

Testimony of Graciela Cabello
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
July 10th, 2019
RE: H.R. 2199, The Central Coast Heritage Protection Act

Introduction

Good Morning Chair Haaland, Congressman Young, and honorable committee members. My name is Graciela Cabello and I am here to testify in support of the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act—H.R. 2199. Thank you for the opportunity to be here. I am here to share my knowledge on how public lands affect Latino communities, youth, and why protecting the central coast can help remove economic barriers to recreation, and improve access to natural places.

Background

I was born and raised on the central coast in the beach town of Santa Barbara. It is known as an affluent community to some, but those of us who grew up there know that the town is not an exception to economic disparities. I am the proud daughter of immigrants who made a life there through hard work, servicing the town's middle class and wealthy residents. During my youth, summer days were rarely spent at the beach, and instead we spent time floating down the Santa Ynez River, seeing wildlife in the area for the first time, and traversing up a mountain to experience the sunset over the Santa Ynez Valley. You see, my parents grew up in rural Mexico surrounded by hillsides, rivers, and agricultural landscapes, and it was because of this resemblance to home and nostalgia that we often visited the Los Padres National Forest. It was a place our family and extended family could gather that felt accessible and provided something for all ages.

These early experiences had a significant impact in the career choices I would later make. In 2014, I co-founded an organization called *Latino Outdoors* that focused on building a community of Latino leaders across the country in nature based careers. It was through this work that I began to better understand the relationship Latinos have with the environment where cultural heritage, health, recreation, and jobs are concerned.

Latinos and the Environment

I support the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act because as someone who has been influenced by a long lineage of Latin American and indigenous beliefs, protecting the natural world is a moral obligation and deeply rooted in my culture. We have a history of taking care of the land for future generations, and today I am here to honor that history. Research shows that 68% of Latino voters want congress to place more emphasis on protecting sources of clean water, air quality, and wildlife habitat while providing opportunities to visit

and recreate on our national public lands.¹ This bill would designate over 226,000 acres of Wilderness, and protects nearly 159 miles of streams as Wild and Scenic rivers.

Polls also show that 94% of Latinos in western states see public lands, such as national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife areas as an essential part of the economy.² Many of the communities that surround the forest or Carrizo Plain National Monument have a significant Latino population that relies on these natural resources to make a living, as well as on the tourism economy. They are restaurant owners, farmers, mechanics, other business owners, and the farm workers that harvest our food.

Permanent protection of our unique wild lands and scenic rivers will ensure our communities have a sustainable source of water for drinking and agriculture, as well as for hunting, fishing, and other recreation Latinos value. The Los Padres National Forest provides drinking water for communities in four counties.

Low Economic Barriers and Geographical Access

My exposure to these wild places as a child was largely due to geographical access and low economic barriers. This is the case for many of the communities up and down the central coast. Many recreational opportunities exist within an hour's drive of home, for much less than the cost of visiting an amusement park. National Parks may provide some of the same benefits, but they are not as accessible to residents as the wild places in their own backyard.

Social and Health Impacts of Access and Recreation on Youth

In my current role as the director of youth and community engagement for *Los Padres ForestWatch*, I connect some of the area's youth to our most treasured places in the forest. Many of them come from under-resourced families or communities and are struggling with their academic performance, social harmony, and other areas of their well-being. Most of them have never had the opportunity to visit such places and I'm fortunate to be able to witness the transformative power of our local mountains and rivers, and the effect it has on them.

Research consistently shows that nature makes children smarter, healthier, and happier.³ Psychologists believe that experiencing awe from wild places can play an important role in

¹ "key findings - Colorado College." 2 Jan. 2012, <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/dotAsset/ba179e0c-886d-47f2-82ed-ee2865f0a6f4.pdf>. Accessed 7 Jul. 2019.

² "key findings - Colorado College." 2 Jan. 2012, <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/dotAsset/ba179e0c-886d-47f2-82ed-ee2865f0a6f4.pdf>. Accessed 7 Jul. 2019.

³ "Tools & Resources | Children & Nature Network." <https://www.childrenandnature.org/learn/tools-resources/>. Accessed 7 Jul. 2019.

bolstering happiness, health and social harmony.⁴ I have seen this type of cooperation firsthand with youth in the forest. I'll never forget the day I led a group of teenagers on a hike and saw their behavior go from guarded, indifferent, and uncooperative when they arrived at the trailhead, to attentive, upbeat, and sociable after we traversed through a flowing creek surrounded by lush vegetation, and then got caught in a hail storm towards the end of the hike. It was as if all their troubles had been forgotten—even if just for a short time.

Conclusion

The Los Padres is at the center of one of North America's only "biodiversity hotspots," which is defined as the earth's biologically richest and most endangered ecoregions. We are all future ancestors and have a historic opportunity to protect this special place for all people and leave a legacy for future generations. I strongly encourage the committee to support H.R. 2199. Thank you.

What will HR 2199 do?

The Central Coast Heritage Protect Act (HR 2199) is meant to protect wild lands and streams and enhance recreation opportunities on federal public lands in Ventura, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. The following is an outline of the bill's key provisions.

I am advocating for this bill because I believe that conservation must include people, and this effort is the product of years of discussion and negotiation. The process has involved business leaders, elected officials, native american community input, ranchers, mountain bikers, conservationists and other stakeholders interested in the use and well-being of these iconic places. I strongly urge the committee to support H.R. 2199. Thank you.

Section 3: Designation of wilderness

Designates 226,606 acres as "Wilderness." Wilderness is the strongest protection available for federal land under federal conservation law. Once an area is designated as wilderness, development such as commercial logging, road construction, energy extraction, etc are restricted while hiking, horseback riding, camping, and other non-motorized activities are allowed. The proposed wilderness areas included in HR 2199 do not currently have any roads in them, so closing the areas to motorized vehicles is simply a recognition of the current reality, not a denial of public access.

The following is a list of the proposed wilderness areas, along with a summary of the reasons for protecting them.

⁴ "Why scientists say experiencing awe can help you live your best life." 19 Feb. 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/why-scientists-say-experiencing-awe-can-help-you-live-your-ncna961826>. Accessed 7 Jul. 2019.

Caliente Mountain Wilderness (35,619 acres): In the Carrizo Plain National Monument and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Includes Caliente Mountain, the highest peak in San Luis Obispo County at 5,104 feet. Tule elk and endangered San Joaquin kit fox and blunt-nosed leopard lizard live there, along with several rare plants.

Soda Lake Wilderness (13,332 acres): In the Carrizo Plain National Monument and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Soda Lake is the largest remaining natural alkali wetland in California. The lake is part of the only “closed watershed” (with no outlet to the ocean) within the Southern California Coast Range and boasts a unique clay dune system. The stark white lakebed can be seen from miles around during the dry months. The area supports rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species, including the blunt-nosed leopard lizard, San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, and San Joaquin antelope squirrel.

Temblor Range Wilderness (12,585 acres): In the Carrizo Plain National Monument and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The Temblors contain native grasses and a host of rare and unusual plant species, such as the Tucker oak and California jewelflower. The Temblors were formed from the uplifting of the San Andreas Fault, resulting in steep valleys and ridges with the Fault being easily visible.

Chumash Wilderness Additions (23,670 acres): In Ventura County in the Los Padres National Forest. Known for its striking narrow, multicolored sandstone canyons, this area is home to pronghorn, tule elk, San Joaquin kit fox, black bear, California spotted owl, and California condor. According to the Forest Service, the area has “considerable” value for the study of fossils.

Dick Smith Wilderness Additions (54,053 acres): In Ventura and Santa Barbara counties in the Los Padres National Forest. Buckhorn Creek and Mono Creek flow year-round. The area contains large, beautiful sandstone outcrops, towering canyon walls, occasional deep pools of water and striking limestone outcrops. Many rare, threatened, and endangered species live in the area, including California spotted owls, red-legged frogs, southwestern willow flycatchers and one of the largest populations of southwestern pond turtles in the Los Padres.

Garcia Wilderness Additions (7,289 acres): In San Luis Obispo County in the Los Padres National Forest. Beautiful oak woodlands and grasslands, the headwaters of the Salinas and Huasna Rivers and shady streamside groves of hardwoods. The endangered California condor forages in the proposed additions. The area’s numerous erosion-caused caves, cavities, and ledges may once again serve as a nesting ground for the majestic bird. Golden eagles already nest there.

Machesna Mountain Wilderness Additions (8,671 acres): In San Luis Obispo County in the Los Padres National Forest. Striking red outcrops of rock, oak woodlands, seasonal wetlands and groves of pine and fir. California condors forage in the area, and it is adjacent to a condor release site.

Matilija Wilderness Additions (30,184 acres): In Ventura and Santa Barbara counties in the Los Padres National Forest. Seasonal streams, oak woodlands, expansive grasslands and habitat for sixteen sensitive plant and animal species, including California condor. Includes the Dry Lakes Ridge Botanical Area. The “Dry Lakes” are dry basins created by fault movements that shelter four Ice Age-relict plant species that do not occur anywhere else in the region as well as rare scattered ponderosa pines.

San Rafael Wilderness Additions (23,969 acres): In San Luis Obispo County in the Los Padres National Forest. Oak woodlands and grasslands offer critical foraging areas for deer, California condor and several other species. The Painted Rock area has a highly scenic waterfall. The area’s many caves provide condor habitat and some of them are important archaeological sites. Some of these sites are included in the National Register of Historic Places. Native Americans continue to use the area for traditional cultural practices.

Santa Lucia Wilderness Additions (2,921 acres): In San Luis Obispo County in the Los Padres National Forest. The area contains very fine oak woodlands and meadows that are being quickly developed elsewhere in the region. The area was a California condor release site in the past and is foraging habitat for the condor today. The popular Rinconada Trail traverses the area.

Sespe Wilderness Additions (14,313 acres): In Ventura County in the Los Padres National Forest. Critical condor sanctuary. Several important seasonal streams. Known for its striking rock formations, including Bluff Creek and Topatopa Bluff.

Diablo Caliente Wilderness (17,870 acres): In Santa Barbara County in the Los Padres National Forest. Home to 16 rare plant and wildlife species, including the California condor and Palmer’s mariposa lily. Noted for its striking rock formations. Seasonal streams, including Caliente Creek and Diablo Canyon, offer welcome shade and water.

Section 4: Designation of Machesna Mountain Potential Wilderness

A “potential wilderness” is an area that is managed as wilderness, except for one or more activities that are inconsistent with wilderness but that are still allowed. The proposed 2,359-acre Machesna Mountain Potential Wilderness will be managed as wilderness, but the Forest Service has 20 years to use heavy equipment to reconstruct a trail for motorcyclists. After 20 years, the area next to the trail will become conventional wilderness. The newly reconstructed trail will be the boundary of the Machesna Mountain Wilderness.

The reason for this arrangement is that the existing Pine Mountain Trail is in a very poor condition and it needs to be reconstructed. The problem is that proposed wilderness abuts the trail. How can we establish a proposed wilderness boundary when we don't know exactly where the Pine Mountain Trail will be in the future after it is reconstructed? The answer was provided by the proposed potential wilderness arrangement described above. Potential wilderness provides the flexibility to slightly adjust the proposed boundary depending upon where they relocate the Pine Mountain Trail.

Section 5: Administration of wilderness

This section of HR 2199 ensures that:

- Land managers can suppress fire in wilderness using all the tools available to them outside of wilderness areas.
- Authority to use bulldozers and other heavy equipment can be delegated to local land managers.
- Livestock grazing can continue where it was being allowed at the time the wilderness areas were designated
- The State of California retains jurisdiction over fish and wildlife in wilderness areas, as is the case with all federal public lands
- Wilderness areas do not have buffer zones—the protections afforded by the Wilderness Act end at the boundary of a designated wilderness.
- Horses are allowed in wilderness.
- Allows the Forest Service to (if they choose) continue to permit the existence of 2 small water diversions inside the San Rafael Wilderness Additions
- Allows the Forest Service to (if they choose) continue to permit the existence of a small powerline on public land inside the San Rafael Wilderness Additions
- Allows equipment to be installed in wilderness to monitor climate data.

Section 6: Designation of wild and scenic rivers

HR 2199 designates 158.5 miles of streams as wild and scenic rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is the nation's primary river conservation tool. Congress passed the Act in 1968 to specifically balance our existing policy of developing rivers for the water, power, and flood control resources by building large dams, with a new policy of protecting some free-flowing rivers with outstanding natural and cultural values for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The following streams are protected by HR 2199:

Matilija Creek (14.4 miles): Provides outstanding opportunities for hiking, backpacking, swimming, wading, wildlife viewing, fishing, and photography in a distinctive and scenic setting. A large waterfall on the main stem is a popular destination. The creek supports resident rainbow trout descended from migrating southern California steelhead. Once federal, state, and local agencies complete the removal of the obsolete Matilija Dam

downstream, the creek will once again provide more than 14 miles of critical habitat for these endangered fish.

Mono Creek (24.5 miles) and Indian Creek (14.4 miles): Offer a refuge for a long list of endangered species, including the largest population of arroyo toad on the Los Padres National Forest. Mono Creek flows through a distinctive narrow gorge with dramatic sandstone and shale formations and large boulders, waterfalls, and deep pools. Trails follow other segments of Mono Creek and much of Indian Creek, providing access for anglers, hikers, and backpackers.

Sespe Creek (20.9 miles): Popular and scenic backdrop for Highway 33. Offers great swimming holes, rock climbing, horseback riding, hiking and picnicking in the spectacular Sespe Gorge. The creek supports one of the few populations of endangered Southern California steelhead trout in southern California and one of the largest populations of endangered arroyo toad. The lower portion of Sespe Creek is already part of the National Wild and Scenic River System.

Sisquoc River tributaries (36.2 miles): The Sisquoc River was protected by Congress in 1992 as a National Wild & Scenic River in part to protect the river's outstanding steelhead trout fishery. Not protected were key Sisquoc tributaries, including the South Fork Sisquoc River and Manzanita, Davy Brown, Munch Canyon, and Fish Creeks. These streams all provide an important refuge for the river's endangered steelhead trout, particularly during drought.

Section 7: Designation of Fox Mountain Potential Wilderness

The 41,837-acre Fox Mountain Potential Wilderness will be managed as wilderness except that the Forest Service has 20 years to use heavy equipment (if necessary) to construct a new trail and reconstruct two existing trails for hikers, horseback riders and mountain bikers. The reason for this is that trail advocates do not believe that the trails can be constructed or reconstructed without motorized equipment. After 20 years, the area will become conventional wilderness, except that the newly constructed and reconstructed trails will be excluded from the wilderness so that mountain bikes can use them and so that motorized equipment can be used to maintain them.

Section 8: Designation of Scenic Areas

The bill designates two scenic areas comprising 34,882 acres:

- Condor Ridge Scenic Area (18,666 acres)
- Black Mountain Scenic Area (16,216 acres)

The bill prohibits all new development in the areas, while allowing the current developments (such as communications sites) to remain.

Section 9: Condor National Scenic Trail

The proposed Condor Trail would run the entire length of the vast Los Padres National Forest. It would be open to hikers, equestrians and (outside wilderness) mountain bikers. Much of the proposed trail already exists, but gaps remain. The Forest Service would be given 3 years to study ways to complete the trail. The rights of private property owners along the proposed trail are strictly protected. Only voluntary cooperation from landowners is encouraged.

Section 10: Forest Service Study

The Ballinger Canyon area is popular with off-highway vehicles (OHV). The bill gives the Forest Service 6 years to study the feasibility of building a new trail for OHVs between Highway 96 and Ballinger Canyon. This would create a loop-trail opportunity.

Section 11: Nonmotorized recreation opportunities

There is a shortage of trails for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking on the Los Padres National Forest and other public lands. Even where there are abundant public lands, there are often very few trails. The bill gives the Forest Service 6 years to study ways to expand the network of available non-motorized trails outside of designated wilderness areas.

Section 12: Use by members of tribes

The language makes it clear that Native Americans have the right to use the areas designated in HR 2199 for cultural purposes, including working with land managers to temporarily close the areas for ceremonies.

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Santa Barbara Zoo Foundation
Santa Clara River Watershed Conservancy
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Santa Ynez Valley Alliance
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Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society
Santa Ynez Valley Visitors Association
Sierra Club, Los Padres Chapter
Sierra Club, Santa Lucia Chapter
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Grapeline Wine Tours
Besant Hill School Brooks Institute Cate
School
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Halter Ranch Vineyard
Jaffurs Wine Cellars
Kalyra Winery
Longoria Winery
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Riverbench Winery
Rusack Vineyards
Sagebrush Annie's
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Boys & Girls Club of Simi Valley
Boys & Girls Club of Ventura
Brad Monsma, author, The Sespe Wild Bryan
Conant, backcountry mapmaker
Bryn Fox, author, Best Easy Day Hikes
California Department of Parks & Recreation
Camp Whittier, Santa Barbara County Central
Coast Concerned Mountain Bikers Chris
Danch, backcountry explorer
Chris Nybo, backcountry explorer/teacher
Chrystal Klabunde, Audubon recreation
leader Community Hiking Club, Diane Erskine
Hellrigel Craig Carey, author
David White, PhD, Ventura Wild
Dick Smith Family
Earth Skills
Equine Sanctuary Ojai
Gael Belden, author
Gary Evans, author, Bird Guide
Gary Valle, kayaker & photographer
International Mountain Bicycling Association
Jan Hamber, condor biologist
John Peterson, backcountry explorer
Kalon Kelley, hike leader
Natural Encounter Birding Tours Natural
History Explorer Naturalist for You
Nick Todd, backcountry explorer Ojai on
Horseback
Oso Ranch & Ojai Trail Riding Company
Robert Stone, author
Robyn Saxer, naturalist, outdoor educator
santabarbarahikes.com
Santa Barbara Rock Gym
SantaBarbaraTrailGuide.com
Sespe Flyfishers
Spencer Berman, backcountry explorer
Steven Harper, Big Sur wilderness hike leader
The Trailmaster