

NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE SOUTHERN SIERRA NEVADA

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Abstract: The natural resources of the southern Sierra Nevada have forever been a source of inspiration. Their value has been obvious to anyone who has ventured a visit or glimpsed the ledger. The splendor of their scenery is matched only by the vastness of their wealth. What is surprising is that these majestic mountains inspired stewardship over exploitation. The success of nearly a century and a half of effort is before us. The southern Sierra Nevada is an outlier. It is a bastion of ecological integrity and landscape continuity amidst a populous, developed region of the world. But as we have heard and will hear throughout this workshop, these resources are threatened by forces not imagined by Muir and Pinchot and Roosevelt. To continue this legacy of stewardship into the 21st century, we need to reexamine how we think about the natural resources of the southern Sierra Nevada. It is a multidimensional concept and we are unlikely to be able to safeguard equally all dimensions. For example, in terms of biodiversity, the southern Sierra Nevada is a relative “cold spot” yet it provides vital refugia to many threatened and endangered species. It serves as an important reservoir of surface water while also sequestering massive stores of carbon. It remains relatively free from the catastrophic impact of exotic and invasive species yet the southern Sierra attracts a multitude of visitors from the surrounding region to across the globe. I will use examples such as these to outline the current status and complex nature of natural resources in the southern Sierra Nevada. I will emphasize the differences in scope and scale contained within the term “natural resources.” My approach will be to highlight the key aspects and note the potential conundrums.