

**STATEMENT BY CITY OF MONROVIA, CA, MAYOR LARA LARRAMENDI
BLAKELY**

**HEARING ON H.R. 2534
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION & PUBLIC LANDS**

**JUNE 13, 2002
1334 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Christian-Christensen, distinguished Members of this Committee and audience, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on this bill, H.R. 2534.

My name is Lara Larramendi Blakely. I am the Mayor of the City of Monrovia, CA, President of the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, and Vice-Chair of the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, also know as the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

H.R. 2534, the “Lower Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River Watershed Study Act of 2001” authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the suitability and feasibility of potential designation and the establishment of a National Park within the boundaries of the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy. The linked watersheds of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers drain approximately 1,513 square miles from the San Gabriel Mountains to the Pacific Ocean and is home to more than 7 million people.

The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy was created via SB 216 (Solis) and AB 1355 (Havice) in 1999 to preserve and enhance urban open space and habitat for the enjoyment of, and appreciation by, present and future generations.

As we proceed into the next century, we have unprecedented challenges before us. We all have a unique opportunity to make a big difference in our communities and improve our quality of life. That opportunity is the challenge to preserve our precious local environment, our beloved rivers and mountains.

The preservation of the upper and lower San Gabriel River and the San Gabriel Mountains is a pressing yet timeless issue. John Robinson writes in The San Gabriels (late 1880’s), “ Contrary to popular belief, it was not an aesthetic love for the mountain scenery or recreational desires that set in motion the crusade for forest preservation. These motives came much later. It was a real fear of watershed destruction, expressed by valley agricultural and civic interests, that led to the federal protection of Southern California forest and brush lands in the late 1880’s” The Angeles National Forest and the San Gabriel River were set aside for this purpose. **One hundred years later, it is time we do our part to continue the preservation of these valuable resources for future generations.**

As the economy has strengthened, development pressures have become critical along the San Gabriel

Mountain foothill communities. Cities are experiencing the potential destruction of important hillside lands that are critical for wildlife preservation, open space, and low impact recreational and educational uses.

All along the Foothills, it is vital to preserve hillside lands that provide valuable watershed for numerous blue-line streams. The value of the surrounding upland habitats is enhanced by the presence of the riparian and other wetland habitats. These habitats provide water for a variety of wildlife species including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and many species of resident and migratory birds.

It is important to conserve hillside lands that contain a wealth of habitats, such as chaparral, coastal sage scrub, riparian woodland, oak and sycamore woodlands, and alluvial fan scrub. It is also important to conserve hillside lands as these habitats provide foraging, breeding, resting areas for raptors, coyotes, badgers, skunks, possums, raccoons, rodents, mountain lions, bobcats, mule deer, gray foxes, California black bears and other native and migratory wildlife species.

These ecological communities provide valuable habitats for the resident and migratory birds, insects, mammals and other native animals and plants. These habitats also serve as movement corridors for wildlife. People may live in particular cities and communities, but wildlife needs a biological linkage or movements corridors along the foothills. These habitat and wildlife corridors need to span the foothill cities to provide adequate range and survival options for wildlife.

As development pressures increase, there is a groundswell of residents that are advocating preservation of our hillsides and our rivers. Local conservancies have been created by our residents to acquire and preserve these precious resources. Preserving the quality of life that our mountains and rivers afford is important to all our residents. Studies conducted on usage of the San Gabriel Mountains show that the southeast area residents of Los Angeles County frequently use these recreational areas. A Sustainable Cities Program sponsored by USC (University of Southern California) recommends 3-4 acres of open/green space per 1,000 people. In the San Gabriel Valley, the reality is less than one half acre per 1,000 people is dedicated opens and/or green space. As Los Angeles County grows, the opportunities for recreation in our mountains and along our rivers must also continue to grow.

We welcome the Secretary to consult with our San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the appropriate State agencies and local government entities. Our conservancy was created on the principle of respecting the local jurisdiction and the rights of the property owners. We are partners in providing good stewardship of our natural resources.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I strongly encourage an “aye” vote on H.R. 2534.

####