

Congressman Issa Witness Statement on H.R. 41, the “Beauty Mountain and Agua Tibia Wilderness Act of 2011” for Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Tuesday October 25, 2011

I would like to start out by thanking Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for bringing up my bill H.R. 41, the “Beauty Mountain and Agua Tibia Wilderness Act of 2011,” and other Wilderness bills, for consideration. I would also like to thank Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member Markey, of the full committee, for their continued recognition of the importance of Wilderness.

At this time it would also be appropriate to express my gratitude and appreciation for the hard work and dedication shown by those who have been instrumental in helping to formulate the plans, draw the maps and perfect the overall bill. Without their perseverance this would not have been possible. They include the individuals at the Bureau of Land Management, the Conservation Fund, people at the Forest Service, employees at the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, staff members on the Natural Resources Committee, my own personal staff and the public.

H.R. 41 will ensure that some of California’s most magnificent scenery and rich wildlife habitats are conserved for the future. It will also improve the recreational opportunities and aid the local economy through increased tourism.

My bill will designate more than 21,000 acres of land, in Southern California, as new Wilderness. The addition of 7,796 acres to the Agua Tibia Wilderness, located in the Cleveland National Forest, will ensure that my constituents, and all Americans, will have even more access to the beautiful deep canyons and coastal sage scrub located there and will protect the Cutca Trail for hikers and equestrians.

The addition of 13,635 acres of Wilderness to Beauty Mountain will expand on the already existing 15,627 acres of rustic and rugged terrain, majestic oak lands and fascinating rock formations. It will also secure

space for a parking area, campground, corrals and access to clean water, and safeguard traditional hunting spaces.

Both areas serve as critical plant and wildlife migration corridors between Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on the east and the coastal mountains of Riverside and San Diego counties on the west. Agua Tibia and Beauty Mountain are places that species such as the Coastal Rosy Boa and the Golden Eagle call home. San Diego State University has even established a field-school there to study it as an “evolutionary hotspot.”

Wilderness is public land that has been protected from development and vehicle use not to isolate it from humans, but so that humans can experience nature in its most primal state. This bill will allow present day Americans to see and encounter terrain, plants and animals in a state similar to how the Native Americans and the first pioneers viewed it generations ago.

When crafting this bill, special care was taken to accept comments and input from local agencies, groups and individuals so that major concerns were addressed. These were extremely helpful and the end product is a better piece of legislation due to the open forum. For example, mining issues were studied and the potential for energy development was reviewed and in both cases the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service stated that the areas were not viable candidates for such activities. In addition, offroading interests were contacted and toured the areas in the field and as a result the bill will not close any legally-open roads or trails to vehicles. This will ensure that hunters and others will still be able to access camp sites that they have used for generations. This bill also took special efforts to protect private property rights and to ensure that firefighting and fire prevention activities would not be impeded. Lastly, the measure permits immigration enforcement, search and rescue and other important activities.

This bill preserves land while making sure that the public can still enjoy it. It is a responsible and sensible step toward protecting a beautiful natural resource. Equestrians will be able to trot along beautiful trails,

hikers can tackle and challenge themselves on mountainous terrain while witnessing spectacular views, hunters will still be able to enjoy traditional game such as deer and quail, and campers can sleep under the sky and observe the stars near the Palomar Observatory which is just a few miles south of Agua Tibia. In fact, this measure is unique in that it calls for the establishment of equestrian-friendly campgrounds in a region that has many riders but very few facilities for them.

This bill will also positively impact the economy of businesses in my district through eco-tourism. During this time of high unemployment and a stagnant economy, efforts that encourage private sector job growth should be supported.

This legislation has bi-partisan appeal, with a companion bill introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer, and support from the Administration. Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, mentioned H.R. 41 in a letter to Congress regarding designating certain lands as Wilderness.

In closing, I would once again like to thank Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for bringing this bill before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands and for the chance to be here. This legislation will protect and preserve lands for use by current and future generations and I look forward to seeing this bill brought to the House floor and eventually signed into law.