

Testimony of Daniel Cozad
San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District
Testimony on the Santa Ana River Wash Plan Land Exchange Act
April 5th, 2017

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Daniel Cozad, and I am the General Manager of the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District in Redlands, California. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak today on HR 497, the Santa Ana River Wash Plan Land Exchange Act.

HR 497 represents the culmination of more than a dozen years of planning and cooperation among 12 local agencies in Southern California. On behalf of our Board of Directors and the Wash Plan Task Force, I thank you for your attention to this legislation.

HR 497 authorizes actions to exchange land through the standard administrative process between the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to allow full implementation of the Wash Plan Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). The Wash Plan HCP was developed as a cooperative effort by the Wash Plan Task Force, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the BLM, with the participation of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The Wash Plan HCP allows construction and maintenance of critical municipal infrastructure and expanded aggregate mining while preserving and enhancing valuable habitat resources in the Santa Ana River Wash. It preserves and manages one of the largest significant habitat areas in the San Bernardino Valley and the land exchange we hope you will support is the lynchpin for completion of this plan. This land exchange will concentrate 283 acres of expanded mining in the area adjacent to existing mining and provides for almost 400 acres of new groundwater recharge areas, while focusing habitat preservation management activities in the highest quality areas. When fully implemented by the Act it will preserve a total 1,474 acres of critical habitat.

In addition to its practicality, the Wash Plan HCP benefits the environment and ecosystems of local species. The plan protects the rare habitat of five species, four of which are federally endangered. The land exchange allows BLM to work with local entities to manage valuable Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) lands, as well as, adjacent locally owned habitat lands, directing local resources to land management activities to augment BLM efforts and improving ACEC lands. Furthermore the plan allows the expansion of local recreational opportunities with access to fifteen miles of new trails.

Lastly this legislation and the Wash Plan HCP have been thoroughly vetted and enjoy broad public support throughout the region. The Wash Plan HCP supports increased water supply for over a million people in an area of the country where drought is common. It supports our local communities and businesses while protecting and endows permanent management of 1474 acres of critical habitat and four endangered species.

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill. This land exchange is of critical importance to completing a plan that multiple communities and dozens agencies and businesses are counting on to fulfill their mission. I have included a couple of maps that depict the Wash Plan and the exchange lands in my written testimony and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.