
[External Email]Draft Environmental Assessment for the South Fork Mountain Vegetation Management Project

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South Fork Mountain is the longest continuous ridgeline in California (and one of the longest in the world), running approximately 40 miles north–south. It is the structural hinge on which landscape-scale connectivity in the southern Klamath Mountains turns. The ridgeline forms the only continuous overland forest corridor linking the Yolla Bolly–Middle Eel Wilderness south, the Trinity Alps Wilderness northeast, the Six Rivers National Forest west, and the Shasta-Trinity National Forest east — providing irreplaceable passage for long-ranging species such as the Northern Spotted Owl, Pacific fisher, Pacific marten, black bear, and many others. As climate change compresses suitable habitat to higher elevations and northward latitudes, this corridor becomes more, not less, critical.

The ridge separates two geologic provinces (the Franciscan Complex and the Klamath Mountains, with the South Fork Mountain Schist forming the structural backbone). Annual precipitation on the west-facing (Mad River) slope reaches several feet⁶, with seasonal snowpack persisting on the upper third into late spring — a critical late-season cold-water source for downstream salmonid streams. The combination of high precipitation, deeply weathered clay-rich soils, schist-derived soils on the eastern face, and slope gradients regularly exceeding 35–60% makes this one of the most landslide-prone landscapes in California, as documented in the 1980 Landslide Hazard Analysis and confirmed in the November 2025 Geomorphic Analysis Report.

The South Fork Mountain LSR was designated to protect mature/old-growth forest characteristics. The LSR overlaps considerably with NSO Critical Habitat Unit CA-38 — CHU 11 (Interior California Coastal (ICC) subunits ICC 1 and ICC 2) under the 2012 Critical Habitat Final Rule — which was originally delineated to provide for at least 21 pairs of owls and for east-west dispersal from adjacent CHU CA-37 and north-to-south movement from the Yolla Bolly Wilderness to CHU CA-35.7 The Klamath–Siskiyou bioregion is a Global 200 ecoregion and one of seven Areas of Global Botanical Significance recognized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains support the strongest remaining “source populations” of NSO on the West Coast — making South Fork Mountain habitat directly relevant to the survival of the species across its range.

Thank you,

Susanne Risso

