

More Than the Sum of its Parts



The west shore of Lake Berryessa, part of the proposed Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area. *photo: Bill Husa/Chico Enterprise-Record with aerial support from LightHawk*



View from the Long Canyon trail towards the upper part of the watershed. *photo courtesy of Tuleyome*

For volunteer pilot Bill Rush, the Lake Berryessa area in northern California has always been a special place. As a teenager, he spent his summer days working on the boat docks and playing at the lake. That same lake is now at the southern edge of a proposed National Conservation Area and Rush is one of the pilots who are using their flight skills to preserve the area so that future generations may enjoy them.

North of the San Francisco Bay Area and west of Sacramento lies a stretch of California's inner Coast Range made up of areas of oak woodland, scrubby and evergreen chaparral habitat, and remnants of native California grasslands. The region provides healthy habitat for peregrine falcons and goshawks, black bear, mountain lion, Pacific fisher and herds of Tule elk. It is also California's second largest wintering grounds for bald eagles.

In April of 2010, LightHawk Program Managers Christine Steele and Laura Stone traveled to Berkeley, California for the Western Wilderness Conference. While there, Steele connected with Tuleyome, a returning LightHawk partner working to establish the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area (NCA) in northern California. The name Tuleyome comes from the Lake Miwok native people's language meaning, "deep home place". One evening, Steele and Stone, along with Tuleyome's then Campaign Director Vallerye Mosquera, began to think about how a suite of LightHawk donated flights could support Tuleyome's efforts at a critical juncture in their campaign: a leaked government memo had brought new attention to the campaign, creating an opportunity to build momentum. Founded almost 10 years ago as a volunteer-driven advocacy group focused on protecting the Putah-Cache bioregion in northwestern California, Tuleyome is now leading the effort to win NCA designation for this unique part of the state.

A Suite of Flights

Over the spring and summer of 2010, LightHawk volunteer pilots Steve Bowser, Bill Rush, and Ralph Britton flew a total of six flights with local elected officials, local media, and congressional staffers.* Each flight was based out of a different airfield around the NCA proposal area to ensure that the flights were accessible to the local communities: from Vacaville to Chico, Winters to



Volunteer pilot Bill Rush (right) with Lake County supervisor and Lake County News editor following their flight. *Photo: Victoria Brandon/Tuleyome with aerial support from LightHawk*



Annie's Rock, a popular vantage point for Cold Canyon hikers. *photo courtesy of Tuleyome*



Cold Canyon is the southern end of the proposed Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area. The steeply dipping sandstone and shale seen here are from the Great Valley formation of the North American Plate (Cretaceous - 60-130 million years old). *Photo Bob Schneider/Tuleyome with aerial support from LightHawk*

Lakeport.

The flights kicked off with guide training for Tuleyome staff and board members. Once acquainted with the region from above, Tuleyome representatives were able to provide a comprehensive experience to passengers during subsequent flights. LightHawk donated flights allowed Tuleyome to share their vision for the area with local media from the Napa Valley Register, Chico Enterprise Record, and Lake County News, as well as local county supervisors, the Mayor of the City of Winters, and a staff member from the office of Congressman Mike Thompson (D-CA). A Lake County Supervisor commented after her flight, "This will enable me to better advocate for wilderness preservation and positive environmental protection policies based upon first-hand visual observation."

Flying full circle – a pilot's connection

Rush stepped up to donate three of the missions. Flying over the areas he had such a deep ground connection with, and being part of the efforts to protect them, held special meaning for him. "That area, my youth, and flying are intertwined. Many, if not all, of my childhood memories were created there," Bill explained. "Learning more of the history [of the area] from my flights with LightHawk really rounded out my experience."

More than the sum of its parts

The NCA proposal would stitch together the region's patchwork quilt of largely undeveloped publicly owned lands and protect them from encroaching development. Gaining this federal designation would also make the region a priority on a national level. It would provide increased access to funding possibilities for conservation and stewardship projects and create a framework for better coordination and management of the public lands. A large, cohesive protected area would create more outdoor recreation opportunities for the public and increased economic opportunities for gateway communities.

After seeing the area from above, Winters Mayor Woody Fridae commented, "I have a better idea of how Winters is situated as a strategic access point into the proposed wilderness area."

Momentum gained

Those donated flights have already made their mark on the campaign. "LightHawk is a vital component of our grassroots campaign," said Bob Schneider, Senior Policy Director for Tuleyome. Following the flight last August, the City of Winters passed a unanimous resolution in support of the NCA proposal. And Congressman Thompson's office plans to set up town hall meetings throughout the region to allow community members to comment on the proposal. As the effort to establish the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area marches forward, LightHawk will ensure that the aerial perspective continues to support Tuleyome's campaign to keep this part of California wild for all.

** In 2008, volunteer pilot David McConnell flew Tuleyome staff and advisory board members over the proposed National Conservation Area.*

About LightHawk

What started in 1979 with one man and a vision has grown to over 185 volunteer pilots flying missions across the U.S., into Canada, through Mexico and down to Panama. Today, LightHawk is the oldest and largest nonprofit, volunteer pilot-based organization flying environmental missions in collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations.

At LightHawk we believe the view from the window of a small airplane provides a powerful and effective platform for research, ground-truthing, environmental awareness, and education.

Contact Information:

International Headquarters
LightHawk
304 Main Street, Suite 14
PO Box 653
Lander, WY 82520

Tel.: (307) 332-3242
Fax: (888) 297-0156

To subscribe please email us: info@lighthawk.org