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April 30, 2014

The Honorable Judy Chu
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
Via e-mail SGRec@mail.house.gov

Re: Support San Gabriels National Recreation Area Legislation

Dear Congresswoman Chu:

The City Project and diverse allies support your draft legislation to create a national recreation area in the San Gabriel Mountains and Watershed, and related Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River designations. The draft legislation promotes healthy green land use, equitable development, and planning by and for the community. Thank you for your work with the community, diverse allies, and the San Gabriel Mountains Forever campaign.

The proposed national recreation area would serve 17 million people within an hour's drive of the mountains. The San Gabriels provide over 70% of L.A. County's open space and host over 3 million visitors a year. As you note in your FAQs about the national recreation area, these mountains provide outdoor spaces to promote public health and environmental justice in the most park-poor region in the United States. Lack of recreational opportunities has severe impacts on urban populations struggling with obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and chronic illness. Opportunities to enjoy outdoor activity are vital for public health and the well being of people of all ages and walks of life. Parks in nearby urban areas lack the resources to adequately provide opportunities for residents and to walk, jog, bike, picnic, or enjoy other outdoor recreation. The national recreation area will promote economic value and resources. Numerous studies have shown that recreational spaces increase property value and increase revenues for local businesses.

According to the National Park Service, economically disadvantaged populations in the study area lack access and the ability to partake of existing opportunities due to lack of close-to-home open space, lack of effective transportation, lack of culturally advantageous facilities or opportunities, and lack of knowledge about recreation and natural resources. Environmental justice must be considered in every major federal action by assessing environmental factors that negatively or disproportionately affect minority populations. Work and stewardship programs for at risk youth, and Transit to Trails programs to take urban residents to mountain, beach, and river trips, help address these concerns.¹

The draft legislation will ensure additional resources, more stakeholder control, and balanced resource management, and promote the diverse values at stake. This includes human health, economic vitality, conservation, culture and history, and Native American values. The legislation provides for a diverse public advisory council, a comprehensive management plan and visitor access plan, and a partnership among federal, state, tribal, and local authorities and the private sector. The public advisory council would include environmental justice representation to help ensure the area serves the needs of all people, including people of color and low-income people.

As part of, or in addition to the management plan or visitor plan and access study, a health impact assessment can further your interest to ensure that the national recreation area would improve health for all people in the region.

With all due respect, we believe that the legislation can be strengthened in the following ways.

Equal Justice, Democracy, and Livability for All

Board: Chris Burrows Juan Devis Robert Garcia Penelope Glass Tom Hayden
Lore Hilburg Robbie LaBelle Lyndon Parker Michael Rodriguez

The City Project is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization and a Project of Community Partners

2. Include legislative findings based on the values at stake

We respectfully recommend that the legislation include legislative findings. Paragraphs 2 and 3 are proposed findings based on your own FAQs and the National Park Service study.

3. Include Health, Civil Rights, Renter, and Urban Park Representatives on the Advisory Council

We recommend including members to represent the following interests on the public advisory council to advise the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, and the partnership, on the management plan and visitor plan and access study:

Public health, to address the concerns you have identified.

Civil rights, including, for example, the Affordable Care Act provisions on wellness, prevention, and health discrimination; Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its regulations on equal access to public resources, and Executive Order 12898 on environmental justice and health.

Renters, to address gentrification and displacement of residents and businesses as areas served by the national recreation area become more desirable.

Urban parks, including active recreation and sports fields, which a national recreation area should provide. The Golden Gate National Recreation Area does.

4. Tribal Authorities in the Partnership

We recommend including tribal authorities in the partnership, and not only on the advisory committee.

The draft Policy Report *Olmsted for the 21st Century* analyzes the value of the national recreation area and your draft legislation. The draft is available at goo.gl/I0ik7Q. Diverse allies submitted public comments in support of the national recreation area to you in September 2013. See www.cityprojectca.org/sangabriel.html.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

The City Project
Robert García, Founding Director and Counsel
Daphne Hsu, Staff Attorney
Dayana Molina, Organizer

¹ See San Gabriel National Recreation Area Proposal Frequently Asked Questions, <http://chu.house.gov/content/san-gabriel-national-recreation-area-proposal-faq>; San Gabriel National Recreation Proposal, <http://chu.house.gov/san-gabriel-national-recreation-area-proposal>; National Park Service, *San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study & Environmental Assessment* (Newsletter #5, Nov. 2011) (*San Gabriel Study*), p. 219, 231.