

Congresswoman Judy Chu (D-CA27) in June introduced a San Gabriel National Recreation Area bill, H.R. 4858, in the House of Representatives. The new recreation area would include the San Gabriel Mountains, the San Gabriel River and adjacent river corridors south of the Angeles National Forest, and the Puente Hills wildlife corridor that provides a link with the Cleveland National Forest. The proposed recreation area would include 615,000 acres of national forest, including the main section of the Angeles National Forest east of Highway 14 and the San Bernardino National Forest west of Interstate 15. These areas are visited by an estimated 4 million visitors a year.

The bill advances one of the key goals of the San Gabriel Mountains Forever Campaign: establishment of a huge recreation area to serve the urban populations concentrated in the Los Angeles Basin. It does not address the second main goal of protecting wilderness. The campaign supports the designation of 122,000 acres of wilderness and the creation of 64 miles of Wild & Scenic Rivers. The campaign's wilderness proposal includes additions to the existing San Gabriel, Sheep Mountain, and Cucamonga Wilderness areas plus two new wilderness areas. The two new proposed areas are the Condor Peak (18,000 acres) and the Castaic Mountains (70,000). (Visit <http://www.sangabrielmountains.org/place> for descriptions of the proposed wilderness areas and Wild & Scenic Rivers.

The San Gabriel Mountains Forever Campaign is working with its legislative champions for introduction of wilderness legislation, perhaps later this year, as a companion to the national recreation area bill. Many of the campaign's proposed wilderness areas feature chaparral ecosystems that have come to be much more appreciated over the last 20 years through the work of Rick Halsey and others who have highlighted the ecological values of chaparral areas. - See more at: http://angeles2.sierraclub.org/news/blog/2014/07/more_wilderness_designations_la_yes_please#comment-183743

The new recreation area would have two units with the forests being managed by the Forest Service and the other lands south of the forests managed by the National Park Service. There would be one management plan with the National Park Service being asked to share resources and expertise with the Forest Service to improve recreational and environmental conditions in the forest, most especially in the concentrated use areas along the San Gabriel River. The bill would require an extensive visitor services plan. The U.S. Forest Service and NPS would be partners in this effort.

“Representative Chu's legislation is an important step forward in a decades-long effort to preserve open space and increase access to nature across the Southland,” said Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Burbank) after introduction of the bill. Schiff and Congressman Tony Cardenas (D-Sylmar) are among the bill's co-sponsors. The new legislation includes public land in both of their districts.

Proposal spreads through different districts

The politics of creating a national recreation area are complex since, in addition to Schiff and Cardenas's districts, the proposed area covers significant land in five other congressional districts, two of which are Republican. Southern California features hundreds of national recreation area stakeholders with political clout-- including scores of foothill cities, Los Angeles County, water and fire agencies, utilities, chambers of commerce, regional associations of government, recreational user groups and many others who are eager to voice an opinion.

The campaign has played an important role in the national recreation area legislative effort, explaining the recreation area concept to stakeholders and soliciting their support. The San Gabriel Mountains Forever coalition gains its strength from a diverse group of partners including the Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, the City Project, PEW Environmental Trusts, Amigos De Los Rios, Council of Mexican Federations (COFEM) and other community, social justice and environmental organizations.

Sierra Club's Los Angeles-based national field staffers Nidia Erceg and Fabi Lao work full time on the campaign which also enjoys the support of volunteers from local Sierra Club groups such as the Angeles Chapter's Forest Committee. Visit YouTube to see an excellent video on [Backyard Wilderness in Los Angeles](#).

The politics of wilderness legislation are complex, similar to those of the recreation area. Although passage of recreation area and wilderness legislation will be challenging in the short run, the effort has now been officially launched--a vital first step. [Check out more information on the legislation](#).

A new national monument?

One option being advanced by the Sierra Club is to ask the Administration to declare the San Gabriel Mountains a national monument. This might achieve many objectives of a national recreation area with the advantage of not having to pass through Congress. Such a national monument would only cover the federal public land in the national forests. Legislation covering the river corridors and Puente-Chino Hills, wilderness and Wild & Scenic rivers would still be needed.

Stay tuned for more updates on L.A.'s potential wilderness designations.

John Monsen is a wilderness consultant to the San Gabriel Mountains Forever Campaign and volunteer supporter as Co-Chair of the Angeles Chapter's Forest Committee. He is currently meeting with stakeholders of the Condor Peak PWA to build support for the area. John was formerly on the Sierra Club National Field staff in Los Angeles where he worked on the San Gabriel Mountains Forever Campaign.

- See more at:

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