Calif. lawmakers seek national monument designations

By Associated Press

WASHINGTON – California lawmakers and advocacy groups are ramping up efforts to win national monument designation for four scenic vistas in the state, from vast stretches of the Mojave Desert to redwood stands along the Pacific Coast Highway to canyons and mountains near the state's famous wine country.

The designation typically takes lands already owned by the government and walls them off from new mining, roads and power lines. Recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking and horseback riding are commonly allowed, though each national monument has its own dos and don'ts.

Supporters of the proposed monuments in California are pursuing two paths. The first is through legislation. Many Republicans are wary, though. So, supporters are also placing greater emphasis on Plan B: Executive action from President Barack Obama. The narrowing window for that option is adding urgency to their efforts.

Presidents have the authority to designate new national monuments through the Antiquities Act, and Obama has approved 16 so far, including three more last week. California groups took notice.

"We think that's exciting, and we merit the same consideration in the near term," said Bob Schneider, senior policy director for Tuleyome, a conservation group that seeks to preserve 360,000 acres in northern California as a national monument.

The group has worked with Democratic Rep. Mike Thompson, who has filed bills in three consecutive congressional sessions calling for what would be named the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument. In December, he brought in Interior Secretary Sally Jewell for a tour and to hear from local residents.

“The majority party is not willing to participate in the debate,” Thompson said. “If the president is willing, I’m all for him protecting the land through an executive order.”

Many of the communities in Thompson’s district support his efforts. One local chamber of commerce projected that a national monument designation would generate an additional $50 million in economic activity in the subsequent five years though increased visitors. But another local chamber has fretted that a national monument designation could impose additional requirements on already overburdened agencies with no guarantee of additional resources.

Any national monuments legislation moving through the House would likely have to go first through a subcommittee chaired by Republican Rep. Tom McClintock of California. He’s clearly skeptical.

“The Republicans want to preserve and enhance the public’s right to enjoy the public’s land. Democrats are seeking to further restrict public access,” McClintock said. “That’s the fundamental, core issue.”

Like Thompson, Sen. Dianne Feinstein also is getting restless. She first proposed legislation in 2009 calling for two new national monuments in the Mojave and Sonoran deserts and reintroduced a version of the bill in early February. Feinstein favors legislative action, but she said in an emailed statement that executive action may be necessary if the bill stalls.

Feinstein, a Democrat, said she would prefer the legislative

route because an executive order would simply create two new national monuments while her legislation includes more land for national parks, wilderness and off-highway recreation. Numerous compromises crafted over the years would be lost.

The Wildlands Conservancy helped the federal government acquire large segments of both proposed monuments in Feinstein's bill through donations of money and land. The group was delighted when Jewell visited the proposed Sand to Snow National Monument last year and a vehicle in her security detail had to stop to let a bighorn sheep cross the road.

"You can't beat that," said David Myers, the organization's executive director.

Interior Department spokeswoman Jessica Kershaw declined to directly answer whether Jewell has recommended that the president use his executive authority on any of the four California projects. But she said Jewell regularly briefs the president on her travels and has talked to him about "the local vision for conservation around the Berryessa Snow Mountain Region."

Kershaw also noted that the Obama administration has testified in favor of Feinstein's legislation back in 2010 and Thompson's legislation in 2013.

McClintock says an executive order creating any monuments in California would be "a complete overreach" by the president and an abuse of the Antiquities Act, which was designed to protect small archaeological sites from looting.

The newest and smallest of the proposed national monuments is in Silicon Valley's backyard, near Santa Cruz. The 5,800 acres were acquired by various foundations and donated to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management just last year.

At a public rally two weeks ago, nearly 1,500 people showed up, stunning organizers who called the event the launch of

their campaign, not the conclusion.

Bruce Babbitt, the former Interior secretary under President Bill Clinton, was the guest speaker.

“Half the town was there,” Babbitt said. “It seemed to me an excellent statement to President Obama of community support. Congress has a chance to act. If it doesn’t, all the more reason for President Obama to step in.”

Wellness challenge tests SLT residents’ fitness

The Monthly Wellness Challenge sponsored by South Lake Tahoe is designed to get the community in shape.

Events will be at the Recreation and Swim Complex, 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Each month a different activity will be offered for community members to experience such as weight lifting, lap swimming, cardio machines, playing basketball, ping pong, climbing the traversing wall, and more. Included each month will be information on general fitness tips to increase product knowledge and safety.

The March Wellness Challenge is called Sweat Sessions and focuses on weight room users. After paying the daily use fee, participants will track the amount of time spent in the Recreation Center weight room from March 1-31. Sessions are tracked in 30-minute intervals. At the end of the month the person with the most intervals will be awarded a certificate and gift package.

Participants may sign up for the program with front desk personnel at the recreation complex at which time they are given a personal Wellness Challenge Tracking Calendar. Staff will post participant's progress on a display in the weight room to inspire challenge participants. Each time the participant performs the designated activity they log their progress.

For more info, call 530.542.6056.

Ice climbing in Tahoe takes root

By Dave Zook, Moonshine Ink

Scaling a glistening slab of vertical blue ice with only a few centimeters of steel crampon points and ice tools pierced into the frozen water, the going is slow, demanding, and dangerous. Nevertheless, a small legion of Tahoe ice climbers is dedicated to finding the small window when ice climbing takes hold in Lake Tahoe.

"Ice climbing can be extremely challenging, frustrating, not to mention dangerous, especially when beginning, and Tahoe is not a world class destination by any means," said Logan Talbott, an Alpine Skills International (ASI) guide and ice climber with 15 years of experience. "But it's a unique medium and people get hooked by the experience of climbing up something like the bizarre formations on a frozen waterfall."

Ice climbing may be overshadowed in Tahoe by skiing and snowboarding, but climbers relish in finding yet another way to celebrate Tahoe's dynamic landscape. Plus ice climbing

typically improves when the skiing deteriorates and vice versa, so the potential for a conflict of sporting interests is minimized.

“I’ll ice climb more when the skiing’s not good,” said Brennan Lagasse, a professor at Sierra Nevada College, ice climber, and skier. “These recent seasons where we’ve had a slow start I’ve certainly climbed a lot more, and it helps get your focus on something super fun rather than dwelling on when it’s going to snow.”

Read the whole story

Wilderness as therapist

By Ray Wiles, High Country News

One of the environmental movement’s most legendary characters was also a traumatized war vet. You might remember George Washington Hayduke for his inventive, destructive antics, but he was also a man who measured road miles by the number of six-packs it took him to drink while driving and whose mind often wandered back to Vietnam. “What’s more American,” Hayduke wonders in Edward Abbey’s novel The Monkey Wrench Gang, “than violence?”

The fictional Hayduke had a real-life model: a former Army medic named Doug Peacock. Peacock served in Vietnam during his 20s, and as he went through the violence of that war, the thing he carried was a map of the Northern Rockies. He brought it out during rare quiet moments and imagined himself in its contours, rolling over the sharp granite creases of the Wind River Mountains or the grassy meadows north of Yellowstone Lake. When he returned from the war, he returned to nature,

studying grizzlies for several decades and fighting for their federal protection, as well as for that of other threatened species. These days, the 72-year-old activist and writer has become a new role model, not just for greens, but for a new generation of veterans.

“What they need to do is go out and immerse (themselves) in the wild,” he said recently. “Let it wrap around you. See what it does to you.”

The idea of wilderness as therapy for veterans is nothing new. In recent years, a growing number of such programs are springing up around it. But in order for it to work on the scale that’s needed, its supporters are going to have to get the military behind it. And that’s where the difficulty lies.

Read the whole story

Sullivan top U.S. finisher in downill

By USSA

GARMISCH, Germany – After more than two hours of delays, the race finally were finally able to squeak one last downhill into February. Fighting flat light and typical thick fog on the Garmisch Kandahar, Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) was the top American downhiller of the day, finishing in sixth place.

It was an Austrian-dominated day, with Hannes Reichelt winning the race, Romed Baumann in second and Matthias Mayer in third. This is the second Austrian downhill podium sweep in a row,

with Mayer, Max Franz and Reichelt taking first, second and third in Saalbach.

Even after hours of delays, the snow was fairly consistent – with 140 volunteers working Friday night until 10 p.m. and starting again at 4 a.m. But because of the light conditions, the track was shortened – beginning at the super G start – which did not suit the classic downhillers usually favored on the Garmisch hill.

The shortened course didn't seem to faze Sullivan (although he said going from the super G start "kind of neuters the race a little bit"), who was eighth in the second training run. Starting 23rd, he attacked the whole way down and took sixth place behind the dominating Austrians. This is his best result since his fifth place finish in Lake Louise in November.

"The race was so tight. I think a tenth – one way or the other – would have cost me five places," said Sullivan. "It's crazy. It was go-for-broke. Luckily, I skied it pretty cleanly, didn't have any big mistakes and had a good result.

Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah), who was fourth in the training run, looked for speed throughout his run, but was bucked around on the tricky, shortened course and took 17th. Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) was 22, behind a three-way tie for 19. Andrew Weibrecht (Lake Placid, N.Y.) was 33rd and Wiley Maple (Aspen) 45th. Garmisch first timers Jared Goldberg (Holladay, Utah) and Bryce Bennett (Squaw Valley) were 36 and 48, respectively.

2 U.S. athletes on podium in moguls

By USSA

TAZAWAKO, Japan – On a snowy day in Japan, Hannah Kearney (Norwich, Vt.) claimed her fourth World Cup win of the 2015 season on Feb. 28, besting Japan's Junko Hoshino and Canada's Audrey Robichaud. Jeremy Cota (Carrabassett Valley, Maine) earned his first World Cup podium of the season, finishing second behind Canada's Mikael Kingsbury.

The U.S. women qualified four athletes for the round of 16 before Kearney and Morgan Schild (Pittsford, N.Y.) made their way to the round of six. Kearney, who celebrated a birthday this week, skied strong to stay in the top spot through each of the rounds.

"The training yesterday was difficult due to the snow conditions, so today we didn't really know what to expect," said Kearney. "We had some fresh snow, and the weather changed every run. I adjusted as best I could. It definitely wasn't my cleanest skiing, but I was rewarded for fighting through those mistakes."

Schild, who qualified for the World Cup tour from U.S. Selections back in December, has been killing it on the NorAm tour, where she currently is ranked second behind fellow U.S. teammate Nessa Dziemian. It's clear 18-year-old Schild can hold her own on the World Cup circuit.

Ali Kariotis (Tiburon, Colo.), Keaton McCargo (Telluride, Colo.), Mikaela Matthews (Frisco, Colo.) and K.C. Oakley (Piedmont) completed the roster for the U.S. women, finishing 15, 16, 20 and 21.

The men also had a strong showing, qualifying five athletes to

the round of 16 before Cota, Dylan Walczyk (Rochester, NY) and Bryon Wilson (Butte, MT) advanced to final two. This was Cota's first World Cup podium since a third place finish in Ruka in 2012.

"It's been too long since I've been on the podium, so I knew I had to try something different," said Cota. "I tried to ski my runs without overthinking anything and keep it really simple. I was really happy with my skiing."

Walczyk finished fifth, followed by Wilson in sixth, Tom Rowley (Long Beach, N.Y.) in 11, Joe Discoe (Telluride, Colo.) in 16, Sho Kashima (Stateline) in 27 and Troy Murphy (Bethel, Maine) in 37.

U.S. men sweep in snowboard slopestyle

By USSA

PARK CITY – The skies were grey and the light flat, but it didn't matter, as the men threw down an unbelievable podium sweep at the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix in Park City on Feb. 27. Eric Willett (Breckenridge, Colo.) walked away with the Paul Mitchell snowboard slopestyle win, Chas Guldemond (Reno) took second and Eric Beauchemin (Grand Blanc, Mich.) was third. On the women's side, Karly Shorr (Milford, Mich.) stood on her first FIS World Cup podium, taking second place.

The U.S. qualified four to Friday's international-level World Snowboard Tour event finals, and all took podium spots.

“Today is friggin’ amazing. I haven’t had this feeling in so long,” said Willett, who is coming back from a shoulder injury and a broken back last year that caused him to the miss the Olympics. “It’s insane. To be here with all my friends and to put down a run that I haven’t put down before just felt so good.” This was Willett’s first World Cup win.

Along with his third place result, Beauchemin also walked away with the overall Sprint U.S. Grand Prix tour win, taking home $10,000. “I’ve been working real hard this year and it’s an amazing to win the Grand Prix overall title,” said Beauchemin. “It’s always been a dream to win an overall like that.”

In addition to the podium, Beauchemin took home the U.S. Snowboarding National Championship, along with Hailey Langland (San Clemente).

Willett, Guldemond and Beauchemin are close friends and have supported each other throughout the season; they’re even staying together this week in Park City. At the end of each run, all three voiced their excitement about the others’ results. But Willett summed it up perfectly. “To actually have all three of us on the podium – all good friends – it couldn’t be any better,” he said. “It’s so sick.”

Shorr, 20, was sixth after the qualifiers, and with only top-10 World Cup results in her career, no one expected her to podium.

“It feels amazing! I never expected that coming into it,” said Shorr breathlessly about her first World Cup podium. “It kind of set me free. I’m really, really happy.”

Shorr—the only U.S. woman to qualify for the slopestyle finals – finished behind Cheryl Maas of the Netherlands and ahead of Elena Koenz of Switzerland.

Agencies expect multiple controlled burns in Tahoe

The Nevada Division of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service may continue prescribed fire operations in numerous areas around Lake Tahoe this weekend and next week.

Operations may take place southwest of Meeks Bay, on Gardner Mountain near South Tahoe High School and off Gardner Street, Christmas Valley, Luther Pass near Grass Lake, and Ski Run Boulevard near Heavenly, Lower Kingsbury Grade off Easy Street, near Logan Creek Drive, Slaughterhouse Canyon, Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park north of Spooner Summit off Highway 28 and at Memorial Point near Sand Harbor. Operations may last through the next several weeks as conditions allow.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size. Agencies coordinate with state and local county air pollution control districts and monitors weather conditions closely prior to prescribed fire ignition.

Before conducting prescribed fire operations, agencies may post road signs around affected areas and make email or phone notifications. The Forest Service updates the local fire information line at 530.543.2600, ext. 6. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Tahoe research provides insights on global change

By Science Daily

Scripps Institution of Oceanography-led study on how natural and human-made sources of nitrogen are recycled through the Lake Tahoe ecosystem provides new information on how global change may affect the iconic blue lake.

“High-elevation lakes, such as Lake Tahoe, are sentinels of climate change,” said Lihini Aluwihare, associate professor of geosciences at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. “Small changes in the lake’s chemistry can have big impacts on the entire ecosystem.”

Lake Tahoe’s nitrogen concentration is one of several factors that helps maintain its crystal clear waters. To keep Tahoe blue in the future, the researchers say it’s important to keep a close eye on the nitrogen balance in the ecosystem over time.

The study, published in the Feb. 23 issue of the journal Nature Communications, tracked nitrogen, including that produced from the burning of fossil fuels, in the Lake Tahoe ecosystem. Nitrogen can affect both the productivity of lake food webs and the composition of the microbes that support nutrition for those food webs.

Read the whole story

Expedition to Himalaya subject of presentation

On March 4 Alpenglow Sports will present the fourth and final winter installment of the Home Brew Series. Truckee local Dave N. Campbell will present his tale Splitboarding the Chinese Himalaya.

Campbell will share photos from his recent journey along the Silk Road to the Kunlun Mountains of China’s Xinjiang province. Situated just north of the Karakoram Range, he and two partners rode powder at 23,000 feet on Koskulak Peak. Their expedition was featured in the January issue of *Backcountry* magazine.

The Home Brew Series, presented by Alpenglow Sports and Tahoe Art Haus & Cinema, is designed to showcase local athletes who live regular lives and accomplish extraordinary feats in the mountains. The series is designed to be mellow, free, and community-centric for all ages and abilities.

Tahoe Art Haus is at 475 North Lake Blvd., Tahoe City. The presentation starts at 7pm.