



Statement of Robert Lovingood
County of San Bernardino Supervisor, First District
Before the
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
December 9, 2015

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Tsongas, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on HR 3668, the California Minerals, Off-Road Recreation, and Conservation Act. This legislation proposes a variety of designations throughout the California Desert, the majority of the effects and designations exist within San Bernardino County.

I appear before you in my capacity as County Supervisor in the First District of San Bernardino County, California. San Bernardino County is geographically the largest county in the contiguous United States at more than 20,000 square miles. I represent approximately 450,000 constituents and my district encompasses over 15,000 square miles. Public lands are a major asset in San Bernardino County, providing a number of economic and recreational opportunities.

In San Bernardino County, more than 80 percent of the land area is in the federal estate, under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of Defense. The federal government actively manages and protects those lands for conservation values and for other uses.

Earlier this year, a measure was introduced in the Senate that would create two national monuments, designate a number of Off-Highway Vehicle areas and addresses conservation, recreation and renewable energy development. During the summer, a request was made to the Administration to designate three national monuments in our county, which would cover well over 1 million acres. It is the preference of the County that any designation would go through the legislative process where the need of the establishment and boundaries can be determined in a transparent public process, and that's why today's hearing and the timing of the proposal moving forward is of significance importance to us.

H.R. 3668 is a balanced approach that protects our desert while also protecting mining jobs and economic opportunities. It strikes a responsible compromise among recreational activities and environmental preservation, while protecting existing uses. Unlike a possible presidential executive order this bill is good policy because it incorporates the voices of local residents and elected bodies. And it maintains the long-standing philosophy that the desert is a land of many uses. In addition, many provisions in the bill cannot be accomplished by Executive Action alone, including the designation of Off-Highway Vehicle areas.

Mining and Economic Development

In San Bernardino County, one of our most significant economic drivers is the minerals industry. The County regulates approximately 100 mines, which provide a wide variety of materials necessary for infrastructure, economic growth, national defense, and countless consumer products. One case in point is Castle Mountain Mining Company's (NewCastle Gold Ltd.) renewed gold operation at Castle Mountain. This area is northeast of the current Mojave National Preserve boundary. When the mine scales up to full production in the next phase, the County anticipates the operation will become the second-largest gold mine in California, creating approximately 300 full-time positions with a direct tax benefit in excess of \$225 million to the County. HR 3668 incorporates the Castle Mountains area into the Mojave Preserve in two phases; half will be added to the park immediately, while the remainder will be incorporated after mining operations are completed at Castle Mountain Gold Mine.

As opposed to designating a national monument that would withdraw public land from mineral entry, H.R. 3668 establishes the Mojave Trails Special Management Area that protects existing mining operations and allows for future mining exploration as long as mining projects never exceed ten percent of the total acreage. These minerals are necessary for a civil society to function, and the minerals are where nature put them, regardless of any overlying designation.

Off-Highway Vehicle Designations

I appreciate Congressman Cook's efforts to include a number of designated Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) recreational areas. OHV recreation has an economic impact of at least \$70 million to the County and supports numerous small and rural businesses in my County. The designation of multiple OHV recreation areas in the bill acknowledges that sustainable multiple uses on public lands should be preserved.

National Trails Highway/Route 66

National Trails Highway, also known as Route 66, is a historic and iconic highway and the centerpiece of the proposed Mojave Trails Special Management Area. The County has the longest unbroken stretch of Route 66 in the country. The highway serves as the only alternative route to Interstate 40 during emergencies and is a popular route of travel for American and international tourists. Several of the aging bridges in the desert were damaged during the storms this summer, requiring emergency closure of some sections. The County faces the daunting task of replacing more than 120 timber trestle bridges, which are all more than 80 years old, yet still require individual environmental clearances. This is a major cost and can take years to obtain. H.R. 3668 includes language that would consolidate the environmental reviews for the trestle bridges on Route 66, thereby providing much needed regulatory relief to address needed repairs, enhancing public safety, and the experience for Route 66 travelers.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for their attention and also request their consideration of H.R. 3668, which strikes a responsible compromise among recreational activities and environmental preservation. I believe this proposal is a balanced approach to protecting, managing, and using our desert areas in San Bernardino County.

I appreciate, Mr. Chairman, your leadership and that of this Committee in your careful deliberation of this important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee, I welcome the chance to respond to any questions you may have.