

ABSTRACT

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SIERRA CLUB'S CHANGING
ATTITUDE TOWARD
ROADBUILDING

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In the early twentieth century, the Sierra Club was a foremost booster of roads and national parks as a way of rendering the mountains accessible. In the middle of the twentieth century, however, the Club reassessed this stance. By looking at three instances where the Club initially supported roads and recreational projects in California's Sierra Nevada—improvement of the Tioga Road, support for a Minaret Summit Highway, and development of Mineral King for skiing—I trace the Club's movement from an organization promoting automobile-oriented recreation to a group opposed to the development of recreation facilities, including roads. These Sierran struggles broaden the importance of the definition of wilderness as roadlessness investigated by Paul Sutter, and demonstrate that such visible concerns over roads persisted beyond the interwar years.

TO RENDER INACCESSIBLE: THE SIERRA CLUB'S
CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARD ROADBUILDING

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Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction: Wilderness Against Recreation.....	1
Chapter 2: Sierran Geography and the Nineteenth Century.....	10
California, Here I Come: Gold, Trails, and Roads.....	13
Chapter 3: The Sierra Nevada in Federal Hands, 1890s to 1950s.....	19
Federal Management of the Sierra Nevada: Increased Protection through Interagency Politics.....	21
A Road the Length of the Mountains: The Sierra Way.....	32
An Improved Road Threatens the Wild: The Tioga Road.....	35
Chapter 4: The Sierra Club Reverses Course: Opposition to Minaret Summit and Mineral King.....	41
Minaret Summit.....	44
A Gap in the Wilderness.....	44
Bernie F. Sisk and Ike Livermore: Access versus Wilderness.....	50
Closing the Gap.....	58
Mineral King.....	62
The First Road to Mineral King.....	63
The Sierra Club at Mineral King.....	71
The Rivalry Played Out: Interagency Politics and the Sierra Club Block Improved Access.....	78
The Road to Sequoia National Park.....	94
Chapter 5: Conclusion: Irreconcilable Differences.....	98

Appendix.....	104
Bibliography.....	105

List of Figures

Fig. 1: California Overview Map, 2008.....	11
Fig. 2: Tioga Road, 2008.....	40
Fig. 3: Sierran Snow Barrier, 1967.....	45
Fig. 4: Minaret Summit Road, 2007.....	59
Fig. 5: Mineral King Road, 2005.....	65
Fig. 6: Proposed Mineral King Ski Resort, 1965-1978.....	80

Chapter 1: Introduction: Wilderness Against Recreation

California's Sierra Nevada, circa 2000: Families and groups of avid downhill skiers alike travel twenty-five winding miles by road from the town of Three Rivers to a parking garage, to then be transported to the high alpine valley of Mineral King in Tulare County—said to be one of the finest skiing locations in the world. With numerous developed bowls, ridgetop restaurants and shopping, dining, and lodging on the valley floor, the area attracts over 2 million visitors a year, in winter and summer both. The high speed, all-year access road, improved especially for the private Disney development on national forest land, cuts through part of Sequoia National Park, harming several giant sequoias as its automobile traffic pollutes the air of the southern Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley. The U.S. Forest Service and Walt Disney Productions make a healthy profit off the ski resort.

Further north, 3,000 cars a day pass over the Minaret Summit Highway, the only trans-Sierra road in the 270 miles between Tioga Pass on the north and Walker Pass to the south. Coursing narrowly along an avenue purposefully left open in the 1930s between the legislated Minarets and John Muir Wildernesses, the road connects Madera County foothill communities with Mammoth Lakes (and its ski resort) and points east. Long a dream of Central Valley businessmen, the road was finally constructed in the 1970s as an all-year highway, despite crossing the mountains at an altitude above 9,000 feet. In severing the longest roadless wilderness in the United States, the highway also cut through the John

Muir Trail, a 211-mile-long hiking trail connecting Mount Whitney and Yosemite National Park. After years of discussion, backers justified the narrow, two-lane mountain road as a defense highway and to allow agricultural goods produced in the valley to more easily compete on price in eastern markets.

These projects were never realized, but the efforts to construct them spanned decades. The Mineral King ski resort (including its access road, improvement of which was essential to the development) and the Minaret Summit Highway were halted through efforts led by the Sierra Club, an early conservation club that became increasingly active and combative in natural resource fights following World War II. Significantly, the Sierra Club had earlier officially endorsed both a trans-Sierra highway over Mammoth Pass (very near to Minaret Summit) and ski development at Mineral King. From its founding in 1892, the Club had as its purpose to “explore, enjoy, and render accessible” the mountains of the Pacific Coast. In the conservation debate of the early twentieth century, led by Club founder and environmental philosopher John Muir, the Club advocated preservation for recreation over use of natural resources. The preservation advocated by the Club in Yosemite National Park, for instance, disallowed a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley, but encouraged development for people, including constructing roads for access.¹ The Club's focus on access, reflected in part through boosting certain recreational roads, changed mid-

¹ Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6, 107. In attempting to keep San Francisco from damming Hetch Hetchy for a municipal reservoir, the Sierra Club sought infrastructure in the valley to support visitors, including a road into Hetch Hetchy, as well as up the still-wild Tuolumne Canyon to Tuolumne Meadows.

century as visitation to the Sierra Nevada mushroomed as a result of an expanding California population, an increased affinity for outdoor recreation, and a network of paved roads in national parks and forests.² In 1951, the Club's mission became “to explore, enjoy, and preserve the Sierra Nevada and other scenic resources in the United States,” evidence of a shift in the values of Club leaders that is indicative of how the Club became increasingly wary of recreational developments.

The Sierra Club played a part in this expanded access through its relations to the majority federal land managers in the range, the United States Forest Service and the National Park Service. The Sierra Nevada saw its first national parks in 1890, its first national forests in 1891, and the Sierra Club's founding in 1892.³ The Sierra Club advocated formally protecting much of the Sierra Nevada from resource development, and the Club worked closely with the Forest Service and Park Service to expand the acreage under such protection. The Club's mission particularly aligned with the preservationist impulse of the National Park Service (established in 1916), and key early leaders of the Park Service were also Sierra Club members. But this cooperation between the Club and federal land managers, tenuously balanced on the pillars of tourism promotion and land

² The population numbers are particularly staggering. California went from 1.5 million residents in 1900, to 5.7 million in 1930 and 15.7 million in 1960. (James D. Hart, *A Companion to California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 501-503. California social critic Carey McWilliams saw the State's growth as a defining characteristic of its history, commenting that California differed from other states in that it “has not grown or evolved so much as it has been hurtled forward, rocket-fashion, by a series of chain-reaction explosions.” (Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception*, 1949 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 25.

³ Although Yosemite had been granted protection in 1864, it did not receive national park status until 1890.

protection, broke down in the 1950s as the land managers promoted increased development of Sierran lands (both in natural resource use, such as logging, and recreational development, including roads) and the Club eschewed development in favor of increased preservation. The Club's changing position dovetailed with other events helping to form the modern environmental movement, including the struggle to define and defend wilderness, and the emergence of a younger generation of environmental leaders.

Just as people construct roads, they can also construct the concept of wilderness. Americans have continued to redefine wilderness in response to their historical circumstances. Roderick Frazier Nash, in his classic *Wilderness and the American Mind*, traces the history of the idea from settlers fearful of the wilderness areas “alien to man,” through the nineteenth century romantic appreciation of wilderness, to a more modern idea of wilderness defined against natural resource use, as happened at Hetch Hetchy.⁴ Nash continues this wilderness/use dichotomy through the 1950s, emphasizing the battle waged by the Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society to keep the proposed Echo Park Dam out of Dinosaur National Monument as a necessary prelude to securing passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Environmental historian William Cronon touched off a firestorm of debate in the 1990s when he questioned the usefulness of the concept of wilderness.⁵ He

⁴ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed., rev. and updated (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁵ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York and London: Norton), 1995, pp. 69-90.

acutely points out that wilderness exists as “the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history....it is a product of that civilization.”⁶ Inasmuch as culture creates wilderness areas, Cronon argues, they cannot help but to reproduce the values of the society trying to reject it, even if wilderness advocates seek to reject such values. Each wilderness does have a history, and this history in turn shapes how people think about and value the wilderness. The Minaret Summit battle, in which the Sierra Club sought to close a non-wilderness corridor left open between two other wilderness areas, demonstrates that wilderness is not just about what a natural area contains, but also more generally about the proper relationship between humans and nature.

In *Driven Wild*, Paul Sutter challenges the stasis of Nash's wilderness/use dichotomy through the first half of the twentieth century. In examining the founders and formation of The Wilderness Society, Sutter shows how the modern idea of wilderness (as embodied in the Wilderness Act's definition of the term) came out of the interwar years. The idea that wilderness equated to roadless areas, Sutter argues, “was a product of battles between preservation and recreational development, not preservation and resource use.”⁷ Sutter shows how the Society's founders grew concerned over the effects of mass recreation on wild lands. Although the Wilderness Act so very clearly embraces this interwar definition, for Sutter the roadless thrust diminished in the postwar period, as

⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁷ Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002), 242.

increased timber cutting and water development threatened federally managed lands.⁸ While detailing the great postwar recreation boom, born of cheap gasoline, rising prosperity, and greater leisure time, Mark Harvey also argues for the significance increased natural resource use, and specifically water development, as “threats to the wilderness” following World War II.⁹

The Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society worked as partners in opposing the Echo Park Dam, each led by younger leaders who were part of a new generation of environmentalists. David Brower, the militant Sierra Club President whose take-no-prisoners environmental attitude twice caused him to found new environmental organizations, defined the new, uncompromising environmental philosophy. Robert Gottlieb writes that the Glen Canyon compromise “forced the group to further reconsider its approach concerning wilderness.”¹⁰ And yet the postwar activities of the Sierra Club had just as much to do with the reaction to increased recreation as they do with natural resource use—perhaps more so. The Club only belatedly adopted the Society's ideas. As late as 1937 the Club agreed to a new road crossing the Sierra Nevada, and as late as 1947 supported the widening of the Tioga Road through Yosemite National Park and development of skiing facilities at Mineral King.

⁸ Ibid., 259.

⁹ Mark Harvey, “Loving the Wild in Postwar America,” in *American Wilderness: A New History*, ed. Michael Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 193.

¹⁰ Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, rev. and updated (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005), 78.

The specific event that caused the Sierra Club to reevaluate its promotion of access to mountains of the Pacific Coast was a late 1940s proposal for a ski resort atop the Mount San Geronio, the highest mountain in Southern California. But these other key events in the Sierra, revolving around roads and recreation, decisively shaped the Sierra Club's wilderness thinking. From heavily involved in the promotion of Sierran national parks and their attendant roads from the 1890s onward, the Club only gradually came to question the federal land managers and the consequences of increased automobile-oriented recreation to natural areas generally and to national parks specifically.

David Louter has examined the trilateral relations of roads, parks, and wilderness through Washington's national parks.¹¹ Because Mount Rainier, Olympic, and North Cascades were “developed” by the Park Service over many decades, the parks offer a particularly good backdrop for the changing conceptions of park roads. Louter finds that, while the Park Service downplayed the importance of roads visiting the chief scenic attractions of the parks, automobiles still had a role to play in mediating the natural experience. He argues that “Americans do not have a strict definition of wilderness,” leading to a bifurcated definition of national parks: “one branch for roadless advocates, the other for mass culture.”¹² That is, for people sympathetic to the goals of The Wilderness Society, national parks could be seen as threats to wilderness, but for

¹¹ David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2006).

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

many others the national parks (roads and all) are the definition of wilderness. While my study looks at projects in both national parks and national forests, this bifurcation of thoughts on roads and wilderness is readily apparent, for both the road proponents and the Sierra Club opposition claimed to be advocates for wilderness. Did allowing for recreational use threaten wilderness, or enhance it? The road proponents, such as Congressman B. F. Sisk who championed the Minaret Summit road, believed that the Sierra could yet support more roads; the Club felt the balance had already tipped too far in favor of protection.

Automobile-oriented consumer recreation had been the foundation for the national park system, as developed by the Park Service's Stephen Mather and his staff of landscape architects. Anne Mitchell Whisnant has shown the regional effect of such development in her study of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina.¹³ Far from a road that lay lightly on the land (as parkways were said to do), creation of the Blue Ridge Parkway “required the arbitration of many significant disputes over substantial issues across boundaries of power.”¹⁴ The actors chronicled by Sutter reacted in part to this parkway, and the commercialism brought on by building such roads for tourism.

My Sierran case studies add to this growing literature on park roads, recreation, tourism, and wilderness, then, by focusing on how a small regional organization intent on encouraging recreational use of the mountains, including

¹³ Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) .

¹⁴ Ibid., 4. Timothy Davis provides an excellent overview of the parkway ideal in his “The Rise and Decline of the American Parkway,” in *The World Beyond the Windshield: Roads and Landscapes in the United States and Europe*, ed. Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 35-58.

through automobile access, became an outspoken advocate for roadless wilderness, questioning the value of mass tourism. Like Sutter and Louter, these stories show how wilderness in the southern Sierra Nevada emerged out of particular historical circumstances. The Sierra Club's battles against improvement to the Tioga Road, completion of the Minaret Summit highway across the mountains, and reconstruction of the road to Mineral King particularly mirror the interwar tenor of wilderness debate discussed by Sutter. Unlike Nash, Sutter, and Harvey, however, who maintain that the postwar wilderness debates were again about preservation versus use, I argue that conflicts over roads and recreation were just as instrumental in influencing that postwar wilderness debate. While the Sierra Club did participate in the charge against dams elsewhere in the West, its home base has always been the Sierra Nevada. The Club's preservation activities in the mountains following the war defined the Club against itself, as it no longer supported the tourism and recreation it once had. The Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society worked together for the Wilderness Act because they shared a common belief in the deleterious effect of roads in natural areas; the narrative below explains how the Sierra Club battled its past to arrive at this definition.

Chapter 2: Sierran Geography and the Nineteenth Century

The place called California entered the European imagination as an island. Whether explorer Hernán Cortés applied the name because of any similarities he found between the land and the island described in *Las Sergas de Esplandián* (a 1510 Spanish romance novel), the comparison is apt.¹⁵ Though California is landlocked (if not entirely static), the idea of California as an isolated entity has been borne out historically in its relationship with the United States. Until completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, California was easier accessible by boat than by land. The barrier of the Sierra Nevada has largely determined this isolation.¹⁶ Although the range is now crossed by nine roads (including one interstate highway) and several railroad lines in the north, the Sierra still serves as a formidable natural barrier to the movement of people and goods.

The Sierra Nevada consists of a single uplifted granite block, an impressive 400-mile-long massif separating California from the East. The northern end of the range blends into Lassen Peak and the Cascade Range; in the south, the

¹⁵ Erwin G. Gudde, *California Place Names: The Origin and Etymology of Current Geographical Names*, 4th ed., revised and enlarged by William Bright (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 59-61. While Spanish explorers did find male inhabitants of California (conflicting with the novel's claims of an all-female population), the abundance of gold discovered later did harmonize with the book's description.

¹⁶ The Sierran barrier sits along much of the state's eastern border. Other impediments to the east and south are the deserts: the Great Basin (including Death Valley), the Mojave, and the Colorado.

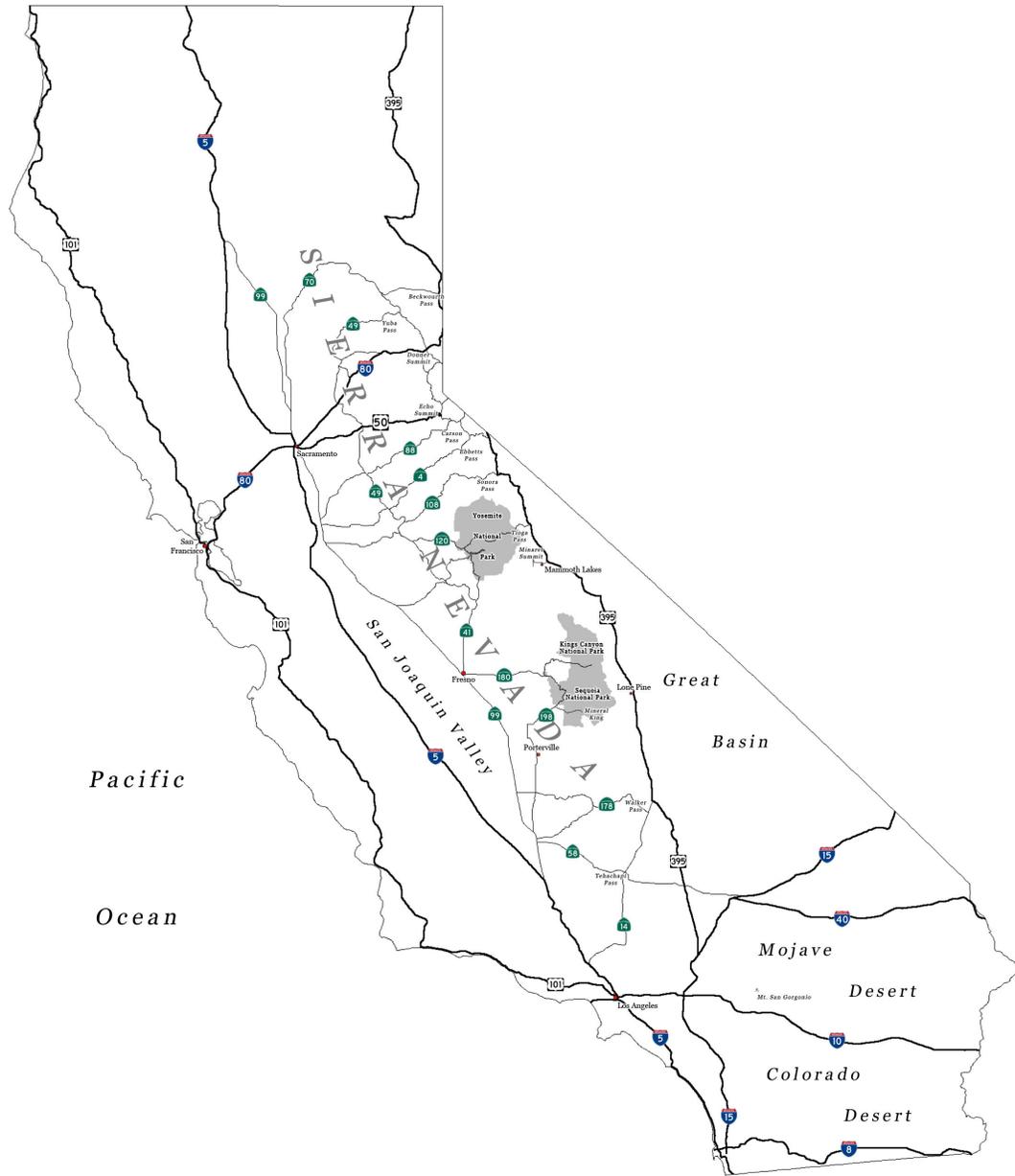


Fig. 1. California Overview Map, 2008. Shown are principal interstate and U.S. Highway routes for the entire State, as well as the main roads in the Sierra Nevada. Produced by the author.

Sierra meets the Tehachapi Mountains at Tehachapi Pass. Due to the specific circumstances of orogeny, the Sierra's eastern escarpment is significantly steeper

than the western slope, with significant consequences for its transportation history. While the approach from the Central Valley evinces a remarkably steady, gradual rise from the valley floor, the eastern edge of the block—particularly in the south, in the area in which this study is concerned—drops dramatically. The Owens Valley, a 75-mile long graben alongside the eastern side of the Southern Sierra, lies at 4,000 feet elevation. Sierran peaks tower over this area to heights exceeding 14,000 feet. Mt. Whitney, at 14,505 feet, is the highest point in the contiguous United States.

Looking back to the Gold Rush and decades following (from 1848 to the early 1870s) is crucial to understanding California's history and particularly subsequent events in the Sierra Nevada. Hundreds of thousands of miners displaced the native populations in the Sierra, whose population may have numbered as high as 50,000.¹⁷ But those who came for gold did not distribute themselves evenly across the mountain range; rather, they concentrated themselves in the north, with the easily accessible mineral deposits on the American and Bear rivers. The High Sierra offered little of interest to the miners. Instead, they congregated in what came to be known as the Mother Lode area, a zone in the western foothills stretching 120 miles from Georgetown in the north to Mariposa in the south.¹⁸

¹⁷ Indians did not permanently inhabit the higher reaches Sierra Nevada, but did retreat to its cooler comforts during summer months. Sierran Indians lived in the foothills—precisely the area in which miners concentrated themselves. For this relationship and displacement, see David Beesley, *Crow's Range: An Environmental History of the Sierra Nevada* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2004), 15-43.

¹⁸ Hart, 284.

The work and settlement patterns of the Gold Rush are so important to today's Sierra Nevada because these patterns of human population and use are largely still intact. The roads that cross the northern Sierra, from Donner Pass to Sonora Pass, were either created or substantially improved because of mining activities and the associated immigration from the East (and many other countries, besides).¹⁹ Many towns in the Sierra foothills trace their origins to the middle of the nineteenth century and today use this history to garner their share of the tourist trade. But for the area south of what is now Yosemite National Park, without gold to attract 49ers, comparatively little settlement occurred. Mineral King experienced something of a mining boom in the 1870s, leading to construction of a small town on the valley floor, but the area's name belies promoters' hopes more than it does the wealth that was found in the mountains.

California, Here I Come: Gold, Trails, and Roads

Overland migration to California from the East did not begin with the Gold Rush. It is true that the pace of immigration changed qualitatively upon discovery of gold by James W. Marshall in 1848, but since the Bidwell-Bartleson Party of 1841 settlers had headed west for opportunity. Due to distance and geography, the journey exposed travelers to severe hardships. Finding a path across the Sierra had earlier presented problems to fur trappers and explorers such as Kit

¹⁹ Unlike in other areas of the country, the Sierra Nevada's roads were not originally Indian paths. Geographer Thomas Frederick Howard concludes that "...it does not appear from early travelers' accounts that Indians played an indispensable role in traverses of the Sierra" (*Sierra Crossing: First Roads to California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 54). The Indian known as Truckee did, however, point out what became the Truckee route, future path for the Donner Party, the transcontinental railroad, U.S. 40, and Interstate 80.

Carson, Jedediah Smith, and John Charles Frémont. The enormous difficulties experienced by the Donner-Reed Party in trying to cross the Sierra in 1846, resulting in the deaths of half of the party, dramatically illustrate the geographic difficulties faced by the emigrants and for a time caused the Donner Pass (or Truckee) route to fall into disuse. Still, by the time settlers came to California for gold, the trails were well trod—if not nearly as convenient or reliable as the paved highways of the twentieth century.²⁰

The Gold Rush defined California's early development as a state and its effects continue to influence land use in the Sierra Nevada. The specific distribution of gold and other minerals, coupled with possibilities offered by the terrain, influenced how mining activities played out. It was the single most important event in the area's American period and, germane to this investigation of Sierran roadbuilding, the distribution of population and travel networks of today can be traced back to that period. Improvement and development of wagon roads crossing the range continued for decades after, but the impact of mining on determining those networks cannot be overstated.

At the time of gold discovery in 1848, emigrants' options for entering California were limited, though settlers trusting to promoters of phantom routes could considerably expand their choices. The few routes available across the Sierra, as pointed out by geographer Thomas Frederick Howard, fulfilled the needs of parties traveling on a once-in-a-lifetime journey, but were ill-suited for

²⁰ Sierra Nevada historian Francis Farquhar notes that most of those who came overland in search of gold “followed the established Truckee route,” but others experimented and opened up new routes. (*History of the Sierra Nevada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 65.)

repeated travel and certainly insufficient to really tie California to the East. Rather, the Gold Rush “worked a change in attitude regarding improved roads” as the dictates of commerce and homesickness made themselves known.²¹ The roads that resulted from these booster efforts, in the form of their paved and improved successors, are the roads that today cross the northern Sierra Nevada. Stewart Mitchell, a California Department of Transportation employee writing in a centennial commemoration of California roads, states that such routes “were particularly prominent during the period of settlement and early growth and are still a very vital factor in the economic and social life of the State.”²² By 1853, Gold Rush settlers had a choice of routes. Significantly, Mitchell notes that the relative popularity of the routes “increased or declined with the fortunes of the area it served.”²³ The boosters and their roads were predicated on serving mining settlements.

State politics soon played a part in the wagon roads story, for California quickly transitioned to statehood in 1850. Mitchell calls the 1850s the “era of the trails,” for while there was no end to the proposals and interest in wagon road construction, no money was forthcoming until the end of the decade.²⁴ In 1855 the California Legislature passed the State Wagon Road Act, to provide for a single link on a transcontinental wagon road. Challenges to the act's

²¹ Howard, 54.

²² Stewart Mitchell, “Crossing the Sierra,” *California Highways and Public Works*, 29(9) (1950), 49.

²³ Mitchell, 51.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

constitutionality and regional infighting among communities possibly to be served, however, hampered its possible effect. Indeed, Sierran roadbuilding reached its zenith in 1865, at which time the coming of the transcontinental railroad promised to overturn the traditional order of Sierran roads.

Wagon roads enabled the first settlers and miners to reach the interior of California, but did not offer a permanent solution to the transportation problem. The seminal event in tying California to the rest of the nation came with completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. The California-to-Utah portion, known as the Central Pacific Railroad, succeeded in crossing the formidable Sierran barrier that twenty years before had presented such problems to wagon trains. The railroad made possible more regular transit across the mountains, something impossible with wagons and Sierran weather. In presenting a more reliable alternative for trans-Sierran traffic, the railroad's opening contributed to the decline of these wagon roads, which thereafter served only local traffic—that is, until three more decades had passed and the automobile again focused public interest on these crossings.²⁵ The wagon roads, in the first place, were seen as temporary, their discussions underlain by the prospect of a transcontinental railroad. Additionally, the idea of such a train linking the coasts appeared before wagons had ever crossed the Sierra Nevada.²⁶

As could be expected from the challenging topography of the Sierra Nevada, and the small grade demanded by the railroad, construction proved

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁶ Howard, 100-101.

challenging.²⁷ Most of the work was done by Chinese workers, who had to contend with the worst of the Sierran weather. Heavy rains in the lower elevations and heavy snows higher up limited the work that could be done. Despite the Central Pacific employing over ten thousand men working on the railroad, progress came slowly in the mountains—particularly as the Chinese blasted through the Sierran granite to complete the Summit Tunnel through the Sierran crest.²⁸ The railroad conquered the mountain, but only with supreme effort and at great cost.²⁹ The railroad's backers were assured of profit from government awards, but later Sierran roads had no such economic incentives.

Upon the railroad's completion, Howard writes that the once-significant wagon roads “sank into decrepitude at varying rates, depending on how closely the railroad paralleled and outperformed them.”³⁰ The Truckee Route, once a main thoroughfare, then neglected, then revived with the coming of the railroad, once again fell into disuse. Proximity to the railroad meant that it offered no geographic advantages, nor did it offer faster or better service. The Lake Tahoe Wagon Road continued as a toll road for another seventeen years, before

²⁷ Due to the low friction of the railroad and the length of trains, specifications for railroad track were much more demanding than those for modern automobile roads.

²⁸ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, 1863-1869* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 230-248.

²⁹ Mother Nature could reclaim the mountains at will, however, as seen when the diesel passenger train “City of San Francisco” and its 226 passengers were stranded for a week in 1952 near Donner Pass because of deep snow. For an account of this dramatic event, see Howard W. Bull, “The Case of the Stranded Streamliner: The Rescue of SP's Snowbound 'City of San Francisco' at Yuba Pass, January 13-19, 1952.” *Trains & Travel* 13, no. 3 (1953), available online at the Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum, http://cprr.org/Museum/Stranded_Streamliner_1952/index.html.

³⁰ Howard, 174.

purchase as a public (toll free) highway by El Dorado County in 1886 and much later improvement as U.S. 50.³¹ The twentieth century shifted the transportation focus to automobile roads, with these roads shaped by forces absent in the preceding decades. Notably, new road construction occurred in the context of national parks, national forests, and the environmental movement. New Sierran automobile roads did not serve mining interests, but served a nature recreation-oriented constituency.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 175. Although there is little secondary research on the conversion of wagon roads to automobile roads, some information can be found in Howard, 174-179, and Mitchell, 66-68.

Chapter 3: The Sierra Nevada in Federal Hands, 1890s to 1950s

From the 1890s to the 1950s, the Sierra became intensively managed by the federal government and heavily visited by recreational tourists in automobiles. The creation of new federal management forms, national parks and national forests, combined with the Sierra Club's founding and the growth of automobile touring to form the basis for today's Sierra Nevada. Although it contained no wilderness areas, the southern Sierra of 1890 was wild: in broad terms, it was almost entirely unpopulated, had few large-scale extractive uses, and, important for this study, few developed roads and no trans-Sierra routes. As the Forest and Park Services took control and made provisions for use, roads were improved or built anew. The Sierra Club joined in promoting access by proposing or endorsing roads throughout the southern Sierra. Interagency rivalry and Club calls for protection of natural areas counterbalanced this quest for access, however, and wilderness protection came to the Sierra as early as the 1920s.

The Sierra Club's founding in 1892 closely followed both establishment of California's first national parks (1890) and the forest reserve system (1891). Composed mainly of residents of the San Francisco Bay Area, the Club organized itself around appreciation and outings in the Sierra Nevada. The club, then, both advocated for protection of parks and forests (such as with Yosemite) and

organized trips into the Sierra, naming and exploring remote parts of the range.³² And because the date of its founding and its area of interest so closely corresponds with establishment of Sierran national parks and forests, both the Club and these federal areas have practically grown up together. While the Sierra Club was far from the only party interested in Sierran issues, it has proved an influential voice in the ongoing conversation.

The Sierra Club enjoyed fraternal relations with both the Park and Forest Services because of mutual interest in protecting lands and providing for use, and this relationship constitutes important background with which to contrast later clashes. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Club came to disagree with the agencies on a number of issues related to access. Elsewhere in the West, the Sierra Club confronted the Park Service over conservation issues, particularly dams. In the Sierra Nevada, the issue of access drove a wedge between the organizations. Federal land managers, within both the Park Service and the Forest Service, recognized the increasing visitation following World War II and planned accordingly. A new generation of leaders within the Sierra Club emerged during this time that disagreed with the earlier philosophy of promoting access through development.

³² Michael McCloskey, *Sierra Club Executive Director: The Evolving Club and the Environmental Movement, 1961-1981*, an oral history conducted in 1981 by Susan R. Schrepfer, Sierra Club History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1983, 174.

Federal Management of the Sierra Nevada: Increased Protection through Interagency Politics

If the Sierra landscape has been shaped significantly by actions of individuals (such as gold miners) and small organizations (like the road-building enterprises of gold rush days), it has since been most impacted by actions of the federal government—the majority landowner in the range. This reflects the pervasiveness of the federal government throughout the twentieth-century West, both in resource administration and transportation.³³ But the federal government, of course, has not acted monolithically in controlling these lands. Rather, the prime influence on Sierran lands has been administration through the Park Service (formed 1916) and the Forest Service (formed 1905). Situated in two different departments (the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, respectively), each agency possesses its own goals, priorities, and management strategies that sometimes conflict—even though their lands frequently neighbor one another.³⁴ Influenced by California citizens,

³³ Gerald D. Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), x.

³⁴ This back-and-forth between the agencies is well-covered in both general works on federal land management and agency history, such as in Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997) or Harold K. Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service: A History*, Centennial ed. (Durham, NC: Forest History Society in association with University of Washington Press, 2004); in regional histories like Anthony Godfrey, *The Ever-Changing View: A History of the National Forests in California* (Pacific Southwest Region: USDA Forest Service, 2005) and Beesley; and investigations of administrative units, like Lary M. Dilsaver and William C. Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees: A Resource History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks* (Three Rivers, Calif.: Sequoia Natural History Association, Inc., 1990). A summary can also be found in Hal K. Rothman, “A Regular Ding-Dong Fight’: Agency Culture and Evolution in the NPS-USFS Dispute, 1916-1937,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 20 (1989): 141-161.

organizations, and businesses, as well as national interests, the agencies have tried to balance demands from these various interests in land use. At the same time, they have competed with one another politically to maintain and enlarge their geographic domains. This back-and-forth significantly impacted Sierran lands, contributing to the creation of wilderness areas on national forests and influencing legislation expanding Sequoia National Park and creating Kings Canyon.

Congress first authorized the President to create national forests—to be managed as “forest reserves” by the Division of Forestry within the Department of the Interior—in 1891.³⁵ The Division of Forestry became the Bureau of Forestry in 1901. In 1905, through the efforts of Gifford Pinchot, a trained forester and progressive, management of the forest reserves transferred to the Bureau of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture, which was then renamed the U.S. Forest Service.³⁶ The reserves shared with national parks a certain limitation on permitted activities, but forest advocates justified them as “necessary and functional entities,” with a greater variety of activities permitted than in national parks.³⁷ With the Forest Service's formation, the Secretary of Agriculture sent a memorandum to Pinchot (probably, in fact, written by Pinchot) that included a sentence summarizing the purpose of the forest reserves: “All the resources of the

³⁵ Concerns over destruction of the San Gabriel Mountains watershed by ranching and mining activities served as one source for creation of the reserves. See Ronald F. Lockmann, *Guarding the Forests of Southern California: Evolving Attitudes toward Conservation of Watershed, Woodlands, and Wilderness* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1981).

³⁶ Dilsaver and Tweed, 98-99.

³⁷ Godfrey, 37. The sale of timber was foremost a crucial difference between parks and forests.

forests are for *use*, under such restrictions only as will insure...permanence....”³⁸

Indeed, for most of their existence national forests have functioned on a “multiple use” philosophy that puts logging, grazing, and—later—recreation on an equal footing.

While the functional organizations of national parks in California came before national forests (in 1890, with the creation of Yosemite, Sequoia, and General Grant), Congress did not create a National Park Service until 1916. Prior to then, the War Department managed the three parks for the Department of the Interior. Park Service historian Richard Sellars argues that from Yellowstone onward, national parks operated on the concept that “development for public use and enjoyment could foster nature preservation on large tracts of public lands.”³⁹ This philosophy of emphasizing recreation over consumptive resource use served as a defining difference between the Park Service and the Forest Service. Although Chief Forester Henry Graves initially supported a separate bureau for national parks, he later desired to incorporate them into Forest Service management. He realized, however, that the Service's multiple-use mission could not shield it from conservationist arguments that the Service might permit logging, grazing, or summer home development.⁴⁰

While the Forest Service under Pinchot moved aggressively to institute its control over the forest lands, the national parks had no such strong parent within

³⁸ Dilsaver and Tweed, 99.

³⁹ Sellars, 16.

⁴⁰ Godfrey, 150.

the Department of the Interior. The Sierra Club saw the lack of clear administration for the park lands as a key reason for the flooding of Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park for San Francisco's water supply.⁴¹ Conservationists recognized the Forest Service's rising power and lobbied for an organization devoted to the national parks—as much to protect them as to keep them from being absorbed by the extraction-oriented Forest Service.⁴² Protection of scenic qualities of the park lands, conservationists believed, would come about only if an agency held that as its mandate.⁴³ As far back as the 1910s, then, the Sierra Club engaged in lobbying (here, for creation of the Park Service) and grasped how two warring natural resource agencies could benefit the conservationist cause.

The Forest Service immediately saw these efforts (in the middle years of the 1910s) as threatening its operations. Pinchot “steadfastly opposed the concept of a parks bureau” and had the Forest Service voice its objections about the Organic Act to create an agency for the national parks.⁴⁴ The Forest Service lost this battle, as Congress established the National Park Service on August 25, 1916. The strong leadership of Stephen Mather, a California businessman who made his fortune in borax, as first director of the Park Service, caused friction between the two agencies but resulted in greater protection for Sierran lands.

⁴¹ Michael P. Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 32.

⁴² Dilsaver and Tweed, 103.

⁴³ Sellars, 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

Although the Forest and Park services eyed each other warily, they at least cooperated to some degree in the 1920s. Realizing that while neighboring parks and forests might be administratively distinct, they were not biological islands unto themselves, the Forest Service agreed to protect national park entrance areas within national forests and to control grazing and timbering operations near park borders. Additionally, the two agencies agreed to review national forest lands to determine which areas should be transferred to national parks.⁴⁵ In 1926, Sequoia National Park expanded eastward, but only after sometimes-contentious negotiations. The Park Service traded three southern townships of the existing park (consisting of timber lands) for this other land to the east, including Mount Whitney. The compromises between the Park and Forest Services and other users of the forest (such as hydroelectric interests) excluded the Kings River canyon and the Mineral King valley from the expanded national park.⁴⁶

But the cooperative spirit of the two agencies soon faded as the Forest Service grew hostile to Mather's unendingly aggressive approach of expanding and bureaucratically fortifying the national parks and the Park Service.⁴⁷ The Park Service's growing strength and focus on preservation and recreation so encroached on Forest Service dominion that wilderness areas began to appear in the national forests. The Forest Service, in recognizing the potential threat posed by the Park Service, implemented some recreation programs almost as soon as

⁴⁵ Godfrey, 176.

⁴⁶ Dilsaver and Tweed, 115, 117-118.

⁴⁷ Godfrey, 176.

the Park Service was created. In a 1918 report commissioned by the Forest Service titled “Recreation Uses on the National Forests,” Frank A. Waugh concluded that recreation should be on par with the other “uses” of national forest lands.⁴⁸ In seeking to differentiate the still-insecure Park Service from the Forest Service, Mather derided the Forest Service as engaging in the “commercial exploitation of natural resources,” while the National Park Service operated “national playgrounds.”⁴⁹ In order to stand its ground against Mather, the Forest Service developed a program of wilderness areas on its lands. Beginning with the 1924 designation of the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico, the regional initiatives program became national in character in the ensuing years. If the Park Service sought to gain control of forest lands to protect their wild qualities, the thinking went, then offering these lands the same sort of wilderness protection under Forest Service administration should diffuse the land-transfer efforts. The back-and-forth about the proper agency to oversee recreation thus helped to protect a far greater area of the Sierra Nevada than would have otherwise been the case, but also served to, in the words of Forest Service historian Anthony Godfrey,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 151. Waugh was a trained landscape architect who in 1913 wrote the influential book *Landscape Gardening*. Waugh taught landscape architecture at Massachusetts State College, and through his student Conrad Wirth, a future Park Service director, had “substantial impact” on the Service from the 1930s until 1964, when Wirth retired. (Linda Flint McClelland, *Presenting Nature: The Historic Landscape Design of the National Park Service, 1916-1942* (n.p.: National Park Service, 1993), accessed online at http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/mcclelland/mcclelland7a.htm on October 29, 2008.)

⁴⁹ Sellars, 58.

“perpetuate the bureaucratic rivalry” and make future interactions between the two agencies difficult to impossible.⁵⁰

The idea to include Kings River canyon in a national park was part of John Muir's original vision for Sequoia National Park, proposed as a wilderness park by Bob Marshall of The Wilderness Society, and pushed to conclusion by Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes.⁵¹ The effort to include the Kings River canyon in a national park further strained relations between the Forest and Park services, but resulted in stringent wilderness protection for the area. In contrast to many other parks created from lands deemed “worthless” for minerals, timber, agriculture, and water resources, some Central Valley citizens thought the Kings River canyon contained significant hydroelectric potential.⁵² The Forest Service, mindful of its multiple use mandate and desiring to please both “development and preservation interests,”⁵³ simultaneously planned a large development at Cedar Grove and large primitive areas on the South and Middle Forks. A strong wilderness proponent, Ickes tried to create a wilderness preserve called John Muir-Kings Canyon National Park in this area.⁵⁴ Although this Congressional bill—viciously opposed by development interests—failed to make it

⁵⁰ Godfrey, 57-58.

⁵¹ For an account of the park struggle, see Dilsaver and Tweed, 197-225. For Bob Marshall's contribution, see Cohen, 82.

⁵² Dilsaver and Tweed, 197.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁵⁴ Ickes's park philosophy differed rather dramatically from that of Mather. In May 1933 Ickes said, “If I had my way about national parks, I would create one without a road in it. I would have it impenetrable forever to automobiles, a place where man would not try to improve upon God.” (*Ibid.*, 204.)

out of committee, Ickes continued to pursue the park plan. Because the Forest Service had played no small part in fostering local resentment of the Park Service (cultivating a fear that park expansion would “lock up” lands), the Park Service had to repair its image. Although Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace (on Roosevelt's orders) expressed support for the new park, California members of the Forest Service, led by Stuart Show, engaged in very public remonstrations against the park—and against the Park Service. Sequoia park historians Lary Dilsaver and William Tweed write that the 1940 creation of Kings Canyon National Park “ended a sixty-year conservation struggle, one nearly unrivaled for rancorous debate, emotional character assassination, and political wheeling and dealing.”⁵⁵ Although much of this occurred with and between development interests, the Park and Forest Services publicly and at times viciously squabbled over the park proposal.

Changes in the administration of national forests in the southern Sierra Nevada in the 1960s reawakened the longstanding tensions between the two agencies. At this time, administrators of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks reassessed the status of their backcountry lands, devoting greater attention to the lands and affording more wilderness protection. Simultaneously, the administrators of national forests surrounding the parks increased logging of the forest lands. Though utilized for timber and grazing purposes, the forest lands remained largely as they were when the national forests were established more than half a century earlier. But the 1960s ushered in a Forest Service more

⁵⁵ Ibid., 212-214.

determined to fulfill its multiple use mandate. The Forest Service built many new roads that increased the amount of logging—much of it in the form of clearcutting. The western portions of the Minaret Summit road, which can still be driven today, were built by logging companies on bids invited by the Service. Dilsaver and Tweed note that the Forest Service had changed neither direction nor policy, but merely faithfully executed the original Forest Service mandate. “What had changed was the need for the forests' resources and the ability of the Forest Service to implement development schemes,” they write, and these schemes included recreational developments.⁵⁶

Much as the Forest Service expanded the intensity and size of other uses, so too did it now advocate large recreational developments for both skiing and year-round recreation. Sierra Nevada environmental historian David Beesley writes that “in doing so it demonstrated its commitment to projects heavily dependent on private corporate investment, automobile connections, and very little consideration of environmental effects.”⁵⁷ The rise of recreation as an important Sierran land use is demonstrated in the history of the Sierra Nevada written in 1965 by Francis Farquhar, a mountaineer and Sierra Club President. The book concludes with a chapter entitled “Utilization and Recreation,” explaining how such uses had come to predominate and capped with a nod to the modern development of skiing in the range.⁵⁸ Though both the Park Service and

⁵⁶ Ibid., 278, 280.

⁵⁷ Beesley, 203.

⁵⁸ Farquhar, *History of the Sierra Nevada*, 239-245.

the Sierra Club accepted earlier developments, the much greater scale of the 1960s proposals, including and exemplified by the Mineral King development, alarmed environmentalists—especially because Mineral King could well have been added to Sequoia National Park in the past and enjoyed protection as a “National Game Refuge.”

The controversy over Mineral King resulted directly from the placement of the valley and environs in Sequoia National Forest rather than in Sequoia National Park; if the Forest Service had not administered the area, it could not have proposed such a massive recreation development. The original legislation left Mineral King out of the park created in 1890, but conservationists and the Park Service clearly considered Mineral King for the 1926 expansion of Sequoia National Park, when the park acquired large areas to the south and east. The mining history and multiple private uses of the basin complicated the proposition of adding the valley and surrounding mountainsides to the national park.

The Sierra Club played a part in this legislative effort, just as it earlier participated in legislation creating the National Park Service. Francis Farquhar later remarked that, in 1926, Mineral King was “already not of a national character.” Because of the private land inholdings and the mining claims (gained through lax enforcement of rules), the Sierra Club and Park Service found it simpler to keep the valley within the forest than to try to eliminate the private ownership. “It was by common consent that we let Mineral King stay out,” Farquhar said.⁵⁹ But the area had definite geographic ties to the newly created

⁵⁹ Francis P. Farquhar, “Sierra Club Mountaineer and Editor,” an oral history conducted in 1974 by Ann and Ray Lage, in *Sierra Club Reminiscences I, 1900s-1960*, Sierra Club Oral History

park lands. The East Fork of the Kaweah River ran out of the valley and through Sequoia National Park—as did the only access road. The area stuck out like a sore thumb, and sat surrounded by the park on the west, north, and east. Due to this inextricable relationship between Mineral King and surrounding areas—and taking into account the land ownership situation—Congress designated the area as a Game Refuge.⁶⁰ Michael McCloskey, who succeeded David Brower as the Sierra Club's Executive Director in 1969 and led the litigation over Mineral King, later stated, “in terms of adequate or sensible park boundaries, the enclave simply didn't make any sense. It was just an historical accident from the debates of the 1920s.”⁶¹ Historical accident or not, Mineral King's administrative disposition—resulting from a legislative decision—played a key role in allowing development proposals to proceed. This was one of several instances in the Club's history where the Club supported a Sierra Nevada land management decision that it later opposed. But in the 1920s and 1930s, a much bigger threat existed to Sierran wilderness than the exclusion of Mineral King from the park: a recreational road connecting the high points throughout the range.

Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1974, 29-30.

⁶⁰ Dilsaver and Tweed, 118, 280. Though the Sierra Club and the Forest Service later tussled over the meaning of this appellation, it was meant to protect wildlife in the area, which freely and unwittingly moved between forest and park lands.

⁶¹ McCloskey, 174.

A Road the Length of the Mountains: The Sierra Way

Just as the Blue Ridge Parkway (and its northern end, Skyline Drive through Shenandoah National Park) was being constructed along the backbone of the Appalachians in the East, chambers of commerce and other interests saw potential for an 800-mile-long road running the length of the Sierra Nevada, with spurs to provide access to various natural wonders and recreational areas along the way.⁶² It began in the mid-1920s as a more modest 200-mile “park-to-park” highway (or Sierra National Parks Highway) originating at Isabella in Kern County and connecting Sequoia and General Grant (the predecessor to Kings Canyon) National Parks with Yosemite, the northern terminus. The boosters were careful to note that the road did not approach the wilderness areas (which lay “miles to the east”), while also pointing out that roads originating on the valley floor extended further to the east than the proposed routing of this highway.⁶³ Nothing was realized of this initial plan (although it did coincide with construction of the Generals Highway through Sequoia National Park). In 1932, however, a much more serious proposal came to light for a road running the length of the Sierra. The road would be accomplished by improving existing roads and construction of comparatively little connecting mileage. Colonel John White,

⁶² The Blue Ridge Parkway connects Shenandoah National Park with Great Smoky Mountains National Park. For a history of the project, see Richard Quin, “Blue Ridge Parkway,” HAER No. NC,11-ASHV.V,2-, Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1997. Although the Sierra Way would not have involved dispossessing residents in the same way as happened for the Blue Ridge Parkway, Whisnant’s *Super-Scenic Motorway* offers insight into the political construction of such a road.

⁶³ “Mather, Albright Invited to View Sierra Road Plan,” *Fresno Bee*, February 27, 1927, p. 1.

superintendent of Sequoia National Park from 1920 to 1947, believed the Generals Highway to have been the spark for the whole project.⁶⁴ The territorial disputes involved in the Sierra Way discussions were emblematic of sometimes adversarial situations arising regularly in Sierran history.

The proposed Sierra Way ran through both national parks and national forests; the Forest Service championed the project and the Park Service initially viewed it with mixed emotions but came to adamantly oppose it. By the middle of the 1930s, the Park Service under Mather and Albright firmly embraced the idea of one main road for each park—and no more. The roads would sufficiently highlight chief scenic attractions, with much of the parks preserved as roadless wilderness.⁶⁵ The Sierra Way, by virtue of the amount of new construction required through the parks, ran against this wilderness grain. Sequoia superintendent Colonel White “was one of the project's most powerful opponents, at least insofar as it affected his park.”⁶⁶

Indeed, one of the routes advocated as part of the Sierra Way (outside of the Park Service) ran from Giant Forest to Mineral King on a totally new

⁶⁴ Dilsaver and Tweed, 182.

⁶⁵ David Louter has investigated how the Park Service's road philosophy has changed through the years via Washington's national parks. Mount Rainier National Park, founded 1899, had roads pushed into its heart; Olympic National Park, founded 1938 but not developed with facilities until the 1950s, had only one road, built around the park's perimeter; and North Cascades National Park, established in 1968 after passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, had no roads going to the park's principal attractions. See his *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2006). Primarily because of the early emphasis on roads in parks, Paul Sutter argues that “national parks and wilderness areas were not one and the same thing—politically or aesthetically” (8). Various parks through the years, such as Kings Canyon and North Cascades, have come closer to the wilderness ideal than others.

⁶⁶ Dilsaver and Tweed, 183.

alignment. White and Colonel C. G. Thomson, superintendent of Yosemite, opposed the Sierra Way partly because it would undoubtedly rob money from other planned park roads.⁶⁷ Park service landscape architects feared the aesthetic damage that would be visible from the scenic vista of Moro Rock. Sequoia park biologists worried of the road's effect on backcountry wildlife and vegetation. The Park Service found support in statements of the Sierra Club and the Commonwealth Club of California.⁶⁸

The Park Service publicly tagged the project's cost as the factor in not going forward with the project, but both Director Cammerer and Superintendent White opposed the project for a number of reasons beyond economics. In 1936, White stated that the “opening up of this last great Sierra wilderness has ramifications which extend far beyond those of an ordinary scenic highway.”⁶⁹ In their other justifications, they mentioned a pamphlet issued by the Commonwealth Club (titled “Should We Stop Building Roads into California's High Mountains?”), the Sierra Club's views, and their views on the importance of wilderness.⁷⁰ Only a few parts of the length of the road were ever built, and despite revived congressional interest in the 1960s, it did not further seriously threaten the southern Sierra. While the Sierra Club and National Park Service shared the view that the Sierra Way would have a destructive influence on Sierran

⁶⁷ “Valley Chambers Oppose Plan for High Sierra Way,” *Fresno Bee*, March 13, 1936, p. B1.

⁶⁸ Dilsaver and Tweed, 183.

⁶⁹ “Valley Chambers,” *Fresno Bee*.

⁷⁰ Dilsaver and Tweed, 185.

wilderness, they diverged sharply over improvement of the Tioga Road in Yosemite National Park.

An Improved Road Threatens the Wild: The Tioga Road

The National Park Service, in particular, has been closely associated with the Sierra Club. Aside from the activities of John Muir and other early members in securing establishment of Yosemite National Park, the first Park Service directors themselves had been Sierra Club members. Stephen Mather, a University of California graduate and Sierra Club member beginning 1904, lobbied Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane for a separate agency for managing national parks, contributing to the 1916 founding of the Park Service and Mather's elevation to be its Director. Upon Mather's death in 1930, the *Sierra Club Bulletin* printed that upon assuming these responsibilities “he turned first of all to the Sierra Club for support of his program. Always in his work for the parks he made a point of identifying himself with us – not as an honorary vice-president, but as a plain member.” Horace M. Albright, Mather's assistant, stand-in during Mather's illness, and Park Service Director from 1929 to 1933, was also a Sierra Club member.⁷¹ While the two organizations had minor differences through the years, the changing Club had its first great rupture with the Park Service over 1950s plans to improve the Tioga Road, as the Club itself struggled to define how much access was appropriate.

⁷¹ Sierra Club, “John Muir Exhibit: Stephen T. Mather,” http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/frameindex.html?
http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/people/mather.html (accessed April 11, 2008).

Like the wagon roads detailed earlier, the Tioga Pass road can trace its origins to miners' dreams of bonanza. Its history, however, is uniquely tied to the creation of the National Park Service and especially the design of national park roads. Its later improvements in the 1950s, vociferously opposed by many Sierra Club members—notably photographer Ansel Adams—foreshadowed debate over Mission 66 infrastructure modernization throughout the national park system. In a story similar to its Minaret Summit highway and Mineral King resort opposition, the Sierra Club early encouraged improvement of the road for automobile use. Plans in the early 1930s called for upgrades of the road in three sections. While the sections at either end of the road were paved by 1938, nothing then happened to the middle section.⁷² Funding for its improvement came as part of the Mission 66 package, but recreational demands and environmental concerns had changed sufficiently in the intervening decades to cause the Sierra Club concern. Over objections of many Club leaders, the realigned road's path led directly across glacially carved granite of the High Sierra.

Mining activities in the area of Tioga Pass took off in the year 1878, prompting construction of what eventually became known as the Tioga Road. Undertaken by owners of the Great Sierra Consolidated Silver Company, the road was unlike ones to Yosemite Valley. Those roads served the tourists, but the Great

⁷² Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press in Association with the Library of American Landscape History, 2007), 257-258. This inaction was partly due to the philosophy of the wartime leader of the Park Service, Newton B. Drury (1940-1951), who stood in marked contrast to the previous directors. National park historian Richard West Sellars writes that Drury “did not fit the mold of the previous directors, who enthusiastically boosted park development and expansion of Service programs” (150). Drury was mindful that the Park Service was unlikely to have large funds appropriated, at any rate, and assured the Sierra Club, “We have no money; we can do no harm.” (Sellars, 174.)

Sierra Wagon Road (as it was first known) served the miners. Amazingly constructed in less than six months, between April and September 1883, the 56-mile road connected Crocker's Station on the west with the Tioga mining district. It did not continue fully across the mountains, but did connect with several trails that descended the eastern slope. The mining boom, as history might have suggested, did not last long, running out in 1888. This left the road poorly maintained, but still used occasionally by the hardy traveler. The road remained under private control even with Yosemite's establishment as a national park in 1890.⁷³

The state of the road caused the federal government to investigate acquiring and improving the road. In 1909, the Sierra Club expressed its desire for repairs so as to “afford one of the most wonderful trans-mountain roads in the world.” But the actual purchase did not come until Stephen Mather himself raised money, with the help of the Club and others, and donated some of his own to the effort. After enabling legislation passed Congress, Mather conveyed the road to the federal government. The Tioga Road itself was hardly suitable for automobiles, but that did not discourage intrepid parkgoers. While the Park Service repaired and made small improvements to the road, not until increased traffic of the 1920s did officials seriously consider a larger program of realignment and improvement.⁷⁴ The 1931 plan for the road's future divided it

⁷³ Richard H. Quin, “Tioga Road (Great Sierra Wagon Road),” HAER No. CAL,22-YOSEM,6-, Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1997, 2-5.

⁷⁴ “Tioga Road,” 8-10, 12.

into three sections; while the two end segments had been paved by 1938, the middle section remained untouched. When money for this middle section of the road came as part of Mission 66, the project became that program's most controversial project.⁷⁵

National park roads had not always been such contentious entities. The public clamored for automobile access to the national parks early in the twentieth century, most famously in regards to Yosemite National Park in 1912.⁷⁶ With formation of the National Park Service in 1916, along with Mather's energetic, automobile tourism-oriented leadership, roads became an integral part of the parks.⁷⁷ This development boom continued through the 1920s, but saw opposition develop in the 1930s. The Wilderness Society organized in opposition to roads like these in the natural areas. The Sierra Way on the west coast ran into opposition from the Park Service itself. On the East Coast, the Park Service began the politically contentious Blue Ridge Parkway.⁷⁸ Park roads under Mather reflected the parkway ideal—slow-speed roads crafted to their environments. But as Timoth Davis points out, the parkway fell out of fashion as “the public became

⁷⁵ Carr, *Mission 66*, 257-258.

⁷⁶ Louter, 24-25. Automobile groups and commercial organizations pressured Secretary of the Interior Walter L. Fisher at the national parks conference held in Yosemite in 1912, and the next year new Secretary Franklin K. Lane lifted the ban.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-40.

⁷⁸ Opposition to the Blue Ridge Parkway differed from other park roads in that it came mostly from affected residents, rather than environmentalists or other outside interests. (Anne Mitchell Whisnant, “The Scenic Is Political: Creating Natural and Cultural Landscapes along America's Blue Ridge Parkway,” in *The World Beyond the Windshield: Roads and Landscapes in the United States and Europe*, ed. Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 68.)

enamored of high-speed motorways.”⁷⁹ The Tioga Road improvement was caught between diverging strands of thought on roads: environmentalists on the one hand questioned *any* road construction, while the public began to demand higher standards and faster speeds for park roads, to which the Park Service responded with an improved Tioga Road.

As I have pointed to elsewhere, changes in recreational tourism, accessibility, population, and environmental thinking contributed to altering the Sierra Club's views on an improved road. The controversy over whether or not to reconstruct the road symbolized the opposition to Mission 66 projects as a whole, which sought to fix aging facilities and providing for the increasing numbers of tourists already visiting the parks and those projected in the future. Though the Tioga Road was, well, obviously a *road*, Ethan Carr notes that it was sufficiently antiquated that its corridor contained “remote, relatively unvisited areas of the park.”⁸⁰ As with other Sierran automobile road proposals in which opposition arose, the argument became one centered on wilderness. The Sierra Club and National Park Service had formerly shared many goals for the national parks, but they diverged sharply as the Park Service moved away from the parkway and the Sierra Club moved toward wilderness. The advocacy of the Club for protecting Sierran lands now came in the form of antagonism toward the Park Service and Forest Service, as we will see with Minaret Summit and Mineral King.

⁷⁹ Davis, 55.

⁸⁰ Carr, *Mission 66*, 266.



Fig. 2: Tioga Road, 2008. The improved road cut directly across the glacially carved granite. Photograph by the author.

Chapter 4: The Sierra Club Reverses Course: Opposition to Minaret Summit and Mineral King

By the time the Minaret Summit highway and Mineral King development controversies gained serious traction in the 1960s, each had been proposed and discussed for decades. San Joaquin Valley businessmen first proposed a crossing in the vicinity of Minaret Summit in the early years of the twentieth century; the winter sports potential of Mineral King gained official recognition in the 1940s. Though the proposals changed form somewhat through the years, the heart of each idea was born in a different environmental time when effects on the natural environment did not receive significant attention. San Joaquin Valley citizens came up with a proposal for direct highway outlet to the East at the same time other Valley communities proposed their own roads, like a Porterville-Lone Pine road further south. As recreational skiing in the United States took off following World War II, particularly in national forests, skiing interests conceptualized a Mineral King operation in line with other facilities at the time: perhaps a few tow ropes and some overnight cabins.⁸¹ The Sierra Club, with several skiers in leadership positions within the club, endorsed such a development. Unfortunately for the developers and promoters, the landscape shifted between the initial ideas and serious attempts at construction. As the amount of

⁸¹ Annie Gilbert Coleman has written about the culture and history of skiing in Colorado in *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas), 2004. The development of recreational skiing in California mirrors that of Colorado, from the development of nascent ski areas in the 1930s to the modern destination ski areas of the 1960s.

development in the Sierra Nevada grew, along with infrastructure elsewhere in the West and the population in California, opposition arose from both groups like the Sierra Club and in the public consciousness more generally. In addition to competing against similar projects, the Minaret Summit highway and Mineral King development fell victim to shrinking wild areas and growing public concern over environmental protection. Though proponents of each argued that wilderness was a non-issue to these projects because of previous legislative decisions, much of the public fight turned on the wilderness quality of the land. The Sierra Club's defense of Mineral King served as a seminal event in environmental history, because it involved the environmental movement's attempts to secure executive, judicial, and legislative solutions in the struggle.⁸² For both Minaret Summit and Mineral King, re-designation (as wilderness and national parkland, respectively) served as the official nail in the coffin to development prospects.

In 1937, as the lesser of two evils, the Sierra Club agreed to a Mammoth Pass crossing as preferable to a Lone Pine-Porterville road. The practical consequence of this agreement, a non-wilderness gap between two legislatively

⁸² The Sierra Club had, of course, engaged in executive and legislative lobbying since the early 1900s. As described elsewhere in this paper, the Club had constant interaction with the Park Service and Forest Service. On the legislative front, the Club had opposed the 1913 Raker Act authorizing the dam in Hetch Hetchy, had lobbied for other national park legislation, and helped to secure passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. In *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, Samuel Hays argues that beginning in the late 1960s environmentalists became more interested in resolving disputes at the administrative level. Although they used all three branches of government, Hays argues, "administrative politics was even more intense than legislative politics" (*Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 469). What the Mineral King fight reveals, however, is that environmental groups could make use of *all* branches of government to achieve their desired goals.

created wilderness areas, later served as justification that the road corridor itself did not possess wilderness quality. The 1920s expansion of Sequoia National Park left out the Mineral King basin (and, as seen, designated it a “Game Refuge” under Forest Service administration) because of complicated land ownership and the evidence of past mining activities. On a map, a finger of Forest Service land jutted north into an area otherwise surrounded by the national park. Although a legislatively produced line on a map does not produce wilderness, development proponents utilized these previous legislative decisions as definitive referendums on the wilderness quality of the areas. The Sierra Club and other interested individuals attacked the economic necessity of the projects and their effects on the natural environment. Although the development proponents did not wish to admit it, the road fights of the 1960s *were* about wilderness and the legislative actions taken in response to these controversies changed the administrative landscape. In wilderness terms, the 1960s are notable for 1964 passage of the Wilderness Act, which legally defined wilderness and created more stringent protection for previously designated areas. The Mineral King and Minaret Summit stories reveal the conflicted nature of wilderness thinking in the United States—not only because the Sierra Club fought against development interests, but because the Sierra Club also fought against itself.

Minaret Summit

The Sierra Nevada has no automobile crossings between Tioga Pass and Walker Pass, a distance of 270 miles. In the winter, four of the northern crossings—Tioga Pass, Sonora Pass, Ebbetts Pass, and Carson Pass—close from the first snowfall until spring brings sufficient melting to allow the California Department of Transportation to plow the roads.⁸³ The closure of these central Sierran routes means the Sierran road barrier extends another 75 miles in the winter, extending to U.S. 50 and southern Lake Tahoe. Minaret Summit and Mammoth Pass both lie around twenty to twenty-five miles southeast of Tioga Pass, to the west of the ski town of Mammoth Lakes.⁸⁴ In the area of Mammoth Mountain, the crest of the Sierra Nevada dips slightly; this gap not only allows moist Pacific storms through to drop significant snow on the eastern side of the Sierra, but also suggested the location for a comparatively low crossing of the Sierra.

A Gap in the Wilderness

Although no organized movement for a crossing at Mammoth Pass existed in the 1930s, consideration for its eventual construction is evident in the

⁸³ For the Tioga Road, usually closed the longest, the average closing date is November 1 and the opening date is May 29. For a list of previous closures, see Mono Basin Clearinghouse, “Tioga Pass Road Opening and Closing Dates since 1933,” <http://www.monobasinresearch.org/data/tiogapass.htm> (accessed October 26, 2008). For a list of altitudes at which roads cross the Sierra Nevada, see Appendix A.

⁸⁴ The road was originally known as the “Mammoth Pass Road,” because it was to cross the Sierra crest at Mammoth Pass. Later plans found the Minaret Summit crossing, several miles north and two hundred feet lower, to be a better route, and hence it became known as the “Minaret Summit Highway.” For this study, there is no practical difference between the two.



Fig. 3: Sierran Snow Barrier, 1967. The gap represents the proposed road corridor. Reproduced from "Forest Highway 100 Study," Prepared by Minaret Summit Coordinating Committee, Sisk Papers.

designation of wild areas in the surrounding national forest land. Stimulated in part by the roadbuilding boom on national forest lands and also by attempts by the Park Service to grab forest lands, the Forest Service in 1926 designated several recreation areas throughout District 5 (California).⁸⁵ Though envisioned as primarily protecting recreation values threatened by increasing road construction, the protection of natural areas from roads presages the formation and rallying of The Wilderness Society in the 1930s. The Sierra contained two of these seven recreation areas: around Echo Lake and Desolation Valley, southwest of Lake Tahoe in the Eldorado National Forest, and in Mono National Forest along Reversed Creek.⁸⁶

The aggressive nature of the National Park Service in acquiring new lands for protection was a key element in stimulating the Forest Service to demonstrate a commitment for protection rather than use.⁸⁷ Although the Forest Service had in 1925 initiated transfer of several areas from its control to Park Service administration, including Mount Whitney and parts of an enlarged Sequoia National Park, the Forest Service worried that the Park Service might continue raiding its lands. Formation of the California State Park system in 1928, accompanied by efforts to transfer forest lands to the State, further threatened the forest service. In response to these events, Chief Forester William B. Greeley

⁸⁵ Godfrey, 212-213.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 212-213.

⁸⁷ The expansion of Sequoia National Park, initiated by Mather upon assuming directorship of the Park Service and finalized in 1926, is one such example of this aggressive approach to park expansion. See Dilsaver and Tweed, 113-118, for a discussion of this expansion.

had all districts prepare proposals for “a system of wilderness areas,” free from roads and other developments.⁸⁸ The Chief of District 5, Stuart Show, and his chief of lands, Louis A. Barrett, developed criteria for listing lands. A chief criterion was to only include those areas where there would be no necessity for future road building for forest administration purposes. Show and Barrett invited the participation of forest supervisors as well as Sierra Club members.⁸⁹ On the national level, the 1929 L-20 regulation, amended several times in years following (including in 1930 changing the designation from wilderness areas to primitive areas) formalized the protection offered to these areas. The Sierra had six of these designated primitive areas. The two areas surrounding the road corridor were the 87,000-acre Mount Dana-Minarets Wild Area between Yosemite National Park and Devils Postpile National Monument (reduced to 82,181 acres in 1931) and the 700,000-acre High Sierra Primitive Area, taking in lands in the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo national forests and increased to 825,899 acres in 1931 (later renamed for John Muir).⁹⁰ During the creation of these primitive areas, the Sierra Club tacitly allowed for a future trans-Sierra road.⁹¹ This allowance is hardly surprising, for at the time the Club still functioned to render the mountains accessible. David Brower, who led the Sierra Club in the 1960s, remarked that in 1928 the Club's policies advocated “roads across

⁸⁸ Godfrey, 215.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁹¹ Dan K. Gordon, letter to the editor, *Fresno Bee*, May 19, 1957, p. 16-B.

practically every pass in the Sierra...you name it, they wanted a road over it.”⁹² In December 1937, the Club explicitly endorsed a Bass Lake-Mammoth Pass route with a resolution by the Board of Directors.⁹³

In a December 27, 1937 letter to Regional Forester Show, Sierra Club President Joel H. Hildebrand transmitted the December 4 resolution: “Moved that the Sierra Club go on record in recommending the substitution of the Bass Lake-Mammoth Pass route for a road across the Sierra in lieu of the proposed Porterville-Lone Pine route.”⁹⁴ The letter provides ample justification for this crossing, but in the context that it be the only trans-Sierra road between Tioga Pass and Walker Pass. It characterizes the Mammoth Pass road as having “legitimate demand”; not seriously invading wilderness areas or passing through existing or proposed Primitive Areas; traversing a relatively less rugged area; and surrounded by areas ideal for recreational use. Thirty years later, when the Valley

⁹² David R. Brower, *Environmental Activist, Publicist, and Prophet*, an oral history conducted 1974-1978 by Susan Schrepfer, Sierra Club History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1980, 180. This is an exaggeration, but it is telling of what Brower felt the Club advocated. Still, while the Sierra Club as an organization did not reverse its position vis a vis roads until the 1950s, prominent individuals within the Club had their own feelings on their desirability. Martin Litton, a Sierra Club Director in the 1960s and 1970s and an uncompromising preservationist, in the 1930s worked against the proposed trans-Sierra road between Porterville and Lone Pine. (Bettina Boxall, “A Matter of Grove Concern,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 2006, A1.)

⁹³ In light of The Wilderness Society's formation two years earlier, it may seem surprising that the Sierra Club would take such a position on the road. While the founders of the Society were able to rally around wilderness as the aim of the new organization, the forty-five-year-old Sierra Club had different concerns. The Club was still guided by its mission that included rendering the mountains accessible. Additionally, the Club did not itself propose the road, but accepted it as a lesser evil in furthering its conservation aims elsewhere in the range.

⁹⁴ Letter to Phillip V. Sanchez, Administrative officer, County of Fresno from B. F. Sisk, May 13, 1965, p. 3; Minarets Summit Hwy (Forest Hwy 100); B. F. (Bernie) Sisk Papers; Central Valley Political Archive, Henry Madden Library, California State University, Fresno. (Hereafter Sisk Papers.)

population had further expanded, the Sierra Club disputed just how much demand a trans-Sierra route would have. But the justification offered by the Club in regards to the wilderness invasion is at odds with this later statements. The Club said the road over the summit (Minaret Summit) leading down to Devils Postpile meant that the area was already invaded—and therefore not wilderness. Because the trans-Sierra road does not go through the administratively designated primitive areas, wilderness did not suffer. The Club offered some practical justifications for the road, too: the fact that the route's topography provided an easy crossing allowed for the possibility of an all-year road. The western approach also provided favorable opportunities for both summer and winter activities.⁹⁵

But this approval of the Mammoth road, and the justifications that it would not “seriously” invade wilderness, had a corollary: this would have to be the only crossing between the two passes. The concluding paragraph of the letter read, “The construction of a Bass Lake-Mammoth Highway should remove *for all time any valid demand for any other road crossing the Sierra south of Tioga Pass*. Such exclusion of other roads is of the greatest importance in order that these Primitive Areas be preserved” (emphasis in original).⁹⁶ That Porterville-Lone Pine link did not die, however. Incorporated into the State Highway System in 1933 but never fully constructed, the Porterville-Lone Pine road remained a potential threat to the southern Sierra, and is even today still an unconstructed

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

State route in the Sierra Nevada.⁹⁷ The Sierra Club endorsed the Mammoth Road as the lesser of two evils, preferring the Mammoth Pass road if there had to be any road at all. The realization that this acceptance did not stop further agitation for the Porterville-Lone Pine road, together with changes in the Sierran landscape in the intervening twenty years, caused the Sierra Club to reevaluate its earlier position.

Bernie F. Sisk and Ike Livermore: Access versus Wilderness

New rumblings for a trans-Sierra road extension in the vicinity of Mammoth Pass or Minaret Summit emerged in the 1950s.⁹⁸ The Madera County Board of Supervisors and the California State Chamber of Commerce, among others, extolled the benefits of extending the existing forest road east, as the Forest Service called for bids to sell more lumber in the Chiquito Basin.⁹⁹ Unlike the later Mineral King development, the Forest Service did not actively endorse this road crossing. The Forest Service only had road constructed to the edge of the area containing merchantable timber. This scenario still left around thirty

⁹⁷ "Sierra Access Is Stressed in Road Discussion," *Fresno Bee*, January 8, 1959, p. 7-C.

⁹⁸ Given the Sierra Club's early concession, this development was not new to them. Raymond Sherwin (Sierra Club President from 1971-1973) recalls that when he joined the Conservation Committee in the mid-1950s and headed up the opposition to the Mammoth Pass Road, he went through "one and a half filing cabinets full of material" on the problem. (Raymond J. Sherwin, "Conservationist, Judge, and Sierra Club President, 1960s-1970s," an oral history conducted in 1980-1981 by Ann Lage, in *Sierra Club Leaders, 1950s-1970s*, Sierra Club History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, 17.)

⁹⁹ Karl Kidder, "Board Sees Need to Extend Road," *Fresno Bee*, August 15, 1953, p. 3-B; "Lumbering to Extend Pass Road," *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1954, p. A7; "Trans-Sierra Highway Plan Is Discussed," *Reno Evening Gazette*, July 7, 1956, p. 6.

miles to be constructed through whatever funds its proponents could secure. Because it would consume such a large portion of the forest highway funds for many years, Congressman Bernie F. Sisk of the Central Valley attempted adding the road to the interstate highway system. Sisk hoped to extend Interstate 70 from its western terminus of Fort Cove, Utah, through Nevada, and westward across the Sierra Nevada. As an interstate, the federal government would provide 90% of the road's cost, hastening prospects for its completion.

But as Sisk and other boosters sought to convince the Forest Service, the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, and the State Department of Transportation of the road's utility, they also had to wage a public relations campaign against the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club in the 1930s stated that the road did not affect wilderness qualities, but this did not forestall this later debate on the road from turning on the question of wilderness. The proponents argued—as the Sierra Club had in earlier years—that the road went *between* wilderness areas and it was thus a non-issue; the Sierra Club and others, besides refuting other rationales given for the road, brought the discussion back to wilderness.

Unlike the Sierra Club's emerging leaders, who were coming to see the Sierra as too accessible to the recreation-seekers, Sisk did not believe that the Sierra offered enough opportunities for Central Valley recreation-seekers. Sisk argued that the “heart” of the battle over the road concerned “whether outdoor recreation should be reserved for the rich or should be made available to those who have to be careful of how they spend their money.”¹⁰⁰ If they did not build the

¹⁰⁰ Letter to Frank A. Cecere from B. F. Sisk, January 28, 1970; Minarets Summit Hwy (Forest Hwy 100); Sisk Papers.

road, Sisk believed, families could be shut out of recreation areas because of overcrowding. The Sierra would effectively be “locked up” so that only those able to afford a pack trip could see “the beauties of these mountains.”¹⁰¹ Although Sisk spent most of his road advocacy playing up the advantages of the road as a through highway—as for defense purposes (an escape route for Central Valley residents in case of Cold War attack), to cut down travel time for Central Valley residents to point east, to make it cheaper to ship Central Valley produce to the east—he also justified it for its recreation potential. Sisk's endorsement of it as opening up the mountains hearkens back to earlier arguments by the Sierra Club advocating other roads into the Sierra.

In a 1971 letter to a Fresno businessman, Sisk admitted that the road might be difficult to justify “on merely a commercial basis.” But he argued road could provide a “reasonable opportunity” for families of “modest incomes” to enjoy the mountain scenery. Sisk wrote that he enjoyed non-automobile trips into the backcountry, backpacking and packing, but recognized that the majority of people did not have the time or financial means to do that on a regular basis—or at all.¹⁰² Sisk's correspondence on the subject is peppered with such concerns for his constituents' access to outdoor recreation. Even a modest highway open only in the summer, he declared, could fulfill the necessary function of getting people

¹⁰¹ Letter to Scott M. Kruse from B. F. Sisk, November 25, 1969; Minarets Summit Hwy (Forest Hwy 100); Sisk Papers.

¹⁰² Letter to C. W. Bonner, President, Bonner Packing Company, from B. F. Sisk, March 29, 1971; pp. 2-3; Minarets Summit Hwy (Forest Hwy 100); Sisk Papers.

“into the Sierras [sic] and see what they are like.”¹⁰³ He was particularly concerned that areas on the range's western side could become, or were already becoming, overcrowded. Citing the growing numbers of people expected to populate the Central Valley, Sisk stressed that the region needed to make better use of natural resources; if it did not, the great overcrowding could hurt existing recreation areas.¹⁰⁴ Allowing Central Valley residents easy access to the eastern Sierra could relieve the pressure on Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks.¹⁰⁵ In addition to helping already overcrowded recreation areas, Sisk believed that the road posed no threat to Sierran wilderness.

In 1963, the Department of Agriculture enlarged and reclassified the former Minarets Wild Area as the Minarets Wilderness. Sisk welcomed this new status for the area, hailing it as “one of the most beautiful and secluded areas in our mountain country of California,” but also emphasizing that the action would not interfere with the “needed highway.”¹⁰⁶ Sisk, then, simultaneously advocated both wilderness protection *and* roads for access, while the Sierra Club felt the balance was already tilted too much toward access.¹⁰⁷ He recognized the value of

¹⁰³ Letter to Virginia Reid, San Joaquin Valley Information Service, from B. F. Sisk, March 17, 1970, p. 2; Minarets Summit Hwy (Forest Hwy 100); Sisk Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Letter to John C. Kluczynski, Chairman, Subcommittee on Roads, Committee on Public Works, from B. F. Sisk, May 21, 1970, pp. 2-3; Minarets Summit Hwy (Forest Hwy 100); Sisk Papers.

¹⁰⁵ Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Harold Snyder from B. F. Sisk, August 6, 1971; Minarets Summit Hwy (Forest Hwy 100); Sisk Papers.

¹⁰⁶ “US Gives Minarets Wilderness Status,” *Fresno Bee*, August 20, 1963, p. 1. This was part of a process that affected twenty national forest wilderness areas in California “that often involved simply adjusting boundaries to arrive at workable administrative units.” (Godfrey, 411.) The designation was still an administrative classification made by the Forest Service and did not offer any greater protections.

¹⁰⁷ Sisk admitted as much in a letter to a constituent: “The key to the differing views between the

wilderness areas and did not feel the road presented a threat to wilderness, as when he wrote that “the Minarets Summit highway would not encroach on any wilderness area.”¹⁰⁸ The area set aside for the highway, wrote Sisk, could not be considered primitive, because there had been “too much encroachment” to preserve any primitive characteristics.¹⁰⁹

The Sierra Club recognized that they had to counter several arguments put forth about the road, but wilderness and access predominated. Norman “Ike” Livermore perhaps felt this juxtaposition most keenly. Beginning his career as a pack train operator and later a director of the Sierra Club, Livermore served as secretary of resources for all eight years under Governor Ronald Reagan (1967-1975). He brought “a conservation stance” to the Reagan administration “that neither friend nor foe had anticipated.”¹¹⁰ His influence on Reagan contributed to major environmental victories during this time. In addition to halting the Minaret Summit and Mineral King roads, the Reagan administration stopped the Dos Rios Dam, which would have flooded Round Valley in Northern California.

Sierra Club and I, I believe, is in the third paragraph of your letter, wherein you say that the Sierra Club policy of rendering the Sierra accessible has been dropped because it is now too accessible. This is a viewpoint with which I am afraid I will continue to disagree. I do not believe the Sierra should be locked up so that only those who have enough money to pack in can get in to see the beauties of these mountains.” (Letter to Kruse, Sisk Papers.)

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Snyders; Sisk Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Letter to Bonner, p. 2; Sisk Papers.

¹¹⁰ Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 177-178. Livermore's staunch advocacy of wilderness should have surprised nobody, for he wrote his M.B.A. thesis on “The Economic Significance of California's Wilderness Areas” in 1936 and proposed a High Sierra Wilderness Conference in 1947, which was subsequently held in 1949. (Cohen, 122-127.)

These legacies of Governor Reagan are not entirely attributable to Livermore. Lou Cannon, who wrote on both Governor and President Reagan, notes that Reagan was “usually responsive to natural beauty.”¹¹¹ In September 1966, Reagan had even voiced criticism of the California Highway Commission “for its tendency to go by the rule of the shortest distance between two points, regardless of what scenic wonder must be destroyed, to hold to that rule.”¹¹² This helps to explain Reagan's executive decision to oppose the Minaret Highway. But Cannon also writes that, aside from air pollution, Reagan knew little about environmental issues. His environmental records as Governor and President are tied to his “custodians of natural resources.”¹¹³ Reagan was forceful in areas that had his interest—particularly on taxes and government—but otherwise leaned heavily on the advice of those serving him. Before Livermore's appointment as secretary of resources, he and Reagan did not know one another, but they hit it off on their first meeting, in part because of their shared affinity for horseback riding.¹¹⁴ Although for these environmental victories Reagan had to concur with Livermore's ideas, Livermore's active efforts at wilderness preservation loomed large during Reagan's years as governor.

¹¹¹ Cannon, 303. The “unusual” corollary was Reagan's belief that the redwoods along California's North Coast did not need additional park protection. The Sierra Club was not impressed with Reagan's environmental stances, and Reagan had the distinction of being the first political candidate whose election was openly opposed by the Sierra Club. (Cohen, 429.)

¹¹² Cannon, 305.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 299, 319. James Watt served as President Reagan's first Secretary of the Interior and through his advocacy for drilling and mining, increased public support for the Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

According to friend and Sierra Club member Martin Litton, Livermore's obsession was “to keep the Sierra Nevada wild for the whole stretch from Tioga Pass in Yosemite National Park to Walker Pass. And that meant keeping the trans-Sierra roads out of there.”¹¹⁵ Livermore himself admitted to this passion in a 1981-1982 oral history, noting that “if and when” he succeeded in getting the Minaret corridor legislatively closed, he could devote more time to social purposes.¹¹⁶ Livermore emerged as the key California state player in halting both the Minaret Summit road and the improved access road to Mineral King.

From his packing days, Livermore had a close emotional attachment to the Sierra Nevada. Livermore had an experience his second summer packing that shaped his crusade against roads in the Sierra. As Livermore remembered it, after a rough day on the trail, the head packer Frank Eggers let him know that they would end up that night

'in the most beautiful camp in the whole mountains.' But when we got into camp that night, there were automobiles! It was just like a stab in the heart you know. It was the year the road was just built....

Into Red's Meadow. Frank hadn't known it....we were told about this great Shangri-la place. It was called, I guess, Pumice Flats, and we came around the last turn, and there were these damned automobiles. It was dramatic, so I said to myself then, 'Well, if I could ever stop this road going any further, I'll do it.' Because it's a symbol, you know, it's the whole length of the Sierra, and unfortunately it's the lowest pass....that was the beginning of my feeling for stopping the road, because it was a shock, a real shock!

...Of course, there are two sides to this question; the automobiles probably thought it was great.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Jane Kay, “Ike' Livermore – environmentalist from Gold Rush family,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 8, 2006, B11.

¹¹⁶ Norman B. Livermore, Jr. *Man in the Middle: High Sierra Packer, Timberman, Conservationist, and California Resources Secretary*, an oral history conducted 1981-1982 by Ann Lage and Gabrielle Morris, Sierra Club History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1983, 75.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

Whether or not it's true that a nineteen-year-old Livermore made a vow that he fulfilled some forty years later, the story brings out his feelings toward automobiles. But within the Reagan administration, Livermore's views were a minority opinion. Regarding wilderness particularly, Livermore felt he was the only person in the cabinet who had a wilderness orientation.¹¹⁸ This orientation earned the enmity of development advocates, particularly because of Livermore's ties to the Sierra Club and his apparent influence on Reagan's actions. In a letter to Larry Kiml of the California Chamber of Commerce, Sisk encourages Kiml to seek face time with Reagan to warn him of “the high price California is going to have to pay for the conservationist policies” being pursued by Livermore and his “Sierra Club cronies.”¹¹⁹ Proponents of the road made note of Livermore's close ties to the Sierran packers, which stood to suffer if the trans-Sierra road were completed.¹²⁰

Though enthusiastic over wilderness, Livermore recognized his tenuous position. In addition to his outlier status on Reagan's staff, the road over Minaret Summit to Devils Postpile National Monument already existed. In trying to create momentum and gain support for an eventual crossing, these proponents tried to get this existing stub road brought up to a higher standard. Livermore knew he

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹¹⁹ Letter to Larry Kiml, Director, Natural & Water Resources Dept., California State Chamber of Commerce, from B. F. Sisk, December 15, 1969; Sisk Papers.

¹²⁰ Livermore, in fact, in the 1930s and 1940s owned Mineral King land that Walt Disney Productions later purchased in its pursuit of a ski resort in the alpine valley. See Livermore, 14.

could not very well argue for wilderness protection of that particular area, but he described the efforts to improve the existing road as like “a worm entering the apple to go all the way across.”¹²¹ Livermore's influence with Reagan, and Reagan's feeling for the wilderness, if not his overarching desire for its preservation, contributed to finally halting the road.

Closing the Gap

For years the Minaret Summit Road's status remained up in the air, as one committee, agency, or legislative body after another rendered its opinion on the desirability and necessity of the road. The U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, California State Department of Transportation, and the California State Legislature all rendered verdicts on this question, but Sisk felt the Legislature was key to the road's construction.¹²² Sisk attempted to get money for the road from the huge pot being devoted to construction of interstate highways, but this money was not available without the road's inclusion in the State highway system. The Forest Service had long tacitly allowed for a trans-Sierra road, which could piggyback on the logging roads on the western side and the road to Devils Postpile on the eastern side. At the end of 1971, the supervisors of

¹²¹ Ibid., 87. The quotation suggests the despoiling effect of roads on natural areas.

¹²² No definitive or even partial history of the Minaret Summit Road struggle exists, so the positions of the various interested agencies through the years must be pieced together. The Bureau of Public Roads was the road's strongest proponent. Various members of the California State Legislature advocated the road, but the body itself only authorized studies. The California Department of Transportation issued a negative report on the road in 1966, and the U.S. Forest Service long took a neutral stance before coming out against the road.



Fig. 4: Minaret Summit Road, 2007. This road descends from the Sierran crest near the town of Mammoth Lakes to Devils Postpile National Monument. Photograph by the author.

the Sierra and Inyo National Forests (those most affected by the proposed road) issued a joint statement deploring the “adverse effects” such a road would have on the forest, and that such effects would outweigh benefits for “national forest uses.” That is, the Forest Service came down on the side of wilderness, rejecting the necessity of the road for access. The statement continued that the Minaret Summit road would only be justified if “required for interstate and intercommunity public travel and commerce, or to meet national defense objectives.”¹²³

¹²³ Karl M. Kidder, “Minarets Highway—New Opposition,” *Fresno Bee*, December 19, 1971, p. A4.

Under Livermore's counsel, Reagan publicly declared the State against improvement of the eastern portion of the Minaret Summit road and against any trans-Sierra road, saying it would “desecrate one of the great wilderness areas of our state.”¹²⁴ Ever the showman, Reagan led a horseback trip into the Sierra Nevada on June 28, 1972. In a mountain press conference,¹²⁵ Reagan announced that he had gained President Nixon's support for halting improvement of the road.¹²⁶ Echoing Livermore's concerns, Reagan said the road would be a “foot in the door” for a trans-Sierra highway. He told the press he would seek to close the wilderness gap, “to preserve the vast, primitive beauty of this wilderness for generations of Californians yet to come.”¹²⁷ The road's proponents vowed to press on, but without federal or state support, they failed to turn the tide.

¹²⁴ Wilson K. Lythgoe, “Reagan Lables Minaret Road Plan 'Desecration,” *Fresno Bee*, June 15, 1972, p. D3.

¹²⁵ The Sierra Club had first planned a press conference in the same area to chastise the federal Department of Transportation for deciding to reconstruct the part of the road leading to Devils Postpile National Monument, and the Department of Transportation's “refusal to state that the Trans-Sierra Highway would not be built.” Through opposition to the road, Governor Reagan and the White House co-opted the press conference as a “celebration” for their “forthright stand.” (Memorandum for John Ehrlichman from Caspar W. Weinberger, June 21, 1972, folder “[Ex] HI 2/ST 1/1/71-,” White House Central Files, Subject Files, HI (Highways-Bridges), Nixon Presidential Materials.

¹²⁶ Wilson K. Lythgoe, “US Drops Plans To Build Minarets Summit Highway,” *Fresno Bee*, June 29, 1972, p. A1. The job was to have been put out for bid on June 30. Whatever his motivations, Nixon left a substantial environmental legacy, including creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act, and a number of pollution control measures. Admiring biographer Jonathan Aitken characterizes Nixon as “a late and at times reluctant convert to the causes of the conservation movement”; environmental historians Samuel Hays and Robert Gottlieb similarly point to Nixon's possible insincerity—but also to his environmental successes. See Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington, D.C.: Regenery, 2003), 395-399; Hays, 58; Robert Gottlieb, 153.

¹²⁷ Lythgoe, “US Drops Plans.”

The combined efforts of Governor Reagan and President Nixon stopped the Minaret Summit road in 1972; the California Wilderness Act of 1984 closed this road gap by expanding the Minarets Wilderness (and renaming it after recently deceased conservationist Ansel Adams). The act ruled out the possibility of a future road by closing the gap left open fifty years prior. In an interesting turn of events, Reagan's presidential administration opposed the wilderness legislation, because it contained far more wilderness designation for California than the administration wanted.¹²⁸

The Minaret Summit struggle showed the vitality of the wilderness concept. In the 1930s, the Forest Service specifically designated the corridor as non-wilderness, to allow for eventual construction of a road. The Sierra Club agreed, and endorsed the road. And yet, today the road is unbuilt, and the corridor has legislative protection as a wilderness. The sequence of events plainly demonstrates that humans construct wilderness just as they do roads. The corridor has changed little in the fifty years between non-designation and designation. If anything, the area would have been less wild in 1984, from a closer logging and recreation road in the west to greater numbers of recreation-seekers attracted to the Mammoth Mountain area in the east. In other words, the corridor never had to exist in the first place, and the 1984 re-designation affirmed, both symbolically and legally, that a road would not cross the Sierra Nevada in this

¹²⁸ Eleanor Randolph, "Burton Death May Affect Legislation," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1983, p. B3. The 2.3 million acres of wilderness proposed in the original bill shrank to 1.8 million in the version made into law.

area. The eventual legislative solution is strikingly similar to the one that finally halted plans for developing Mineral King as a ski resort.

Mineral King

Mineral King shared many similarities with the Minaret Summit road situation. The Sierra Club, as a major conservation organization, came out in opposition to a major project after earlier formal approvals. The Club again clashed with the Forest Service (home to the mandate of “multiple use”), though much more strongly at Mineral King because of the more activist developer role assumed by the Forest Service. The development struggle engaged the attention of government at a variety of levels and interested citizens. Just as the State of California, the Park and Forest Service, the Sierra Club, local government and boosters met and battled over the Minaret Summit road, so too did they work with and face off against one another in the planned transformation of the Mineral King Valley. Conservationists again turned to the Park Service in hopes of blocking the project. But in an odd turn of events, the Sierra Club successfully used a road to *halt* a development. After the wilderness consciousness raising of the 1930s, conservation organizations looked carefully at new roads because of how they encouraged development and allowed for significantly increased access. By impeding improvement of the Mineral King access road, the Sierra Club delayed the project enough to engineer a legislative solution, with transfer of the valley to Park Service control.

The First Road to Mineral King

The Mineral King valley and surrounding mountainsides experienced a mining boom in the 1870s that brought the first development of any sort to Mineral King, but miners found it less than a dream come true. The inability to easily (and cheaply) process the ore on-site contributed to financial problems for the mines. All attempts to construct a wagon road to the valley proved difficult, and the road's character added to the expense of continuing mining operations. As Linda A. Wallace, a former Mineral King ranger and historian of the Mineral King Road, writes, “The road was built for one reason – to exploit the perceived riches in a small subalpine valley. Little thought was given to the distant future in those heady days of construction.”¹²⁹ The miners anxious to stake their claims constructed the road at the lowest quality possible—a circumstance that made later improvements exceedingly difficult.

The Mineral King Road originated in 1874 as a pack trail to haul mining equipment up the East Fork of the Kaweah River. Though miners used this early path (the Meadows Trail) to haul a considerable amount of material to the mines, it never became more than a trail.¹³⁰ The New England Tunnel and Smelting Company tried to improve the trail in 1877 when it gained new ownership of the mine, but ceased work when continued financial difficulties took their toll. When Thomas Fowler revived mining interest in Mineral King, he made transformation

¹²⁹ Linda A. Wallace, *A Short History of the Mineral King Road, Sequoia National Park, California* (Linda A. Wallace, 2004), 1.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

of the trail into a wagon road a top priority, helping to form the Mineral King Wagon and Toll Road Company.¹³¹ When completed in August 1879, the wagon road construction had taken more than five years, with a final five-month burst of effort allowing wagons to enter the Mineral King valley for the first time.¹³² In 1899, Second Lieutenant Henry B. Clark, acting superintendent of the two parks, reported on the road's poor quality:

This so-called county road through a National Park is unsatisfactory, and presents many complications and opportunities for disputes with trespassers and stockmen. The county of Tulare spends but very little for its repair, while the General Government contributes nothing, though both are alike interested in the improvement of this single thoroughfare. The roadway is cut in the hillside, and the grade as now established is wretched.¹³³

By 1965 (and still today), the road had benefited from only small improvements from the wagon road days. It follows much the same route, with the exception of a rough grade that was replaced on a lower portion of the road. The road was widened for automobiles and has retaining walls to keep the roadbed in place.¹³⁴ But miners and laborers built the road to serve wagons, and nobody had since re-engineered it to support high-speed automobile travel—a point of perennial grief for proponents of downhill skiing in Mineral King.¹³⁵

Interest in developing Mineral King for winter sports predated (by many years) the Forest Service's February 1965 prospectus. The Forest Service reacted

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³² Dilsaver and Tweed, 46-47; Wallace, 30.

¹³³ Dilsaver and Tweed, 86.

¹³⁴ Wallace, 32.

¹³⁵ From personal experience in 2005, the author pegs the maximum safe speed for the road at about 20 mph—if there is no oncoming traffic.



Fig. 5: Mineral King Road, 2005. The road is unstriped for virtually its entire length, but is mostly paved. Photograph by the author.

both to the trend toward increased recreation generally and to specific interest in Mineral King.¹³⁶ As early as World War II, interested parties inquired with the Forest Service about possibly developing the area for skiing. In 1945 and again in 1946, the Forest Service sent in personnel to make very preliminary surveys of the suitability of Mineral King for winter sports. Their conclusions presaged the

¹³⁶ In Colorado, the Forest Service took an early role supporting alpine skiing and cooperated with local organizations in promoting skiing. This cooperation was vital to recreational skiing's development, because in 1946 "Colorado skiers did at least 90 percent of their skiing on federal land...with every one of the state's developed winter sports sites either on or adjoining national forest or park land." (Coleman, 90, 138-146.) In California, much of the best ski terrain was similarly under Forest Service administration.

later arguments over Mineral King: the area had enormous potential because of the number and variety of slopes, but it was one of the last (natural) areas of its kind and the present road could not handle wintertime traffic.¹³⁷

In 1953, the National Park Service, recognizing the interest in developing Mineral King as a winter sports area, began probing its potential responsibilities for a concomitant road improvement project. In February of that year, Sequoia and Kings Canyon Superintendent E. T. Scoyen informed Regional Director Lawrence C. Merriam about “local agitation again” over developing Mineral King. Scoyen spoke with the Secretary of the Tulare County Chamber of Commerce and informed him that the Park Service would not build the road, because “there was no sound National Park reason” why it should. Scoyen confided in Merriam that the financing prospects for the project were so remote as to be virtually non-existent, and Scoyen's job, as he saw it, was “to be sure that it is not loaded on the National Park Service.”¹³⁸ In April, Scoyen further informed Merriam of private efforts to construct a toll road, backed by at least \$4 million of private money. Informing the Park Service Director of these developments, Merriam remarked that “acquiescence in a toll road through the park might prove a dangerous precedent and that in general we would oppose the road as such,” and he further suggested that an Act of Congress might be required to legally construct a toll

¹³⁷ Arthur B. Ferguson, Jr. and William P. Bryson, “Comment, Mineral King: A Case Study in Forest Decision Making,” *Ecology Law Quarterly* 2 (1972): 500. The road problem presented itself each time the prospect of Mineral King development was raised in the 1940s and 1950s.

¹³⁸ Memorandum to Regional Director, Region Four from Superintendent, Sequoia and Kings Canyon, February 16, 1953; L3027 SEQU; Administrative Files, 1949-1971; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Hereafter all citations to RG 79 will be to this Administrative Files series.

road.¹³⁹

In a May 27, 1953, report to Chief Landscape Architect Thomas Vint, Benjamin L. Breeze laid out the problems inherent in a toll road across national park land, chief among them the lack of precedent. While stating that the Park Service itself had no vested interest in having the road improved, Breeze noted it had previously shown a willingness to work with the Forest Service: “In 1950, when Tulare County suggested a survey from Route 198 to Mineral King, we replied ‘In the event the United States Forest Service initiates such a reconnaissance survey, the National Park Service will be glad to collaborate.’ No action was taken by the Forest Service, to my knowledge.”¹⁴⁰ Although a toll road emerged as a possibility later on, the salient point here concerns the Park Service's ambivalent attitude toward a road when development would have been much smaller than plans proposed later. Park Service administrators expressed a willingness to work with the Forest Service, but they sought to avoid entanglement in the development as much as possible, because the road and ski facility had nothing to do with national park values. At the same time, they recognized that the current road probably occupied “the only practicable route.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Memorandum to National Park Service Director from Regional Director, Region Four, April 21, 1953; L3027 SEQU; RG 79. During the main fight over improvement of the Mineral King Road in the 1960s, the Sierra Club and Park Service talked of any roads within national parks needing to service a “park purpose” or violate the Service's Organic Act. Scoyen and Merriam were unsure if granting a toll road franchise to a private party would lawfully fall within the Park Service's mission.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Thomas Vint to Benjamin L. Breeze, May 27, 1953; L3027 SEQU; RG 79.

¹⁴¹ Memorandum to National Park Service Director from Regional Director, Region Four, April 21, 1953; L3027 SEQU; RG 79.

Because this 1953 development never came to pass, nobody tested the Park Service's willingness to allow road improvement. The Forest Service, however, filed away the Park Service's expressed desire to gladly cooperate on the project.

One final note on postwar skiing in California's national forests is in order here. Along with roads, the rise of recreational skiing contributed to the Sierra Club embracing a wilderness ethic. This is most evident in 1940s attempts to develop the San Geronio Wild Area, in the highest mountains east of Los Angeles, for skiing. Skiers coveted the area because of its terrain and closeness to the Southern California population centers. The Forest Service established the San Geronio Primitive Area in 1931, before recreational skiing had come to California. Pressure from groups such as the California Chamber of Commerce and the California Ski Association caused the Forest Service, in the mid-1940s, to consider removing land from the heart of the wilderness for development as a ski center.¹⁴² Anthony Godfrey writes that what started as a local issue “blossomed into a broad, national debate on Forest Service wilderness policy,” as the ski groups, environmental organizations (including The Wilderness Society), and others argued about the proper use of the land. Reacting to letters protesting the potential ski development, Forest Service Chief Lyle Watts in 1947 conceded the area had “higher public value as a wilderness and a watershed than as a downhill skiing area.”¹⁴³

¹⁴² Godfrey, 366.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 368. A year earlier, Watts had said that “the public value of the ski area seems to be so much greater than the value of the area as a wilderness that modification of the area seems to be a public necessity.” (Godfrey, 366.)

Recognizing the demand for skiing, but wanting to ensure that the protected wilderness remained free of ski development, the Sierra Club's Winter Sports Committee sought out suitable alternative sites, outside wilderness areas and national parks. Concentrating on the Sierra Nevada, the committee's survey in 1948 reinforced the conclusions of others that Mineral King offered spectacular ski terrain and great opportunity for commercial development, but tempered its enthusiasm with concern over road access and avalanche danger in the basin. As a result of these surveys and developer interest, the Forest Service in 1949 issued a prospectus calling for bids that nevertheless drew only one response from a bidder unable to meet all the requirements.¹⁴⁴ In 1953 the Tulare County Chamber of Commerce again raised the idea, leading to the internal Park Service discussions above and a pro-development public hearing, but "once again, the inability to provide for all-weather access put a damper on the project."¹⁴⁵ Pressure on San Geronio waned, too, but when the 1964 Wilderness Act afforded the area firmer protection, commercial ski interests again turned their attention to Mineral King.

The Wilderness Act was a monumental piece of legislation for the environmental movement, as it finally provided legal, rather than administrative, protection to wilderness. In the wake of success against Echo Park Dam, Howard Zahniser of The Wilderness Society drafted and began working toward such

¹⁴⁴ John L. Harper, *Mineral King: Public Concern With Government Policy* (Arcata, Calif.: Pacifica Publishing Co., 1982), 53-55.

¹⁴⁵ Godfrey, 421-422; Harper, 53-56.

legislation, marking what Roderick Frazier Nash calls “a determination [for preservationists] to take the offensive.”¹⁴⁶ To those concerned the the Wilderness Act would “lock up” lands, wilderness advocates pointed out that the bill applied to lands which already had some protection, and would at most only encompass about two percent of the country's land area.¹⁴⁷ The Act's definition of wilderness embraced the tenets of the philosophy first espoused The Wilderness Society: “an area...untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”¹⁴⁸ The Act further stipulated that no commercial enterprise and no permanent road be allowed in the wilderness areas covered by the legislation. The Wilderness Act was not evoked explicitly in the environmental battles involving the Minaret Summit Highway and the Mineral King development because they both existed outside of designated wilderness areas. But the Act's very passage in the years immediately preceding these battles, particularly in the way the Act's wilderness definition excluded roads, underscores how wilderness had become a mainstream concern. In trying to keep Mineral King free of a expansive destination ski resort, the Sierra Club tapped into this political atmosphere that embraced preservation to slow and eventually halt development efforts.

¹⁴⁶ Nash, *Wilderness* , 222.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁴⁸ The text of the Act is in Lary M. Dilsaver, *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, Lanham Way, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994, 277-286.

The Sierra Club at Mineral King

As an interest group first concerned with the mountains of the “Pacific coast” and later beyond, the Sierra Club provided input and commented on management and development plans for the Sierra Nevada from an early time. The Club recognized that day-to-day agency administration much more than sporadic legislation shaped the wild lands. The Forest Service had for many years used the Club as a “friendly lobby” to help with Congressional appropriations and public relations of Forest Service activity. But as the Forest Service moved from custodial management to a greater emphasis on use (particularly with timber), and as the Club found itself increasingly questioning Forest Service motives, this cooperative spirit dissipated.¹⁴⁹ Likewise with the National Park Service: the Sierra Club had advance knowledge of and input to plans made by the Service. Though the two organizations did not march completely in lock step, they shared many common goals. Conrad Wirth, Director of the National Park Service, expressed such a thought in a 1958 letter to former Sierra Club President Harold E. Crowe, commenting that “even a casual survey indicates that our field of agreement is much broader than the sum of our differences.”¹⁵⁰

But the Club and the Park Service did disagree on specific issues, as did the Club and the Forest Service. While the Sierra Club went on record in the 1940s approving Mineral King development, the 1960s plans ran counter to the Sierra

¹⁴⁹ Susan R. Schrepfer, “Establishing Administrative ‘Standing’: The Sierra Club and the Forest Service, 1897-1956,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 58 (1989): 57-58.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Conrad Wirth to Harold E. Crowe, January 7, 1958; A22 Sierra Club Pt. 3 WASO from 1-1-1958; RG 79.

Club's ideals and what it saw as the public demands of the time. The Forest Service excluded the Sierra Club from planning for the 1960s development, sloughing off the Club by stating that public demand justified the development and the Sierra Club could consult with the winning bidder.¹⁵¹ This treatment by the Forest Service combined with other conflicts (such as that over San Geronio) to convince the Sierra Club that administrative politics alone were ineffective, for the Club had no assurance the Forest Service would consider all outside suggestions.

In 1947 and again in 1949, the Sierra Club board of directors formally endorsed development of Mineral King. Martin Litton, one of the least development-minded of the directors, recalled, “Any place that could be developed for skiing, the Sierra Club used to kind of think that was nice.”¹⁵² Alex Hildebrand, a Sierra Club director from 1948-1957 and 1963-1966, framed the selection in the context of possible threats to other areas (such as to San Geronio). In the 1940s—in light of the rapid expansion in skiing and the inability of current facilities to meet demand—the Club argued it could “serve a useful purpose by helping to locate areas that would be suitable for ski resorts and promote their use.” In other words, the Club sought to influence Forest Service decisions by providing information framed as the Club itself wished. The Club undertook its own snow surveys and, although the terrain and access did

¹⁵¹ Ferguson and Bryson, 507.

¹⁵² Martin Litton, “Sierra Club Director and Uncompromising Preservationist, 1950s-1970s,” an oral history conducted 1980-1981 by Ann Lage, in *Sierra Club Leaders I, 1950s-1970s*, Sierra Club Oral History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, 74.

hold some drawbacks, selected Mineral King because of the availability of snow and the fact that it lay outside any national park.¹⁵³ The Sierra Club later claimed that it supported only fairly modest skiing facilities at Mineral King—certainly nothing on the scale of the \$3-million development called for by the Forest Service in 1965, much less the \$35-million proposal with which Walt Disney Productions responded later that year.¹⁵⁴ Beyond the enlarged scope of the development, other circumstances had changed, too. By the 1960s, the Club had grown in size, placed stronger emphasis on the rights of nature, and distrusted federal agencies that it saw as actively destroying the environment.¹⁵⁵ This adversarial relationship caused the Sierra Club to look elsewhere (to the judiciary and legislature) and came from a litany of conservation battles, including several in the Sierra Nevada.

Since approval of initial plans for Mineral King development, broader changes in the country and the population led the Sierra Club to increased activism in the growing environmental movement. From opposition to logging in the Deadman Creek area of the Sierra Nevada, to the Mission 66 development program in the national parks, to dams in Dinosaur National Monument and the Grand Canyon, the Club increased its national profile. In response to the

¹⁵³ Alexander Hildebrand, “Sierra Club Leader and Critic: Perspective on Club Growth, Scope, and Tactics, 1950s-1970s,” an oral history conducted in 1981 by Ann Lage, in *Sierra Club Leaders I, 1950s-1970s*, Sierra Club Oral History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, 35.

¹⁵⁴ McCloskey, 174.

¹⁵⁵ Susan R. Schrepfer, “Perspectives on Conservation: Sierra Club Strategies in Mineral King,” *Journal of Forest History* 20 (1976): 190.

increased pace and scale of public works such as dams, and to the booming population and subsequent growth in outdoor recreation, the Sierra Club's advocacy efforts increased dramatically. Projects that the Club previously might have approved or accepted were now approached with caution because of the shrinking numbers of wild areas. Although the Sierra Club never had been just a hiking club, it had become a more strident conservationist and pro-wilderness voice.¹⁵⁶ Beginning in the 1950s, the Club became less cooperative and more adversarial in dealings with the Forest Service and the Park Service. William Siri, who's active involvement with the Club began in 1956, recalls it as beginning to take a purist posture on wilderness issues at this time: "There are no trade-offs; there are no compromises; except those into which you're backed, by sheer force."¹⁵⁷ Siri saw the very function of the Club as that of an adversarial organization.¹⁵⁸ As detailed below, the Club expressed this contrary position to the agencies by engaging in administrative politics with the Forest Service and Park Service over key disputes that dampened the cooperative spirit.

When the Forest Service planned to log Deadman Creek in the eastern Sierra in the 1950s, David Brower had the Sierra Club bring in its own outside experts, whose findings contradicted the needs expressed by Forest Service officials. Harold K. Steen, author of a history of the Forest Service, notes that this

¹⁵⁶ Brower, 181; Godfrey, 425.

¹⁵⁷ William E. Siri, *Reflections on the Sierra Club, the Environment, and Mountaineering, 1950s-1970s*, an oral history conducted by Ann Lage, Sierra Club History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1979, 86.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

event “ended any question in Brower's mind that the Forest Service no longer could be trusted.”¹⁵⁹ Though the Sierra Club historically aligned itself closely with the Park Service, the two organizations disagreed sharply on the Mission 66 program. As discussed above, the Park Service reconstructed Yosemite's Tioga Road over Club dissent. By the time the Club met to reconsider the Mineral King development, then, the directors (led by David Brower) felt they had ample reason to be suspicious of the programs of the federal land managers.

The 1965 reversal of the 1947 endorsement of Mineral King development came about only after significant disagreement among the Sierra Club board of directors. Several members on the board had participated in the earlier decision and felt the Club honor-bound to live up to its earlier commitment. Bestor Robinson, a Sierra Club Director from 1935 into the 1960s whom David Brower felt too often sided with the developers, thought it in the Club's best interests to live up to its earlier agreements. Because the Sierra Club frequently responded to plans of these agencies, renegeing on promises did not help relations.¹⁶⁰ Alex Hildebrand, who participated in the 1947 pledge, felt the proposed development was not damaging enough to require a reversal of the board's earlier decision.¹⁶¹ The Forest Service, because it had this earlier pledge in hand, did not foresee

¹⁵⁹ Steen, 303.

¹⁶⁰ Bestor Robinson, “Thoughts on Conservation and the Sierra Club,” an oral history conducted in 1974 by Susan R. Schrepfer, in *Sierra Club Reminiscences I, 1900s-1960s*, Sierra Club History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1974, 46-47. In the introduction to the oral history, Schrepfer says Robinson “is not a purist,” but “favors the realistic approach to scenic preservation” (v).

¹⁶¹ Hildebrand, 37.

serious opposition to the development and therefore felt secure in issuing the development prospectus.¹⁶² The perspectives of both the Club and the Forest Service here indicate the importance the environmental organization attached to administrative politics.

But several directors realized that things had changed since the earlier acquiescence.¹⁶³ After the Forest Service issued the prospectus in February 1965, the directors discussed the size of the proposed development. These early meetings focused on mitigation and on the bounds of acceptable development.¹⁶⁴ The Executive Committee, at an emergency meeting held March 5, in fact ordered Kern-Kaweah Chapter chairman John Harper to cooperate with the Forest Service, an action Harper felt to be “[selling] out the Club's best interests.”¹⁶⁵ The May 1965 meeting—at which the directors passed a resolution opposing this development—revealed an initially divided board. After David Brower spoke up in favor of compromising with development, Martin Litton stood up and addressed the problems this development would cause. As Litton recalled:

I remember Ansel Adams saying, “I didn't know it was going to be in the national park.” (The road, that is.) I said, “All you have to do is look at the map, dumbhead.” I showed them a map, and here we were going to ruin Sequoia National Park for this silly thing that the Sierra Club advocated. Why, then it went the other way around, everybody voted the other way.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Siri, 80-81.

¹⁶³ Brower, 55.

¹⁶⁴ McCloskey, 173-174.

¹⁶⁵ Harper, 80. The Kern-Kaweah Chapter consisted of members in Kern and Tulare counties; Mineral King is in Tulare County.

¹⁶⁶ Litton, 28; Brower, 177.

Development opponents on the board argued that the Sierra Club had sufficient reason to change its position: there had been no hearing on changing the land classification of Mineral King (whose status had been “quiescent” for many years); the Sierra Club's policy on wilderness and buffer zones had changed through the years; and while Mineral King was not as a whole wilderness, parts of it were a de facto wilderness and the valley served as a jumping off place for trips into the surrounding wilderness. Litton brought up the possible effects on Sequoia National Park, but the minutes from that May meeting indicate that the Sierra Club also feared that a high-speed road to Mineral King would foster a connecting link over Farewell Gap (at the southern end of the valley) with the proposed Olancho-Porterville Road.¹⁶⁷ The resolution that resulted from these debates opposed development as provided for in the prospectus, requested that public hearings be held, and informed the Forest Service of Sierra Club support for the primitive nature of Mineral King.¹⁶⁸

William Siri, the Sierra Club President at this time, recalled in the 1970s that sufficient time had passed and the circumstances had changed enough for there to be “no grounds” for the Sierra Club to agree with Mineral King development. “It simply had to be made ultimately a part of Sequoia National Park, and this of course has been the intent of the club ever since then. I don't think there's any question about that now in anybody's mind in the club.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Harper, 82-83.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 83.

¹⁶⁹ Siri, 85-86.

Though the Sierra Club engaged in litigation to slow the proposed development and still engaged in dialogue with the Forest Service over the development's parameters, the Club ultimately sought transfer of the valley to the relative safety of Park Service control, which could only be effected through an Act of Congress.

The Rivalry Played Out: Interagency Politics and the Sierra Club Block

Improved Access

On February 27, 1965, the Forest Service issued the prospectus “for a proposed Recreational Development at Mineral King in the Sequoia National Forest.” After only a couple of sentences stating the purpose of the prospectus and giving a very general description of Mineral King's location, the prospectus's introduction devotes two paragraphs to the problem of visitor access:

The high potential of Mineral King for a winter sports development has been recognized for more than two decades, but the lack of suitable winter access has prevented development of the area. During the past 25 years there has been little change in the access road situation at Mineral King, but during this same time, public demand for winter sports development has increased greatly – especially in Southern California

Improving the access for winter travel is an essential first step in the development of this area. The Forest Service does not suggest how, when, or by whom this will be done. This prospectus is issued with the understanding that the successful applicant will find sufficient incentive, without obligation on the part of the Forest Service, to solve the winter access problem so that a major year-round recreation development may result.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ “Prospectus For a proposed Recreational Development at Mineral King in the Sequoia National Forest,” February, 1965, p. 1; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, California Region; Mineral King Collection, Special Collections Library, Henry Madden Library, California State University, Fresno (hereafter Mineral King Collection).

To nobody's surprise, Walt Disney Productions responded to the prospectus.¹⁷¹ Walt Disney himself had been one of the first investors in one of the first ski resorts in the Sierra, the Sugar Bowl Ski Resort on Donner Pass, and he had served as master of pageantry at the 1960 Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley, both in the Lake Tahoe area. What's more, Disney did not just happen to respond to the development proposal, but had been in active talks with the Forest Service about some sort of recreational ski development in Southern California.¹⁷² The success of Disneyland (opened in 1955) contributed to Walt's interest in expanding the company's presence in outdoor entertainment, and the first land had already been purchased for Walt Disney World as the company also worked on Mineral King designs.

The Disney plans for Mineral King downsized over the years as on-site investigators evaluated the avalanche hazard and as growing public concern caused it to scale back its objectives. The plans submitted in 1965 called for fourteen ski lifts to seven locations above the Mineral King valley that would also separate advanced, intermediate and beginning skiers.¹⁷³ But the additional

¹⁷¹ Disney was not the only group to respond to this proposal. Five others also presented plans on August 31, 1965. The high profile nature of the project caused the Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman to make the final decision on the winning bidder. (Harper, 87, 94-95.)

¹⁷² For Walt's involvement with the Sugar Bowl, see Jeff Pepper, "Mount Disney: The Legacy of Walt at Sugar Bowl," <http://www.2719hyperion.com/2008/03/mount-disney-legacy-of-walt-at-sugar.html> (accessed November 1, 2008). Both a Sierra Club member (Harper, 61-67) and a member of Disney's planning staff (Harrison "Buzz" Price, in his *Walt's Revolution! By the Numbers* (Orlando, Fla.: Ripley Entertainment, 2003), pp. 46-51) note the Disney interest in Mineral King well before the 1965 prospectus. Price additionally notes that Disney considered San Geronio, but was warned off by the Forest Service because of a "hornets nest of opposition" (46).

¹⁷³ Walt Disney Productions, "Walt Disney Submits Application for Mineral King Recreational Development," press release, August 31, 1965, Mineral King Collection.



Fig. 6: Proposed Mineral King Ski Resort, 1965-1978. Reproduced from Dilsaver and Tweed.

facilities on the valley floor put the “major” in “major year-round recreation development,” and serves as an example of the post-war commodified ski experiences Annie Coleman describes in Colorado.¹⁷⁴ The north end of the valley would have a self-contained alpine village, with two large hotels, ice skating rink, convenience shops, conference center, cafeterias, restaurants, and other support facilities, such as a first aid station and fire station. And although the Disney plans were founded on improvement of the road to the valley, the 2,500-vehicle

¹⁷⁴ Coleman, 4. Indeed, the singing Audio-Animatronics bears Disney planned for the village have little to do with skiing. The bears found their way to Disney theme parks in the Country Bear Jamboree show.

parking area was situated outside the valley, in what the 1965 press release called “one of the most significant aspects” of the plans.¹⁷⁵

But Disney could not act alone to construct the resort. The Mineral King valley itself, including the mountainsides up to the ridgeline, was under complete control of the Forest Service. However, the Park Service managed lands that surrounded Mineral King on the north, east, and west. Although the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management controlled much of the land to the west, the Mineral King Road inescapably traversed miles through national park lands, and its improvement required consent of the Park Service. Tulare County had maintained the road—including the length in Sequoia National Park—until California adopted it as a state highway in 1965. These circumstances dictated that only cooperative efforts could secure the road's improvement to an all-weather standard.

The Forest Service's attempt to place the onus of road improvement on the developer is interesting, for the Service and its parent, the Department of Agriculture, devoted significant resources to working with the National Park Service to secure approval for the improvements. The Forest Service estimated the cost of constructing a road suitable for winter access at more than \$5 million, and again reminded the developer, “no public agency is obligated to undertake the road project.”¹⁷⁶ The winning bidder would be issued a preliminary permit of three years. The thirty-year term permit would be contingent on the first contract

¹⁷⁵ Walt Disney Productions, “Walt Disney Submits Application.”

¹⁷⁶ “Prospectus,” p. 3.

being let for a “significant portion” of the improved road and when funds were programmed for completion of the road within five years, in addition to required approval from the Forest Service of development plans.¹⁷⁷ The Forest Service clearly recognized the problem of access from the previous development efforts. But thrusting the responsibility onto a private company, who campaigned to make it again a public responsibility, did little to help the situation.

Well before the Forest Service accepted a bid—indeed, over a month before the bid deadline—the California Legislature incorporated the Mineral King road into the state highway system. John Harper, who wrote his perspective on the Mineral King development to address examples of “surreptitious planning...that did not seem to serve the public's interest,” provides the State's action in this regard as one such instance. As Harper points out, the State agreed to finance an improved road without knowing the cost, without having done a feasibility study, and without even knowing what form the development would take!¹⁷⁸ The State, eager to secure external financing for the road's improvement, in September 1966 applied for a \$3 million grant (for a road estimated to cost around \$25 million) from the federal Economic Development Agency, under the argument that the road and Mineral King development would benefit economically depressed Tulare County. The EDA approved the grant in the following month, but it came with certain stipulations: the State had to put up matching funds and meet certain deadlines for the grant money to be paid. From December 14, 1966,

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Harper, 111.

California had 24 months to get the entire road project under contract. This proved difficult for two reasons: first, as detailed below, the National Park Service only reluctantly approved an improved road after much delay; second, the road had no clear funding source. As set forth in a special report released by the Division of Highways on February 8, 1967, the \$20 million required for the road represented about 10 percent of the unfrozen funds for Southern California and “the allocation of funds to such a project must be at the expense of other critical projects which were considered as deficiencies.” The report suggested that cooperative financing, possibly involving Walt Disney Productions, the Forest Service, and Tulare County, as a possible solution.¹⁷⁹ Because the State had assumed the road without any studies, it had put itself on the hook for an unknown amount of money with little idea of the end result. Although Governor Edmund Brown had heavily endorsed the project, going so far as to appear at a press conference at Mineral King with Walt Disney in October 1966, his 1967 replacement, Ronald Reagan, had serious misgivings about using taxpayer money to help the development. Reagan's philosophy of fiscal discipline later led to formal removal of the road from the state highway system.

Although the outcome was the same—Reagan opposed improving a road in the Sierra Nevada—his reasons for removing the Mineral King road from the state highway system stood in rather stark contrast to the reasons he came out against the Minarets road. At the time Reagan signed the bill in August 1972, coming just two months after the Minarets press conference, Reagan remarked

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 118.

that he was “firmly in support of the development of Mineral King as a recreation area,” but felt that “proper future development” did not require a high-speed road and that “alternate access methods” could meet the need better than a road.¹⁸⁰ In a 1978 syndicated radio address (part of a series delivered by Reagan between 1975 and 1979), Reagan stressed the need for recreation on public lands. He pointed to the amount of wilderness or roadless areas around Mineral King as justification for its development.¹⁸¹ Reagan's decisions, then, did not solely come from an abiding defense of the wilderness, but were also influenced by his feelings toward recreation and government spending.

As the Department of Agriculture neared selection of a winning bid for Mineral King development, the Park Service informed the Forest Service to make prospective bidders aware of the Park Service's insistence that any improvement to the road “not seriously scar the landscape.”¹⁸² The Park Service had specific guidelines for national park roads and also had serious questions regarding their legal responsibilities and obligations concerning the road.¹⁸³ The 1950s

¹⁸⁰ “Reagan Signs Mineral King Highway Ban,” *Fresno Bee*, August 19, 1972:, p. A1.

¹⁸¹ Skinner, Kiron K., Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds, *Reagan's Path to Victory: The Shaping of Ronald Reagan's Vision: Selected Writings* (Old Tappan, NJ: Free Press, 2004), 278-279.

¹⁸² Letter from Assistant Director Howard R. Stagner to Mr. and Mrs. Walter Weyman, December 22, 1965; L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 1-1-1964 to 12-31-1965 Pt. 1; RG 79. While this is the underlying philosophy of the parkways embraced by the Park Service in the 1920s, the Park Service had no such goals for this road, as it merely cut across park lands. Additionally, the carefully manicured landscapes characteristic of parkways would have been difficult to achieve with the Mineral King Road because of the presence of numerous giant sequoias.

¹⁸³ Dating back to 1926, when the National Park Service signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Bureau of Public Roads regarding road construction in national parks, the Service had explicit standards for roads under its stead. See *Ethan Carr, Landscape by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 174-175.

development proposal that considered a toll road had vexed Park Service management. Since the road did little to benefit Sequoia National Park—it ran through park lands but did not provide access to any recreational developments within the park—and could in fact bring environmental harm to the park, would the Park Service be violating its mandate? Could the Park Service legally allow the road improvement, given its non-park purpose? The Sierra Club strongly lobbied the Park Service to embrace a preservationist attitude, using arguments about harmful environmental effects and a strict interpretation of Park Service road policies.¹⁸⁴ As evidenced by the three years of negotiations required for the Park Service to agree to construction and to grant permits, the Park Service experienced internal disagreements about the desirability of road improvements and its obligations to the Forest Service.

These contradictions are particularly well expressed by both Interior Secretary Stewart Udall (1961-1969) and Park Service Director George B. Hartzog, Jr. (1964-1972). They understood the threats facing the national parks and the need for parks to play an integral role in the growing recreation movement, but did not emphasize wilderness enough for the Sierra Club. Rather than focus on intensive development of national park facilities, as his predecessor Connie Wirth had done, Hartzog aggressively expanded the system itself at a pace more rapid than ever before.¹⁸⁵ William Siri recalled that Hartzog understood and sympathized with the environmental movement, but also felt sensitive to political

¹⁸⁴ Harper, 128.

¹⁸⁵ Sellars, 206.

pressure. He worked with conservation organizations, but compromised for the sake of retaining his position.¹⁸⁶ In discussions with other Interior Department officials, Hartzog expressed his extreme displeasure over the road, but he ultimately accepted Udall's acceptance of the road improvements. In 1964, mindful of President Lyndon Johnson's mandate for expanded outdoor recreation programs, Secretary Udall and the Interior Department issued a seventy-six-page pamphlet entitled *The Race for Inner Space*, describing threats to the America's wildlands. In it, Udall announced that he and Agriculture Secretary Orville Freeman had agreed to a new era of cooperation to provide necessary recreation facilities.¹⁸⁷ The Forest Service, however, failed to consult with the Park Service (or the Sierra Club or other organizations) before issuing the development prospectus, poisoning the atmosphere surrounding the project. While the Park Service refrained from outright attacks on the Forest Service in its Mineral King efforts, Interior officials privately worried about possible effects on Sequoia National Park.

As a public relations matter, the Park Service expressed support for the Forest Service to manage its lands as it saw fit and additionally mentioned a required “diversity of opportunity” in the outdoors, including in the “orderly development of resorts, ski areas, and other pursuits desired by our expanding population.” The Park Service attempted to assuage opponents by repeating Forest Service assurances of “careful consideration” to the “important values” in

¹⁸⁶ Siri, 76.

¹⁸⁷ Harper, 131.

the canyon.¹⁸⁸ Internally, however, Interior Department officials worried over the scope of the road project planned by the State of California. In response to a March 16, 1967 letter from Walt Disney Productions, Stanley Cain (Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks) attached a note to Hartzog with the comment, “We can't go for [these/this]¹⁸⁹ road. It serves no NPS purpose – is wholly an intrusion.”¹⁹⁰ A week later, Cain expressed similar sentiments to Hartzog when a letter came in from the California Transportation Agency asking for approval in principle for the “general concept” of constructing the road: “Who the hell do they think runs NPS – Disney, USFS, or Calif.? As on the services' letter from Disney, I noted we can't give them what they want – shouldn't anyway.”¹⁹¹ The Forest Service grew ever more impatient, leading to a series of letters between Secretaries Udall and Freeman. Freeman chided Udall for so long delaying a necessary project; Udall pointed out the long-term consequences of road improvement actions. The communications did little to improve departmental relations.¹⁹²

Udall, though strong-willed and firmly against the Mineral King road improvement, nevertheless recognized that he was numerically and politically

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Assistant Director Howard R. Stagner to Mr. and Mrs. Walter Weyman, December 22, 1965; L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 1-1-1964 to 12-31-1965 Pt. 1; RG 79.

¹⁸⁹ The State of California and Walt Disney Productions claimed they contemplated building a single road, but the Interior Department felt the plans actually called for two roads.

¹⁹⁰ Attached to letter from Donn B. Tatum to Secretary Udall, March 16, 1967; L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 1-1-66 to 12-31-1967 Pt. 1-A; RG 79.

¹⁹¹ Attached to letter from Gordon C. Luce to Secretary Udall, March 23, 1967; L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 1-1-66 to 12-31-1967 Pt. 1-A; RG 79.

¹⁹² Harper, 133.

outmatched. A host of opponents allied against him, including Governor Reagan,¹⁹³ the state's U.S. Senators, other U.S. congressmen, state legislators, Tulare county officials, businessmen and speculators, and also some members of the media.¹⁹⁴ In an attempt to mediate this departmental conflict, the Bureau of the Budget offered something of a horse trading compromise: in exchange for guarantee of Interior Department approval of the Mineral King access road, the State of California would finally support establishing Redwood National Park. Backed strongly at the federal level by President Johnson and Secretary Udall, the redwood park faced equally strong opposition from Governor Reagan. The Budget Bureau formally sought this compromise with an October 1967 bill sponsored by California Senator Thomas Kuchel. Although the bill did not pass, Udall recognized the overwhelming pressure on him to allow the roadwork to proceed. At a high level meeting in December 1967, Udall finally relented.¹⁹⁵ In a press release announcing Interior's cooperation, Agriculture stressed the necessity of improved road access and the lack of economic alternatives.¹⁹⁶ But the generalized agreement to issue permits still required explicit agreements— negotiations that dragged on for over another year as Interior studied the proposed route and formulated its conditions for the permits.

¹⁹³ Recall that Reagan endorsed the development. He did not demonstrate his opposition to government money paying for the road's improvement until 1972, when it became obvious that the State would be responsible for the cost.

¹⁹⁴ Harper, 133.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 133-135; Schrepfer, "Perspectives on Conservation," 186.

¹⁹⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture Press Release, December 27, 1967; L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 1-1-66 to 12-31-1967 Pt. 1-A; RG 79.

John Harper writes that the Interior Department simply changed its antagonistic tune and began squabbling over “highway design specifications rather than right-of-way and routing.” Interior's insistence on studies and carefully crafted design requirements seriously delayed the project.¹⁹⁷ This delay was vital to the Sierra Club's ability to attack the project by other means (legislation and litigation). Though Interior had studied the road for over two years, and Udall agreed to allow the road project to move forward in December 1967, by the following March top Interior officials still lacked a clear idea of their demands. When Sequoia Superintendent John McLaughlin telephoned Washington to inquire about negotiation strategy, Deputy Director Harthon L. Bill wrote to Associate Director Howard A. Baker that they would require, in short order, ground rules and standards about what is permissible and not. “To do otherwise,” Bill wrote, would find them “without a basis for discussions and a likelihood of losing any leverage there may be for the protection of resources in Sequoia National Park.”¹⁹⁸ The Park Service seemed to only have a firm idea that no giant sequoia be destroyed or damaged as a result of the road improvement. This issue took precedence regardless of cost, as stated in a letter from Karl T. Gilbert, the Chief of the Division of Resources and Visitor Protection, to a citizen concerned over the road's effects.¹⁹⁹ To study the plans of the California Division

¹⁹⁷ Harper, 138.

¹⁹⁸ Memorandum from Harthon L. Bill to Associate Director, March 4, 1968; L3027 02 L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 1-1-68 to 3-31-68 Pt. 1; RG 79.

¹⁹⁹ Letter from Karl T. Gilbert to Mrs. Janet C. Neavles, March 7, 1968; L3027 02 L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 1-1-68 to 3-31-68 Pt. 1; RG 79.

of Highways (and perhaps give the agency something to fall back on when inevitably criticized), the National Park Service contracted with the Clarkeson Engineering Company to prepare a report.

John Clarkeson, the lead highway engineer, took issue with the State over its insistence on a new alignment and its interactions with the Park Service. He strongly endorsed extensive use of the extant right-of-way, something he felt the State and Forest Service ignored. But Clarkeson's criticisms extended beyond just the design standards, to the actions of the State and Forest Service. In June 1968 he let the Department know that those agencies would likely give the impression that the Park Service was holding things up. Actually, Clarkeson said, the State had not even surveyed the route and no heavy work had been done.²⁰⁰ More troubling to Clarkeson, the State made statements in oral conferences that contradicted the data they submitted, and so all data they submitted should be carefully scrutinized. Given the special circumstances of the road through the national park, Clarkeson felt the State should provide considerably more information on its plans than it had. The State's attitude, Clarkeson wrote, "seems to have been that if left alone, a very satisfactory job from the Park's viewpoint would be attained. In view of some of the conference discussions and in view of nearby examples of similar work by this agency, I do not believe that general assurances of this nature should be accepted."²⁰¹ Despite Clarkeson's

²⁰⁰ Memorandum to Chairman, Road Committee from Deputy Assistant Director, Interpretation, June 10, 1968; 03 L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 4-1-68 to Sep. 30 1968 Pt. 2; RG 79.

²⁰¹ Letter from John Clarkeson to Edward C. Hummel, November 7, 1968; 04 L3027 SEQU Mineral King Ski Area 10-1-68 to Feb 28 1969 Pt. 3; RG 79. Clarkeson went on to say that if the Division of Highways intended to construct the road as they had California State Highway 198 (from which the Mineral King Road originated), "it would seem that this agency should not be

protestations, the Interior Department in November agreed to the State's proposed location of the road, moving the road negotiations into the final stage before permits could be issued: design standards.

The design standard negotiations encompassed the precise form of the road (in terms of width, grade, overlooks), protective measures necessary during construction, and provision for law enforcement on the roadway. Although the Park Service rejected Clarkeson's routing recommendation, it endorsed many of his suggestions on standards that Clarkeson's report had proposed. The letter from Associate Director Hummel to Chief Forester Edward Cliff informing of route approval also expressed Interior's displeasure with some of the State's proposed standards. Hummel suggested that the Park Service work with the Forest Service and Division of Highways to incorporate Clarkeson's suggestions on additional bridges, tunnels, viaducts, cribbing, retaining walls and other construction methods.²⁰² The Special Use Permit drawn up by the Park Service included provisions for such devices and also stipulated that the Park Service have final approval over plans before contracts be awarded. Additionally, a Park Service representative would work with the State in preparing the plans.²⁰³ Like

trusted with the project in view of the collateral cost to Park values which this type of design and construction would entail.”

²⁰² Letter from Edward A. Hummel, Associate Director of the National Park Service, to Edward P. Cliff, Chief of the Forest Service, Nov. 14, 1968 (Exhibit V for Plaintiff, *Sierra Club v. Hickel*, No. 51464 (N.D. Cal., filed July 23, 1969), *rev'd* 433 F.2d 24 (9th Cir. 1970), *cert. granted, sub nom. Sierra Club v. Morton*, 91 S. Ct. 870 (1971)).

²⁰³ Special Use Permit 4:102-067, attached to memorandum from Associate Director, Management and Programming to Regional Director, Western Region, June 3, 1969; 02 L3027 SEQU Mineral King 6-1-69 to Jul 8 1969 Pt. 5; RG 79. The permit specified the roadway as having a 24-foot driving surface, 6-foot paved shoulders, and 6-foot paved ditches in cut sections.

the other phases before, negotiations over the permits dragged on—in this case, over six months. Until issuance of permits, the Mineral King valley would remain quiescent. The Park Service's long dalliance, reviews, and negotiations stalled actual work on the road for many years. When the permits seemed imminent in June 1969, and the Sierra Club knew the futility of further administrative lobbying, the Club embarked on a new strategy of litigation to halt development activities.

The Mineral King development has received significant attention for its resulting litigation history.²⁰⁴ The Mineral King case emerged as the second biggest environmental litigation in U.S. history after the Storm King case of 1965, in which a federal court ruled that the Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference had standing to sue over a proposed power plant. Samuel Hays suggests that the media magnified the effect of the relatively few environmental suits filed.²⁰⁵ In this matter, however, the lawsuit's importance cannot be overstated. Its importance lies in how it bought time for the Sierra Club (on top of the delays caused by the Park Service) to pursue other resolutions to the development problem; the lawsuit's value to the Club was not in its final adjudication. The

²⁰⁴ cf. “Note, Mineral King Valley: Who Shall Watch the Watchmen?” *Rutgers Law Review* 25 (1970-1971): 121-122; Ferguson and Bryson; Thomas Lundmark, Anne Mester, R. A. Cordes, and Barry S. Sandals, “Commentary, Mineral King Goes Downhill,” *Ecology Law Quarterly* 5 (1975-1976): 555-574; and Joseph L. Sax, “Standing to Sue: A Critical Review of the Mineral King Decision,” *Natural Resources Journal* 13 (1973): 76-88. The article on which Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas based a famous dissenting opinion can be found reprinted in Christopher D. Stone, *Should Trees Have Standing?: And Other Essays on Law, Morals and the Environment* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996). For context, see Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

²⁰⁵ Hays, 481.

Club filed suit in federal district court on June 5, 1969, after the Forest Service approved the Disney master plan and permits were about to be issued. The Sierra Club asked for an injunction against development in the Mineral King Valley itself and an injunction against any actions toward improving the Mineral King Road because such work violated the Park Service's authority to construct roads across national park lands.²⁰⁶ Several of the Sierra Club's complaints related directly to an improved road: that it threatened giant sequoias; that the Park Service should not have authorized a road because it did not serve fundamental park purposes; that the Forest Service and Park Service accord did not make clear that no further enlargements would be necessary; and that by permitting the road, the Park Service would harm Sequoia National Park's natural state. On July 23, 1969, the court granted the injunction.²⁰⁷

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, on appeal by federal attorneys, overturned the injunction, dismissed the Club's petitions as insubstantial, and ruled that the Club did not enjoy legal standing. After the Club appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, the Ninth Circuit agreed that the injunction would remain in effect until the Supreme Court decided on whether to hear the case.²⁰⁸ The Supreme Court accepted the case, and the subsequent legal proceedings revolved around the question of standing and whether the Sierra Club could bring suit without alleging personal injury. The Court decided in April 1972, by a 4-3

²⁰⁶ "Watchmen," 121-122.

²⁰⁷ Harper, 166-169.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 172-173.

margin, that the Club lacked standing to sue, but left the door open for it to file an amended lawsuit, which the Club soon did. In the revised complaint, the Sierra Club also alleged that the agencies failed to comply with the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)—a piece of environmental legislation that did not exist when the lawsuit was first filed. The court set no date for trial, and the courts never offered a final resolution on the merits of the case.²⁰⁹ Rather, the legal proceedings “had stalled development efforts and caused a sizable deflation in development interest,” in the words of Harper.²¹⁰ The Supreme Court decision, however, soon led to a key action by the California Legislature.

The Road to Sequoia National Park

Immediately following the Supreme Court's decision, Walt Disney Productions issued a press release in an attempt to meet objections of the development's opponents. Disney included a cog-railroad in these plans as a possible means of transporting visitors into the valley. John Harper thought the reappearance of the railroad suspicious, given that three years earlier Disney deemed the idea unacceptable and unprofitable. He surmised that Disney expected “a great upwelling of public empathy for the project, a mandate to go ahead and use State funds to build the road so that the resort could eventually

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 180-181.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 182.

become the asset that Walt Disney had intended.”²¹¹ However, following these actions, the California Legislature in the summer of 1972 reassessed the road's inclusion in the state highway system.

Ike Livermore, California's secretary of resources under Governor Reagan, opposed the large Disney plan and especially resented Walt Disney Productions' insistence not to contribute to the road for its ski resort.²¹² The Republican Reagan administration inherited State approval of the project from the Democratic Edmund G. Brown. While Reagan approved of the development in principle, his fiscal conservatism argued against financing the road with taxpayer money. When Disney publicly discussed a cog railroad following the Supreme Court decision, Livermore seized his opportunity and with Assemblyman Edwin L. Z'berg succeeded in passing legislation to remove the road from state control. Reagan signed the legislation on August 18, 1972. Michael McCloskey, the Sierra Club's Executive Director during and after the litigation, recalls this move by the State Legislature and governor as crucial to turning the tide against Mineral King development. He additionally described the lawsuit as “absolutely critical” to gaining the Sierra Club time to build its case and secure this support, thereby underscoring the complicated political field in which the Club operated.²¹³ The lawsuit was “absolutely critical,” but so were the delay resulting from the interagency conflict and the action of the California Legislature (whose action

²¹¹ Ibid., 181.

²¹² Livermore, 78, 81.

²¹³ McCloskey, 169.

was pushed along by Livermore).

With the question of access as uncertain as ever, the Forest Service endeavored to complete an environmental impact statement, as required by NEPA. As Sequoia National Forest staff worked on draft and final versions of the EIS, incorporating public feedback, Walt Disney Productions began to look elsewhere for ski development. This survey included privately owned land around Independence Lake, north of Lake Tahoe, but land transfer problems soon snuffed out Disney's interest. The EIS examined a preferred transportation model of private automobiles on the lower portion of the road, diesel buses through Sequoia National Park on the existing road, and a cog railroad to cover the last several miles. The document additionally laid out a large number of alternatives, including no improvement to the road, construction of the State of California's original proposal, and monorail access.²¹⁴ The Sierra Club found many of the same deficiencies with the report that had prompted the lawsuit, summed up by John Harper as “general environmental callousness”—a charge likely true, given the expansive development planned for the fragile alpine valley. The Forest Service considered another reduction in scale (which would be the fifth such reduction from Disney's 1965 plans) and again contemplated improving the access road as a way to keep costs down.²¹⁵ As this seemingly endless process of revision, report and comment played out, efforts to incorporate the Mineral King area into Sequoia National Park finally gained traction. Through the devotion of

²¹⁴ Harper, 193.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 201-202.

California Congressmen John Krebs and Philip Burton and Senator Alan Cranston, Congress in 1978 passed an omnibus parks bill to transfer control of the valley to the National Park Service.²¹⁶

The Mineral King struggle, from 1965 to 1978, fully demonstrates the aggressive nature of the modern environmental movement. After re-evaluating its initial support for the development in 1965, the Sierra Club used administrative and legislative lobbying in an attempt to stop a mammoth ski resort from coming to the valley. The Sierra Club, too, sought judicial resolution to the problem. And although the public discussion skirted the issue, the Mineral King story was every bit about wilderness as the Minaret Summit highway fight because increasing access meant decreasing wilderness. David Brower described Mineral King as “one of the really extraordinary thresholds to wilderness.” That is, even if you do not define Mineral King itself as wilderness (because of the cabins or mining remnants), Brower felt it warranted protection because of its surroundings.²¹⁷ The struggle came down to access: automobiles had been able to travel up to Mineral King since the early twentieth century, but not in the numbers and conditions required by a large ski resort. Despite the outspokenness of the skiing advocates, the project failed to harmonize with the public mood regarding environmental protection. From the new government-funded road to the massive village in Mineral King, the Mineral King ski resort ran against the grain of the wilderness and environmental protections of the 1960s and 1970s.

²¹⁶ Harper has an excellent account of the struggle in the late 1970s to pass the bill, pp. 203-218.

²¹⁷ Brower, 177.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Irreconcilable Differences

In 1957, while the Tioga Road controversy was in full bore, Sierra Club President Harold Bradley wrote to National Park Service Director Conrad Wirth, in an attempt to ameliorate some of the tension between the organizations. Although in Wisconsin until after his retirement from professorship in 1948, Bradley was an old-guard Club member who had participated from afar in the Hetch Hetchy battle in the early twentieth century. Bradley's letter portrays the Sierra Club as a deferential organization and uses the metaphor of an "ideal married couple" to describe their relations: "Yours must always be the final decision. Ours—like the wife—may be that of suggestion, if we are playing the part well and acceptably to you. If we are not playing the role acceptably, we shall wish to be told where we fail, because our very dearest love is to see the Service succeed to the highest extent."²¹⁸ Bradley goes on to define the problems between the organizations as one of communication. Had the two organizations engaged in "better communications before decisions have been made," such a "mistake" as the Tioga Road improvement could have been avoided.²¹⁹

While Bradley felt the Sierra Club and the Park Service could have come to agreement had they only worked harder, the two organizations had been growing further apart in their goals. They both may have claimed to be seeking to protect the Sierran landscape, but their definitions of that protection differed. The Park

²¹⁸ Letter from Harold Bradley to Conrad Wirth, July 17, 1957; A22 Sierra Club Part 2 WASO from 1-1-54; RG 79.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Service, as evidenced by the Mission 66 development program, felt a strong need to provide for use of the national parks, which included adequate roads and other visitor facilities. The Sierra Club grew increasingly wilderness-oriented following the war, as seen in its opposition to the Minaret Summit Road and a large ski resort at Mineral King. If the Club and the Service ever been an “ideal married couple,” by the 1950s they should have been contemplating divorce, and could have cited the issue of wilderness as an “irreconcilable difference.”

The Sierra Nevada has served as a crucible for forming environmental policy in the United States. Especially since the federal government established national parks and national forests in the mountain range, the Sierra has seen many environmental battles waged over its resources.²²⁰ The National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service have sought to balance use (or sometimes a specific subset of use, recreation) with the need to protect the natural resources. They have sometimes been aligned with the aims of the Sierra Club, but have at other times been at loggerheads with one another. From their inception, the Park Service and the Forest Service made provisions for access. The Sierra Club supported the ambitious roadbuilding plans of Stephen Mather, even introducing its own road ideas and contributing to purchase of the Tioga Road in Yosemite National Park. The Club advocated development in the Sierra Nevada, in keeping

²²⁰ Before the federal government established parks and forests, Central Valley farmers and Sierra Nevada hydraulic miners (who used the force of water under pressure to wash away whole mountainsides in search of gold) clashed over Sierran mining. For an account of the court battle (decided in 1884) that ended hydraulic mining in California, see Robert L. Kelley, *Gold vs. Grain: The Hydraulic Mining Controversy in California's Sacramento Valley* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1959). Although this struggle had great environmental consequences, those involved fought it on economic terms.

with its bylaw of rendering the mountains accessible. At least to the end of 1945, the Sierra Club had endorsed reconstruction of the Tioga Road to higher standards, accepted a trans-Sierra crossing in the vicinity of Mammoth Pass, and supported a ski development at Mineral King.

Following the war, the Sierra Club suffered an identity crisis. Increasing numbers of Americans sought out nature recreation, threatening to love the parks and forests to death. The Forest Service and Park Service continued with the policies they had always had, making the natural resources available for use and recreation. But each in its way intensified its efforts in this regard. The Forest Service expanded logging operations on its lands, leading to the Deadman Creek controversy over the necessity of logging such a large area, more forest road construction to facilitate the logging, and more and larger recreational developments such as that proposed for Mineral King. The Park Service for many years during and after World War II lacked funds to do any development work, but in 1956 embarked on the Mission 66 program to upgrade and expand visitor facilities. These efforts, geared to make the parks and forests more accessible, stood at odds with the Sierra Club's growing feeling that the Sierra had become accessible enough in the years since the Club's founding. As the Club—and here I speak of it as if it were of a single mind, but various personalities within it have affected its course as leaders and directors—evaluated these new outlooks of the Park Service and Forest Service, it rejected some of its earlier positions and came down on the side of automobile-free wilderness.

The wilderness idea embraced by the Sierra Club following the war had its origins in the interwar years. The Club's growing concern over recreation on these federal lands mirrored the philosophy espoused by The Wilderness Society, whose rise against automobile-oriented recreation on natural lands is well-described by Paul Sutter. That definition of wilderness has at its heart that wilderness is roadless, and the definition is so important because it gained the force of law with passage of the Wilderness Act. But the Sierra Club's comparatively tardy acceptance of this wilderness definition challenges the historiography of the postwar debate. Sutter demonstrated that the interwar years, at least, broke from the traditional preservation/natural resource use rubric, but accepts its resurgence following World War II. Roderick Frazier Nash and Mark Harvey also believe that the postwar movement for wilderness protection had at its heart concern with water development.

The Sierra Club opposed dams elsewhere in the arid West, but at "home" in the Sierra Nevada it fought against itself as it challenged the improved Tioga Road and the Minaret Summit highway. These battles occurred as the Sierra Club gained an increasingly influential national role in the environmental movement, and in part helped the Club (along with The Wilderness Society) win approval for the Wilderness Act. The fight to block development of Mineral King as a ski resort cemented the power of the Sierra Club, just as the large public support for the Sierra Club's position demonstrated both acceptance of the tenets of the Wilderness Act and the uneasiness with large recreational developments on natural lands.

The combination of these Sierran struggles demonstrates that in these mountains, at least, the Sierra Club's major wilderness concern was over recreation. If we accept the argument of Nash, Sutter, and Harvey that water use dominated the wilderness discussion, we overlook a major part of the Sierra Club's experience that pushed it so strongly toward wilderness. Recognition of how these battles turned on the question of roads and recreation increases the importance of Sutter's work. While the founders of The Wilderness Society had ties around the country, the Society itself had a distinctly eastern orientation, as evidenced by its early opposition to the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Sierra Club's later grappling with issues caused by recreation in California, and specifically the Sierra Nevada, builds the case that recreation problems extended beyond the interwar years as a central, rather than peripheral, concern of the environmental movement.

The traditional twentieth century wilderness narrative begins with the dichotomy of preservation (an umbrella term that included development for recreation and tourism) versus natural resource use. Sutter drew out the increased interwar concern with recreation itself—the fight was within the formerly coherent “preservation” category. I argue that the problems of recreation remained a dominant concern following World War II, even as new threats from dams did develop. As Cronon states, wilderness areas are not divorced from history, but are very direct manifestations of the cultures in which they are produced. We cannot know what we hope to gain by protecting wilderness unless we understand why we protect it in the first place. Because

there is no singular wilderness definition, we must look to context to explain why the wilderness and national park landscape exists as it does. By examining these Sierran examples, we see that the Sierra Club reacted to the growing involvement of the automobile in outdoor recreation just as clearly as had the Society. The Sierra Club's reaction is significant, because it has shaped the managed landscape of the southern Sierra Nevada differently than would have other concerns over natural resource use. Because there are many interests in any wilderness designation, there is room for multiple explanations; the Sierra Club's acceptance of roadless wilderness deserves recognition as a crucial part of forming the modern idea of wilderness.

Appendix

List of Present-Day Sierra Nevada Automobile Crossings from North to South

Pass Name	Route Number	Elevation (ft.)
Beckwourth Pass	CA 70	5,203
Yuba Pass	CA 49	6,709
Donner Summit	I 80	7,239
Echo Summit	U.S. 50	7,382
Carson Pass	CA 88	8,592
Ebbetts Pass	CA 4	8,756
Sonora Pass	CA 108	9,609
Tioga Pass	CA 120	9,944
Walker Pass	CA 178	5,282

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San Francisco Chronicle

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