

Statement of Geary Hund of Riverside County, California
On H.R. 3682, the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act
Before the United States House of Representatives
Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public
Lands
November 13, 2007

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Geary Hund and I am a resident of Idyllwild, California in Riverside County. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act.

I believe Riverside County is one of the most spectacular regions in California. From the rocky crags of Mount San Jacinto to the sands of its eastern deserts, its scenic beauty is remarkable. It is this beauty that attracts tens of thousands of visitors annually to places like Joshua Tree National Park and it is one of the primary reasons it is among California's fastest growing counties. During my 30 year career I've worked as a law enforcement ranger, ecologist, fire manager, and conservationist. In these capacities I've visited most of the areas included in this legislation.

The California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act proposes to create four new wilderness areas and to increase the size of six existing ones. The bill would also designate four wild and scenic rivers and it would add important new lands to the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains National Monument, itself a legacy of Congresswoman Bono's work. The areas proposed for protection in the bill are among the best remaining wild lands in southern California including:

- The steep and rugged mountain ranges of the eastern deserts, with their deeply dissected canyons, vast bajadas, elusive herds of bighorn sheep, desert tortoise, and lush palm oases;
- The dramatic Monument additions ranging in elevation from below sea level to over 8,000 feet, which preserve remnants of an ancient lakeshore, a vital wildlife corridor and the pine covered slopes of Santa Rosa Peak;
- The cascading waters and lemon lilies of Fuller Mill Creek;
- The mountain top island of pines and oaks on Cahuilla Mountain, and the deeply wooded Canyons of the South Fork San Jacinto.

Protecting these and the other areas in the bill will contribute to the quality of life of millions of people, whether they visit them often or only notice them in passing, for increasingly, it's understood that preserving nature has practical benefits – forests clean our air and store and filter our water. And open space near communities often equates to a strong local economy by increasing property values and attracting more residents, businesses, and visitors. The lands and rivers in the bill also help preserve California's rich biological diversity, for many rare and wondrous creatures grace these remarkable places. By setting aside and connecting their habitat we will help to ensure their future. But perhaps the greatest value of these wild places is the contribution they make to the preservation of the human spirit. For these are places of respite from the fast pace of modern life, they are places of discovery for our children and they are places for personal renewal. Lands such as these are increasingly rare in our world and we must

make every effort to preserve them.

While crafting any important piece of legislation a conscientious policymaker must ensure that the final product reflects the concerns and desires of his or her constituents. With H.R. 3682, Congresswoman Mary Bono has done an outstanding job of seeking local input and addressing concerns. For example, she:

- Consulted extensively with local elected officials, fire safe councils, federal agencies and other interests and made 20 boundary adjustments to allow for effective fire and fuels management;
- Met with recreationists of all kinds, including mountain bikers, hikers, off-road vehicle enthusiasts and equestrians and excluded from proposed wilderness areas that are managed for vehicle use and popular mountain bike trails;
- Worked with federal agencies and utility companies to exclude areas that could potentially be used to meet California's future energy needs;
- Carefully listened to the concerns of private landowners and ensured that their right to access and use of their property would not be impaired; and
- Met with tribal representatives, addressing their cultural and other concerns.

Congresswoman Bono has a well-deserved reputation for collaboration and reasonableness that is clearly illustrated by the way she went about crafting this bill. It should therefore come as no surprise that H.R. 3682 has faced minimal opposition from within Riverside County, and that it is supported by a wide variety of interests including local chambers of commerce, tribes, municipalities, recreation and conservation groups and two Riverside County supervisors whose districts are affected by the bill.

I firmly believe that as a result of Congresswoman Bono's responsiveness to the concerns raised by local interests and the importance of the areas included in the bill, H.R. 3682 will benefit not only Riverside County, but our nation as a whole. I urge the committee to support this important legislation and once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify.