



BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS
CALIFORNIA

Trout Unlimited / Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, A Statement of Support Medicine Lake Highlands Should Be Designated a National Monument

Nov, 1, 2023 -- SACRAMENTO Trout Unlimited (TU) and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) welcomed today's announcement by the Pit River Tribe of a campaign to gain designation of the Medicine Lake Highlands and Aquifer (MLHA) as a national monument.

Even among California's remarkable diversity of landscapes and ecosystems, the MLHA stands out. This resource-area has extraordinarily high value for fish and wildlife, due to its capacity for retaining and delivering clean, cold water for a variety of aquatic and terrestrial habitats, in particular the Fall River, California's largest spring creek and a legendary trout fishery.

The Medicine Lake Highlands is an enormous and largely pristine hydrological recharge and storage resource, with huge implications for California's water supply. It captures and stores almost as much water as California's 200 largest reservoirs, and discharges over 1.2 million acre-feet of snowmelt annually. But the Medicine Lake Highlands have long been a target for development, especially for geothermal power, and other forms of resource extraction.

TU and BHA strongly support permanent protection for the MLHA. Sam Davidson, public lands policy analyst for TU, said, "The Medicine Lake Highlands and Aquifer is a truly unique area of public lands and is the beating heart of some of the best fishing in California. As the warming climate wreaks havoc on California's coldwater fish and fisheries, we must better protect the places that consistently provide natural water storage and clean, cold water for people and wildlife. The Medicine Lake Highlands and Aquifer deserve special management and permanent protection – today."

"For hunters and anglers, there is no substitute for productive habitat," said Devin O'Dea, BHA's Western Policy and Conservation Manager and a longtime California resident. "The Medicine Lake Highlands and Aquifer are the source of some of the richest terrestrial and aquatic habitats in all of California. Now is the time to make sure this remarkable resource area and its amazing fishing and hunting opportunities is permanently protected."

Some of the best trout streams in the western U.S. owe their productivity to the unique geology of the MLHA. The Fall River and its world-renowned trout fishery, in particular, is dependent on spring-fed flows from the MLHA. This 23-mile-long stream is the largest spring creek in California and harbors two distinct subpopulations of large rainbow trout. All but one of the complex of springs, streams and lakes that feed into the Fall River get their water from the underground storage provided by the MLHA.

Due to its cold, clean, consistent flows, the Fall River hosts one of the largest populations of wild trout of any California stream and has been designated a Wild and Heritage Trout Water by the California

Department of Fish & Wildlife. The slightly alkaline waters of the Fall River also support a prolific network of aquatic vegetation, which in turn produces huge numbers of aquatic insects.

For thousands of years this landscape has been important for the culture and traditional practices of the Ahjumawi (Pit River) and Modoc tribes, as well as to more distant tribes. Thanks to years of advocacy from Indigenous peoples, a 113-square-mile area of the Medicine Lake Highlands has been listed under the National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural District.

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