8,

Black Oak Ranch road crew 40,

Happy Day Farms CSA 30

Total ~ 544 hours x \$23.56/hour = \$12816.64

Total Donated by Bruce Hilbach-Barger = \$1976.75

TOTAL MATCH = \$14,973.39