

MY JOURNAL

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By Mike Wenninger

The crowning glory of our county is the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area. It stretches from Scott Mountain to beyond Denny into Humboldt County, more than a half-million acres of peaks, streams, waterfalls, lakes, forests, and meadows—and vistas that can move one to prayer or song, tears or poetry.

Many newcomers here, myself included (going on eight years in Weaverville), tend to think that the Alps Wilderness has always been there. The area just fits; what else could it possibly be? However, we're naive; we overlook man's inexorable tendency to infringe on nature.

In reality, the wilderness area is a mere 16 1/2 years old. It was a struggle to get it created.

Alice Goen Jones of Weaverville is one of many people who deserve credit for persuading Congress to set aside the Alps Wilderness. On Sunday afternoon, at a meeting of the Trinity County Historical Society, she briefly described the arduous effort that was required.

Wilderness areas have their roots in an 1891 act of Congress that created forest reserves, the predecessors of national forests. In 1905, the U.S. Forest Service was established.

However, Mrs. Jones pointed out, it was not until the 1920s that the concept of wilderness areas was integrated into forest management doctrine. In 1926, 136,000 acres of what is now the Alps Wilderness was designated the Trinity Recreation Area.

In 1932, that became the Trinity Alps Primitive Area, and eventually it was enlarged to 286,000 acres.

In 1964, Congress passed the Wilderness Act, reserving to itself the exclusive right to designate a

wilderness. Initially, there was a 10-year period for determining wilderness areas. In 1972, some folks in Trinity County realized that time was running out and there still was no Alps Wilderness.

A campaign was started, and Alice Jones did her part by going on the road with a slide show compiled from photos she had taken during many trips into the Alps. She also spoke at hearings on the proposed wilderness, testifying with the authority of a botanist and forester; she has both educational and work credentials in those fields. Mrs. Jones commented that interest in the proposal in Trinity County became so intense that between 1,500 and 2,000 people turned out for a congressional hearing held in Weaverville in the early 1980s.

Finally, in 1984 Congress passed the California Wilderness Act, which included the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area. In September that year, President Reagan signed the act.

What had begun in 1972 as a citizen campaign expected to last a year or two had turned into a Trinity County struggle lasting a dozen years. In the end, a bonus was that the hard-won wilderness area was almost twice the size of the former Trinity Alps Primitive Area.

This kind of struggle to preserve and protect the bounty of our home has become the norm. Witness now the plight of the Trinity River. Observe the vigilance required to prevent visual blight in the forests around us and to keep harmful chemicals out of our water supplies.

It's a constant struggle, but one we must stick with to honor those like Alice Jones who fought the good fight before, so that following generations could enjoy the rewards.

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