

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**August 19, 2014**

**The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack**  
**Secretary**  
**U.S. Department of Agriculture**  
**1400 Independence Ave., S.W.**  
**Washington, DC 20250**

**Dear Secretary Vilsack,**

**The San Gabriel Valley is a truly special place. This region boasts one of the fastest-growing mountain ranges in the country, provides habitat for more than 160 rare, threatened, and endangered species, and houses significant architecture from important moments in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, the region is also one of the most heavily used public land areas in the United States. There is an incredible demand for more open space, enhancement of visitor services, and increased recreational opportunities.**

**As you know, many in the San Gabriel Valley and beyond have been calling on the Administration to consider a national monument designation for the San Gabriel Mountains. Your willingness to work with local communities and stakeholders in this efforts is an encouraging sign to all those who have fought diligently over a decade to achieve meaningful enhancements and permanent protections for these remarkable and rugged lands. Your commitment to this area is vital – now more than ever – toward revitalizing the Angeles National Forest for future generations.**

**Many constituents and community stakeholders have weighed in on this matter, and outlined their thoughts and concerns. It is imperative that local needs and concerns are addressed in any forthcoming designation. To that end, we urge you to focus on an outcomes-based approach that addresses the following goals:**

- Protection of the area's natural, historic, and cultural resources;**
- Rehabilitation and re-opening of all recreation areas throughout the forests for sustainable recreation;**
- Establishment of new recreation areas, parking areas, restrooms, educational kiosks, and trails for communities located in park poor, income poor areas underserved by recreational opportunities and access to the forests;**

- Implementation of a comprehensive multilingual signage system (including safety, way finding, and interpretive signage) throughout the proposed monument and urban access points;
- Creation of a front line visitor reception program to welcome and orient visitors at all key entry points and recreation areas;
- Development of a comprehensive education program (including health, community values at stake, fire prevention, and litter elements) to serve the needs of foothill communities and adjacent residents and visitors;
- Enhancement of engagement and support of volunteer programs, local nonprofit organizations, and community groups which complete stewardship projects and educational programs in the forests;
- Increased economic opportunities for urban and disadvantaged youth, unemployed people, and diverse businesses to work within the forests undertaking restoration and trail maintenance, recreation outreach and planning, and public outreach and education;
- Fairly distributed health and environmental justice benefits considering environmental and health factors that negatively or disproportionately affect minority and low income populations under Executive Order 12898 and other applicable laws, regulations, and policies;
- Partnerships with tribal governments which enhance tribal capacity to address environmental, health, and welfare concerns; and
- A public advisory council representing a broad range of interests including representatives of local health, conservation, and environmental justice organizations.

In particular, we urge you to specifically engage the urban river corridor communities in these efforts to ensure that their residents can also access, enjoy, and learn about their natural environment in a more robust and responsible way. This project is the poster child for President Obama's Great Outdoors America initiative of strengthening the interface between urban communities and nature.

We also want to emphasize that any monument designation must include a plan to engage the urban communities along the river corridor, especially youth, minorities, and veterans. Tragically, many of the neighborhoods in the shadows of the San Gabriel Mountains are some of the most park-poor in the country. These communities stand to benefit the most from conservation work and volunteer opportunities, environmental education, and greater access to nature. To that end, we urge you to look in earnest at incorporating and expanding programs such as the Department of Transportation Transit to Trails program, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation Corp, the Community Gardens program, and the More Kids in the Woods program, and make these the cornerstones of a San Gabriel national monument.

Additionally, we want to ensure that the U.S. Forest Service is prepared to address some long-lasting deficiencies prevalent in the Angeles National Forest, if the area is declared a national monument. Specifically, management and assistance provided to visitors is a key area that must be enhanced. Areas of the forest have had to be closed due to the inability to manage both the safety of visitors and protection of natural resources. Graffiti, trash, overcrowding, and overwhelming vehicle traffic are, unfortunately, constant problems.

We recognize that U.S. Forest Service personnel in the Angeles National Forest are truly some of the most dedicated and diligent public lands caretakers. They navigate the very difficult challenge of managing one of the most visited forests in America with limited resources. A national monument that engages the public by enhancing recreational and educational opportunities and forming public partnerships to coordinate funding and programs can correct this.

You have a unique opportunity to turn vision into reality through a national monument designation. As good stewards of our environment, we must act quickly to protect all the invaluable resources in the San Gabriel Mountains, and give the public the opportunity to experience these mountains in the most sustainable, empowering, and fulfilling way. We urge you to explore this possibility carefully and we stand ready to assist you.

Sincerely,



JUDY CHU  
Member of Congress



ADAM SCHIFF  
Member of Congress



TONY CARDENAS  
Member of Congress



GRACE F. NAPOLITANO  
Member of Congress



LINDA SANCHEZ  
Member of Congress