

**Statement of
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U.S. Department of the Interior
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
S. 1423, Central Coast Heritage Protection Act
April 21, 2016**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on S. 1423, the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act. This bill would designate three wilderness areas within the Carrizo Plain National Monument managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). S. 1423 would also establish the Black Mountain Scenic Area on lands managed by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and designate or expand nine wilderness areas within the Los Padres National Forest, two of which would include some BLM-managed public lands. The BLM supports S. 1423 and would welcome the opportunity to work with Senator Boxer and the Subcommittee to address various technical concerns discussed below.

Background

The Carrizo Plain National Monument (Monument), which includes over 206,000 acres of public lands, was designated by President Bill Clinton on January 17, 2001. The Monument, located only a few hours from Los Angeles, in San Luis Obispo and Kern Counties, California, is home to diverse communities of wildlife and plant species, including the critically endangered San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, and blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The Chumash, Salinian, and Yokuts Tribes have called this area home for at least the last 10,000 years. The Monument provides many recreational opportunities, such as hiking, camping, and hunting and – due to its remoteness – provides visitors outstanding opportunities to be alone with nature. Lands within the Monument boundary are cooperatively managed by the BLM, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) through a Memorandum of Understanding established to ensure that the three entities manage their respective lands in a complementary fashion.

Under the Monument's 2010 Resource Management Plan (RMP), the BLM currently manages approximately 62,455 acres of public lands for the protection of wilderness characteristics. The decision to manage these public lands for wilderness characteristics under the RMP occurred as part of a 10-year collaborative planning effort with strong public support. Within the Monument, the BLM also manages the approximately 17,984-acre Caliente Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in a manner that does not impair its suitability for potential future preservation by Congress as wilderness, as provided for under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act or the Wilderness Act.

S. 1423

Wilderness (Sections 3-5, 7)

S. 1423 would designate three new wilderness areas within the Carrizo Plain National Monument – the Caliente Mountain Wilderness (approximately 35,600 acres), the Soda Lake Wilderness

(approximately 13,300 acres), and the Temblor Range Wilderness (approximately 12,500 acres). These proposed additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System will protect fragile ecosystems and provide important habitat for a diversity of plant and animal life. These proposed wilderness areas also serve as unique and irreplaceable outdoor research laboratories. For example, the proposed Soda Lake Wilderness is the largest remaining natural alkali wetland in southern California and is the only closed basin within the coastal mountains. These lands have retained their primeval character and have been influenced primarily by the forces of nature, and provide outstanding opportunities for solitude as well as primitive and unconfined recreation experiences.

The BLM supports the designation of these wilderness areas but would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and Subcommittee on minor boundary adjustments to ensure that the boundaries are consistent with existing WSAs and areas managed for wilderness characteristics under the 2010 Carrizo Plain RMP. Finally, the BLM understands that the sponsor intends to amend the map references in the bill and reference the maps entitled “Proposed Caliente Mountain Wilderness”, “Proposed Soda Lake Wilderness”, and “Proposed Temblor Range Wilderness”, dated June 3, 2014. The June 3, 2014, maps inform the position of the BLM on this legislation.

The bill would also designate or expand nine additional wilderness areas within the Los Padres National Forest. We defer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding provisions in the bill concerning lands and interests managed by the USFS; however, the proposed addition to the Garcia Wilderness Area would include approximately 120 acres of BLM-managed public lands, and the proposed addition to the Machesna Mountain Wilderness Area would include approximately 530 acres of BLM-managed public lands. The BLM supports the proposed wilderness designations of BLM-managed lands in the Garcia and Machesna Mountain Wildernesses. The BLM notes that the BLM-managed Machesna WSA does not appear to be included in the proposed wilderness additions. Incorporating this WSA into the designations may enhance manageability of the area.

Wild & Scenic Rivers (Section 6)

Section 6 of S. 1423 pertains to lands managed by the USFS. The BLM defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding these provisions.

Scenic Areas (Section 8)

Section 8 of the bill would designate two scenic areas – the Condor Ridge Scenic Area (approximately 18,600 acres) in the Los Padres National Forest and the Black Mountain Scenic Area (approximately 15,800 acres) on lands administered by the USFS and the BLM, including the approximately 160-acre Black Mountain WSA. The BLM supports this section of the bill, but would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor to address some technical concerns, including the addition of a reference to the Secretary of the Interior.

National Trails (Section 9)

Section 9 of the bill would establish the Condor National Recreation Trail. The BLM has not reviewed a detailed map for the trail, but we understand that the majority of the trail traverses the Los Padres National Forest with a small segment that traverses BLM-managed public lands. The

BLM generally supports the designation of this trail, but we would like the opportunity to more closely review the proposed route and work with the sponsor and Subcommittee to address other technical concerns, including correction of a citation to the National Trails System Act.

Miscellaneous Provisions (Sections 10-12)

Sections 10 and 11 of the bill pertain to lands managed by the USFS. The BLM defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding these provisions. The BLM supports Section 12, which addresses use by members of Native American tribes.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on S. 1423, the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act. The BLM supports the conservation goals of the bill. We look forward to continuing to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to address the technical concerns outlined above as this bill moves through the legislative process.