

Thank you Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Committee. I am here to testify on behalf of my bill, H.R. 1708, the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act.

If passed, my bill will enlarge the size of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area to include the lands known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor. This includes Simi Hills, Santa Susana Mountains, Verdugo Mountains, parts of Santa Clarita, San Gabriel Mountain foothills, the Los Angeles River, and Griffith Park; all important green spaces in the greater Los Angeles region.

My efforts to protect the Rim of the Valley began in the early 2000s upon the request of many of my constituents. I soon introduced a bill to direct the National Park Service to conduct a special resource study to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating all or a portion of the Rim of the Valley Corridor as a unit of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and to study how these areas could be protected and utilized by the local communities. That bipartisan bill was passed and President Bush signed it into law in 2008. The National Park Service began their study two years later in 2010 and transmitted its final report to Congress in February of 2016.

The legislation before the Committee today is based on the findings of the Park Service's report as well as feedback I received from local communities and interested stakeholders across the Los Angeles region. It expands the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area by approximately 191,000 acres and incorporates much of the Park Service's final recommendations while also including and excluding certain areas based upon local feedback.

Over the years, I held numerous townhalls and conducted extensive outreach to inform my constituents and those in the greater Los Angeles area about how this bill will preserve green space, while also protecting private property rights and existing local land use authorities. Due to this outreach, the bill has broad bipartisan and regional support as referenced by the letters of support provided to the Committee from local stakeholders.

At the Federal level, my legislation is cosponsored by every member in the vicinity of the Rim of the Valley. I am also pleased that Senators Feinstein and Harris are carrying this legislation in the Senate. In drafting this bill, I benefited from guidance by both Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Bishop.

The goal of this legislation is to enable local landowners, local governments, and interested stakeholders to better utilize federal resources and to preserve this beautiful ecosystem for generations to come, as well as improve access to nature for recreational and educational purposes.

By expanding the National Recreation Area, the National Park Service will have the authority to implement capital improvements, like repairing hiking trails and maintaining facilities for public enjoyment; study wildlife and its habitats; and participate in cooperative conservation with local landowners. The Park Service will also be able to accept land donations or purchase land from willing sellers within the boundary if the Secretary deems it appropriate. The expansion will respect private property rights and existing local land use authorities. It will not require land owners to participate in any conservation or recreation activities, and it will not put any additional restrictions on property owners or businesses. Furthermore, this legislation does not allow for land acquisition through eminent domain.

With so much of Los Angeles County considered to be park-poor, with 51% of residents living more than half a mile to the nearest park, we must take steps to increase access.

Preservation of the open space in our communities is not only good for our environment and ecosystems, but it is beneficial for the health and wellbeing of residents of all ages. The Rim of the Valley corridor is an area of striking natural beauty, and I feel strongly we just do whatever we can to preserve that beauty for the benefit of LA residents, the millions each year who visit, and for future generations.

I'm hopeful that this Committee can move the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act forward. I thank the Chairwoman and the Committee for holding this hearing, and I look forward to working with you on this important issue.