

Testimony on HR 3862, the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act
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Mr. Chairman and honorable committee members, my name is Bill Dart and I am the Director of Land Use for the Off-Road Business Association (ORBA). The Off-Road Business Association is a national non-profit trade association representing all aspects of the motorized off-road recreation industry. Our member businesses include the full OHV industry spectrum of vehicle manufacturers, aftermarket suppliers and distributors, and local retailers, many located in Riverside County. ORBA protects the interests of its member companies by promoting and protecting off-road recreation opportunities throughout the country. Motorized recreation is a major economic engine, both the manufacture and sales, but more significantly, the expenditures made by motorized recreationists as they travel to enjoy motorized recreation opportunities around the country. As an indicator of how significant the economic impacts are, a study by the University of California found that OHV recreation in California generates over \$10 billion dollars in economic activity and has created over 80,000 direct employment jobs in California alone.

I am a native of California and have been recreating on public lands for my whole life. I have lived in rural communities where recreation tourism is the most significant industry. I have been involved with motorized recreation of all kinds first as an enthusiast, then as an organizer and activist, culminating with over 19 years as a professional advocate for motorized recreation. I understand the issues surrounding the wilderness debate, and we have much in common with wilderness advocates, as we also want to see the landscapes in question preserved as they are today.

ORBA supports the intent of the original Wilderness Act of 1964. However, we also believe that the use of this designation should be *reserved only for areas that truly qualify*. Overall, a wilderness designation is the most extreme limits and restrictions on access and use that the federal government can place on public lands. By definition, wilderness designations do not allow mechanized vehicles in the area, including bicycles and wheelchairs. These restrictions effectively discriminate against certain constituencies by effectively denying them meaningful access to these public lands. As a result, these areas are no longer accessible to a large portion of American society, namely the very young, the elderly, and the handicapped who are not able to hike long distances. We believe that these areas deserve protection from future development but should not be off limits to such a large segment of the population.

We are concerned with a number of the areas included in this bill and do not feel that all of them are appropriate for this type of designation. Our concern is that many forms of recreation currently occur on them. Rockhounds, hunters and off-road enthusiasts use these areas and have been doing so for many generations. These are all valid uses of public lands and are not currently detrimental to the surrounding habitat. Rockhounding is a very popular past time engaged in by the surrounding retired population and several

of the areas proposed as wilderness in this bill will prohibit that activity, needlessly in our view. Gem and rock hounding currently occurs in the proposed Orocopia Mountains addition, the Chuckwalla Mountains addition, and the Palen-McCoy Mountains addition. Some of these proposed wilderness areas are also currently used by sportsmen, such as bird hunting in the Palen-McCoy Mountains edition. Therefore, in order to access these areas people must use SUVs or 4 wheel drive vehicles. Since a wilderness designation would not allow motorized vehicles in these areas, if this legislation was enacted, these rockhounds and sportsmen would be locked out of these areas unless they were able to hike long distances to get there.

ORBA has reviewed the online maps available to the public and have found them to be difficult to examine for the areas we are concerned about. As a result, we are unable to determine if currently used OHV areas will be included. For example, the maps make it unclear as to whether the Historic Bradshaw Trail would be included in the Orocopia addition. The Bradshaw Trail was the first road through Riverside County and was blazed by William Bradshaw in 1862, as an overland stage route beginning at San Bernardino and ending at [La Paz](#), AZ (now Ehrenberg, AZ). The trail was used extensively between 1862 and 1877 to haul miners and other passengers to the gold fields at La Paz. The trail is a 65 mile county graded road that traverses mostly public land between the Chuckwalla Mountains and the Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range. The trail offers spectacular views of the Chuckwalla Bench, Orocopia Mountains, Chuckwalla Mountains and the Palo Verde Valley.

There are very few OHV recreation opportunities within the Riverside County area. "Taking the High Road", a study released in 2002 by the OHMVR Division, states that "since 1980 the amount of land available to recreate on for off-highway vehicles (OHV) has shrunk 48 percent in our deserts alone, while OHV registrations have increased 108 percent since 1980." Currently California has over 1 million registered OHVs and, as of April 2, 2007 there are 96,034 registered green sticker vehicles in Riverside County alone. This form of family recreation has seen immense growth in recent years. By implementing public lands policies that further decrease the amount of land to recreate on we are doing a great disservice to these families. Some people believe that the only way to minimize the impacts of OHV use on the environment is to eliminate it. The opposite is actually true. Clearly OHV users and their vehicles are not just going to go away. Without legal areas for these families to recreate on user created trails will be the result. These user created areas often, but not always, result in habitat damage.

Instead of creating additional wilderness areas that will restrict citizens' access to the land, ORBA would like to request that Congress consider other alternatives that will assure that: 1) All citizens are able to use the public lands without discrimination; 2) mechanized vehicles can be used to fight forest fires; and 3) management of the public lands can occur in order to maintain trails, forest health and other facilities.

Finally, I would like to add that we are concerned about the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act because Representative Bono has not attempted to seek the input from the OHV community with regard to how it will affect public lands access for our

recreation interests. We are in the process of trying to work with Congresswoman Bono and her staff on H.R. 3682, but we would like to be a part of the on-going discussions with their community stakeholders and to be more involved with the legislative process for this bill.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing ORBA to testify today and we urge you to carefully consider the concerns we have with H.R. 3682. We look forward to additional conversations with the House Natural Resources Committee and Congresswoman Bono to make this bill work for the people, environmental preservations and future users of these public lands.

This concludes my prepared statement and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.