

Testimony of
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Member of the Board of Supervisors
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Before the
House Natural Resources Committee's
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands,

Hearing on H.R. 6159: To Provide For a Land Exchange Involving
Certain National Forest System Lands in the Mendocino National Forest in the
State of California

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Good morning Chairman Grjalva, Ranking Member Young and other members of the Committee. My name is John Vasquez and I am a member of the Board of Supervisors of Solano County, California. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify here today in support of H.R. 6159, the Deafy Glade Land Exchange Act. This legislation, which Congressman George Miller introduced, is in the public interest because it would allow Solano County to acquire land in the Mendocino National Forest known as Fouts Springs for the continued capital improvements and operation of a residential facility for juvenile offenders in exchange for the transfer to the Forest Service pristine land in the Forest known as Deafy Glade.

Solano County has operated the Fouts Springs Youth Facility under a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) with Colusa County, California since 1959. The Facility is operated by the County of Solano Probation Department under the guidance and direction of the JPA Board of Directors. I have been a member of the JPA Board of Directors for 6 years. The County of Solano manages the finances of Fouts Springs and has committed over \$2 million of County funds toward operational expenditures over and above Facility activities that generate program revenue. Solano County did this because of our belief in the model programs delivered at the Facility.

The Facility is located on 82 acres of land in the Mendocino National Forest and is an alternative to traditional youth detention facilities. Fouts Springs' mission is to change criminal behavior through a structured program involving education, counseling, work and exercise. Because of its isolated location Fouts Springs is able to provide a unique environment that balances the need to protect the community from these high risk juvenile offenders with the need to provide a healthy atmosphere that supports behavioral change. The program reduces recidivism and is viewed as a last resort for youth before being referred to a state institution/prison.

The Fouts Springs program removes youth from their home environment and places them in a remote setting where they learn the skills to become law abiding and productive members of their communities. Fouts Springs is unique in that it houses its own High School. While small, Nielson High School operates much like a large comprehensive high school – offering a variety of education and vocational experiences. We do everything from teaching youth about fresh food and nutrition, to getting their GED and developing employment skills such as landscaping and

welding. Twenty-three California counties have placed juvenile offenders at Fouts Springs for six month, nine month, or one year periods. In the last 90 days, the program has experienced a recidivism rate of 24%. That means that 76% of the youth participants have remained out of custody.

Fouts Springs relies on evidence based practices. The program is designed to help youth attain personal growth and development through accountability, responsibility and achievement. Emphasis is placed on education which includes quality vocational education. By taking a youth out of an inconsistent and negative environment with little or no structure, and placing him in a consistent and supportive program, a youth is given a sound foundation for change.

The program stresses and rewards honesty, acceptance of responsibilities, hard work, efforts at self-assessment, and future planning. In all instances the youth is provided patient guidance and education. Youths soon realize that discipline at Fouts Springs Youth Facility is fair, firm, consistent, and used as a learning device. As a youth progresses through the program, he learns that manipulative and dishonest behavior will not help him meet the requirements for graduation. He realizes that efforts at honesty and hard work will provide positive responses in Camp, at home, and in the community. The goal of Fouts is to return youths to the community as more responsible and productive members of society.

Fouts Springs relies on Solano County's graduation and recidivism percentages as a performance measure to determine whether its goals are met. Solano County minors placed in Fouts Springs' program (approximately 60 youths) have benefited from a 67% graduation rate over the last three years. Upon graduation, in almost all cases, minors are returning home to reunite with their parents or guardians and are acclimated back into the community. They remain under the intensive supervision of Probation staff, receiving aftercare services including but not limited to, weekly support groups, vocational assistance, school enrollment, and family crisis support, coupled with life skills learned in Fouts Springs' program, all of which help to reduce their recidivism rates.

Without Fouts Springs many of these youths would be committed to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Division of Juvenile Justice, where they would receive limited intervention services, and upon release, would be placed on parole and may not receive aftercare services. Probation believes these youths have a better chance of rehabilitation and the community is better served if they continue to be placed at Fouts Springs.

In addition to the valuable programs offered to youth throughout California, the Fouts Springs Facility is also a significant contributor to the Colusa County employment base and local economy. Colusa County is very rural with a total population of 21,945. This represents a density of 18 people per square mile, a significant contrast to Washington D. C. which reports a density of 9,378 people per square mile. The average per capita income is \$27,701 and over 80% of its businesses have 9 or less employees; 68% have 4 or less. Fouts Springs has 30 full time employees that make on average over \$50,000 a year with a total payroll of \$1.8 million. The Facility also partners with Colusa County Schools to provide 8 educational staff for the Facility with a total payroll of over \$475,000.

Solano County leases the land on which it operates Fouts Springs from the Forest Service under a special use permit. Over the years, Solano County has invested a significant amount of money in capital improvements to the Facility. In 2000 alone the County invested over \$4.5 million, including the cost of constructing a new administration building, a new dormitory and a new waste water system and treated water holding tank. The facility is currently in need of additional improvements, including replacement of the main water line and holding tank, electrical system improvements, and renovation of one of the dormitories. It simply does not make fiscal sense for the County to continue to invest County dollars in improvements on land that we do not own. As was told to me by an astute business person: “A fellow wants to know that every nail he puts in, will be his some day”.

Solano County and the National Forest Service have been in discussions about the exchange of Fouts Springs property and Deafy Glade since 1987. In March of 1998, both parties entered into an agreement to explore the exchange of the lands underlying the Fouts Youth Facility. In anticipation of the exchange, the County purchased 160 acres of private land in the Mendocino Forest called Deafy Glade. The acquisition was pursued because the Forest Service indicated a desire to acquire Deafy Glade for access to the Snow Mountain Wilderness Area and the property owner would not sell the land to the Forest Service.

Solano County relied on a memo dated June 16, 1992 to the Regional Forester. The Jones - Deafy Glade property was listed as the top Mendocino priority for funding. This memo says the Jones-Deafy Glade Property has been a high priority trade or acquisition property for the prior ten years. The primary reason listed for trade or acquisition/priority listing was its location directly adjacent to the Snow Mountain Wilderness Area.

The memo goes on to say these parcels are totally surrounded by National Forest system lands with an important Wilderness access trail traversing the private property. In 1988 the Trail was realigned and a new trail head was reconstructed. Unfortunately those segments of the trail crossing the private parcels were not reconstructed due to the inability of the Forest Service to obtain a right-of-way from the landowner. This situation has led to the existence of an approximate one mile gap in the middle of a popular trail. The trail is steep and vague across the private land; yet due to the terrain features, the trail needs to cross the private parcels.

In the past year, I hiked this trail. I can assure you that this trail is still in this condition. One hikes from a beautifully constructed trail on Forest Service property to a steep narrow trail that at one point traverses a stream with no footbridge. If I had not wanted to see the entire parcel, I would not have continued given the condition of the trail. The land exchange will help solve this problem.

In 2004, the Forest Service accepted a revised land exchange proposal and agreed to conduct a Feasibility Analysis in 2005. On September 12, 2006, the “Proposed Fouts Springs Land Exchange Feasibility Analysis” was issued by the Forest Service. The report concluded that the proposed exchange was “not feasible at this time” and “should not move forward. The only rationale the Forest Service gave was that the land exchange might impede the expansion of future off road vehicle recreational activities on Forest land. This is an inconsistent message

from that being given to the County of Solano and the Fouts Springs JPA Board of Directors for the prior twenty years and from the message we relied upon when we acquired Deafy Glade.

While the Forest Service has been supportive of extensions to the County's special use permit, it is not fiscally prudent for the County to continue to make improvements on land that the County does not own. The Deafy Glade Land Exchange Act benefits the Forest Service, Solano County and the State of California by giving the Forest Service title to pristine land that is of greater or equal value to Fouts Springs in exchange for the Forest Service transferring the Fouts Springs property to Solano County.

Such an exchange will ensure that Solano County can continue to operate a first class youth detention and rehabilitation facility that benefits the residents of the State of California and serves as a model program to deter juvenile delinquency. If this bill were to become law and the exchange occurs, our County will commit resources to grow and enhance programs that will help youth move from unacceptable anti-social behaviors to healthy, productive members of our society. This bill while appearing to be a simple land exchange, actually has the potential to change the lives of the most troubled of youth in 29 California counties.

In conclusion, I thank the Chairman and other members of the Committee as well as Congressman Miller and the other cosponsors of H.R. 6159 for your work on this important legislation. There is no better way to expose troubled youth to the benefits offered by the public lands managed by the Forest Service than by transferring the Fouts Springs property to Solano County so that we can continue to maintain and expand our first class treatment facility.