

May 6, 2011

Citizens Redistricting Commission  
1130 K Street, Suite 101  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Recommendations for the Placement of San Gabriel Mountain Public Land in Los Angeles County Congressional Districts**

Dear Citizens Redistricting Commission:

We recommend that the federal public land in the San Gabriel Mountains be placed in the same Congressional districts as the foothill and San Gabriel River watershed communities to the south of the range. These communities have the highest stake in the management of the land and their residents are its most frequent visitors. The iconic San Gabriels, which are located in the Angeles and western San Bernardino National Forests north of the 210 Freeway, comprise over 70% of the public open space in Los Angeles County and arguably constitute its most important natural resource. The Angeles National Forest is one of the few truly urban national forests in the nation, providing nearby urban dwellers with clean air, drinking water and a major source of recreation. We ask that the Commission recognize the unique status of the Angeles National Forest as the backyard mountain range of Los Angeles County foothill and watershed communities during redistricting and honor the unique relationship between these communities and their adjacent public land.

The San Gabriel Mountains are visited by over three million people a year, rivaling the visitation numbers of Yosemite National Park. 90% of those visitors come from communities south of the range. Visitation is especially high from the 22 foothill and watershed communities located along the southern boundary of the Angeles National Forest from Sylmar on the west 50 miles east to Claremont. All of the communities are within 15 miles of one of the three major highway entrances to the San Gabriel Mountains that lead north from the 210 Freeway. These foothill and watershed communities share a common geographic orientation to the mountains and historic, social and economic interests with each other. Together, we believe they form a community of interest. Foothill and watershed communities share many common concerns about the management their federal public lands, including fire and fuels management; drinking water quality and watershed protection; enhancement of recreational quality; and issues of public policy that will be decided by Congress.

A decade ago the historic relationship between the public lands in the Angeles National Forest and adjacent communities such as those in the Pasadena and Azusa areas was severed by gerrymandering. This created negative consequences and inequities such as those faced by residents of the predominately Latino communities in the San Gabriel River watershed who frequent San Gabriel River recreation areas in the Angeles National Forest to the north. These visitors face the worst recreational conditions in the San Gabriels. The public lands along the San Gabriel River lack sufficient toilets, adequate garbage collection and safe river access. This inequity is perpetuated by the diminished voice San Gabriel watershed residents have in forest

management and resource allocation. Latino forest visitors, including the residents of the San Gabriel River gateway city of Azusa, are located in a different Congressional district than the adjacent federal public lands in which they are major stakeholders. We believe that the California Citizens Redistricting Commission has an important opportunity to rectify this inequity, reunite people with their public lands and restore their voices. The Commission should have significant latitude to accomplish this since the San Gabriel Mountains themselves contain few residents.

We recommend the following general principle to the Commission in placing the San Gabriel Mountains in Congressional districts: extend districts that include the 22 foothill and watershed communities we have identified north across the San Gabriel Range to the northern boundary of the Angeles National Forest as it reaches the Mojave Desert. This will give the community of interest a stronger voice in how its public lands are managed, which is a major public benefit. As a practical matter, given the long southern flank of the Angeles National Forest and the large population of the foothill and watershed cities, it will not be possible to place all of the cities or all 650,000 acres of Angeles National Forest in just one or two Congressional districts. Three or four Congressional districts is probably a more reasonable target. Ideally, the foothill and San Gabriel River watershed communities would be grouped together in a small number of Congressional districts and those districts would extend north across the range.

Please find attached a recommendations document that includes:

\*\*Additional background on the importance of the San Gabriel Mountains to Los Angeles County foothill and San Gabriel River watershed residents;

\*\*An analysis of the community of interest formed by foothill and watershed communities south of the range;

\*\*Recommendations on how two models Congressional districts, one centered in the Pasadena area and one in the Azusa area, could be drawn to include many foothill and watershed communities in the same Congressional districts as major sections of the Angeles National Forest. We have also included an Angeles National Forest Recreation Map that shows how the districts could logically extend north across the San Gabriel range.

We very much appreciate this opportunity to submit recommendations to the Citizens Redistricting Commission. If we can answer any questions you might have, please give us a call.

Sincerely,

[Signature on hard copy submission]

John Monsen



For John Monsen, Juana Torres and Daniel Rossman

Juana Torres

Reseda, CA 91335\

Daniel Rossman

Los Angeles, CA 90041

Attachments:

\*\*Recommendations

\*\*Angeles National Forest Map with Model District Lines (only included in hard copy submission)

## **Recommendations on the Placement of Public Lands in the Angeles National Forest into Los Angeles County Congressional Districts**

### **I. The Importance of the San Gabriel Mountains and the Districts in Which They Are Located**

The San Gabriel Mountains provide the scenic backdrop to the eastern San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys. This iconic range is a major source of LA County recreation and protected watershed. Recreational opportunities provided urban residents by the Angeles National Forest are extensive, including hiking, fishing, hunting, picnicking, scenic drives, mountain biking, skiing, snowboarding, rappelling, rock climbing, peace and solitude, natural beauty, steep mountain and remote canyon vistas, wildlife viewing, and snow and water play. The San Gabriel Mountains comprise over 70% of the public open space in Los Angeles County and they are visited by over three million people a year. The Angeles National Forest provides 35% of LA County's water supply. 90% of those visitors come from communities south of the Angeles and western San Bernardino National Forests where the San Gabriel range is located. Supporting evidence for this conclusion on visitation is available in a Forest Service survey that links visitors to the zip code in which they reside (<http://apps.fs.usda.gov/nrm/nvum/results/Forest.aspx>).

Despite their importance, federal public lands such as the San Gabriel Mountains have often been at best an afterthought in drawing Congressional boundaries or at worst ignored landscapes used to facilitate gerrymandering. This works against the public interest since members of Congress who have federal public lands in their districts hold significant influence over how these lands are managed. Constituents in a Congressional district that includes public land have an enhanced ability to have their voices heard in the management of the land through their Representative. Although public lands belong to everyone, deference is given to members of Congress on public land issues within their districts. Members of Congress have a say in how public lands are managed through appropriations, hearings and legislation. They can be an

important informal voice on behalf of their constituents through suggestions they or their staff make directly to local agency management. Foothill and watershed communities adjacent to the San Gabriel Mountains are major stakeholders in the management of the San Gabriel Mountains. The voice of these stakeholders will best be heard when they are placed in the same Congressional districts as their public lands.

## **II. Linking a Community of Interest to Congressional Districts**

### **A. Foothill and Watershed Cities Form a Community of Interest**

We believe that the 22 San Gabriel Mountain foothill and San Gabriel River watershed cities from Sylmar on the west 50 miles east to Claremont form a community of interest based on their geographic, economic and historical relationship to the San Gabriel Mountains and on traits they have in common with each other. Their proximity to the San Gabriels is a major source of their community identities. They share a common geographical orientation to the mountains and their residents are frequent visitors. All of the cities are on the southern flanks of the range within 15 miles of one of the three major highway entrances to the Angeles National Forest that lead north from the 210 Freeway. These cities are built on sediments deposited over thousands of years from rivers and streams running south from the San Gabriels. Many of the foothill and watershed communities have trail systems that lead directly from the cities into the mountains. The range is a source of tourist dollars for local businesses. It is a major source of drinking water for many communities and flooding is a concern to all. The cities also share common concerns about the management of the range by the federal government including fire and fuels; improvement of recreational quality; and protection of watershed and open space.

Here is a list of foothill and watershed cities that we believe form a community of interest and which constitute potential core cities in Congressional districts extending north to include the San Gabriel Mountains:

#### East San Fernando Valley

Sylmar, San Fernando, Pacoima, Sunland, Tujunga.

#### Western San Gabriel Valley

La Canada, Glendale, Altadena, Pasadena, Sierra Madre, Arcadia, Monrovia.

#### Central San Gabriel Valley

El Monte, South El Monte, Irwindale, Baldwin Park, Duarte, Glendora, Azusa, Glendora, La Verne, Claremont.

What follows are two examples of how core elements of this community of interest could be included in Congressional districts that encompass major sections of the San Gabriel range.

## **B. Uniting the Foothill and San Gabriel Watershed Communities with the San Gabriel River Watershed in the Angeles National Forest**

If you look north from Azusa, the gateway city to the Angeles National Forest along Highway 39, you will enjoy a view of the dramatic main canyon of the San Gabriel River whose upstream tributaries are frequented by Azusa residents for recreation. You will also be looking north into a different Congressional district. We are proposing a new Congressional district that unites the San Gabriel River watershed in the Angeles National Forest with people who live in the watershed to the south.

Residents of the mostly park-poor, underserved, Spanish speaking communities in the San Gabriel River watershed frequent the nearby Angeles Nation Forest. This recreational opportunity is highly affordable – only \$5 a day for parking with no entry fee. Thousands of predominately Latino families visit the upstream tributaries of the San Gabriel River on a typical summer weekend. The recreational conditions these visitors encounter are the worst in the Angeles National Forest. Simple things like restrooms, rangers who speak Spanish, signage, garbage cans, and safe trail access to the water are often absent. This is due to the fact that the visitors come from downstream communities that have little voice in how the San Gabriel River watershed in the Angeles National Forest is managed. They have been gerrymandered out of their ability to influence the management of their public lands.

Our recommendation is that the cities located along the San Gabriel River just south of the Angeles National Forest form the core of a Congressional district that extends north to include all of the San Gabriel watershed in the Angeles National Forest. The core cities in the district would include Azusa, Irwindale, Baldwin Park, El Monte and South El Monte. The core cities end at the Whittier Narrows on the south where the San Gabriel River and the Rio Hondo come together at the Whittier Narrows dam. All of these cities and San Gabriel River watershed in the Angeles National Forest are also within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy that approaches open space protection in the area as a unified whole. These same lands are being evaluated as part of a the San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resources Study being conducted by the National Park Service that recognizes the relationship of the communities in the San Gabriel River watershed to their public lands to the north.

Other factors uniting the communities the San Gabriel River watershed: These communities make up the heart of the San Gabriel Valley and share language (Spanish) and socio-economic conditions. These communities lack adequate open space and many of their youth suffer from obesity and diabetes. They share a geographical orientation to the San Gabriel Mountains and are located along the San Gabriel River. The communities share issues of water quality and flooding with their neighboring communities. They are eager to see the open space north of their communities preserved, access such a bikeways and public transit expanded, and forest recreational conditions improved.

We recognize that Azusa, Irwindale, Baldwin Park, El Monte and South El Monte do not have sufficient population to form an entire Congressional district. However, we recommend that they form the core of a Congressional district that could be filled out with adjacent foothill and

watershed communities that are part of the boarder community of interest and other watershed communities to the south.

Model boundaries in the Angeles National Forest north of watershed communities: Angeles Crest Highway on the north; the Angeles National Forest/San Bernardino National Forest boundary on the east; Angeles Crest Highway on the northwest; Forest Service Roads 2N23, 2N24, 1N36 on the west. See attached map (hard copy submission only)

### **C. Uniting Pasadena Area Cities and A Major Section of the Angeles National Forest Accessed from Angeles Crest Highway.**

Every day Pasadena residents can look north – sometimes just a few blocks north, depending on where they live – and appreciate the city’s striking scenic backdrop: the San Gabriel Mountains. They will also be looking north into a different Congressional district than the one they live in. This is particularly disconcerting given the city’s intimate relationship with the range. Pasadena is built on sediments deposited over thousands of years from streams running south from the San Gabriels. Over a hundred year ago Pasadena began as a resort destination for its backyard range, serving as a gateway to the San Gabriels. It still is. Pasadena has an extensive trail system that leads directly from the city into the mountains. The range is a source of tourist dollars for local businesses. It is a major source of Pasadena’s drinking water. Fires and floods that originate in the mountains are an annual danger.

Cities directly adjacent to Pasadena, including Glendale, Altadena and La Canada, share this intimate relationship with the San Gabriel Mountains. We believe that the cities form a core community of interest, based most especially on their relationship with the San Gabriels. All four cities are located near a major gateway to the forest, the Angeles Crest Highway. They benefit economically from the range. They share a common geographical orientation to the mountains and their residents are frequent visitors. These four cities also share common concerns about the management of the range, including fire and fuels; watershed protection; sediment storage and debris basins; improvement of recreational quality; protection of forest open space and wildlife; and issues of policy, such as federal land designations.

We recognize that these Pasadena area cities do not have sufficient population to constitute an entire Congressional district. However, we do recommend that they form the core of a Congressional district. To fill out the district, foothill and watershed communities immediately east for west could be added as could Burbank and other adjacent areas to the south. Note that our concern here is not the precise composition cities in the Congressional district but the inclusion of a major section of the Angeles National Forest in the district that includes Pasadena, Altadena, La Canada and Glendale. The sections of Angeles National Forest we propose for inclusion in this district are generally ones reachable along the Angeles Crest Highway, which heads north and then northeast across the forest. The proposed district would include Mt. Wilson, Front Range peaks such as Mt. Lowe, the Chilao Campgrounds, the Snowcrest Ski Area, Buckhorn Campground and the Pleasant View Ridge Wilderness Area. Note that although areas like Pleasant View Ridge are also adjacent to the Mojave Desert, most visitors access them using Angeles Crest Highway.

Model boundaries in the Angeles National Forest north of the Pasadena Area: the Angeles National Forest Boundary on the north; Angeles Crest Highway on the east; Forest Service Roads 2N23, 2N24, 1N36 on the east; Angeles Forest Highway and Big Tujunga Canyon Road on the west. See attached map (hard copy submission only).

**D. Thoughts on Additional Districts Linking the San Gabriels with Communities to the South.**

Although other potential Congressional districts to the east and west of our examples are not modeled in this proposal, the same logic should apply of uniting communities south of the forest that generate the most visitation and which have the strongest ties with the public land in the same Congressional districts as the public land in the San Gabriel Mountains.