Descriptive Summary

Title:

Collection Number:
MS 113

Creator:
Wilson, Lee, 1904-1989

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.

Extent:
3 Paige containers (13 l.f.)

Language:
English

Repository:
Special Collections, Robert E. Kennedy Library
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, California 93407

On deposit from:
The Environmental Archives of San Luis Obispo County
PO Box 8601
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406
Administrative Information

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.

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.

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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.

Abbreviations Used:
c.: circa
n.d.: no date
n.p.: no publisher
l.f.: linear feet

Funding:
A generous gift from Harold Miossi 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.

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

Genres and Forms of Material:

Correspondence
Newspaper Clippings
Maps
Photographs
Serials
Related Materials

Related Collections:

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.
**Biographical Note**

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 Lee 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.: [n.p.], 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 conservations, 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.

Wilson and Miossi drafted the legal description of the 22,250-acre tract, which Cranston introduced in December 1971. Wilson, Miossi, 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.


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
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:

2. Watchdog and Advocacy Efforts, 1960s-1980s
3. Correspondence, 1956-1980s

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.
Series Description/Folder List

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.

A. Non-Profit Agencies
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

B. Los Padres Interpretive Association
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

C. Santa Lucia Chapter, Sierra Club,
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 [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

D. Regional Conservation Committees, Sierra Club
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
E. Government Agency Records
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
Series 2. Watchdog and Advocacy Efforts, 1960s-1980s
Contains two subseries: A. San Luis Obispo County Advocacy Efforts and B. California (minus San Luis Obispo County) Advocacy Efforts.

A. San Luis Obispo County Activism
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
Black Mountain Wildlife Project

Box 2 Folder 2
Caliente Mountain Access Trail

Box 2 Folder 3
Cuesta Grade, 1967

Box 2 Folder 4
Cypress Mountain

Box 2 Folder 5
Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant Opposition

Box 2 Folder 6
Estero Bay

Box 2 Folder 7
Garcia Mountain Wilderness Study

Box 2 Folder 8
Hearst Ranch Development, San Simeon, 1960s

Box 2 Folder 9
Laguna Park, 1969

Box 2 Folder 10
Land Conservancy Act in San Luis Obispo County

Box 2 Folder 11
Lopez Canyon (Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) Folder 1 of 5

Box 2 Folder 12
Lopez Canyon (Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) Folder 2 of 5

Box 2 Folder 13
Lopez Canyon (became Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) 3 of 5

Box 2 Folder 14
Lopez Canyon (became Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) 4 of 5
Box 2 Folder 15
Lopez Canyon (became Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) 5 of 5

Box 2 Folder 16
Lopez Canyon (became Santa Lucia Wilderness Area) Statements before Public Hearings

Box 2 Folder 17
Los Padres National Forest

Box 2 Folder 18
Los Padres National Forest, Cobblestone Mountain Wilderness Area

Box 2 Folder 19
Los Padres National Forest, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process/Replies, 1981-84

Box 2 Folder 20
Los Padres National Forest Trails

Box 2 Folder 21
Montaña de Oro State Park, 1963-1984

Box 2 Folder 22
Morro Bay State Park

Box 2 Folder 23
Nipomo Dunes

Box 2 Folder 24
Nipomo Dunes, Collier Carbon and Chemical Corporation

Box 2 Folder 25
Pacific Gas & Electric

Box 2 Folder 26
Peregrine Falcon Preserve

Box 2 Folder 27
Pismo Beach

Box 2 Folder 28
Port San Luis

Box 2 Folder 29
Sargent Cypress Grove, Cuesta Ridge, SLO County

Box 2 Folder 30
Santa Lucia Wilderness Area
B. California ex-SLO Advocacy
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
Bodega Bay

Box 3 Folder 2
Endangered American Wilderness Act, 1970s

Box 3 Folder 3
Energy Policies and Statements

Box 3 Folder 4
Inyo National Forest

Box 3 Folder 5
Miscellaneous Advocacies

Box 3 Folder 6
Off-road Vehicle Use in State Parks, 1970s

Box 3 Folder 7
Pesticides

Box 3 Folder 8
Pinnacles National Monument

Box 3 Folder 9
San Gorgonio Wilderness Area

Box 3 Folder 10
San Joaquin Wilderness Area

Box 3 Folder 11
San Rafael Wilderness Area

Box 3 Folder 12
Ventana Wilderness Area
Series 3. Correspondence, 1956-1980s
Contains one subseries: A. Correspondence with Local Activists.

A. Correspondence with Local Activists
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
Eissler, Fred

Box 3 Folder 14
Hanks, Bob

Box 3 Folder 15
Jackson [Goddard Jones], Kathleen

Box 3 Folder 16
McMillan, Ian

Box 3 Folder 17
Miscellaneous Correspondence

Box 3 Folder 18
Re Kathleen Jackson [Goddard Jones] Dispute, 1956-1971

Box 3 Folder 19
Re Appointment of Walter Hickel as Secretary of the Interior, 1969
Contains two subseries: A. Negatives and B. Photographic Prints.

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

Box 3 Folder 2
“Oaks on Highway 101, Atascadero, To Be Cut Down by Road Dept.,” November 1970

Box 3 Folder 21
Jada Cove, Pinnacles National Monument

B. Photographic Prints
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
Eucalyptus Trees, Pismo Beach State Park

Box 3 Folder 23
Santa Lucia (Lopez) Canyon Wilderness Area

Box 3 Folder 24
Santa Lucia (Lopez) Canyon Wilderness Area

Box 3 Folder 25
Mineral King

Box 3 Folder 26
Outings, Santa Lucia Chapter, Sierra Club, 1960s and 1970s

Box 3 Folder 27
Sargent Cypress Grove, Cuesta Ridge
Contains one subseries: A. Serial Publications.

A. Serial Publications
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, PG&E in-house publications, and a broken run of the Sierra Club Bulletin from 1959 through 1963. 1 box.

Box 3 Folder 28

Box 3 Folder 29

Box 3 Folder 30

Box 3 Folder 31

Box 3 Folder 32

Box 3 Folder 33
PG&E Progress, April 1963 – December 1964

Box 3 Folder 34
PG&E Progress, April 1965 – August 1967

Box 3 Folder 35
PG&E Progress, September 1968 – December 1969

Box 3 Folder 36
PG&E Progress, January 1970 – October 1971

Box 3 Folder 37
PG&E 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

Box 3 Folder 43

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.