



Statement of Robert Lovingood
County of San Bernardino Supervisor, First District
Before the
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
October 8, 2015

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on S. 414, *the California Desert Conservation and Recreation Act of 2015*. This legislation proposes a variety of designations throughout the California Desert, the majority of the effects and designations exist within San Bernardino County.

I appear before you in my capacity as County Supervisor in the First District of San Bernardino County, California. San Bernardino County is geographically the largest county in the contiguous United States at more than 20,000 square miles. I represent approximately 450,000 constituents and my district encompasses over 15,000 square miles. Public lands are a major asset in San Bernardino County, providing a number of economic and recreational opportunities.

In San Bernardino County, more than 80 percent of the land area is in the federal estate, under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of Defense. The federal government actively manages and protects those lands for conservation values and for other uses.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge and thank Senator Feinstein for her inclusive approach in developing the current legislative proposal and allowing the County to comment during the drafting of the proposal. The Senator and her staff consulted with a number of local governments and interest groups. This type of stakeholder input is imperative to ensure any proposed designation creates a net positive benefit for the variety of interests that use the desert and that critical multiple use activities are preserved. While the final outcome may not fully garner support by all, at least a variety of uses, values and concerns were considered.

The centerpiece of Senator Feinstein's proposed legislation is the designation of two National Monuments, which would withdraw mining activities and other forms of mineral use from public lands, except for existing operations. The proposed national monuments are wholly or partially within San Bernardino County, and span well over 1 million acres.

Mining and Economic Development

Concerns remain in regards to the proposed legislation and the potential negative impacts to mining, economic development and jobs in our County. In San Bernardino County, one of our most significant economic drivers is the minerals industry. The County regulates approximately 100 mines, which provide a wide variety of materials necessary for infrastructure, economic growth, national defense, and countless consumer products. The proposed national monument status withdraws public lands from mineral entry; this prevents the extraction of important mineral materials, such as aggregates, which are the basic materials necessary for maintaining roads, bridges and local infrastructure.

Diminished access to aggregate will increase the haul distances for road maintenance materials, inhibiting disaster recovery, increasing costs to the taxpayer, fuel consumption, Greenhouse Gases, traffic congestion and accelerate wear-and-tear on our aging roads and bridges.

There are a number of active mines within the proposed boundaries, including Castle Mountain mine. This area was not included in the 1994 California Desert Protection Act because it was an active gold mine. The Castle Mountain mine is still active and their permit allows them to continue mining and reclamation until December 2025. When Castle Mountain scales up to full production in the next phase, the County anticipates the operation will become the second-largest gold mine in California, creating approximately 300 full-time positions with a direct tax benefit in excess of \$225 million to the County. I understand discussions with Castle Mountain are ongoing and we appreciate the Senator's interest in resolving their concerns. S. 414 should include reasonable and practical access and the potential expansion of existing mining operations and a process for permitting. We do not see a mechanism for Park Service to issue mining permits in the proposed legislation.

Off-Highway Vehicle Designations

While I have concerns with the bill, I appreciate the Senator's efforts to include designated off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreational areas and provisions for local revenue sharing from renewable energy development. OHV recreation has an economic impact of at least \$70 million to the County and supports numerous small and rural businesses in my County. The designation of multiple OHV recreation areas in the bill acknowledges that sustainable multiple uses on public lands should be preserved.

Renewable Energy Development

San Bernardino County has some of the largest solar energy projects in the world operating or under construction within our boundaries. Provisions included in the bill would ensure local governments receive compensation for utility-scale renewable energy projects on public lands. This funding will allow the County to enhance public services to address impacts from these large projects, especially in the remote desert communities.

National Trails Highway/Route 66

Revenues may be used to help offset much-needed repairs for National Trails Highway, Route 66, a historic and iconic highway, which is the centerpiece of the proposed Mojave Trails National Monument. The highway serves as the only alternative route to Interstate 40 during emergencies and is a popular route of travel for American and international tourists. Several of the bridges were damaged during the storms this summer, requiring emergency closure of some sections. The County faces the daunting task of replacing these bridges, which require individual environmental clearances. This is a major cost and can take years to obtain. Additional provisions could be included in this bill to provide some regulatory relief to address needed repairs, enhancing public safety, and the experience for Route 66 travelers.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for their attention and also request their consideration of provisions included in legislation recently introduced in the House, which strikes a responsible compromise among recreational activities and environmental preservation by establishing a special management area. The measure allows for protection of existing mining and reasonable future mining exploration. I believe this proposal is a balanced approach to protecting, managing, and using our desert areas in San Bernardino County.

I appreciate, Mr. Chairman, your leadership and that of this Committee in your careful deliberation of this important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee, I welcome the chance to respond to any questions you may have.