

**A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT 2024**

**Executive Summary  
July 2024**

**THE RANGE OF LIGHT  
NATIONAL MONUMENT**

**SUPPORT BOOK**

## Executive Summary

The Range of Light National Monument is a proposed 1.4-million-acre addition to the National Park Service in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains; its purpose is to conserve the precious, vulnerable landscape between Yosemite National Park and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks. This federal land is comprised of the Sierra National Forest managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the San Joaquin Gorge managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. The monument encompasses many natural, scientific, ecological, environmental, tribal, historical, cultural, scenic, and recreational objects of national and global significance. These objects remain under threat of loss, damage, and destruction without the preservation and restoration that a national monument would provide. In addition, the landscape has experienced extensive changes in the past decade due to wildfires and drought, such that the forest ecosystem and the local economy are in need of repair, restoration, and renewal, which the monument in its full articulation delivers.

A decade-long initiative seeking conversion of this region into a national monument has matured through extensive grassroots organizing, scientific investigation, land surveying, political campaigning, media coverage, and introduced legislation; this campaign is detailed in the campaign section of this book. The rest of this support book describes the objects of scientific interest and explains how the proposal aligns with provisions of the Antiquities Act of 1906. It details the ways in which the proposed national monument would benefit the local region, California, and the nation, by preserving and protecting Native American artifacts and culture, highlighting conservation history, restoring the forest ecosystem, protecting wildlife, healing the watershed, fighting climate change, and serving and supporting the people living in the region and the citizens of the United States of America.

This Executive Summary reviews each of these topics, while the larger treatise delves into detail regarding special aspects of the objects and the effects of protecting them and recommended approaches, beginning with Native American historical objects.

### Objects of Native American Historic and Cultural Interest



Prior to contact with European Americans, Native Americans lived in the Range of Light Region for at least 13,000 years. Throughout the 19th and early 20th Centuries, their way of life was disrupted, their communities displaced, and their population decimated by the influx of miners, loggers, ranchers, and settlers, including through the federal designation of the region as a forest reserve in 1893.

Despite this, the region continues to be the physical and spiritual home to tribal nations and their tribal members, and this history is reflected today in multiple locations and objects of Native American cultural interest surrounding and within the proposed

monument. These include historic tribal ceremonial sites, dwelling sites, and sources of traditional food and hunting, and the existence of extensive trading routes and trails.

A monument will enhance protection and access to these resources for both Native Americans and other monument visitors and preserve and foster Native American cultural practices. Perhaps, most significantly, it will expand application of traditional cultural practices in forest management, especially cultural burning and meadow restoration.

### Objects of European American Historical and Cultural Interest.



The proposed national monument will also encompass and preserve multiple objects of historical and cultural significance reflecting the exploration, settlement, and utilization of the region throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries. This history is reflected today in pioneer cabins, former mining sites and machinery, fire lookout towers, historic and scenic railroads, and other tangible objects related to Gold Rush history.

Notably, the Sierra Nevada is the birthplace of conservation in California. The same period of destruction also saw significant historic efforts to protect the area, prominently by those of legendary conservationist John Muir, who founded the Sierra Club. This established a land ethic, which is deeply interwoven into American consciousness and ideals. The proposed national monument will protect a large area – 30% of which was originally-designated in 1890 as part of Yosemite National Park – but was later opened to commercial exploitation by ensuing Acts of congress. The monument will also showcase unique aspects of the diverse American story that include the historic role of Buffalo Soldiers as America’s first park rangers.





## Objects of Natural and Scientific Interest – Biological Interconnectivity



The Sierra Nevada is one of the most biodiverse places on the planet, and the Range of Light encompasses 1.4 million acres of the western slope of this majestic range, spanning six biotic zones, from the foothill oak woodlands to alpine peaks of rock and lichen. These zones host rich and varied plant and animal life, including 1,400 plant species, 26 species of conifers, and 350 species of fish and wildlife. This rich variety includes 67 species identified by the Forest Service as

“species of conservation concern” and 24 species designated as endangered or threatened by state and federal agencies. The latter include the Pacific fisher, the Sierra Nevada red fox, Lahontan cutthroat trout, the bald eagle, the spotted owl, and the willow flycatcher. The monument is home to more than 300 different bird species, which migrate through the seasons, and a large portion of the monument has been designated as an Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society. The monument also includes scarce remaining areas of old growth forest, two groves of giant sequoias, and the soils that are the foundation of the entire forest ecosystem.



Finally, the Range of Light National Monument is centrally-located in the longest continuous wilderness area in the lower 48 states. It currently provides essential corridors for migration and genetic mixing of species by uniting the northern and southern sections of the 400-mile Sierra Nevada Ecological Zone. These designated wilderness areas currently protect higher mountain areas, leaving no comparable continuous protected corridors below 7000 feet, across the Range of Light Region, showcasing the importance of protecting this vulnerable area and establishing connections across biotic zones.

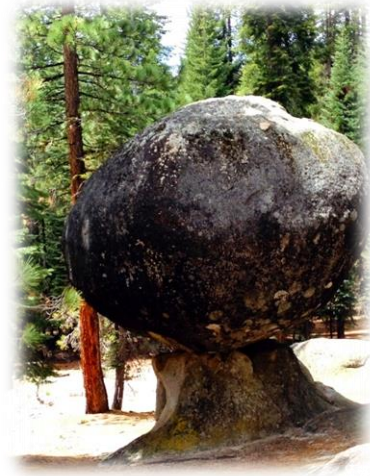
## Objects of Scenic and Recreational Interest.



The proposed Range of Light National Monument contains a multitude of spectacular, varied, and unique scenic and recreational assets. These include more than 740,000 acres of currently-designated or proposed wilderness, 250 miles of existing or proposed wild and scenic rivers, two designated scenic byways, and world-renowned hiking trails including the John Muir Trail, the Pacific

Crest Trail, the Theodore Solomons Trail, and the San Joaquin River Trail, which was originally a Native American trading route.

Interspersed among these features are multiple areas that are ideal for hiking, camping, picnicking, boating, fishing, horseback riding, and bicycling. However, many of these sites remain extensively under-developed or under-maintained, with half of the campgrounds closed and many trails in serious disrepair. Indicative of its under-developed potential, the Sierra National Forest contains only one-third as many trails per acre as the adjacent national parks.



These scenic and recreational assets are valuable in their own right, but they are central to a coordinated strategy for the National Park Service overall management and care and protection of natural resources and services to the American public. The monument may also relieve pressure and over-crowding in neighboring Yosemite National Park, which has instituted daily permits to protect park resources and the park experience.

## The Sierra Nevada Watershed

Three rivers dominate the Sierra Nevada watershed in the Range of Light Region: the San Joaquin, the Kings, and the Merced. The San Joaquin River is in the center of the monument and flows from its source high in the Sierra Nevada through California's Central



Valley, joining the sea at the San Francisco Bay-Delta. Although its headwaters are pristine and spectacular places of serene solitude, the river's lower reaches are heavily dammed and diverted. In contrast, the Merced River, which forms the proposed monument's northern boundary, and the Kings River, which forms the proposed monument's southern boundary, are largely undisturbed and free-flowing until they reach the Central Valley, with outstanding scenic and recreational characteristics throughout. The North Fork of the Kings, Dinkey Creek, and South Fork of the Merced Rivers are also spectacular tributaries. There are 146.3 miles of eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers in the area, which include Dinkey Creek, from its source in the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness to its confluence with the North Fork Kings River, a 12.7-mile segment of the Kings River, and 29 miles of the upper San

Joaquin River, including its North, Middle, and portions of its South Fork.



Other essential watershed-related objects in the Range of Light Region include extensive mountain meadows and wetlands, hundreds of spectacular mountain lakes, a network of smaller streams and river tributaries; all of which filter and purify water and slow its movement and prevent flooding and soil erosion, while sustaining life in the region and across the state. In addition, nine reservoirs created for water management and power generation offer extensive scenic and recreational opportunities. The Sierra Nevada watershed, which is essential to the Central Valley's agricultural economy, would be protected by healthy forests and a functioning watershed.



Both large and small watershed-related features of the region require enhanced protection to continue to serve effectively as a major water source for the state of California and as important scenic, recreational, scientific, and objects within the monument.

### Threats to these Objects.

Over multiple decades, the valuable historic, cultural, scenic, and recreational objects within the proposed Range of Light National Monument have been significantly degraded by commercial logging, which is the primary focus of the Sierra National Forest. These objects face additional damage under current and future plans for logging in the remaining forested acreage, including in groves of giant sequoias. Also, many fires have greatly altered the region, and the landscape is now subject to extensive post-fire salvage logging, one of the most damaging activities to the forest and its ecosystem.



Rivaling logging as a principal threat to the Range of Light Region are wildfires and inappropriate wildfire prevention and restoration activities. The Forest Service's response to wildfires has been to

expand commercial logging, despite the fact that these actions are correlated with increased fire frequency and intensity.

Additional threats to the Range of Light Region and the objects within it include: current and future commercial mining and livestock grazing, road-construction, inadequate control of human damage from off-road vehicles, garbage accumulation, illegal marijuana grow sites, herbicide application, and vandalism. Concurrently, the Forest's Service's chronic under-investment and under-maintenance of existing campgrounds, trails, and recreational facilities, as well as its failure to develop multiple potential additional assets of these types, represent an opportunity to enhance the value of the proposed national monument.



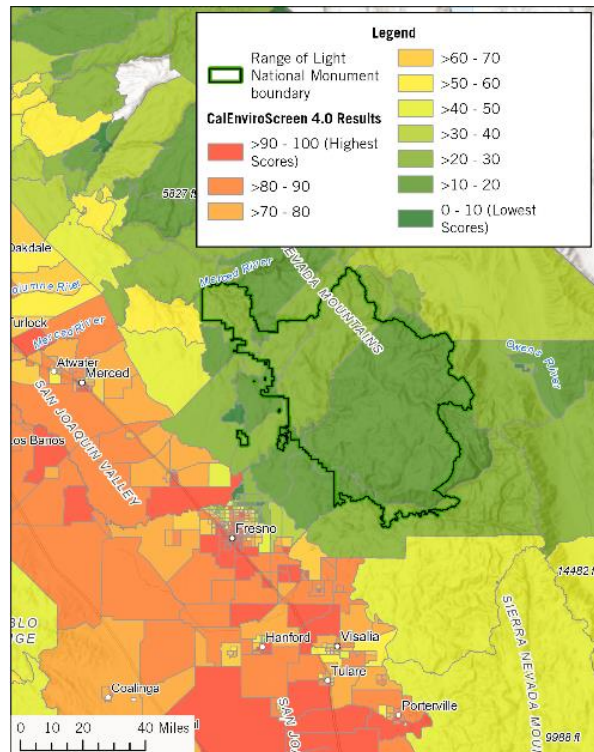
### Benefits for the Local Region & California – Economic



While preserving key objects of historical, cultural, natural, scenic, and recreational interest on behalf of the entire nation, the proposed national monument would particularly benefit the residents and rural communities in California's Sierra Nevada and Central Valley regions. The new national monument would increase local employment by some 2,900 jobs – 40 new jobs for every job displaced – and catalyze park-based tourism,

residential growth, and business opportunities worth \$1.1 billion annually.

Finally, social justice, accessible recreation, and health and wellness would be enhanced for the nearby population in the Central Valley, which is 73% Persons of Color. These groups are chronically under-represented among visitors to National Park Service units nationwide, and locally, they disproportionately suffer from the adverse consequences of pollution, poverty, and lack of parks, which affect their livelihoods, well-being, and physical condition.







A very high proportion of the nearest residents suffer from poverty, air pollution and asthma, lack of access to parks and nature, and have poor educational opportunities and a low overall life expectancy. The closest large urban area to the monument, Fresno, is ranked as the second worst metropolitan area in America to raise children according to the broadly-defined Child Opportunity Index (COI), and nearby to the south, Bakersfield is considered the worst in the nation for children. These historically underserved groups can be expected to accrue the most benefit from National Park Service management and monument status

### Role in Addressing the Climate Crisis and Global Deforestation & Soil Loss

Adding 1.4 million acres to the nation's protected lands would measurably advance the goal of protecting 30% of the nation's lands by 2030, as President Biden has pledged. In a single action, it would increase the administration's legacy of protecting federal land in national monuments by 25%. This would preserve and expand forests sequestering carbon and protect and create a wildlife corridor important in enabling plants and animals to adapt to climate change. Trees are significant in their ability to fight global warming while supporting the ecosystem and watershed. In turn, trees stabilize the soils, which store carbon and support the long-term health of the forest plant life.

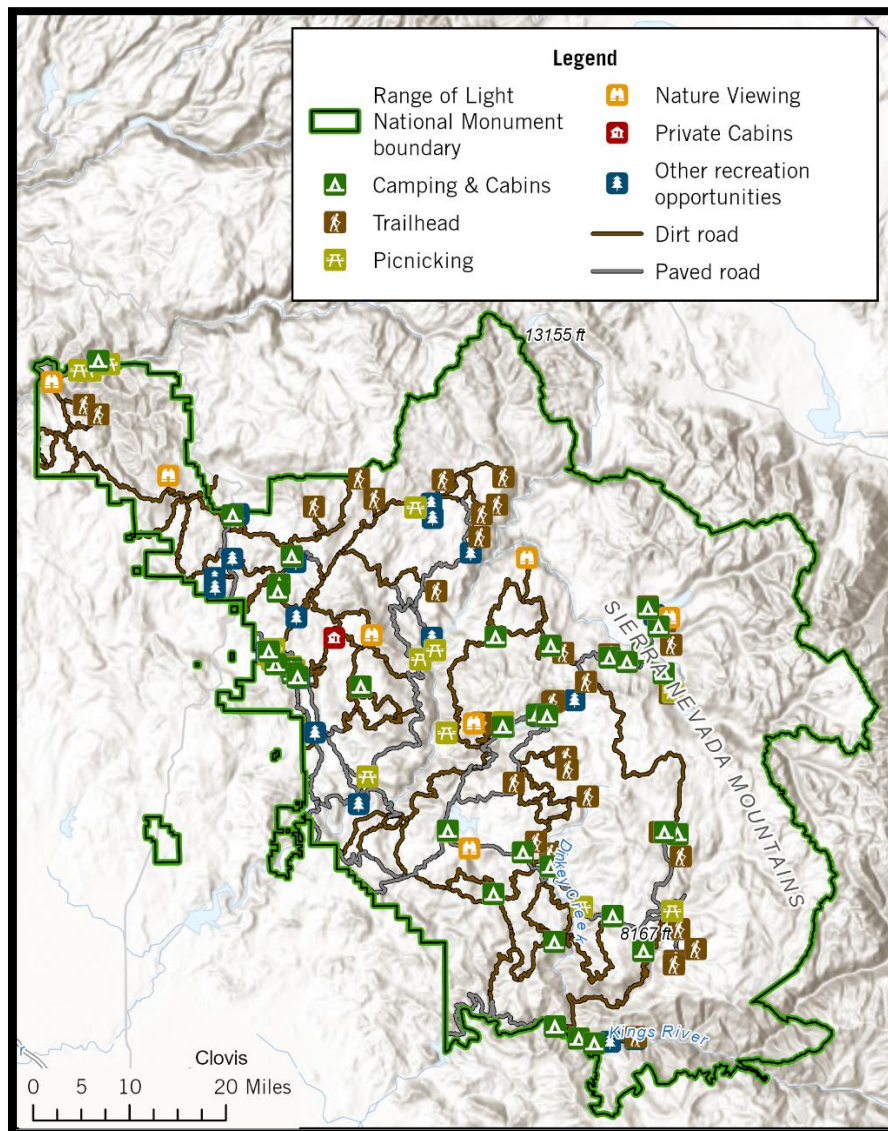
Soil organic carbon is also the planet's largest terrestrial carbon reservoir actively exchanging carbon with the atmosphere, and soils store substantial amounts of carbon while also harboring an unseen world of microorganisms and nutrients which support hundreds of plant species endemic to the region.





## Geographic Dimensions & Resource Map

These many historic, cultural, natural, scenic, and recreational assets documented in this report are widely distributed across the Range of Light's 1,427,750 acres, making a national monument encompassing the entire Sierra National Forest and San Joaquin Gorge the most efficient minimum scale for achieving their protection. Further, given the location of the Range of Light Region between national parks to its north and south and in the center of the longest interconnected wilderness, that geographical scope is the minimum required to provide a continuous protected area and wildlife corridors necessary to preserve biological diversity and to create a unified and expanded recreational experience.



**Figure 1: Range of Light Road, Recreation & Resource Map**

## Support for the Proposal

Through more than a decade of grassroots advocacy, support for the Range of Light National Monument has been mobilized among residents, businesses, and tribal nations, and regionally and nationally in the news media, with conservation advocacy groups, churches, and political leaders and elected officials. A statement documenting the scientific importance of the proposed monument has been endorsed by more than 200 scientists nationwide. In 2022, Rep. Jackie Speier introduced “The Range of Light National Monument Act” with 11 cosponsors, laying the legislative groundwork for a Presidential Proclamation. A comprehensive description of the campaign with references to support letters and legislation is included. With this strong and growing grassroots foundation, the time has come to designate the Range of Light National Monument, and protect this landscape for all people for all time.



## The Mandate for Action



The information reviewed in this summary clearly articulates that the time has come to protect the entire Range of Light Region and all its key cultural, historical, natural, scientific, scenic, and recreational assets by adding the entire region to the National Park System, which has been a manager of monuments since the agency’s inception in 1916. This is the only place where it is possible to “unite the parks” of Yosemite and Kings Canyon, and unify the wildernesses. Although large in scale, this monument is well within the precedents of previous national actions to preserve the nation’s heritage and address today’s environmental challenges. It is similar in size to the recently declared Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument, which is nearly a million acres. Thus, it is appropriate that the President use his executive power to implement this national monument via a Presidential

Proclamation using the Antiquities Act.



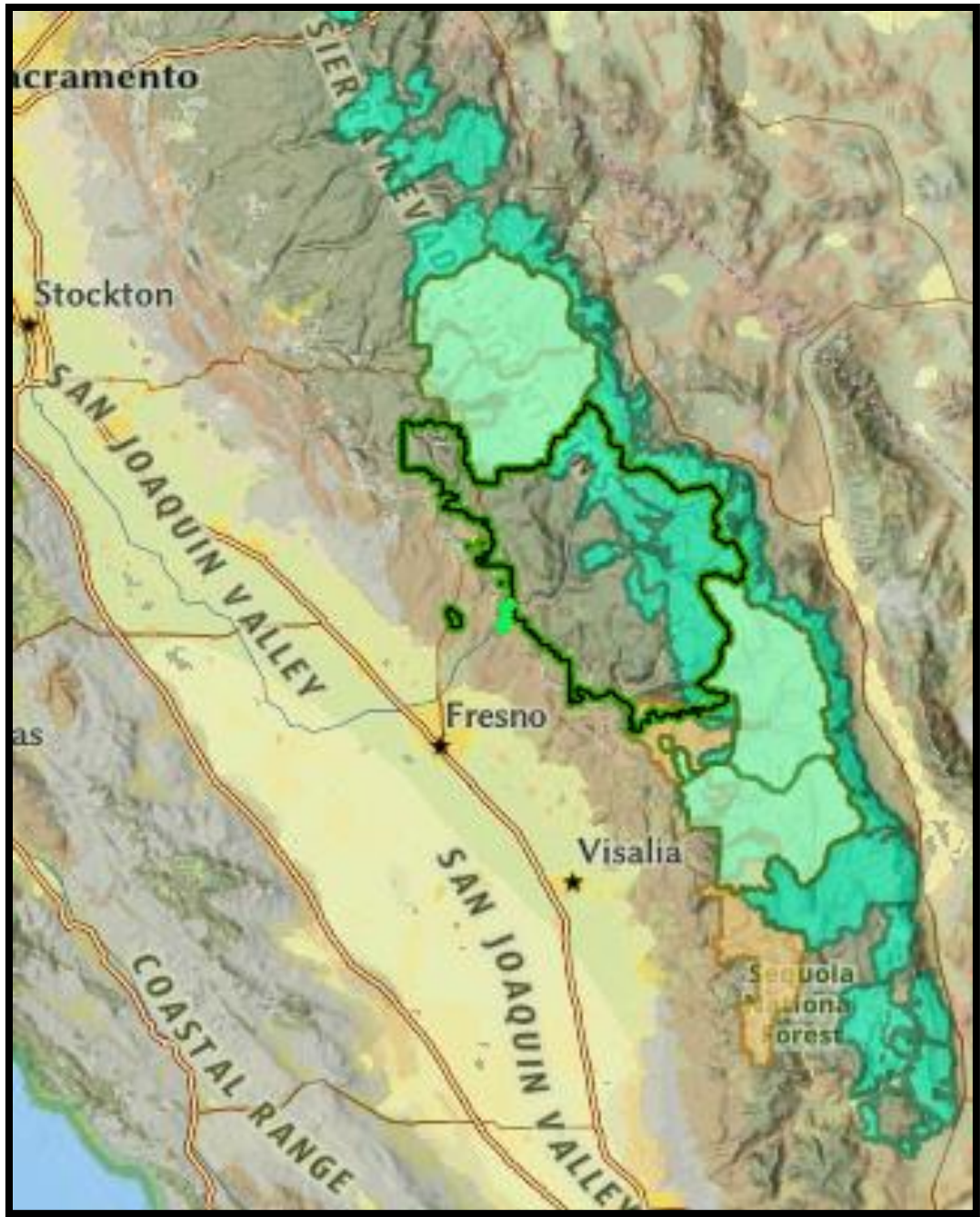


Figure 2: Range of Light Overview Map