

**Statement of
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**House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, & Public Lands**

**H.R. 2199, Central Coast Heritage Protection Act
July 10, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 2199, the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act. The bill would designate three wilderness areas within the Carrizo Plain National Monument managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). H.R. 2199 would also establish the Black Mountain Scenic Area on lands managed by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and designate or expand nine wilderness areas within the Los Padres National Forest, two of which would include some BLM-managed public lands. Finally, the bill designates the Condor National Recreation Trail across the Los Padres National Forest and small portions of BLM-managed public lands.

The Department of the Interior (Department), through Secretarial Orders 3347, 3356, and 3366, has pledged to expand access to America's public lands, to increase hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities nationwide, and to enhance conservation stewardship. In addition, the Department is focused on restoring full collaboration and coordination with local communities and making the Department a better neighbor.

As a matter of policy, the Department strongly supports Congressional action to resolve issues of wilderness designation and release of WSAs on public lands across the West, and we welcome opportunities to further those efforts. However, we also want to ensure that designating new wilderness areas on public lands that are outside of existing WSAs is the most appropriate land management tool, and that such designations would not unnecessarily impede public access or limit outdoor recreational opportunities. The Department would like the opportunity to work with the sponsors and the Subcommittee to address a number of issues and technical concerns outlined in this statement.

Background

The Carrizo Plain National Monument (Monument), which includes over 206,000 acres of public lands, was designated on January 17, 2001. The Monument, located only a few hours from Los Angeles in San Luis Obispo and Kern Counties, California, features the white alkali flats of Soda Lake, Painted Rock, open grasslands, and a broad plain rimmed by mountains. When conditions are right, numerous wildflowers can carpet the valley floor. In addition, the Chumash, Salinian, and Yokuts Tribes have called this area home for at least the last 10,000 years. Lands within the Monument boundary are cooperatively managed by the BLM, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) through a Memorandum of

Understanding established to ensure that the three entities manage their respective lands in a complementary fashion.

Under the Monument's 2010 Resource Management Plan (RMP), the BLM currently manages approximately 44,500 acres of public lands for the protection of wilderness characteristics. The decision to manage these public lands for wilderness characteristics under the RMP occurred as part of a 10-year collaborative planning effort with strong public support. Within the Monument, the BLM also manages the approximately 17,984-acre Caliente Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in a manner that does not impair its suitability for potential future preservation by Congress as wilderness, as required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

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Wilderness (Sections 3-5, 7)

H.R. 2199 would designate three new wilderness areas within the Carrizo Plain National Monument – the Caliente Mountain Wilderness (approximately 35,600 acres), the Soda Lake Wilderness (approximately 13,300 acres), and the Temblor Range Wilderness (approximately 12,500 acres). Each of these areas generally serves as habitat for a variety of plant and animal life, including tule elk, upland game birds, and other species managed by CDFW. They also provide many recreational opportunities, such as hunting, hiking, camping, and – due to their remoteness – provide visitors with outstanding opportunities to be alone with nature.

Only Congress can determine whether to designate WSAs as wilderness or to release them for other multiple uses. The WSAs included in the proposed wilderness designations have been pending final resolution by Congress since 1991. The Department, therefore, supports Congress settling the status of these lands, which would provide certainty to public land users in central California.

Pursuant to the priorities outlined by the Department, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsors and the Subcommittee to ensure that wilderness designation on public lands outside of existing WSAs is the most appropriate mechanism to adequately protect these areas. Alternative management approaches could conserve sensitive resources while still accommodating other uses and activities permitted on BLM-managed lands.

If Congress opts to proceed with designation of these lands as wilderness, we would like to work on minor and technical amendments to this section, including boundary adjustments to enhance manageability and to ensure that the proposed designations are consistent with existing WSAs and areas managed for wilderness characteristics under the 2010 Carrizo Plain RMP.

The bill would also designate or expand nine additional wilderness areas within the Los Padres National Forest. We defer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding provisions in the bill concerning lands and interests managed by the USFS; however, the proposed addition to the Garcia Wilderness Area would include approximately 120 acres of BLM-managed public lands, and the proposed addition to the Machesna Mountain Wilderness Area would include approximately 530 acres of BLM-managed public lands. As with the proposed designations within the Monument, the Department would like to work with the sponsors to ensure that wilderness designation on public lands outside of existing WSAs is the most appropriate

mechanism to adequately protect these areas. If Congress opts to designate these areas as wilderness, we would like to work with the sponsors on a clarifying amendment to this section.

Wild & Scenic Rivers (Section 6)

Section 6 of H.R. 2199 pertains to lands managed by the USFS. The BLM defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding these provisions.

Scenic Areas (Section 8)

Section 8 of the bill would designate two scenic areas – the Condor Ridge Scenic Area (approximately 18,600 acres) in the Los Padres National Forest and the Black Mountain Scenic Area (approximately 15,800 acres) on lands administered by the USFS and the BLM, including the approximately 160-acre Black Mountain WSA. The Department would like to work with the sponsors to address some technical concerns with this section, including the addition of a reference to the Secretary of the Interior.

National Trails (Section 9)

Section 9 of the bill would establish the Condor National Recreation Trail. The Department has not reviewed a detailed map for the trail, but we understand that the majority of the trail traverses the Los Padres National Forest with a small segment that traverses BLM-managed public lands. The Department supports the designation of this trail, which would increase recreational opportunities, but we would like the opportunity to more closely review the proposed route and work with the sponsors and Subcommittee to address other technical concerns, including correction of a citation to the National Trails System Act.

Miscellaneous Provisions (Sections 10-12)

Sections 10 and 11 of the bill pertain to lands managed by the USFS. The Department defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding these provisions. The Department has no objection to section 12, which addresses use by members of Native American tribes.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 2199, the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act. We look forward to working with the sponsors and the Subcommittee to address the issues and technical concerns outlined above as this bill moves through the legislative process.