

The Honorable Jerry Muenzer
Supervisor, District Four
San Benito County Board of Supervisors

Testimony on HR 3641 “Pinnacles National Park Act”
Friday, June 8, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the Subcommittee, for the record I am Jerry Muenzer, District Four Supervisor for San Benito County. I am pleased to have the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of my county to express firm support for H.R. 3641, the “Pinnacles National Park Act”. I would also like to express thanks to my Representative, Congressman Sam Farr, for his longstanding leadership and stewardship within our County, and also Congressman Jeff Denham, for his support of this important legislation.

I am a lifelong resident of California and have spent more than 50 years in San Benito County. I have been a County Supervisor for year and a half. My family has a retail store business in Hollister, and I am proud to say we have been in business for 102 years.

As part of my duties with the San Benito County Board of Supervisors, we look for ways to promote the best of our county. San Benito is where people come to visit and stay to live, work, and raise their family. San Benito County has a unique and beautiful landscape, and we are also developing a wine trail as part of our tourism efforts. Our County supports the Pinnacles National Park Act because it celebrates and enhances our local slice of our national heritage – Pinnacles National Monument – which is one of the best assets we have in our county, region, and state. Anyone who has visited this place knows it is special. From exploring caves, to viewing springtime wildflowers, to hiking through spire-like rock formations, visitors and families can participate in activities that leave lasting memories. It is truly worthy of National Park status.

The Pinnacles National Monument was created in 1908 by President Theodore Roosevelt. It was designated to protect the beautiful rock formations that rise between 500 and 1,200 feet and talus caves, notable for its tunnels. Pinnacles is located at the junction of the Pacific and the North American Tectonic Plates. The San Andreas Fault is just four miles to the east and the Miner’s Gulch and Pinnacles Faults run directly through the Pinnacles system. It is part of one of the few regions in the world that boasts a Mediterranean climate. Its present size is more than 26,000 acres and is home to half of the skeletal remains of the Neenach Volcano, which erupted 23 million years ago.

The Pinnacles system is home to 149 species of birds, 49 mammals, 22 reptiles, six amphibians, 68 butterflies, 36 dragonflies and damselflies, nearly 400 bees and many thousands of other invertebrates.

One project I am particularly proud about is the re-introduction of the endangered California condor, the largest flying land bird in North America. Since 2003, the Park Service has been a part of the California Condor Recovery Program to re-establish

California condors at Pinnacles. This cooperative endeavor between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventana Wildlife Society, Pinnacles Partnership and others, in collaboration with the California Condor Recovery Team, have done a tremendous job on recovery efforts and public education. Many visitors come to this region to get an opportunity to see the Condor in the wild.

The Pinnacles National Park Act would elevate America's 11th national monument, the Pinnacles National Monument, to a congressionally designated National Park. The legislation would also rename the current Pinnacles Wilderness as the Hain Wilderness after Schuyler Hain, who first came to the area in 1886, and add over 2000 acres of land within the boundaries of the park into wilderness. Congress has already recognized the wilderness characteristics at Pinnacles by previously designating more than one-half of the monument as wilderness. The National Park Service recognizes that the additional acreage proposed for wilderness designation within this legislation is appropriate.

This legislation has broad support from our county, as well as the neighboring Monterey County Board of Supervisors – both counties have passed resolutions in support of the legislation. The San Benito Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau is also enthusiastically supportive of this legislation. Pinnacles is uniquely located in coastal California to attract thousands of visitors each year which provide a viable and vital economic engine for San Benito County. Tourism is a primary focus for the business owners in the County of San Benito. Increasing the number of tourists would promote a healthy impact for those not only in the retail sector but also dining, lodging and sightseeing opportunities. The increase in wilderness protection and the new National Park designation would strengthen the region's economic and tourism potential. Research shows that for every \$1 invested by the Federal government into our national parks, they return \$4 to the community in tourism dollars.

Situated slightly inland from the California coast, Pinnacles National Monument has not yet realized its full potential to reach locals and tourists. Many tourists travel, dine, and stay overnight in areas along the coast, such as Monterey and Santa Cruz, where they are visiting to recreate, camp, view wildlife, and enjoy the great outdoors. However, many are not aware of Pinnacles National Monument and as a result, do not make the short trip inland to see this treasure. By designating more wilderness within Pinnacles and elevating its stature to a National Park, we believe that more visitors will come through our restaurants and businesses, and more visitors will stay overnight near the park.

I'd like to end with an inspiring quote from Ken Burns, whose directed "The National Parks: America's Best Idea." In a letter of support that Burns wrote for this legislation, he states:

"A Pinnacles National Park would preserve a unique portion of our land: not only a critical record of geological time (what John Muir would have called a 'grand geological library') that helps Americans look back millions of years to understand the vast tectonic forces that shaped - and still shape - our continent but also a rare habitat for condors, a wide array of flowers, and 400 species of bees. It would preserve a place that over the

centuries, Native Americans, early Spanish settlers, homesteaders from the East, and Basque shepherders have considered home, offering an important series of perspectives on the larger sweep of American history.”