

Testimony of Rep. Ken Calvert (CA-42)

**H.R. 2956, *To provide for the establishment of the Western Riverside County Wildlife Refuge*
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife**

September 24, 2019

2:00 pm

Thank you Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock for including H.R. 2956 on today's hearing agenda. The Western Riverside County Wildlife Refuge will enhance the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP), enabling the federal government to meet its obligations under the plan and providing for species protections in perpetuity. Full implementation of this plan will address a number of environmental issues related to inevitable future growth throughout my community, allowing us to meet the needs of the next generation.

Riverside County is home to 40 distinct ESA-listed species, and California leads all states with 287 listings. In addition, California has one of the most robust state-level endangered species conservation programs in the nation. Over the years we have had to make hard choices and learn to work within these realities. As a result, a variety of stakeholders in my local community came together to find a comprehensive solution that would provide certainty for continued economic development and allow for the necessary infrastructure to meet future growth while mitigating for any impacts to listed species.

After years of work and painstaking negotiations, the Western Riverside County MSHCP was born (see Map 1). The MSHCP Implementing Agreement was signed in 2004 and required each party to contribute its own share of conservation measures. The heart of the MSHCP is a contiguous wildlife preserve running through the plan area, with

Cleveland and San Bernardino National Forests serving as the preserve's terminal points.

The MSHCP requires 500,000 total acres for conservation, and 350,000 of those are accounted for within the two national forests. The parties to the Implementing Agreement share an obligation to acquire and set aside the remaining 150,000 acres for conservation. Private landowners are responsible for two-thirds of the acquisition while the state and federal governments share a responsibility for the remaining third. The Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (WRCRCA), the joint powers authority responsible for administering the MSHCP, has already acquired 62,500 acres, of the 150,000 total, at a cost of \$500 million. To date, the federal government has not yet met its goal for acquisition and has made little meaningful progress towards that end.

H.R. 2956 seeks to empower the federal government to live up to its end of the bargain by creating a National Wildlife Refuge within the plan area (see Map 2) that will enhance MSHCP purposes. WRCRCA plans to donate already acquired land to the newly established refuge, at no cost to the federal government. Western Riverside's MSHCP stakeholders aim to replicate San Diego's successes with integrating the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge with the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program.

The MSHCP stakeholders believe this refuge will help mitigate for future development, allow for the consolidation of lands already acquired for conservation, and enhance public recreation throughout southern California.

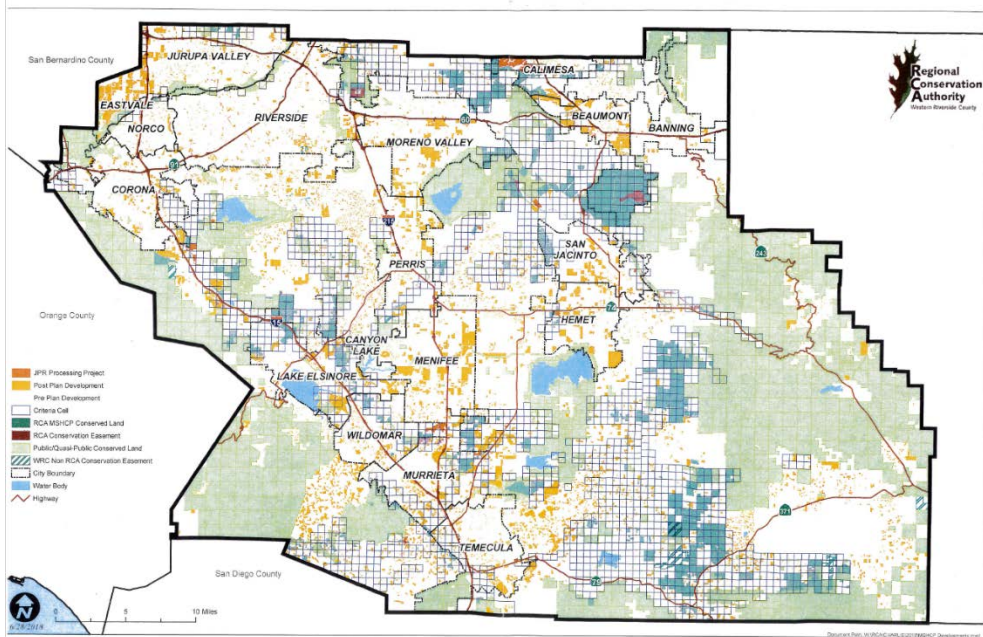
The Western Riverside MSHCP has been heralded as a model for HCPs nationwide with respect to the collaboration between the federal government, state and local governments, and private property owners. I

have been proud to support my community since the very beginning in its proactive efforts to secure our region's economic future.

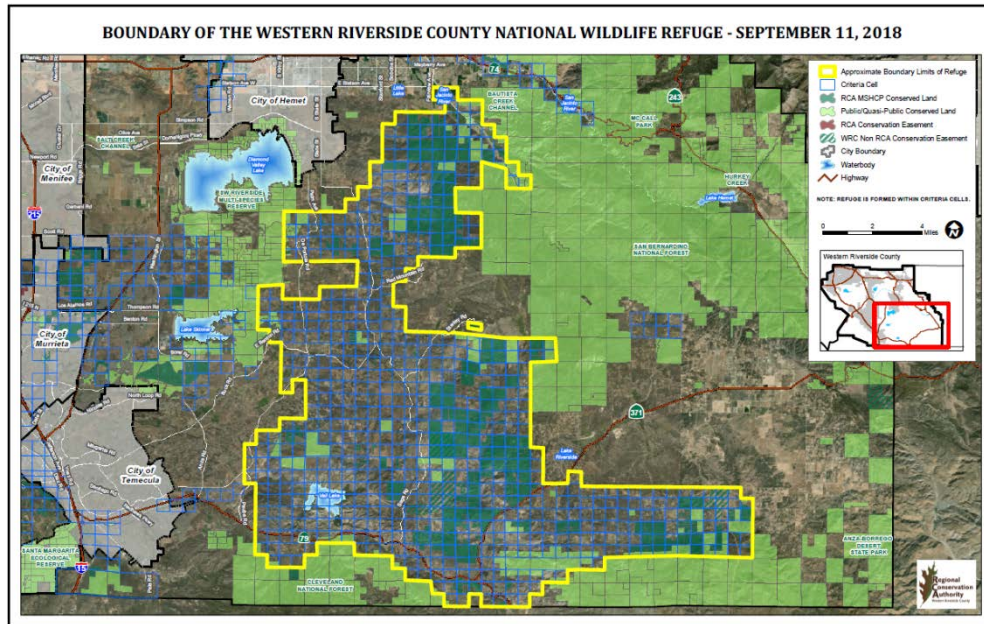
I applaud the work of WRCRCA's Jonathan Ingram and Charlie Landry, our Riverside County Supervisors, and the private landowners who all had the vision to put aside short-term conflict to invest in our region's future. It is my hope that the Western Riverside County Wildlife Refuge will be another step in the right direction.

Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock, I appreciate your and your respective staffs' willingness to work with me on this legislation and to understand the importance of this issue to my community. I look forward to continuing to work with you to advance this legislation through the House and have it ultimately signed into law.

Attachments:



Map 1: Full MSHCP Area (Source: WRCRCA)



Map 2: Proposed boundary for Western Riverside County Wildlife Refuge (Source: WRCRCA)