

# IN SUPPORT OF ESTABLISHING THE RANGE OF LIGHT NATIONAL MONUMENT

## A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ

### SUMMARY

The proposed Range of Light National Monument will protect the largest interconnected wilderness in the contiguous United States. This national monument will preserve 1.4 million acres of federal lands between Yosemite and Kings Canyon National Parks; protect wildlife habitats and an interconnected wildlife migration corridor, preserve forested lands essential to mitigating climate change, and provide for recreational opportunities.

This resolution calls for General Synod 34 to join the growing movement of over 200 scientists, 150 businesses and nonprofit organizations, the Democratic National Committee and California Democratic Party, and 21 members of the United States House of Representatives in support of establishing the Range of Light National Monument.

### KEY TERMS

**National Monuments:** Federal Agencies identify “nationally significant lands and waters” for permanent protection as National Monuments. The key difference between National Monuments and National Parks for this resolution is that U.S. presidents can establish National Monuments, a power granted them by the Antiquities Act of 1906,<sup>1</sup> and National Parks are established only by combined action of both houses of the U.S. Congress.<sup>2</sup>

**Wilderness:** A general term that refers to natural environments that have not been significantly modified by human activity. This is the definition in which this resolution refers to wilderness.

**Wilderness Designation:** Is a legal term and designation created and defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964.<sup>3</sup> A “Wilderness Designation” is accomplished only through an act of Congress, which is beyond the scope of this resolution.

**Migration Corridor:** Is wilderness that is protected for the purpose of preserving known migration routes for wildlife.<sup>4</sup>

**The Earth Charter:** Is a collection of sixteen principles for turning conscience into action for all life on Earth to thrive that has been embraced by individuals and organizations from 89 countries around the world.<sup>5</sup> The sixteen principles are organized into the four pillars of 1) Respect and Care for the Community of Life, 2) Ecological Integrity, 3) Social and Economic Justice, and 4) Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace.<sup>6</sup> It is the product of a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural conversation on common goals and shared values for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society.<sup>7</sup> The Thirty-Third General Synod of the UCC affirmed support for the Earth Charter in ““Who Will Speak for the Trees?” A Resolution on the Rights of Nature.”<sup>8</sup>

41 While much broader in scope than the proposed Range of Light National Monument, the Earth  
42 Charter furnishes educational and awareness-building resources that may be beneficial to  
43 individuals, congregations, and other settings of the UCC in their support and advocacy for the  
44 Range of Light National Monument.

45  
46 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

47  
48 Humans need a dramatic shift from the point of view that the Earth and all her resources are  
49 available for our sole benefit. Nature was created as a mutually sustaining ecosystem, which is  
50 not to be destroyed or abused. People of faith are stewards of the land in our care, and the land  
51 itself provides a sacred place to spiritually connect with God and all of God’s creatures. “The  
52 Earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (PS. 24:1).

53  
54 The Earth and its inhabitants are facing an existential crisis of global proportion that requires our  
55 immediate attention and action. The Bible is clear that we are part of God’s creation (Psalm 24:1  
56 *The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world, and its inhabitants too.*). Therefore, we  
57 are responsible for creating and maintaining a healthy environment for all life as stated in  
58 Genesis 1:26 *Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they  
59 may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the  
60 crawling things on earth.”* The Earth is an original gift to sustain all life. We are responsible for  
61 restoring and protecting life and supporting policies and people that further that protection.

62  
63 The preamble of the Earth Charter describes what is at stake in a “Just world for all;” *We stand  
64 at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the  
65 world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and  
66 great promise. To move forward we must recognize that amid a magnificent diversity of cultures  
67 and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We  
68 must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature,  
69 universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is  
70 imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater  
71 community of life, and to future generations.*<sup>9</sup>

72  
73 The UCC has a long history of supporting environmental issues by adopting General Synod  
74 Resolutions. This started with the Integrity of Creation, Justice and Peace Resolution of General  
75 Synod 16 in 1987, which led to studies on toxic pollution (1987, 2007, 2020) and recognized the  
76 activist work of several black women in Warren County, North Carolina who originated the term  
77 “environmental racism.”<sup>10</sup> Other efforts have included the campaign of the Three Great Loves:  
78 Neighbor, Children, and Creation (2017), programs on Green and Creation Justice Churches, and  
79 the formation of Environmental Justice Teams. The United Church of Christ Synod has passed  
80 resolutions that directly express concerns for creation-care.<sup>11</sup>

81  
82 The Thirty-Third General Synod in 2021 adopted “Who Will Speak for the Trees?” A Resolution  
83 on the Rights of Nature.<sup>12</sup> This resolution called on the UCC to support the Earth Charter<sup>13</sup> and  
84 to “promote the Rights of Nature to be free from human harm; including the right to healthy  
85 habitats, the right to species flourishing, the right to a fair share of the bio-region and its goods,  
86 and the right to fulfill their ecological potential without human infringements.”<sup>14</sup>

87  
88 The proposed Range of Light National Monument is located between Yosemite and Kings  
89 Canyon National Parks in the center of the longest interconnected wilderness in the contiguous  
90 48 states; as such it will re-create a 1.4-million-acre interconnected habitat area and establish a  
91 sacred space in one of the most vital landscapes in the world, the Sierra Nevada.<sup>15</sup>  
92

93 Half of California’s native plant species live in the Sierra Nevada and more than 400 are found  
94 nowhere else on earth.<sup>16</sup> The proposed monument area is home to 26 species of conifers,  
95 including the iconic Giant Sequoia.<sup>17</sup> These trees are champions in the fight against climate  
96 change and play an important role in protecting the planet as a whole. In addition, 93 at-risk  
97 species live in the area, 12 of which are on the endangered species list, including the Sierra  
98 Nevada Red Fox, the Pacific fisher and the Great Gray Owl.<sup>18</sup>  
99

100 The proposed Range of Light National Monument would also create a refuge for people where it  
101 is urgently needed: the proposed monument is adjacent to the Central Valley, a region suffering  
102 from the worst air pollution<sup>19</sup> and water pollution<sup>20</sup> in the nation, and with a dearth of local, city  
103 and state parks,<sup>21</sup> and home to a growing population with the need for clean air, pure water and  
104 time outside to experience peace, beauty and spiritual renewal.<sup>22</sup>  
105

106 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

107  
108 **WHEREAS** the UCC has a long history of supporting environmental issues through the  
109 adoption of General Synod Resolutions; and  
110

111 **WHEREAS** all life depends on flourishing and natural cycles, and global climate change  
112 disrupts those cycles;<sup>23</sup> and  
113

114 **WHEREAS** the proposed Range of Light National Monument is located between Yosemite and  
115 Kings Canyon National Parks in the center of the longest interconnected wilderness in the  
116 contiguous U.S.; as such it will re-create a 1.4-million-acre interconnected habitat area<sup>24</sup> and  
117 establish a sacred space in one of the most vital landscapes in the world, the Sierra Nevada  
118 mountain range; and  
119

120 **WHEREAS** support for the Range of Light National Monument, as a designation that protects  
121 wildlife and enables peaceful recreation and restoration of our natural world is a vivid witness  
122 that all of creation starts with God;<sup>25</sup> and  
123

124 **WHEREAS** half of California’s native plant species live in the Sierra Nevada mountain range  
125 and more than 400 are found nowhere else on earth, and the proposed monument area is home to  
126 26 species of conifers, including the iconic Giant Sequoia and 93 at-risk species, 12 of which are  
127 on the endangered species list including the Sierra Nevada Red Fox, the Pacific fisher and the  
128 Great Gray Owl;<sup>26</sup> and  
129

130 **WHEREAS** the proposed Range of Light National Monument would also create a refuge for  
131 people where it is urgently needed;  
132

133 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church  
134 of Christ supports the Range of Light National Monument, a designation that protects wildlife  
135 and enables peaceful recreation and the restoration of our natural world;

136  
137 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of  
138 Christ calls on all settings of the church to respond to the Range of Light resolution by taking  
139 intentional actions such as:

- 140 • Encouraging individuals to join the movement of support for the Range of Light National  
141 Monument by endorsing it at <https://www.unitetheparks.org/endorse>.
- 142 • Contacting their elected representatives about the Range of Light National Monument  
143 and its significance beyond California, and asking for their support.
- 144 • Learning about and supporting local conservation efforts in their settings.

145  
146 **FUNDING:** The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance  
147 with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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149 **IMPLEMENTATION:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries  
150 or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/articles/lee-story-appa.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npca.org/resources/3202-what-is-a-national-monument>;  
<https://www.fws.gov/glossary/national-monument>; <https://www.nps.gov/cane/planyourvisit/natl-monument.htm>; <https://www.wilderness.org/articles/article/monument-designation-faqs>

<sup>3</sup> the Wilderness Act of 1964 provides this definition: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man [sic] and his [sic] own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man [sic], where man himself [sic] is a visitor who does not remain ... An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.” Source: <https://www.fws.gov/law/wilderness-act-1964>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fws.gov/story/wildlife-corridors>;  
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/migrationmapping.htm>;  
<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2020/03/11/wildlife-migration-corridors-in-the-western-us-need-identification-conservation>

<sup>5</sup> <https://earthcharter.org/about-the-earth-charter/>; see section “The Movement”

<sup>6</sup> <https://earthcharter.org/about-the-earth-charter/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://earthcharter.org/about-the-earth-charter/faqs/#ec12>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ucc.org/who-will-speak-for-the-trees-a-resolution-on-the-rights-of-nature/>; 5<sup>th</sup> Be It Further Resolved

<sup>9</sup> Principles of the Earth Charter, <https://earthcharter.org/read-the-earth-charter/preamble>

<sup>10</sup> Rev. Dr. Robert Shore-Goss in interview; <https://celdf.org/2021/08/conversation-united-church-of-christ/>

<sup>11</sup> Past General Synod Resolutions: 2013, Mountain Top Removal: Coal Mining in Appalachia; Urging Divestment from Fossil Fuel Companies to Address Climate Change; On Making UCC Church Buildings More Carbon Neutral; 2015, Transition From Fossil Fuels to Renewable Energy; 2017, The Earth Is the Lord’s, Not Ours to Wreck: Imperatives for a New Moral Order;

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2019, Let Justice Roll: Declaring Support for the Green New Deal, Affirming the Intersectionality of Climate Justice with All Justice Issues, [https://www.ucc.org/environmental\\_resolutions\\_at\\_general\\_synod](https://www.ucc.org/environmental_resolutions_at_general_synod); General Synod 33 2022 “[Who Will Speak for the Trees? A Resolution on the Rights of Nature.](#)”

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ucc.org/who-will-speak-for-the-trees-a-resolution-on-the-rights-of-nature/>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 3<sup>rd</sup> Be It Further Resolved

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5<sup>th</sup> Be It Further Resolved

<sup>15</sup> Please see the letter signed-on by 200 scientists with backgrounds in geophysics, earth systems, climate, and natural resource management:

[https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365\\_775c8dc941874b82bd0754c37e0d9210.pdf](https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365_775c8dc941874b82bd0754c37e0d9210.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Range of Light one-page fact sheet published by Unite the Parks:

[https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365\\_1452a7ec6b46429c8be65ca466444fc8.pdf](https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365_1452a7ec6b46429c8be65ca466444fc8.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/sanjoaquinvalley/epa-activities-cleaner-air>;

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/may/13/california-san-joaquin-valley-porterville-pollution-poverty>; <https://theknowfresno.org/11/20/2018/the-kieshaun-white-healthy-air-experiment/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/21/us/california-central-valley-tainted-water.html>;

<https://environment-review.yale.edu/mapping-agricultural-water-contamination-risk-californias-central-valley-0>; <https://e360.yale.edu/features/inside-the-uphill-fight-for-clean-water-in-californias-central-valleypollution>

<sup>21</sup> The Trust for Public Lands ranks Fresno 97 out of 98 cities across the categories of acreage, investment, amenities, access, and equity; <https://www.tpl.org/parkscore/rankings>

<sup>22</sup> Please see the letter signed-on by 200 scientists with backgrounds in geophysics, earth systems, climate, and natural resource management:

[https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365\\_775c8dc941874b82bd0754c37e0d9210.pdf](https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365_775c8dc941874b82bd0754c37e0d9210.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Range of Light one-page fact sheet published by Unite the Parks:

[https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365\\_1452a7ec6b46429c8be65ca466444fc8.pdf](https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365_1452a7ec6b46429c8be65ca466444fc8.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Language excerpted from Resolution as Adopted by the Thirty-Third General Synod of the UCC in 2021, “[Who Will Speak for the Trees? A Resolution on the Rights of Nature.](#)”

<sup>25</sup> Range of Light one-page fact sheet published by Unite the Parks:

[https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365\\_1452a7ec6b46429c8be65ca466444fc8.pdf](https://www.unitetheparks.org/files/ugd/ce2365_1452a7ec6b46429c8be65ca466444fc8.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Additional Sources:

- Alexis Buntun, “What Do the Rights of Nature have do with Indigeneity?” BioNeers, <https://bioneers.org/rights-nature-indigeneity>
- Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, <https://celdf.org/>
- Mari Margold, “Marching towards Change: Faith and Governance in the Movement for the Rights of Nature,” Center for Humans and Nature, <https://www.humansandnature.org/marching-toward-change>
- David R. Boyd, *The Rights of Nature: A Legal Revolution that Could Save the World*, FVW Press, 2017.

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