



## MATTOLE VALLEY & THE KING RANGE

The free-flowing Mattole River, majestic King Range and isolated Lost Coast combine to make this one of California's most spectacular and diverse coastal areas. The Mattole River flows freely for 62 miles from the headwaters to the Pacific. It drains 304 square miles of Humboldt and Mendocino Counties and ranges in elevation from sea level to 4,000 feet. The western edge of the watershed averages only 3-4 miles inland from the Pacific draining the east slope of the King Range. Numerous coastal streams drain the steep King Range western slope. The adjoining 35-mile coastline is California's most remote, with pristine black sand beaches and colorful rocky tide pools.

In contrast to most of the north coast, redwoods are curiously absent in most of this area which contains a mixed Douglas-fir forest normally found in more inland locations. The King Range peaks block marine air from coming inland making the area too hot and dry in summer for redwoods. One exception occurs in the headwaters of the river where cooling fog spills over the ridges supporting majestic old-growth redwoods. Coast prairies blanket much of the northern part of the area. The 3-4,000 foot peaks in the King Range wring water from Pacific storms making this California's wettest spot with rainfall exceeding 120 inches annually.



## I. Resource Values

### Natural

- The **Lost Coast** is one of the longest remnants of undeveloped coastline in the continental U. S., and the longest in California.
- **Ancient redwood and Douglas-fir groves** in Federal, State and land trust ownership include Mill Creek, Gilham Butte, Honeydew Creek and the Upper Mattole River and Forest Cooperative. Other areas of ancient redwood and Douglas-fir forest remain in private ownership. Species such as sugar and knobcone pine, and incense cedar commonly found further inland are also located here.
- The area is the most **seismically active** in California, especially the lower watershed near Petrolia. Three of the earth's great plates grind together at the Mendocino Triple Junction, just offshore from Cape Mendocino. Earthquakes have a major impact on the landscape causing major landslides and rapid uplift rates.

### Plants and Animals

- Northern Spotted Owl nest in the mature forest areas.
- The following species of salmon and trout are found in the area's streams:
  - *Coho salmon* are found in the Mattole River and Big Creek.
  - *Chinook salmon* are found in the Mattole River
  - *Steelhead trout* are found in the Mattole watershed and most of the coastal streams.
- Surveys are ongoing to determine the presence of **fishers and martens** in the area.
- **Habitat** is present for **marbled murrelets**, but none have been confirmed in the area. Surveys are ongoing.
- The area supports a diversity of **coastal and marine birds** including osprey, bald eagles, brown pelicans, cormorants and peregrine falcons.
- The Mattole supports a wide diversity of **herpetofauna**, totaling 27 species including eight species of salamanders, three frogs, five lizards, nine snakes, one turtle and one toad.
- **Marine mammals** including harbor seals, stellar sea lions and grey whales ply the coastline.
- **Beach layia** is a federally listed plant found around the Mattole Estuary.

### Cultural

- The area was once home to the **Mattole and Sinkyone tribes**. These tribes were decimated in the 1800s as settlers moved into the area. Because of this, ethnographic records on these tribes are limited. The area is very rich in cultural resources with archaeological sites found throughout the Mattole watershed and all along the coastline.
- **California's first oil** well was drilled in Petrolia in 1861. Production was minimal.

- At the turn of the century, harvesting of **tanoak bark** for use in leather tanning was the area's major industry.

- **Timber harvest** began in earnest after world war two with mechanical harvest improvement and expanded lumber demand. Earlier logging was focused on the valuable redwoods in the adjoining Eel River watershed and bypassed the (primarily) Douglas-fir forests here.

- **Ranching** has had a long history in the area, beginning with the early settlers who supplied the mining camps in the Trinity Alps.

### Recreation

- Visitors come from around the U. S. and internationally to backpack and hike the **Lost Coast Trail** through the King Range and Sinkyone Wilderness. Dramatic mountaintop trails combine to provide over 100 miles of hiking opportunities. Guided interpretive hikes are offered in the ancient redwoods of the Mattole headwaters and the tide pools of Shelter Cove.



- The **Mattole River** is renowned for its steelhead trout runs. Local residents have successfully pushed for strict fishing regulations to help protect the dwindling salmon and steelhead runs and aid with recovery. All other streams in the area are closed to fishing to help the recovery effort.

- **Camping** is available in the King Range NCA and A. W. Way County Park, and private campgrounds in Petrolia and Shelter Cove.

- The **coastline** is the major visitor attraction in the study area. Visitors engage in numerous activities including ocean fishing (salmon and bottom fish), surfing, beachcombing, tidepool exploring, sea kayaking and abalone diving to name a few.

### Visual

- This area packs in a diversity of **spectacular scenery** that regularly receives attention in national magazine/guidebook articles and photo essays, for example, National Geographic Traveler, Sunset, Backpacker etc.

- The **narrow County Road** Corridors' provide outstanding scenic drives for adventurous travelers.



- Majestic **ancient redwood and fir forest** in the Mattole Headwaters.
- At the **King Range**, the Pacific Ocean meets 3-4,000 foot forested peaks making for a spectacular meeting of land and sea.
- Small villages and grassy mountain ranchlands in the Lower Mattole Valley provide a **pastoral setting**.

## II. Community Values

### Land ownership

- Private **homesteaders** own a large number of subdivided parcels formerly held by timber companies. Most parcels are in the 20-160 acre size.
- Industrial **timberland** covers a part of the study area, mostly on the east side of the Mattole watershed. The Pacific Lumber Company, Barnum timber and Eel River Sawmills are the major owners.
- Large **ranches** are scattered throughout the study area.
- The **Bureau of Land Management** owns and manages about 11% of the Mattole watershed and most of the land in the coastal watersheds west of the King Range crest.
- Approximately 3,500 acres in the headwaters of the Mattole are managed by members of the **Upper Mattole River and Forest Cooperative**, including Sinkyone Wilderness State Park, California Department of Fish and Game's Ecological Reserve, Save-the-Redwoods League, Sanctuary Forest, Restoration Forestry, Inc, and the Redwoods Monastery.
- Several **land trusts** hold lands in the area mostly for eventual transfer to Federal and state government. Trusts include Save-the-Redwoods League, Sanctuary Forest and the Conservation Fund.
- A. W. Way **County Park**.
- Four small **unincorporated communities** are located within the study area, Petrolia, Honeydew, Whitethorn and Shelter Cove. Of these, Shelter Cove, a 4,200 lot subdivision, has the greatest potential for growth.

### Economics

- Traditionally the region's economy has been based on **primary industries** including timber, ranching, and to a smaller extent, fishing and agriculture.
- Increasingly **recreation and tourism** are becoming important. During the summer as many as 180,000 people come to recreate in the area's public lands, and to view the pastoral coastal scenery of ranches and homesteads along the county roads. The largest single concentration of tourist use is in Shelter Cove, a resort community.
- **Cottage industries** such as specialty food products and small organic farms are making a foothold in the area.
- The area has an **underground economy** associated with marijuana cultivation.

### III. Opportunities and Threats

- In some instances, **subdivision** of large ranches and industrial forest-lands for home development has impacted the area through increased road mileage and heavier use of poorly designed roads. Acquisition or placement of easements on land in the most sensitive/critical watersheds and the education of landowners on the proper construction and maintenance of roadways would reduce this threat. Subdivision of large landholdings is expected to continue into the foreseeable future, as land values are high and increasing in the Mattole Valley. There has been a groundswell of community driven efforts to reduce erosion from private land roadways.
- A highly active tectonic setting, combined with sensitive terrain and the state's highest rainfall, makes the Mattole River watershed one of the most **erodible watersheds** in the United States. In turn there is a high natural rates of sediment delivery from hill slopes to the stream channels.
- **Timber harvest** on unstable slopes impacts the watersheds. Harvests are currently occurring among the area's last remaining privately-held old-growth Douglas-fir groves located in the Upper and Lower North Fork's of the Mattole.
- **Sedimentation** in pools is limiting spawning and rearing habitat for salmon. The Mattole Estuary, an important component of the Salmon/Steelhead spawning cycle, has been degraded to a point where it provides marginal habitat.
- **Riparian vegetation** is slowly recovering from past timber harvest, grazing and resulting flood damage. Many stream reaches lack the canopy cover that creates shade and moderates summer temperatures. Warm, unshaded streams create hostile conditions for salmon and trout spawning and rearing.
- **Private land holdings** are scattered along the coastal backcountry. Opportunities exist to work with owners to carefully consider any further development of these lands that would compromise the unique wilderness character of the Lost Coast. Also, the Shelter Cove Subdivision has several thousand undeveloped lots. Planning carefully for future road access, zoning and development would protect the resource values and aesthetic character of the area. This would benefit visitors by protecting viewsheds, but would also help community members through increased property values.
- There is a high level of **community interest** and long track record of involvement in protection of the area's old-growth forests, water quality, and fisheries habitat and rural character.

### IV. Conservation Action

#### Current

- All of the **ancient forest on BLM managed lands** in the area is protected through administrative withdrawals from timber harvest, either by designation as a Late Successional Reserve of a Research Natural Area/Old Growth Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).
- The BLM land surrounding the **Mattole River estuary** is designated as an ACEC and as such is administratively withdrawn to protect beach layia, the estuary ecosystem and archaeological sites.

- Approximately 37,000 acres of BLM managed land in the King Range National Conservation Area and Chemise Mountain Wilderness Study Area are administratively withdrawn from all development pending potential designation by Congress as **Wilderness Area**.
- Upper Mattole River and Forest Cooperative - Approximately 3,500 acres of old-growth and second growth Redwood-fir forest is cooperatively managed by members of the **Upper Mattole River and Forest Cooperative**. Participants include Sanctuary Forest, Save-the-Redwoods League, California Department of Fish and Game, California State Parks, the BLM and several private landowners.
- Ongoing projects to **acquire** old growth forests, watershed land, and supporting habitat for permanent protection in the Corridor from the Redwoods to the Sea and Squaw Creek.
- Ongoing **watershed restoration** efforts by Federal, state and local agencies and individual landowners to reduce barriers to salmon migration (e. g. Culvert realignment), and to restore and remove roadways that contribute sediment loads to the watershed -for example, Good Roads Clear Creeks initiative by Mattole Restoration Council.
- Efforts are ongoing by the **Mattole Salmon Group** to rear, release and monitor salmon and trout in the Mattole watershed.

#### Prospective

- Numerous **acquisition opportunities** arise in the study area due to intense community interest in protecting significant resource values, a long-term history of land acquisitions and exchanges in the King Range NCA, and changing patterns of ownership. Several immediate opportunities include:
  - Several tracts within and adjoining the Upper Mattole River and Forest Cooperative led by Sanctuary Forest.
  - A coastal parcel in the center of the King Range NCA led by the Conservation Fund
  - Numerous parcels in the Corridor from the Redwoods to the Sea between the King Range and Humboldt Redwoods State Park led by Save-the-Redwoods League.
  - Community efforts to raise awareness and protect remaining old-growth stands, most notably in the North Fork of the Mattole, could lead to future requests for acquisition/protective easements.
- **Road inventory and restoration** efforts to reduce sediment yields and improve aquatic quality are occurring throughout the watershed. These include:
  - Ongoing and proposed restoration efforts under SB 271 grants for roads in the Mill Creek watershed and the Upper Mattole River and Forest Cooperative.
  - Private road inventory/restoration under the "Good Roads Clear Creeks" initiative led by the Mattole Restoration Council. This effort is being initiated this year and has potential for use throughout the watershed.
  - Restoration projects under Clean Water Act grants for road removal on the South Fork of Bear Creek, and sediment reducing

trail maintenance throughout the King Range.

- **Planning** - Efforts are proposed to develop long-term management plans for key portions of the study area including The King Range NCA, Mill Creek watershed, Gilham Butte and the Upper Mattole River and Forest Cooperative.

## V. Potential Partners

- Bureau of Land Management
- California Coastal Conservancy
- California Conservation Corps
- California Department of Fish & Game
- Wildlife Conservation Board
- California State Parks
- The Conservation Fund
- Environmental Protection Information Center
- Humboldt County
- Mattole Restoration Council
- Mattole Salmon Group
- Mendocino County
- Mid Mattole Conservancy
- Mill Creek Watershed Conservancy
- Pacific Forest Trust
- Private owners
- Redwood Community Action Agency
- Sanctuary Forest, Inc.
- Save-the-Redwoods League
- State Water Resources Control Board
- Trees Foundation

## VI. Linkages

- **Sinkyone Wilderness State Park** lies immediately adjacent to the south.
- **Humboldt Redwoods State Park** is immediately adjacent to the east.
- The **South Fork Eel River** watershed adjoins the eastern edge of the Mattole watershed.
- The **Bear River Watershed** adjoins the northern edge of the Mattole watershed.

## VII. References

- King Range National Conservation Area Management Program, 1974, Bureau of Land Management.
- Dynamics of Recovery, 1995, Mattole Restoration Council.
- Elements of Recovery, Mattole Restoration Council, 1989.
- The Origin of Mattole, Through the Eyes of a Salmon, 1996, George Minor.
- An Every Day History of Somewhere, Ray Raphael