

**Statement of Carl Olson**  
**Hearing on H. R. 1835 “Rim of the Valley Corridor Study Act”**  
**June 14, 2007**  
**House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Carl Olson (P.O. Box 6102, Woodland Hills, California 91365, 818-223-8080, olson@lafn.org). I am representing myself as an affected property owner and the American Land Rights Association and National Inholders Association headed by Chuck Cushman (www.landrights.org). I was twice publicly elected as a director of the Topanga-Las Virgenes Resource Conservation District, now known as the Santa Monica Mountains Resources Conservation District. These districts are much like soil conservation districts in other states. I am not currently on the board and do not represent it here.

Many objectionable contents are in this bill, and it should be defeated.

**1. It’s a Platinum Pig in a Poke.**

The Rim of the Valley Corridor is truly a “pig in a poke”. The term “Rim of the Valley Corridor” is not even defined in the bill. It depends upon some California state legislation and obscure filings by the unelected state agency called the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. It could change at any time outside the control of Congress.

So that the Subcommittee can see what it would be buying, I have brought maps to distribute. The bill is attempting to expand the current Santa Monica Mountains National Recreational Area vastly. The map shows the current NRA boundaries, and the arrows show the many new urban areas it goes into. Yes, it involves the San Fernando Valley, plus parts of the San Gabriel, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys. You have undoubtedly seen much of the scenery in numerous films and TV shows. It includes Brentwood, Bel Air, the Sunset Strip the famous Hollywood sign, the Hollywood Bowl, downtown Chinatown, the Rose Bowl, vast swaths of the Angeles National Forest with its hundreds of inholders, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, and other well-known landmarks. The expansion area includes parts of numerous cities (Los Angeles, Pasadena, Altadena, Glendale, Burbank, La Canada-Flintridge, La Crescenta, Montrose, Santa Clarita, Simi Valley, Moorpark, Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Thousand Oaks, and Westlake Village).

Yes, the property values here are astronomical—easily \$1 million per acre. My own house in Woodland Hills is in a typical residential neighborhood, but is included in this Rim of the Valley Corridor, as is everything south of Ventura Boulevard. Areas such as Tarzana, Encino, Sherman Oaks, and Studio City.

There are approximately 158,000 residential and commercial properties in this Corridor in Los Angeles County and another 10,000 in Ventura County.

## **2. Astronomical Costs of Acquisition**

As mentioned, the property values are easily \$1 million per acre. That works out to \$1 billion per 1000 acres. Any substantial acquisitions would undoubtedly soak up the National Park Service's purchase budget for decades. I note that the National Park Service announced its acquisition budget a couple weeks ago. This proposal would put a substantial crimp in it to be taken from numerous worthy projects from around the country.

You may be interested that the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area has not even bought much of its own potential area since its inception in the 1970s. It has acquired only 30,000 acres out of its allotted 155,000 acres. Why pile on more? Moreover, the National Recreation Area has yet to develop fully its current holdings with recreation opportunities for all. Why dilute its operating funds even more and divert its attention from their primary job?

Moreover, for every one of the pricey parcels to be acquired, this means it comes off the property tax rolls. There is no provision for payments in lieu of taxes. Local governments and their taxpayers would be saddled with untold hundreds of millions of dollars of added taxes to make up for the shortfall.

## **3. No Compelling Need**

The map shows vast green park areas already everywhere. The City of Los Angeles has nearly 400 parks plus about 800 children's play areas and sports fields. That amounts to about 1 park per square mile. There are similar parks in the other cities, plus county parks and state parks.

There is plenty of state bond funding for parks in California. There is no need for the federal government to be burdened for a state agency's program. Remember, the Rim of the Valley Corridor is the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy program, not a federal one.

## **4. Dangerous SMMNRA Brush Fire Policies**

Brush fires in the area especially threaten open land which abuts right up to residential and commercial properties. Most of the acreage that has burned in recent years has been on government lands such as that of the National Recreation Area and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

These agencies have been unwilling to clear any substantial brush from their holdings so that they won't imperil themselves or their neighbors. The City of Los Angeles has complained numerous times about both the National Recreation Area and the Conservancy to clear their brush to city standards, but to no avail. A perfect example is the brush-laden 150 acres of Franklin Canyon above Beverly Hills (yes, that Beverly Hills). It imperils hundreds of homes. The fire insurance is just astronomical. The National Recreation Area won't clear its own brush on this land. The National Recreation Area won't even let the neighboring homeowners clear the brush. The National Recreation Area claims that it would take an act of Congress to allow it to clear the brush or allow neighbors to do so. Maybe you should take up this issue in separate legislation. (See attached article from *Los Angeles Times*.)

## **5. Nearly No Public Procedural Safeguards.**

The bill has nearly no public procedural safeguards. There are no representatives of the public to be consulted. There are no industry, civic, recreation, educational, neighborhood, conservation, taxpayer, or other such non-government groups to be consulted. There are no named public agencies to be consulted. There is no guarantee of any public record be made and available for easy public access. There is no guarantee that eminent domain will not be imposed on property holders. There is no guarantee that a draft of the final report will be made public for comment and that the comments would be made public and also presented to Congress. The "Study Topics" in the bill are so vague as to be meaningless, including the fact that no relative weight has been assigned to any of them. There is no indication of the meaning of the phrase "concerns of private landowners within the existing boundaries of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area", nor which private landowners will be consulted to provide such concerns.

## **6. Previous Opposing Comments**

When a similar bill HR704 came up in 2003, the American Land Rights Association testified against it. I am attaching a copy of the testimony, since the many cited problems have not gotten any better in the past four years.

In summation, it would be best to shelve this bill as being unnecessary, overly expensive, unworkable, and as an unfair burden to the rest of the country. Thank you.

Statement of Michael Hardiman, Legislative Director

American Land Rights Association

Before the House of Representatives, Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

HR 704, Rim of the Valley Corridor Study Act

Thursday, October 16, 2003

The American Land Rights Association was founded in 1977 by private property inholders in California, and now has membership in all fifty states concerned with both private property rights and public lands multiple use and access. I have been an inholder in Imperial County since 1990.

I have submitted letters from thirty-four Los Angeles area residents, including property owners and recreational users in and near the proposed study region. All of these very strongly oppose HR 704.

Mr. Chairman, there is a remarkable difference between the claims made by supporters of this bill, versus the reality of National Park Service (NPS) actions in this and other nearby park units under the same regional management.

Recreation:

HR 704's sponsor Congressman Adam Schiff has said Los Angeles has "one of the lowest ratios of park and recreation lands per thousand population of any area in the country." However, a Park Service regional takeover under HR 704 will most likely reduce recreational access.

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John Williams from San Bernardino, a former Park Service employee, writes to the committee, "I am currently finishing a historic interpretive sign project on the Old Ridge Route, the original highway that ran from Bakersfield to Los Angeles." Williams predicts that "the Park Service's excuse for shutting down this Route will be that it doesn't meet federal highway standards and is a liability risk. That is what the Park Service did here in 1991 when they took over an old Boy Scout camp - shut down a road open since 1932, thus eliminating public access to that part of the recreation area."

Ed Waldheim from Glendale, President of the California Off Road Vehicle Association, writes that "The National Park Service is anti-access and should not have an expanded role in Southern California, in particular considering its lack of maintenance of existing facilities."

The term "recreation" does not even appear in the bill as a need or purpose for HR 704.

Dealings with property owners:

Pat Tiller of the Park Service testified in March 2003 that the Santa Monica National Recreation Area "has become a model of collaboration" with "many private property owners."

Former Santa Monica Mountains resident Donald Scott may disagree. The reason I say "former" is because Donald Scott is dead. After Scott refused to sell his land to the Park Service, the NPS trumped up marijuana growing charges against him, and led a raid on his home in October of 1992. Scott was shot and killed by a Los Angeles County Sheriff, who had joined the Park Service on the raid.

Eight years later, in 2000, the Park Service and the Sheriff's Department finally reached a multimillion dollar wrongful death settlement with Scott's widow, Frances. No drugs were ever found.

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Unfortunately, this disgraceful episode is not unique. On one of the Channel Islands just off the coast of Los Angeles, the Gherini family was running a successful recreation business of just the type that NPS claims it wants to see, including kayaking, mountain biking, hiking and bow hunting as part of a bed and breakfast operation. The NPS wanted the entire place to themselves, and saw that the Gherini's, who had lived on the island since 1869, were not going to leave voluntarily. So they took things into their own hands.

In January of 1997, the Park Service landed two helicopters with twenty armed agents on the island. As in the Scott case, once again trumped up charges were used to justify the raid, which included misdemeanors such as an expired work permit and operating a stove without a license.

This time, no one was killed. But the Gherini's business was ruined because tourists were petrified to go to the island anymore.

It's only a study:

Joe Edmiston of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy claimed in Senate testimony earlier this year that "this bill does not presuppose an outcome, it merely directs a study."

Well, consider this. When the Park Service began a study of the nearby Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County in 1999, they promised openness, but that is not what happened. Here is a confidential statement written by NPS study director Ray Murray just after the study began:

"We can shield sensitive info in several ways from Freedom of Information Requests and subpoenas. I'll clarify and layout our options. Often we can mark documents and materials as "Pre-Decisional."

Letters dating back as far as 1994 demonstrated that the Park Service was pushing for a park unit for the area, many years before the study began.

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This study was slated for three years, but it is behind schedule and over budget, and will take approximately five years to complete. This leaves property owners with a regulatory cloud on their land, and with many plans on hold for all that time.

In conclusion, HR 704 has significant regional opposition from property owners and public access community leaders. Up to this point, they have had no idea what the NPS and the Conservancy have in had in store. Supporters should go back to the drawing board and this time around, begin an inclusive discussion process.