

**CITY OF SANTA CLARITA, CALIFORNIA  
COUNCILMEMBER LAURENE WESTE**

**TESTIMONY**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS**

**H.R. 1708  
SPONSORED BY REPRESENTATIVE ADAM SCHIFF**

Good afternoon, Chair Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Committee. I am Councilmember Laurene Weste from the City of Santa Clarita, California. We are a city of approximately 225,000 residents; located within California's 25<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, which is represented by Congresswoman Katie Hill.

I am honored to be here today to thank Representative Schiff for sponsoring H.R. 1708 and to speak in support of the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act.

For three decades, it has been my pleasure to work with government, environmental, business, non-profit and community leaders in building a framework in our region; leading to enhanced partnerships between various stakeholders with the goal of preserving and enhancing the critical natural resources of Southern California.

The Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act is the long-awaited implementation of the *Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study*. This study, conducted by the National Park

Service, was authorized in 2008 and transmitted to Congress in early 2016. I personally attended a number of outreach meetings conducted by the National Park Service during the study and the additional meetings held while the legislation was being developed. I can attest to the comprehensive outreach, which sought to be responsive to everyone's needs, desires and concerns. This legislation reflects the variety of perspectives expressed during those community meetings.

As the study was being conducted, it highlighted the significant ecological resources in the Upper Santa Clara River area, which includes our community. Santa Clarita, like many in Southern California, is under tremendous pressure to develop every available acre. Providing park land, open space, trails and recreational opportunities is something that my constituents care about and utilize on a regular basis.

At the time Santa Clarita incorporated in 1987, given that our community is surrounded on three sides by beautiful mountain ranges, the Angeles National Forest and state owned Santa Clarita Woodlands Park, the City Council made the decision to align with other agencies for the establishment of a green belt around the City, as well as protection, enhancement and interconnectivity of trails and open space. Additionally, we have partnered with other public agencies and non-profit organizations to identify and preserve important wildlife corridors in the rapidly growing urban environment that is the greater Los Angeles area.

Furthermore, in 2007, the voters of Santa Clarita approved formation of an Open Space Preservation District. I was proud to lead that effort, which has resulted in the City of Santa

Clarita owning and joining with other public agencies to acquire over 11,000 acres of open space. Public agencies, non-profits and the private sector working together, will continue to enhance the quality of life, and the physical and mental well-being for residents of my community and throughout Southern California.

Los Angeles County is considered to be park-poor. The strengthening of partnerships and infusion of federal resources into the region brought about by this bill, has the capacity to touch approximately 13 million people within the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area.

H.R. 1708 is important to our community because it provides a solid pathway for the federal government to more fully participate as a partner with the City of Santa Clarita and other stakeholders in the region to significantly augment our collective open space, park lands, historical sites and trails. For example, our interconnected trail system allows individuals to enjoy healthy activities, such as walking, running and riding their bicycles.

Additionally, our community is home to over six-thousand employees of the film industry and a number of movie ranches. The open space venues in our community that are utilized by the film industry provide tremendous economic benefit to the local, state and national economies.

Companies choose to locate in Santa Clarita due to our community's proximity to open space, trails and recreational areas, which provide amenities that workers are seeking to enhance their health and overall quality of life.

As an elected official of California's 18<sup>th</sup> most populous municipality, I appreciate the thoughtful approach that Representative Schiff has incorporated into the bill. H.R. 1708 does not seek to take any land use authority away from local governments, require any property owner to sell land or in any way diminish private property ownership or management rights, or adversely impact properties that are immediately adjacent to the proposed expansion of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. These specific provisions of the bill reflect that Congressman Schiff listened to concerns expressed during community meetings and responded with appropriate assurances.

The bill recognizes the strong alliances that have been built throughout the region and seeks only to enable the federal government to be a full partner with public and private stakeholders.

With the availability of state park bond resources and local resources, such as Santa Clarita's Open Space Preservation District, this bill can lead to leveraging modest federal investments; which will yield high levels of return by creating and enhancing amenities that residents and businesses value in making their decisions to locate in our community and surrounding areas.

I urge your support for H.R. 1708.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.