

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S CONDOR SANCTUARY AND WILDLIFE REFUGES

## THE PLACES:

Southern California is home to three protected California condor reserves, which are essential in multidecade efforts to save one of the world's most endangered species from extinction: the 53,000-acre [Sespe Condor Sanctuary](#) — established in 1947 and expanded in 1951 — the adjacent 2,471-acre [Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge](#) and the 14,097-acre [Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge](#). All three are closed to the public except through organized tours to protect condor breeding, nesting, roosting and foraging.

## WHY THEY ARE SPECIAL:

California condors are the largest birds in North America, with wingspans of nine feet and weighing up to 20 pounds. They are also one of the most critically endangered, protected under the Endangered Species Act since 1973. As their population plummeted, a captive-breeding effort called the California Condor Recovery Program was launched in 1979, and in 1987 the last free-flying condor was taken into captivity on the Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

At that point there were just 22 California condors left on Earth.

The three condor reserves give the birds essential habitat to nest, forage and breed, and the safe haven necessary for their survival and recovery. As of 2022 no fewer than 89 condors were flying free in these reserve areas, with some individuals traveling from the coast to the Sierra Nevada foothills.

These reserves also provide habitat to many other rare, threatened and endangered species including tule elk — California's only native elk — pronghorn, golden eagles, prairie falcons, giant kangaroo rats, blunt-nosed leopard lizards, Buena Vista Lake shrews, San Joaquin kit foxes, vernal pool fairy shrimp, valley elderberry longhorn beetles, California red-legged frogs, Kern primrose sphinx moths, and eight protected plant species.

## THE STAKES:

The three California condor reserves are directly threatened by Trump's vow to expand oil and gas drilling on public lands. The reserves are surrounded by active oilfields. While potential for fossil fuel production inside these long-protected areas has so far remained unexplored, they may be in the crosshairs of Trump's plans for oil and gas development. That would transform their pristine habitat into toxic industrial wastelands, threatening the decades-long work to save California condors from extinction.

### Contact:

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