

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

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### Witness Statement

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#### H.R. 2941

#### Las Cienegas National Conservation Area in the State of Arizona

#### Testimony of Peter G. Backus, individual

The proposed Las Cienegas National Conservation Area is indeed a good idea that deserves support in Washington equal to what it enjoys here, which is both substantial and broad based. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, several other southern Arizonans and I will testify in support of the proposal at a Congressional subcommittee hearing. To some, my support of the legislation may sound strange, because I am a land developer. However, I support the proposal for both professional and personal reasons.

As most local people know, the lands encompassed by the proposed NCA are magnificent. The proposal will unite under a unique management plan some 200,000 acres of land held by the Bureau of Land Management, the State of Arizona, Pima County, and various private landowners. What is less obvious is the important role the NCA plays in providing linkages to four national forest units and Saguaro National Park southeast of Tucson. The NCA would form the centerpiece of a protected landscape that would forever provide important travel corridors and habitat for some of Arizona's impressive wildlife.

I support the NCA as a businessman because it protects the property rights of individual landowners. Those landowners within the proposed boundary have a wide range of options. The best news is that no one can force them to do anything. If you own property within the NCA, you can continue to live there as you have in the past with no restrictions on your property use or access. You may want to sell your land, or keep it and sell the development rights. Or, you may want to trade your land for land that is outside the boundary. All of these options remain open to you. In fact, your property value may very well increase.

The use of a national conservation area designation for Las Cienegas is designed to create greater flexibility than other options. It is unique in that it seeks to protect the rights of the property owners inside the area while meeting the desires of the general public to protect important natural resources. As a developer outside the NCA and a landowner inside it, I am deeply impressed with the proposal. It truly blends protection of the environment with protection of private property rights.

Personally, I know the area to be included within the proposed Las Cienegas NCA very well and strongly believe in its long-term protection. Over the years there is little of its landscape that I have not enjoyed while horseback riding. Though I have never kept a log of the days and nights I have spent there, I would guess that it comes to more than 120 during the last 15 years. I did not go as a scientist, environmentalist, businessman, or cowboy, but as a citizen of the United States of America who enjoys southern Arizona. It is a tremendous gift we have as Americans and Westerners to be able to freely enjoy our public lands.

The vast open lands that make southern Arizona so unique are the reason I am here. They are worth protecting and sharing, now and forever. The NCA is not just a good idea now; it is a great idea for the

future!

Sincerely,  
Peter G. Backus

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