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## Guide to the Lee Wilson Papers

Special Collections Department

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San Luis Obispo, CA 93407-0605

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Lee Wilson Collection

**Date (inclusive):** 1956-1989

**Date (bulk):** (bulk 1961-1972)

**Collection number:** MS 113

**Creator:** Wilson, Lee, 1904-1989

**Extent:** 3 Paige containers (13 linear feet)

**Repository:** Special Collections, Robert E. Kennedy Library

California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, California 93407-0605 On deposit from: The Environmental Archives of San Luis Obispo County PO Box 8106 San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-8106

**Abstract:** Papers of San Luis Obispo environmental activist Lee Wilson, including correspondence, research notes and materials, and photographs, primarily relating to the founding and early years of Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club, the creation of the Santa Lucia Wilderness Area, and other watchdog efforts in San Luis Obispo County, California, donated by the family to The Environmental Archives of San Luis Obispo County in 1994.

### Provenance

Donated by his family, Lee Wilson's papers are part of The Environmental Archives of San Luis Obispo County, which was founded at Cuesta College in the summer of 1992 by local environmental activist Harold Miossi. The collection is housed in and administered by Special Collections at Cal Poly under the terms of a depository agreement.

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### Restrictions on Access

Collection is open to qualified researchers by appointment only. For more information on access policies and to obtain a copy of the Researcher Registration form, please visit the Special Collections Access page.

Collection stored remotely. Advance notice for use required.

### Restrictions on Use and Reproduction

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### Preferred Citation

[Identification of Item]. Lee Wilson Papers, San Luis Obispo County Environmental Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Calif.

### Biography

A founding member and first president of the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club, Lee Wilson was a lifelong environmental activist and conservationist. His papers document his efforts on environmental causes in San Luis Obispo County, primarily in the 1960s and 1970s. Wilson was particularly active in leading grassroots efforts to influence local and federal environmental policy.

Frank and Emma Wilson's son Lee was born in Rangely, Colorado, on June 18, 1904. The Wilson family made their living as farmers and instilled a love of the land and open spaces in their son. In 1914, the family moved to Arizona, where Lee attended Mesa High School. Because of his father's asthma, the family moved to California in 1921. Lee was an Eagle Scout, graduated from high school in Lindsey, California, and attended the University of California at UCLA. Wilson and his brother started an electrical contracting business. He and Lillian Wilson were married in 1928. During World War II he taught electrical engineering at UCLA and served as an air raid warden.

He became a member of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club in 1948. For many years, Lee and Lillian Wilson led a group of Sierra Club members who hiked Mount Whitney every Labor Day weekend. Lee and Lillian hiked the entire John Muir Trail in the Sierra.

The Wilsons had three children: Jeannette Wilson Armstrong, Marian Wilson Sacco, and Lee Jr., who shared their parents' love of the outdoors. In 1958, Wilson moved the family business, Lee Wilson Electric Co., to Arroyo Grande so they could be near their children and live in a small community.

Wilson was an active member of the Native Plant Society of San Luis Obispo County. He researched and photographed native plants of the county with Cal Poly social sciences professor Robert F. Hoover for many years. Photographs from these trips helped illustrate Hoover's *Color Supplement to the Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County, California* (San Luis Obispo, Calif.: [no publisher], 1974).

In addition to serving as leader of Boy Scout Troop 248, Wilson also worked on campaigns to preserve the Pismo Beach Dunes and Oso Flaco Lake. In 1961, he was a founding member of the Santa Lucia Group, a local offshoot of the Santa Barbara-based Los Padres Chapter of the Sierra Club. By 1968, the Santa Lucia Group became a formal chapter of the Sierra Club.

Wilson waged successful campaigns on a number of environmental issues, most notably designation and use of wilderness areas. He worked to ban the use of off-road vehicles in local wilderness areas. The Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs recommended that the Forest Service permit off-road vehicles use in the Garcia and Machesna Mountain Wilderness Areas, stating, "Both areas appear to have no timber or mineral values but receive substantial motorized recreation use."

Wilson and other local conservationists, including Ian McMillan, knew both wilderness areas had once been home to a thriving California condor population, located along the condor flyway, where they were a common sight before the increasing use of off-road vehicles. As part of his letter-writing campaign in response to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs' recommendation, Wilson in 1979 wrote to congressional representative Robert Lagomarsino: "I believe the elimination of the use of motor vehicles of any kind...would encourage the condor to again use both Hi Mountain & Machesna nesting sites."

Wilson also worked closely with Harold Miossi on creation of the Santa Lucia Wilderness Area, a goal of the Sierra Club chapter since the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Wilderness status was being thwarted by the district's congressional representative, Burton Talcott, and by the U.S. Forest Service, which argued that only "experts and bureaucrats should determine what tracts should be saved." When Alan Cranston was elected to the U.S. Senate from California in 1968, the plan regained momentum.

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Wilson and Miozzi drafted the legal description of the 22,250-acre tract, which Cranston introduced in December 1971. Wilson, Miozzi, and San Luis Obispo Mayor Ken Schwartz testified several times in Washington, D.C., for passage of the bill, but Talcott continued to oppose it. Eventually, the proposed name was changed from "Lopez" to "Santa Lucia," but it was not until Leon Panetta defeated Talcott for the district's congressional seat in 1976 that the SB 3027 succeeded. In 1978, Congress designated the Santa Lucia in central California and the Rogue River in Oregon as the first Bureau of Land Management wilderness areas, which President Jimmy Carter signed.

After the Santa Lucia Wilderness Area was finally created, Wilson believed that access to the area for hiking could be improved. Wilson successfully petitioned the Forest Service to create a trail from Highway 101 to the new wilderness area. He talked his son-in-law into donating 100 gallons of gas for the trucks to haul the volunteers up the mountains to break the trail. A plaque commemorating this work is located at the trailhead.

In 1979, Lee Wilson was one of seven people honored nationally with Special Achievement Awards from the Sierra Club, for his work on the Santa Lucia Wilderness Area. Established in 1966, Special Achievement are bestowed on individual Sierra Club members or groups a particular action, campaign, or effort of singular importance to conservation or the Club.

In 1985, the San Luis Obispo *Telegram-Tribune* honored him with a front-page picture entitled "Man of the Mountain" in the Focus weekend magazine. The Arroyo Grande Rotary Club honored him with a Rotarian Fellow Award for his involvement in their many community projects. He was also recognized for 25 years of perfect attendance. Lee Wilson was the subject of a posthumous resolution from the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors for his 18 years of service on the San Luis Obispo County Water Resources Advisory Committee.

In 1988, Lee and Lillian Wilson celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. On August 31, 1989, Lee Wilson died in Arroyo Grande, California. His three children and seven grandchildren, who share his love of hiking and the outdoors, survived him.

#### Sources

Wilson family, 2003

Neiburger, Carl, "Man to Match the Mountain: An Album of Portraits of Lee Wilson Taken in the Wilderness He Helped Save," *San Luis Obispo County (Calif.) Telegram-Tribune*, 24 January 1981

Social Security Administration, Social Security Death Index, Master File. Ancestry.com <http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 9 June 2007

#### Scope and Content Note

The Lee Wilson Collection contains the correspondence, publications, maps, and photographs of environmental activist Lee Wilson of Arroyo Grande, California.

Family members gathered the papers in 1994 for the Environmental Archives of San Luis Obispo County, which were transferred to the repository at Cal Poly by volunteers for the Environmental Archives. During processing, duplicates were recycled, which reduced the collection size to 3.75 linear feet.

Where possible, the provenance, or original organization, of the papers has been preserved. However, in order to simplify access to the collection for researchers, some materials in specific formats and topics were reorganized and refoldered to more accurately reflect their contents.

The provenance, or original organization, of the papers has been preserved for the most part. However, in the years after 1970, the growing volume of material and McMillan's overlapping involvement with different groups lobbying on similar issues created numerous small files. In order to simplify access to the collection for researchers, most materials were refoldered and adhere to McMillan's original subject categories, while some were shifted and renamed to more accurately reflect the contents.

The Lee Wilson Collection is divided into five series:

1. Non-Profit and Government Affiliations, 1963-1988
2. Watchdog and Advocacy Efforts, 1960s-1980s
3. Correspondence, 1956-1980s
4. Visual Media, 1960s-1970s
5. Research Materials, 1959-1985

The Lee Wilson Papers are housed in three Paige boxes, with Series 1– Non-Profit and Government Agency Affiliations and Series 2 – Watchdog and Lobbying Efforts, containing the most extensive and unique portions of the collection, each filling one container.

#### Funding

A generous gift from Harold Miozzi funded the arrangement and description of this collection.

#### Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

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## Subjects

Wilson, Lee, 1904-1989

Environmental protection – California -- San Luis Obispo – Citizen participation

Land use – Environmental aspects – California – San Luis Obispo County – History

McMillan, Ian I., 1905–1991–Correspondence

Natural history – California – San Luis Obispo County

San Luis Obispo County (Calif.) – History

Santa Lucia Wilderness Area

Sierra Club - Santa Lucia Chapter

## Genre and Forms of Materials

Correspondence

Newspaper Clippings

Maps

Photographs

Serials

## Related Material

Related Collections

Special Collections, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo:

Guide to the Enrico Bongio Papers, 1952-1993 (MS 124)

Guide to the Kathleen Goddard Jones Papers, 1933-2001 (MS 119)

Guide to the Harold Miossi Papers, 1942-1990 (MS 112)

Guide to the Ian McMillan Papers, 1925-1990 (MS 111)

The Environmental Archives of San Luis Obispo County was founded in the summer of 1992 when environmental activist Harold Miossi invited leaders in local environmental causes to gather and discuss how best to preserve "the letters, writings, photos, publications, and thinking of ... prominent [local] conservationists for present students and for posterity." Miossi further proposed that the archives be established at Cuesta College, as "a fitting repository since the College District embraces all of San Luis Obispo County." Cuesta College president Grace Mitchell approved the project, stating, "Cuesta College is proud to make this contribution to our county's future." The Cuesta College Foundation agreed to sponsor the project, and Miossi contributed the first major gift to the Cuesta College Foundation for the new archives.

The principal mission of the Environmental Archives of San Luis Obispo County is as follows: "To collect, preserve and make available for research the writings, documents, and photographs dealing with the history and development of the environmental movement in San Luis Obispo County." The archives include the papers of five local activists: Harold Miossi, Ian McMillan, Lee Wilson, Enrico Bongio, and Kathleen Goddard Jones.

**1. Non-Profit and Government Affiliations 1963-1988**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains five subseries: A. Non-Profit Agencies; B. Los Padres Interpretive Association; C. Santa Lucia Chapter, Sierra Club; D. Regional Conservation Committees, Sierra Club; and E. Government Agency Records.

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**A. Non-Profit Agencies**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains records and reports from non-profit agencies in which Lee Wilson was active, arranged alphabetically by agency, from the 1960s-1970s. 4 folders.

Box 1, Folder 1      **Conservation Committee, California Native Plant Society, 1970s**  
Box 1, Folder 2      **Conservation Committee, California Native Plant Society, 1980s**  
Box 1, Folder 3      **Reports, California Natural Areas Coordinating Council, 1970s**  
Box 1, Folder 4      **Cuesta College Conservation Advisory Committee 1960s**

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**B. Los Padres Interpretive Association**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains Lee Wilson's records and reports from Los Padres Interpretive Association, arranged alphabetically by record type, 1970s. 4 folders.

Box 1, Folder 5      **Board Agendas, Minutes, Annual Reports, Los Padres Interpretive Association 1974-1976**  
Box 1, Folder 6      **Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation, Los Padres Interpretive Association**  
Box 1, Folder 7      **Newsletters, Los Padres Interpretive Association 1975-89**  
Box 1, Folder 8      **Outings, Los Padres Interpretive Association, 1970s, 1980s**

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**C. Santa Lucia Chapter, Sierra Club**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains records and publications of the local chapter of the Sierra Club. Includes materials related to the founding of the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club in San Luis Obispo County, 1963-1980. 11 folders.

Box 1, Folder 9      **Banquets, Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club**  
Box 1, Folder 10      **Bulletins, Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club**

**Scope and Content Note**

[includes Bulletins transitioning into "Santa Lucia Chapter"]

Box 1, Folder 11      **Bylaws and Procedural Manual, Santa Lucia Chapter, Sierra Club 1960s-1980s**  
Box 1, Folder 12      **Correspondence, Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club 1963-68 1980**  
Box 1, Folder 13      **Events (Recreation Roundup), Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club**  
Box 1, Folder 14      **Events (Wildland Education Conference), Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club 1963**  
Box 1, Folder 15      **Finances, Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club 1960s**  
Box 1, Folder 16      **Founding, Santa Lucia Chapter, Sierra Club 1961**  
Box 1, Folder 17      **Membership Committee, Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club**  
Box 1, Folder 18      **Program Committee, Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club**  
Box 1, Folder 19      **Publicity Committee, Santa Lucia Group, Sierra Club**

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1. Non-Profit and Government Affiliations 1963-1988

D. Regional Conservation Committees, Sierra Club

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D. Regional Conservation Committees, Sierra Club

Scope and Content Note

Contains Lee Wilson's records from regional committees of the Sierra Club, 1965-1980. 6 folders.

Box 1, Folder 20

**Southern California Regional Conservation Committee, Sierra Club, 1965-68, 1970s**

Box 1, Folder 21

**Forest Practices Committee, Southern California Regional Conservation Committee, Sierra Club, 1970s**

Box 1, Folder 22

**Forest and Wilderness Committee, Southern California Regional Conservation Committee, Sierra Club, 1970s-1980s**

Box 1, Folder 23

**Joint Northern and Southern California Regional Conservation Committee, Sierra Club**

Box 1, Folder 24

**Outing Impact Study Team, Southern California Regional Conservation Committee, Sierra Club, 1970s**

Box 1, Folder 25

**Wilderness Act Workshop, Sierra Club, 1960s-1970s**

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E. Government Agency Records

Scope and Content Note

Contains Lee Wilson's correspondence and records for government agencies, arranged by agency name, 1969-1988. 3 folders.

Box 1, Folder 26

**Bureau of Land Management Correspondence, 1970-1988**

Box 1, Folder 27

**San Luis Obispo County Planning Commission, 1969-1986**

Box 1, Folder 28

**Water Resources Advisory Committee, San Luis Obispo County, 1960s-1970s**

**2. Watchdog and Advocacy Efforts 1960s-1980s**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains two subseries: A. San Luis Obispo County Advocacy Efforts and B. California (minus San Luis Obispo County) Advocacy Efforts.

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**A. San Luis Obispo County Activism**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains correspondence and records relating to Wilson's efforts to research, educate, and effect legislative change on specific issues affecting San Luis Obispo County, including his efforts to secure federal wilderness area protection for Lopez Canyon area, arranged alphabetically by issue, 1960s-1980s. 1 box.

Box 2, Folder 1	<b>Black Mountain Wildlife Project</b>
Box 2, Folder 2	<b>Caliente Mountain Access Trail</b>
Box 2, Folder 3	<b>Cuesta Grade 1967</b>
Box 2, Folder 4	<b>Cypress Mountain</b>
Box 2, Folder 5	<b>Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant Opposition</b>
Box 2, Folder 6	<b>Estero Bay</b>
Box 2, Folder 7	<b>Garcia Mountain Wilderness Study</b>
Box 2, Folder 8	<b>Hearst Ranch Development, San Simeon 1960s</b>
Box 2, Folder 9	<b>Laguna Park 1969</b>
Box 2, Folder 10	<b>Land Conservancy Act in San Luis Obispo County</b>
Box 2, Folder 11	<b>Lopez Canyon (Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) Folder 1 of 5</b>
Box 2, Folder 12	<b>Lopez Canyon (Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) Folder 2 of 5</b>
Box 2, Folder 13	<b>Lopez Canyon (became Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) 3 of 5</b>
Box 2, Folder 14	<b>Lopez Canyon (became Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) 4 of 5</b>
Box 2, Folder 15	<b>Lopez Canyon (became Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) 5 of 5</b>
Box 2, Folder 16	<b>Lopez Canyon (became Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) Statements before Public Hearings</b>
Box 2, Folder 17	<b>Los Padres National Forest</b>
Box 2, Folder 18	<b>Los Padres National Forest, Cobblestone Mountain Wilderness Area</b>
Box 2, Folder 19	<b>Los Padres National Forest, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process/Replies 1981-84</b>
Box 2, Folder 20	<b>Los Padres National Forest Trails</b>
Box 2, Folder 21	<b>Montaña de Oro State Park 1963-1984</b>
Box 2, Folder 22	<b>Morro Bay State Park</b>
Box 2, Folder 23	<b>Nipomo Dunes</b>
Box 2, Folder 24	<b>Nipomo Dunes, Collier Carbon and Chemical Corporation</b>
Box 2, Folder 25	<b>Pacific Gas &amp; Electric</b>
Box 2, Folder 26	<b>Peregrine Falcon Preserve</b>
Box 2, Folder 27	<b>Pismo Beach</b>
Box 2, Folder 28	<b>Port San Luis</b>
Box 2, Folder 29	<b>Sargent Cypress Grove, Cuesta Ridge, SLO County</b>
Box 2, Folder 30	<b>Santa Lucia Wilderness Area</b>

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**B. California ex-SLO Advocacy**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains correspondence and records relating to Wilson's efforts to research, educate, and effect legislative change on specific issues affecting various areas in California, excluding San Luis Obispo County, 1960s-1980s. 1 box.

Box 3, Folder 1	<b>Bodega Bay</b>
Box 3, Folder 2	<b>Endangered American Wilderness Act 1970s</b>

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## 2. Watchdog and Advocacy Efforts 1960s-1980s

### B. California ex-SLO Advocacy

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Box 3, Folder 3	<b>Energy Policies and Statements</b>
Box 3, Folder 4	<b>Inyo National Forest</b>
Box 3, Folder 5	<b>Miscellaneous Advocacies</b>
Box 3, Folder 6	<b>Off-road Vehicle Use in State Parks 1970s</b>
Box 3, Folder 7	<b>Pesticides</b>
Box 3, Folder 8	<b>Pinnacles National Monument</b>
Box 3, Folder 9	<b>San Geronio Wilderness Area</b>
Box 3, Folder 10	<b>San Joaquin Wilderness Area</b>
Box 3, Folder 11	<b>San Rafael Wilderness Area</b>
Box 3, Folder 12	<b>Ventana Wilderness Area</b>

**3. Correspondence 1956-1980s**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains one subseries: A. Correspondence with Local Activists.

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**A. Correspondence with Local Activists**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains Wilson's correspondence with a variety of local activists, including Kathleen Goddard Jones and Ian McMillan, arranged alphabetically by correspondent name. 7 folders.

Box 3, Folder 13	<b>Eissler, Fred</b>
Box 3, Folder 14	<b>Hanks, Bob</b>
Box 3, Folder 15	<b>Jackson [Goddard Jones], Kathleen</b>
Box 3, Folder 16	<b>McMillan, Ian</b>
Box 3, Folder 17	<b>Miscellaneous Correspondence</b>
Box 3, Folder 18	<b>Re Kathleen Jackson [Goddard Jones] Dispute 1956-1971</b>
Box 3, Folder 19	<b>Re Appointment of Walter Hickel as Secretary of the Interior, 1969</b>

**4. Visual Media 1960s - 1970s**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains two subseries: A. Negatives and B. Photographic Prints.

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**A. Negatives**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains negatives of local areas Wilson made for documentation purposes related to watchdog efforts. 2 folders.

Box 3, Folder 20	<b>Oaks on Highway 101, Atascadero, To Be Cut Down by Road Dept. November 1970</b>
Box 3, Folder 21	<b>Jada Cove, Pinnacles National Monument</b>

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**B. Photographic Prints**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains photographs of local areas Wilson made for documentation purposes related to watchdog efforts. Also includes few prints of Sierra Club outings in the 1960s and 1970s. 6 folders.

Box 3, Folder 22	<b>Eucalyptus Trees, Pismo Beach State Park</b>
Box 3, Folder 23	<b>Santa Lucia (Lopez) Canyon Wilderness Area</b>
Box 3, Folder 24	<b>Santa Lucia (Lopez) Canyon Wilderness Area</b>
Box 3, Folder 25	<b>Mineral King</b>
Box 3, Folder 26	<b>Outings, Santa Lucia Chapter, Sierra Club, 1960s and 1970s</b>
Box 3, Folder 27	<b>Sargent Cypress Grove, Cuesta Ridge</b>

**5. Research Materials 1959-1985**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains one subseries: A. Serial Publications.

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**A. Serial Publications**

**Scope and Content Note**

Contains research resources Wilson used in the course of his advocacy, arranged alphabetically by author/title. Subject areas include local government documents, nuclear power, resource management, PG8E in-house publications, and a broken run of the *Sierra Club Bulletin* from 1959 through 1963. 1 box.

- Box 3, Folder 28      **Davis, Betty S. "The Southern Sea Otter Revisited." Reprinted from Pacific Discovery, 30:2, March-April, 1977**
- Scope and Content Note**
- pp. 1-13.
- Box 3, Folder 29      **"Historic and Primary Trail Classification: Concluding Report to the Planning Commission From the November 20, 1986 Public Hearing." [San Luis Obispo, CA]: Resource Management Department and Parks Department, January 1987**
- Box 3, Folder 30      **Laven, John Eugene, "Conservation Conflict, Ombudsman Alternative," unpublished master's thesis [re Sargent Cypress grove], 1970**
- Box 3, Folder 31      **"National Forest Trails: Neglected and Disappearing." Bainbridge Island, WA: National Trails Council June 1985**
- Box 3, Folder 32      **"Nuclear Safeguards Initiative," unpublished manuscript, Los Angeles: Californians for Nuclear Safeguards October 1974**
- Box 3, Folder 33      **PG8E Progress, April 1963 – December 1964**
- Box 3, Folder 34      **PG8E Progress, April 1965 – August 1967**
- Box 3, Folder 35      **PG8E Progress, September 1968-December 1969**
- Box 3, Folder 36      **PG8E Progress, January 1970-October 1971**
- Box 3, Folder 37      **PG8E Progress, May 1972-October 1981**
- Box 3, Folder 38      **Sierra Club Bulletin, October 1959**
- Box 3, Folder 39      **Sierra Club Bulletin, December 1960**
- Box 3, Folder 40      **Sierra Club Bulletin, December 1962**
- Box 3, Folder 41      **Sierra Club Bulletin, December 1963**
- Box 3, Folder 42      **Starr, Walter A., "From Yosemite to Kings Rivers Canyon, unpublished manuscript, undated**
- Box 3, Folder 43      **Steiner, Wesley E., "San Luis Obispo County Tomorrow and Related Matters of Interest," 1966. Unpublished ms. presented before the SLO Regional Planning Conference February 1966**
- Box 3, Folder 44      **Walcott, Francis J., et. al., "Report to the Sierra Club Foundation, the Sierra Club Board of Directors, and the Sierra Club Conservation Department from the Wilderness Classification Study Committee, December, 1967**