

Statement for the Record by Congresswoman Mary Bono

House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on
National Park, Forests and Public Lands

Hearing on H.R. 2016
June 7, 2007

Chairman Grijalva, Members of the Subcommittee and Full Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on H.R. 2016, the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) Act. As you know, Mr. Chairman, we started the work that led to this legislation with the National Landscape Conservation System Caucus that was formed to examine ways to provide recognition some of our country's most impressive open spaces.

I came to this point today after recognizing how effectively the model for balancing conservation and recreational pursuits has been achieved on federal lands in my Congressional district. In October of 2000, the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act became law, providing an example of one of the first national monuments to be designated legislatively.

The issues surrounding the culminating legislation were many, with varying concerns over access, recreation, and preserving the unique plant and wildlife species that live in the area. In the end, we were able to effectively engage our local stakeholders to gain the support of private landowners, Native American tribes, and the conservation community.

The success of the Monument and its value to the Coachella Valley in California is significant. This is the reason why I am supporting H.R. 2016, as the ability for the Bureau of Land Management to oversee these lands for conservation while also working to achieve the continued need for access and recreation is commendable.

At this time, within the Monument in my district, work is being done to protect the Peninsular Desert Bighorn Sheep and a total of 73% of the existing critical habitat for this endangered species is within the NLCS.

It is my hope that visitors to the Monument will continue to experience this unique area for years to come. Further, I do think it is important that we move forward with this legislation while knowing that different areas throughout the country have enacted various management plans for the lands within the System components. Protecting the

original intent of these underlying prescriptions that may have been established in legislation or through an Administrative act is both sensible and important.

The NLCS needs the proper oversight of Congress, which is why I think that today's hearing is so valuable. The System ranges from monuments to trails, including areas that I've visited throughout my life across the country. It is clear that the BLM faces challenges that we can now potentially better quantify what value these lands bring to so many parts of our lives.

In moving forward with this legislation, I have heard input from other Members, and it is my hope that proper consideration can be given to ensuring we can protect these unique areas while maintaining the intent of existing law.

Today's hearing will hopefully display the varied ways in which these lands can be utilized for enriching the lives of tourists from other countries or the casual weekend for outdoor enthusiast who is fortunate enough to have these lands in their backyard.

With that, Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Bishop, I am hopeful of the bipartisan support of the Committee on this effort as well as the support of the Administration. I thank you again for the opportunity to testify given the time changes that have taken place with the other priorities of this Committee.