

Testimony of Steve Koretoff

House Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulations

May 20, 2014

Testimony – Statement by Steve Koretoff in support of legislation to designate certain lands in Central California as the Clear Creek National Recreation Area (H.R. 1776).

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to share my views, the views of the Friends of the Clear Creek Management Area, and views of other multiple-use interests about this bipartisan land use legislation.

My name is Steve Koretoff; I am a native of Fresno County, located in the heart of the Central Valley of California. My family has been farming in this area going on 5 generations, I am the general manager for the family's organic almond packing facility. I currently reside with my family in Fresno, California. I am a recreation and public land advocate who has championed responsible access to public lands for the last 10 years.

I served on the BLM's Central California Resource Advisory County (2009-2013) which brings diverse interest groups together to offer land management advice to the BLM. In addition, I have served as Chairman of the OHV Sub-committee to the RAC.

Mr. Chairman, before getting into the substance of my concerns, I want to give the committee a quick overview of CCMA. In 2002, *Dirt Rider Magazine* listed Clear Creek as one of the top 10 OHV recreation sites in the country. It is located mostly in southern San Benito County in the Coastal Mountain Range that separates the Salinas Valley from the Central Valley. As this committee knows, the BLM functionally closed this 75,000 acre unit to all user groups in May 2008. Before the emergency closure, the unit was open for OHV use on approximately 242 miles of designated routes from October 16th to May 31. This unit also contains approximately 25 miles of county roads.

I have operated OHVs with family, friends, and club members in CCMA since the early 1990's. Many of our family and friends have been recreating in and around CCMA for three generations. I consider many BLM employees on various units to be both personal friends and professional colleagues.

I and others in the OHV community, additional stakeholders, and San Benito County found ourselves in strong disagreement with the Hollister Field Office's initial decision to issue an emergency closure order in May 2008 and its recent 2014 Record of Decision which basically codifies that initial order and renders the unit functionally closed to OHV recreation.

I believe H.R 1776 strikes the right balance between access and safety by relying on proven management as signs and public outreach currently being used by sister land management agencies to caution the recreation public about the life threatening hazards of rock climbing, snow skiing, swimming, and boating.

Between 1981 and 2007, OHV recreationists through the California OHMVR grants program contributed approximately \$7 million dollars to CCMA for trail and facility construction, route maintenance, resource protection, and law enforcement. No doubt during that time period, millions of dollars of appropriated funds has also been spent to manage multiple-use recreation on that unit.

I believe H.R. 1776 recognizes that investment of taxpayer dollars and user fees by restoring OHV recreation on the unit using the NEPA approved 2005 CCMA Travel Management Plan.

I believe that H.R. 1776 recognizes that that CCMA should be open for public use.

I urge Congress to support this bipartisan legislation that designates the 70,000-acre CCMA as a National Recreation Area with OHV recreation and other multiple-use recreational activities codified and protected in statute including the 242 miles of routes and 400 acres of open areas identified for motorized use in the 2005 CCMA Travel Management Plan.

On behalf of myself, the OHV community, and other access stakeholders, I thank the subcommittee for allowing me to testify on H.R. 1776.

At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions.

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