

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH T. EDMISTON, FAICP, HON. ASLA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL
PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
ON
H.R. 1835, THE RIM OF THE VALLEY CORRIDOR STUDY ACT

June 14, 2007

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate the opportunity you have afforded to support H.R. 1835, the Rim of the Valley Corridor Study Act. I am speaking here today in a dual capacity as both the Executive Director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the Executive Officer of the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is the principal agency of the State of California charged with protection of open space and the natural resources of almost three quarters of a million acres surrounding the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. Since 1983 the Mountains Conservancy has had the responsibility acquiring park and open space land, building trails, and providing for other public access improvements within the Rim of the Valley Corridor. Since 1985 the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority has been the “operational arm” of the Conservancy, and manages some 50,000 acres of open space and parkland. The Authority is a joint effort of the Mountains Conservancy and the Conejo Recreation and Park District and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. These local entities, representing a very conservative voting base, are the bulwark of support for open space preservation in our region. I mention this political orientation only to emphasize that support for more parks, open space and recreation opportunities is not a partisan issue in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties where the Rim of the Valley Corridor is located.

Successive state legislative amendments have expanded the territory of the Rim of the Valley Corridor so that it now encompasses a portion of the Santa Monica Mountains, the Santa Susana Mountains, Simi Hills, Verdugo Mountains, San Rafael Hills, and the area of the San Gabriel Mountains within the upper Los Angeles River watershed. This was done in recognition of the essential ecological unity of the mountains system in southern California and the artificiality of limiting protection to only a portion of it.

The importance of the Rim of the Valley Corridor is twofold: The striking natural scenery and open space that still encircles the greater Los Angeles area, and the proximity of those natural resources to the ten million residents of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties.

In 1978 Congress established the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area acknowledging that it was a special area, almost unique in the park system, in that the National Recreation Area would be administered cooperatively with the state, regional, and local governments. That model has worked splendidly. There is now a seamless web of parkland extending from the beaches of Malibu to the height of Simi Peak, from the heart of downtown Los Angeles fifty miles west to Mugu Lagoon which is one of the last of California's unspoiled coastal wetlands. Although the Santa Monica Mountains NRA is far from complete, the outlines of its success are apparent. The Federal government has provided both material and intellectual resources that have coalesced and stimulated a much wider movement for the protection of the area and making it accessible for public recreation opportunities. The original authorization for the SMMNRA was \$155,000,000, but to date the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy of the State of California has spent over \$430,000,000 and the California State Parks

Department has spent another \$60,000,000 or so. Last year California voters passed a Natural Resources Bond Act allocating another \$56 million to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. In fact, it is far to say that the principal outcome of the SMMNRA's establishment has been to prod ever higher investment by state and local government in the Recreation Area in return for a comparatively modest Federal contribution to the total.

There is every indication that including the Rim of the Valley Corridor within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area will have the same positive effect upon the protection of ecological communities and the well-being of human communities in northern Los Angeles and eastern Ventura counties. However, this bill does not presuppose an outcome, it merely directs a study. And a cooperative one at that. The National Park Service model has worked well for the Santa Monica Mountains proper, and can be readily adapted for most of the Rim of the Valley Corridor.

Let me emphasize why H.R. 1835 is so urgent. While the satellite photos of southern California still show the wreath of green represented by the Rim of the Valley Corridor, land use decisions pending within the next few years can change all of that forever. Actions will be taken in that time frame by major landowners whether or not to engage in park partnerships—and many times sale for park and recreation purposes is a preferred choice for local property owners—or whether to commit the land to residential and commercial development. Already, enactment of this purely study measure is long overdue.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the agencies I represent are prepared to help the study in any way we can. Our data bases, planning studies, and personnel all will be made

available. Even more significantly, I am prepared to recommend to my governing boards that we assist our colleagues in the Park Service with more than lip service, but with a substantial financial contribution to this study.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement; I would be happy to address any questions the committee may have.

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