

**Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests & Mining
S. 483, Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act
November 20, 2013**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on S. 483, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act. The Department supports S. 483 as it applies to lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding lands within the National Forest System. We look forward to working with the sponsors and the Committee on minor modifications to the legislation.

Background

The proposed 350,000-acre Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area (NCA) is one of the most biologically diverse regions in northern California. The area is an outdoor wonderland, rich in natural and cultural features. Visitors can enjoy a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, backpacking, whitewater rafting, camping, rock climbing, and kayaking.

Located less than one hundred miles from the Sacramento and San Francisco metropolitan regions, the proposed NCA stretches from Lake Berryessa in the south to the majestic Snow Mountain Wilderness in the north and encompasses the remote Cache Creek Wilderness. The ease of access, minimal travel time, and proximity to major population centers of the Central Valley and the Bay Area make this rugged area a “backyard destination” for approximately ten million people.

The biological richness of the region is unlike any found in California. The landscape rises from near sea level in the south to over 7,000 feet in the north, supporting such diverse ecosystems as the blue oak woodlands near Putah Creek in the south and the sub-alpine habitat within the Snow Mountain Wilderness. The proposed NCA is also home to a wide variety of native and rare plants such as Sargent's cypress and serpentine willow and provides habitat for dozens of iconic California birds and animals including bald and golden eagles, black bears, mountain lions and herds of wild tule elk.

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S. 483 would designate nearly 350,000 acres of federal land in northern California as the Berryessa Snow Mountain NCA, primarily in Lake, Napa, and Yolo Counties. The proposed NCA would also include federal land in Mendocino and Solano Counties. Approximately 180,000 acres are managed by the Forest Service, 141,000 acres by the BLM, and 28,000 acres by Reclamation.

Each of the NCAs designated by Congress and managed by the BLM are unique. However, these designations typically have certain critical elements in common, including withdrawal from the public land, mining, and mineral leasing laws; limiting off-highway vehicles to roads and trails designated for their use; and language that charges the Secretary of the Interior with allowing only those uses that further the conservation purposes for which the unit is established. Furthermore, these Congressional designations should not diminish the protections that currently apply to the lands. This bill honors these principles, and we support the NCA's designation as it applies to lands managed by the Department of the Interior.

A central part of the area covered by the proposed Berryessa Snow Mountain NCA will be Lake Berryessa, impounded by Reclamation's Monticello Dam, which is the principal feature of the federal Solano Project. The Solano Project is operated for multiple purposes, with operations and maintenance responsibility on the project provided pursuant to an Operation, Maintenance and Replacement contract between Reclamation and the Solano County Water Agency. Because of the multi-purpose nature of the Solano Project, and the multiple beneficiaries it serves, Reclamation supports the reference in Section 5(a)(1) to the Reclamation Act of 1902, and its relevance to the management responsibilities on Reclamation at Lake Berryessa. Reclamation also supports language in Section 7 of HR 1025 stating that nothing in the act modifies, changes, or supersedes any contract or agreement approved or administered by the Bureau of Reclamation or Solano County Water Agency or their contractor and Solano Irrigation District. As a keystone for outdoor recreation within the NCA, Reclamation would like to ensure that Lake Berryessa continues to be managed for a diverse range of recreation opportunities as provided for in Reclamation's 2006 Record of Decision for the Lake Berryessa Visitor Services Plan.

The BLM would like the opportunity to consider possible minor boundary modifications for manageability. Additionally, we recommend language to provide for BLM land tenure adjustments, if they further the protective purposes for which the NCA is designated. Finally, we would like the opportunity to work with the Sponsor and the Committee on other more minor and technical amendments.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S. 483 the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act.