

Statement for the Record in support of H.R.344, the Pinnacles National Park Act
Offered by Congressman Sam Farr before the
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources

I would like to begin by thanking Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Bishop for the opportunity to speak in support of H.R. 3444, the Pinnacles National Park Act, and I appreciate the time taken by members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands to join me today.

The Pinnacles National Park Act would elevate America's 11th national monument, the Pinnacles National Monument, to a congressionally mandated National Park. The legislation would also rename the current Pinnacles Wilderness as the Hain Wilderness after Schuyler Hain, who first came to the area in 1886 and allow the Interior Secretary to acquire land within the boundaries of the park as deemed necessary.

Hain serves as a great introduction to this bill. As a self taught naturalist he was the first visionary to realize just how unique the Pinnacles region is, and he led the first effort to publicize the region and protect its distinctive resources for future generations.

I would like to focus my statement today on the many aspects of Pinnacles that I believe warrant its designation as a National Park. The park is unique in our country for a variety of reasons. It is one of the few regions in the world that boasts a Mediterranean climate; it serves as home for dozens of federally protected species; it has a long, rich cultural history; it serves as a center for geological science, it's an area of unspoiled beauty; and opening this summer thanks to the use of Land and Water Conservation Fund to purchase the Pinnacles Ranch the Pinnacles Campground is now within the boundaries of Pinnacles National Monument, and is managed by a concessionaire.

First, I understand the need for grassroots support and our local communities realize the importance of elevating Pinnacles to National Park status. I ask to enter into the hearing record resolutions of support from San Benito and Monterey counties, both of which share this treasured resource.

Additionally, I ask to submit into the hearing record a statement of support from Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan, documentary producers who spent a decade researching and filming the just-released PBS documentary series, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*.

Mr. Chairman, in 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt recognized the uniqueness of the Pinnacles area, located in California's San Benito County, and created the Pinnacles National Monument. The Monument was initially designated to protect the lichen-encrusted igneous spire-like rock formations that rise between 500 and 1,200 feet.

President Roosevelt recognized the nation's premier talus caves, enormous piles of loose rock that were knocked loose over the millennia to form twisting tunnels and cracks. He realized the beauty and magnificence of the volcanic features towering over the smooth contours of the surrounding countryside.

That original designation consisted of 2,060 acres, but it has since been expanded five times by presidents and once by Congress. Its present size is more than 26,000 acres and plays home to half of the skeletal remains of the Neenach Volcano, which erupted 23 million years ago. If you want a dose of science, realize that the other half of this volcanic formation is nearly 200 miles south, near present-day Lancaster, California. That drastic movement, caused by the persistent creep of the San Andreas Fault, is one of the reasons the Pinnacles system is such an important center for geological science.

While the Pinnacles system may be smaller than other National Parks in California, you would be hard pressed to find any area comparable in its vast complexity and diversity of resources.

I would also like to inform the Subcommittee that my office has started preliminary discussions with a neighboring landowner who seeks to sell more than 18,000 acres of land for inclusion into Pinnacles system. That would bring the total Pinnacles system to 44,000, putting it on par with Acadia National Park in Maine and Carlsbad Cavern National Park in New Mexico.

I bring this to the Subcommittee's attention because this future addition to the Pinnacles system will add a parcel of land rich in wildlife, land and water resources along with a four-mile stretch of the San Benito River and numerous springs. This property also nests condor 514, the first condor hatched in the county in at least 70 years. This magnificent bird recently took his first flight over historic condor breeding grounds in the San Benito back country.

Geology

As I already mentioned, the Pinnacles system is well known for its unique location, which continues to move today under the force of ongoing seismic activity. You can see how this affects the topography where offset streams cross faults and valley bottoms and terraces show signs of uplift. We know much more about plate tectonics and earth movement that we did when the Pinnacles system was created by the Antiquities Act, and we continue to learn more today.

We now know the reason the two halves of the ancient Neenach Volcano are almost 200 hundred miles apart is because the Pinnacles are located at the junction of the Pacific and the North American Tectonic Plates. With the San Andreas Fault just four miles to the east and the Miner's Gulch and Pinnacles Faults running directly through the Pinnacles system, it's no wonder that seismic activity is so frequent, a perfect site for the United States Geological Survey to maintain two seismometers.

Allow me to put this in perspective. We know the Neenach Volcano erupted east of Los Angeles; with its current blistering pace equivalent to the rate your fingernails grow, the North American Plate will move the Pinnacles far enough north to be east of San Francisco in about 10 million years or so.

Climate

The Pinnacles system is about more than just land formations. The climate of the Pinnacles is a perfect example of Mediterranean climate, with cool wet winters and hot dry summers. Summer temperatures of over 100 degrees are common, but coastal fog means nighttime temperatures fall to the 50s, creating enormous daily temperature swings. The winter climate sees milder days with nights dropping into the low 20s. The region sees around 16 inches of rain annually.

There are only five regions of the world that fall support Mediterranean habitats, and California's coastal regions are the only location in the United States. That means there are many flora and fauna that exist solely due to the microclimate, and it's a very fragile ecosystem.

The Mediterranean biome contains some of the most fertile, beautiful and coveted land on the planet, yet it occupies only 2 percent of the Earth's land surface. And unfortunately, a long history of human influence has taken its toll. Over 30 percent of the world's Mediterranean biome has been modified through development and land conversion, and less than 5 percent of remaining lands are protected worldwide.

Flora and fauna

The Pinnacles system is home to 149 species of birds, 49 mammals, 22 reptiles, six amphibians, 68 butterflies, 36 dragonflies and damselflies, nearly 400 bees and many thousands of other invertebrates.

Most famously, the endangered California condor, the largest flying land bird in North America, has been re-introduced into the park and can occasionally be seen gliding on updrafts near the rocky cliffs.

After a precipitous decline in numbers, the California condor remains one of the rarest birds in the world. Its population numbers about 350 total, with fewer than 200 free-flying birds around the world. That's an increase from 1982, when just 22 California condors lived. The birds were captured that year in a bold attempt to rescue the species from extinction.

Condor numbers declined for a number of reasons, but the critical factor was revealed only after the captive breeding program began. The primary threat to the California condor recovery was found to be lead poisoning. Condors can inadvertently ingest lead bullet fragments lodged in animal carcasses and gut piles. As a result, the California

Legislature and California State Fish and Game Commission have restricted use of lead ammunition throughout the birds' range.

Since 2003, Pinnacles has been a part of the California Condor Recovery Program to re-establish California condors at Pinnacles. This cooperative endeavor between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Ventana Wildlife Society, the Institute for Wildlife Studies, Pinnacles Partnership and private partners like the RS Bar Guest Ranch, in collaboration with the California Condor Recovery Team have done a tremendous job on recovery efforts and as I mentioned earlier we now have our first wild hatch riding the thermals in almost a century.

Turkey vultures are a more common site in the area, which is also home to golden eagles, prairie falcons, Cooper's hawks and sharp-shinned hawks. Mammals in the park include black-tailed deer, bobcat, gray fox, raccoon, jackrabbit, brush rabbit, ground squirrel, chipmunk, and several kinds of bats, including the Townsend's big-eared bat.

A major attraction for Pinnacles is the myriad wildflowers that bloom throughout Pinnacles from late January through early July, including the California poppy, baby blue-eyes, black sage, larkspur, bush lupine, buckwheat, and orchids just to name a few.

Cultural history and significant support

The region that is home to the Pinnacles also boasts a healthy share of historical significance. The Pinnacles system encompasses a unique blend of California heritage, ranging from pre-historic and historic Native Americans to the arrival of the Spanish to 18th and 19th century settlers, including miners, cowboys, vaqueros, ranchers, farmers and homesteaders.

In 1933 a Civilian Conservation Corps camp was established in the area. For nine years the corps improved the trails that had been created by early homesteaders, added steps and guard rails to trails, built a dam, and paved the road into Bear Gulch.

The region also played host to John Steinbeck's famous writing. "Of Mice and Men" is set on a ranch outside Soledad, the Western gateway city to the Pinnacles system, and ties into the hardships of ranching in the area. And Steinbeck's book "East of Eden" is set in King City, another gateway community to the area.

The creation of the Pinnacles National Park is strongly supported by documentary producer Ken Burns, whose latest project was titled "The National Parks: America's Best Idea." As Burns wrote in a letter of support:

"Grounded in the tradition of recognizing the special importance of a national monument by extending its designation to that of a national park, we wish to wholeheartedly endorse H.R. 3444 and the creation of Pinnacles National Park. A Pinnacles National Park would preserve a unique portion of our land: not only a critical record of geological time (what John Muir would have called a 'grand geological library') that helps Americans look

back millions of years to understand the vast tectonic forces that shaped - and still shape - our continent but also a rare habitat for condors, a wide array of flowers, and 400 species of bees. It would preserve a place that over the centuries, Native Americans, early Spanish settlers, homesteaders from the East, and Basque shepherders have considered home, offering an important series of perspectives on the larger sweep of American history.”

And former National Park Service Director Fran Mainella, who visited Pinnacles during her tenure, has expressed her support for elevating the status of Pinnacles to a National Park.

Sister Park Agreement

Finally, I would like to remind the Subcommittee that since 1997, our National Park Service and Argentina’s National Parks Administration (the Administración de Parques Nacionales) have enjoyed cooperation concerning the conservation, preservation and management of national parks and other protected natural and cultural heritage sites.

Within their framework of cooperation, the Pinnacles National Monument and the Argentina’s Quebrada del Condorito National Park wish to establish a sister park arrangement to further mutually beneficial cooperation. This agreement would progress quickly upon elevation of the Pinnacles to National Park status.

Mr. Chairman, it is clearly evident that the Pinnacles system is so much more than the rock formations themselves. The Pinnacles system is an outstanding example of the Mediterranean climate, its home to hundreds of species of flora and fauna, it has a long cultural history, it plays a key role in geological science and it’s an inspiring, unspoiled location.

Mr. Chairman, it’s in the midst of adversity that we discover what is truly great about this nation of ours. It’s been almost 150 years since California Senator John Conness, in the midst of the Civil War, introduced -- and President Lincoln signed into law -- something unprecedented in human history: setting aside a tract of natural scenery for the future enjoyment of everyone in the Yosemite Valley for "public use, resort, and recreation."

Today, however, the pressures to preserve our last best places are even more so. As in real estate we could look for comparables in size and use but in the final analysis nothing compares to the Pinnacles and its diversity complexity can not be recreated once it’s lost. Elevating Pinnacles to a National Park will give this public trust the attention it both needs and deserves. With only two percent of the world’s land located in the Mediterranean biome we have a great opportunity to elevate one of the last remaining unspoiled public trusts.

I truly believe this resource should be elevated to National Park status so future generations will be able to enjoy this ever moving public trust. I hope the Subcommittee

agrees with my analysis and advances this bill to the full Committee. Thank you for your time.