

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 1708, A BILL TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF THE SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA TO INCLUDE THE RIM OF THE VALLEY CORRIDOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

APRIL 2, 2019

Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 1708, a bill to adjust the boundary of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (NRA) to include the Rim of the Valley Corridor, and for other purposes.

The Department recognizes that a special resource study has found that the expansion of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA proposed by H.R. 1708 meets the National Park Service's criteria for addition to the National Park System. However, because we are focusing resources on reducing the National Park Service's \$11.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog and addressing other critical national park needs, the Department does not support enacting this proposed expansion at this time.

H.R. 1708 would expand the boundary of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA by approximately 191,000 acres of land within the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor, the mountainous areas that surround the San Fernando, Simi, and Conejo Valleys northwest of Los Angeles, partly contiguous with the Santa Monica Mountains NRA. The proposed Rim of the Valley Unit would be administered as part of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA and an updated management plan for the park would be required within three years of enactment. Provisions are included in the bill to ensure that the inclusion of the Rim of the Valley lands in the Santa Monica Mountains NRA would not interfere with specified existing uses.

The Santa Monica Mountains NRA was established by Congress in 1978 to help preserve and protect the natural resources of the Santa Monica Mountains and the adjacent coastline and provide outdoor recreational opportunities within the vicinity of densely populated Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. Within a boundary encompassing approximately 154,000 acres, the National Park Service (NPS) owns a relatively small proportion of the land—approximately 23,600 acres, or 15 percent. Altogether, 58 percent of the land within the boundary is in public ownership, including the NPS lands. The NPS coordinates actions with State and other public agencies that manage park lands through a cooperative management agreement, which allows all partners to realize cost savings and efficiencies. The NPS also partners with nongovernmental organizations to further the purposes of the NRA.

P.L. 110-229, enacted in 2008, directed the Secretary of the Interior to evaluate the suitability and feasibility of designating all or a portion of the Rim of the Valley Corridor as a unit of Santa Monica Mountains NRA. The study area consisted of approximately 650,000 acres of land

within the mountains encircling the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys. The study's preferred alternative, among four alternatives evaluated, recommended an expansion of approximately 173,000 acres of lands judged to have the highest concentration of resource values and recreational opportunities. The preferred alternative also recognized a limited role for National Park Service land ownership, as is the case within the existing national recreation area, and a continuation of the existing collaborative partnership-based management model. The study team conducted extensive public outreach throughout the study process and throughout the region, receiving approximately 7,200 comment letters during the study period; more than 90 percent of comment letters preferred a much larger alternative than the recommendation transmitted to Congress. The study was transmitted to Congress on February 16, 2016.

H.R. 1708 differs in several ways from the study's preferred alternative transmitted to Congress. H.R. 1708 would include a greater number of acres of land within the boundary, approximately 191,000, than the approximately 173,000 acres the preferred alternative proposed. Additionally, the bill would remove all properties contained in the 2016 recommendation that are identified by the State of California as containing oil and gas operations, as well as the Santa Susana Field Laboratory. These changes would eliminate any unintentional regulatory burden to gas and oil development and prevent the transfer of Federal lands at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, and their associated facilities, including clean-up costs, to the National Park Service. Finally, H.R. 1708 would add lands to the east of the City of Santa Clarita and in the western Santa Susana mountains for the purpose of regional trail connections.

If the committee decides to act on this legislation, the Department would like to provide an updated legislative map to reference in the bill, and a corresponding amendment. This map would show the Rim of the Valley Unit as an addition to the NRA, not as a substitution of the original NRA boundary.

Ms. Chairwoman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.