

Kalmiopsis Wilderness

By Oregon Wilderness Coalition

The Kalmiopsis Wilderness, located in southwestern Oregon's Siskiyou National Forest, is an area of extraordinary ecological diversity. The Kalmiopsis is part of the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion, which has been designated an Area of Global Botanical Significance by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), one of only seven such areas in North America. The ecoregion, home to more than 3,500 plant species, has also been proposed as a possible World Heritage Site, highlighting the area's significance to global biodiversity.

The U.S. Congress included the Kalmiopsis in the original 1964 Wilderness Act, a landmark piece of legislation that set aside areas where, according to the act, "the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." However, the 1964 act protected fewer than 80,000 acres of the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion, only a fraction of the area's wildlands.

In the 1970s, wilderness proponents lobbied to expand the Kalmiopsis Wilderness, seeking protection for an additional 280,000 acres. The timber and mining industries, however, were strongly against the expansion of designated wilderness since such areas prohibit logging and new mining claims. Representative Jim Weaver, a Democratic congressman from Eugene, was the strongest supporter of the environmentalists' proposal. Although Republican Senator Mark Hatfield supported other wilderness areas, he reduced the proposed expansion of the Kalmiopsis by more than two-thirds. Today the Kalmiopsis Wilderness encompasses almost 180,000 acres, the second largest wilderness area in Oregon.

In the summer of 2002, one of the largest fires in Oregon history burned across almost all of the Kalmiopsis. The Biscuit Fire, started by a lightning strike, burned almost 500,000 acres of land in southern Oregon and northern California. Debate continues over how to manage affected lands. Particularly controversial is the question of whether to harvest burned and overstocked stands or to let the landscape regenerate without intensive intervention.

Further Reading: Wallace, David Rains. *The Klamath Knot: Explorations of Myth and Evolution*. Berkeley, Calif., 2003.

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DellaSala, D.A., et al. "A Global Perspective on the Biodiversity of the Klamath-Siskiyou Ecoregion." *Natural Areas Journal* 19, 1999: 300-319.

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