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Visit Mendocino County, Inc., President & CEO

Testimony on HR 1411
"California Coastal National Monument Expansion Act of 2013"

Thursday, May 9, 2013

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the "California Coastal National Monument Expansion Act of 2013."

My name is Scott Schneider. I am the President and CEO of Visit Mendocino County, Inc. Visit Mendocino County is the official Mendocino County Tourism Bureau, contracted to market Mendocino County businesses, events and attractions with the ultimate goal of increasing the total economic impact of the travel and tourism industry throughout the County.

Visit Mendocino strongly supports HR 1411 and efforts to protect the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands by expanding the California Coastal National Monument. We believe that expanding the monument will boost our local economy, and this belief is widespread, if not unanimous, in the Mendocino business community. Earlier this year, over 50 local businesses from our rural county signed a letter supporting the proposed expansion.

The Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands have been called one of the most significant parts of the Mendocino coastline. These lands are where the Garcia River crosses the rugged cliffs, rumped dunes and rolling meadows of California's coast. This area is home to wildlife like sea lions, bobcats, and the rare Point Arena Mountain Beaver. Visitors come not just for the views, but to go hiking, fishing, and bird watching.

Adjacent to the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands is the California Coastal National Monument, which stretches along the entirety of the California coast to protect the thousands of federally owned rocks and islands scattered along the coast. This monument is one of the most viewed and yet least recognized national monuments in the entire country. Expanding the designation onto land would provide countless visitors with a new opportunity to better access and better understand this incredibly scenic and unique national monument.

The support for protecting the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands is seemingly universal. In fact, I have not heard of a single person who opposes the proposal. The business community is supportive, the local county board of supervisors is supportive, the cities of Point Arena and Fort Bragg are supportive, the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians is supportive, countless community organizations are supportive, and rancher Larry Stornetta, whose family used to own the public land and who continues to graze on the land, is supportive.

Just a few months ago, a group of elementary school and middle school children formed a group called *Students Protecting the Coast*. They produced watercolor paintings of the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands that they have turned into a slideshow presentation and used to build even more support for the monument proposal.

In order to fully understand the importance of this bill to the local communities throughout Mendocino, one must better understand the area in which these lands reside. Mendocino County is a large rural county – approximately the size of Rhode Island and Delaware combined. Its population of just over 88,000 people relies greatly on two major industries – agriculture and tourism as fishing and timber are no longer providing the jobs and economic growth they once did in the second half of the 20th Century. In fact, tourism is the area's biggest employer.

To be clear, our local economy needs help now. The closest city to the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands is Point Arena, which has a population of 449 people and, as of 2009, the estimated median household income in the city was nearly half the statewide average.

The addition of the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands to the California Coastal National Monument would provide an economic boost to cities like Point Arena and businesses and taxpayers across the county. Tourism on the Mendocino Coast already supports, as of 2011, close to 5,000 jobs and generates over \$20 million in state and local taxes. The Mendocino region receives about 1.75 million visitors per year and about 80 percent of them are from the Bay Area and the Sacramento region.

Expanding the California Coastal National Monument to protect the Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands would establish Point Arena as the pre-eminent gateway city to the monument. This added visibility and distinction would attract even more visitors to the area and would encourage them to stay longer and spend more money. Greater visitation would create new jobs and increase the already vital tax revenues and tax relief that come from visitor spending. Currently, each household receives close to \$650 of tax relief annually from visitors. To many of our businesses and communities, this additional help cannot come soon enough.

Given the incredible natural beauty and cultural significance of the area, the benefits that the monument would bring to our community and our economy, and the exhaustive support from the community, I cannot identify a single reason why this proposal shouldn't move quickly through Congress.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation.