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SLO County Commemorates 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act

The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors today passed a resolution commemorating the 50th anniversary of the passage of the federal Wilderness Act, the first legislation of its kind in the world.

The Board's resolution noted that "San Luis Obispo County is fortunate to contain the iconic Garcia, Santa Lucia and Machesna and Silver Peak Wilderness Areas." The resolution was presented to the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club.

"The Central Coast is home to some of the most beautiful and ecologically diverse stretches of land in North America, and after 50 years, the Wilderness Act continues to help keep it that way," said Congresswoman Lois Capps of the board's action. "Protecting and preserving these precious lands for future generations was a top priority then and must continue to be now."

The Wilderness Act was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on September 3, 1964, creating America's National Wilderness Preservation System and setting aside 9.1 million acres of wildlands for "the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will . . . provide for the protection of these areas and the preservation of their wilderness character." Over the past 50 years, Congress has added more than 100 million acres of federal lands to the wilderness system.

"A uniquely American cultural achievement, wilderness represents our nation's decision to forego development in certain special places and preserve permanently, by law, wild places where nature can continue to dominate," said Wilderness50 co-chair Vicky Hoover, co-chair of Wilderness50, a coalition of agencies, organizations and universities coordinating local and national events to mark the 50th anniversary and raise public awareness of wilderness. The year-long celebration is designed "to remind Americans of our nation's historical close connections to nature and the importance of preserving these special wild lands for generations to come."

More than 400 local wilderness education and awareness events will be held nationwide, including Walk for Wilderness marches, outings and service trips, airport and visitor center exhibits, speakers, interpretive programs, trainings and workshops, art shows, music and dance programs and stewardship projects will be held in communities across the country. “Wilderness Forever,” a photography exhibition, will open at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in Washington, D.C., in September. A National Wilderness Conference to be held in October in Albuquerque, New Mexico, will be a forum for discussing the growing challenges of perpetuating the values of wilderness in a time of unprecedented environmental and social change, and charting a course for the next 50 years.

The public can get an online calendar and a map of local events and get involved in planning efforts by following Wilderness50 on Facebook, or visiting the website wilderness50th.org and signing up for monthly updates.

The 757 wilderness areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) are managed by the four federal land management agencies—the Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and National Park Service. To learn more about the Wilderness Act and the NWPS, visit www.wilderness.net, which provides general information about wilderness and specific information about each of the 757 wilderness areas.

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