

# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE



September 26, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

## Re: San Gabriel Mountains National Monument

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of five national, member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and Winter Wildlands Alliance and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who paddle, climb, mountain bike, and backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes. Collectively, we have members in all fifty states and a network of approximately 1,100 local clubs and advocacy groups across the nation. Many of our members and supporters enjoy the recreation opportunities of the San Gabriel Mountains and have distinct interest in the permanent protection of this invaluable landscape.

Featuring dramatic relief, free-flowing rivers, and a wide range of vegetation types and wildlife habitats, the San Gabriel Mountains are an iconic natural resource worthy of protection as a National Monument. The San Gabriels provide a third of Los Angeles County's drinking water and also play an important role in helping to alleviate regional air quality problems.

Lands within the proposed San Gabriel Mountains National Monument provide the vast majority of Los Angeles County's open space, and offer outstanding opportunities for close-to-home, active outdoor recreation for the more than 15 million people who live within a 90-minute drive of the Angeles National Forest, including populations historically underserved in the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities. These opportunities offer a broad range of experiences, from highly accessible day trips for gentle hikes and picnicking, to a full range of the more adventurous experiences prized by many of our members.

“Frontcountry” areas—places close enough for daytrips from population centers, but which offer a natural, generally intact, and scenic setting with opportunities for adventure—are an exceedingly important and under-protected part of the outdoor recreation landscape. These areas, which are exemplified by the San Gabriel Mountains, are critical in providing opportunities for healthy, active outdoor recreation, and fostering a sense of connection to nature and place. They also play an important role in supporting the outdoor recreation economy, which contributes \$85.4 billion dollars to California’s economy annually.<sup>1</sup>

The following are among the outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation found in the San Gabriel Mountains:

### **Mountain Biking**

The San Gabriel Mountains offer a diverse range of exceptional mountain biking trails, with arid, sandy, and smooth sagebrush trails transforming into rocky technical trails in the lush drainages to the south. The area includes rolling and ascending double track trails as well as steep challenging areas, many of which lead to inspiring overlooks. This variety provides opportunities for riders of all ability levels to escape nearby urban areas and seek rejuvenation in the forests above.

With more than 1,000 miles of trails accessible to hikers and approximately 800 miles accessible to mountain bikers, the San Gabriel Mountains offer recreational opportunities for all skill levels.<sup>2</sup> For less advanced hikers or mountain bikers, a quick jaunt through the Arroyo Basin to the dam and back is a great way to enjoy the area. For more ambitious visitors, the Brown Mountain-El Prieto loop is more demanding and equally rewarding, and the Mt. Lowe-Sam Merrill-Sunset Ridge trails will challenge any seasoned rider.

Outdoor Alliance is supportive of a National Monument designation that will protect and enhance opportunities for mountain biking in the San Gabriels by continuing to authorize mountain biking on all routes and trails currently open to bikes until a thorough and quality trail system can be identified and designated. Additionally, we hope the designation, potentially in conjunction with other means, will support updates to travel management to evaluate and enhance existing and future trail opportunities and the user experience, as well as bring greater resources to bear for recreation management.

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<sup>1</sup> OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION, *THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY: CALIFORNIA* (2012), available at [http://outdoorindustry.org/images/ore\\_reports/CA-california-outdoorrecreation-economy-oia.pdf](http://outdoorindustry.org/images/ore_reports/CA-california-outdoorrecreation-economy-oia.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The San Gabriel Mountains’ trails are documented in the book *Where to Bike: Los Angeles Mountain Biking*, a popular guide used by visitors and local enthusiasts.

## **Whitewater Paddling**

The rivers and streams of the San Gabriel Mountains become a whitewater paddling treasure when rainfall causes water levels to rise.<sup>3</sup> Narrow granite canyons treat advanced paddlers to waterfalls and rapids, deep pools, and spectacular scenery. Other sections offer more open canyons with lush vegetation bordering the rivers and moderate rapids that appeal to intermediate paddlers. These recreational opportunities are a backyard gem for local paddlers, allowing them to connect with the San Gabriel Mountains in a powerful and healthy way.

To recognize the value of paddling in the San Gabriel Mountains, a National Monument designation simply needs to acknowledge that paddling is a positive and sustainable use of the area's rivers and to protect the flows and hiking access needed to enjoy them.

The local paddling community is excited about the Wild and Scenic River designations proposed in H.R. 4858 for the San Gabriel River and its forks, San Antonio Creek, the Middle Fork of Lytle Creek, and Little Rock Creek. We request that protection from future dams and diversions comparable to those afforded by Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act be included in the National Monument designation language. We suggest that Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act should be adapted to cover the rivers proposed for Wild and Scenic designation in H.R. 4858 in the context of the National Monument designation rather than the context of Wild and Scenic River designation.

## **Rock Climbing**

The San Gabriel Mountains afford world class opportunities for rock climbing. While there are several great areas throughout the San Gabriel Mountains to rock climb, the finest climbing resource is Williamson Rock, a premier sport climbing destination for Southern California. Climbers from California and around the world have been enjoying Williamson's mild summer temperatures, proximity to Southern California's urban centers, and excellent rock quality since the 1960s. However Williamson has been subject to a temporary closure since 2005 to allow the Forest Service to analyze its ability to allow climbing access while protecting raptors and the endangered Mountain Yellow Legged Frog and its critical habitat. Currently, access to Williamson Rock is still

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<sup>3</sup> Whitewater runs in the San Gabriel Mountains include the East Fork San Gabriel River; West Fork San Gabriel River; North Fork San Gabriel River; Main San Gabriel; San Antonio Creek; Little Rock Creek; Bear Creek; Cattle Canyon; Big Tujunga; Cucumonga Creek; and Arroyo Seco Creek.

closed, but the Angeles National Forest has recently released a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement that would propose to reopen Williamson Rock to climbing (under specific conditions) while protecting the environment.

Outdoor Alliance hopes that a National Monument designation will acknowledge the high recreation value of Williamson Rock and will help to expedite the NEPA process directed at reopening access to Williamson Rock while providing protection to sensitive natural resources.

## **Winter Recreation**

For skiers, snowboarders, snowshoers, and others seeking winter adventure, the San Gabriel Mountains offer a high-altitude escape from the urban population centers just a little over an hour away. With several peaks rising above 9,000' and the range's tallest peak, Mt. San Antonio, rising to 10,068', winter conditions and opportunities for snow-based recreation exist here most years, and often persist into early summer.

Opportunities exist at developed ski areas, backcountry huts and in a variety of dispersed settings at the core of the mountain range. Many of these locations are accessed from the Angeles Crest Highway (CA-2), but are either in or near designated Wilderness, offering an important mix of accessibility and remoteness.

Important backcountry skiing areas include Mount Baden-Powell, Throop Peak, the Mount San Antonio-Mount Baldy area, Mount Waterman, and Mt. Islip.

## **Hang Gliding and Paragliding**

The San Gabriel Mountains are considered to be a birthplace of hang gliding in the United States and offer outstanding opportunities for hang gliding and paragliding. Kagel Mountain and Marshall Peak offer exceptional flying opportunities and were integral to the development of the sport in the United States. As a result of the proximity to these outstanding resources, the Southern California Hang Gliding organization grew and evolved into the United States Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, and the San Gabriel Mountains can be considered as a birth place of both the sport and its national organization in the United States.

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The range of outstanding recreation opportunities in a natural and scenic setting close to major population centers makes the San Gabriel Mountains a truly unique and invaluable recreational resource for the communities of Southern California and visitors alike. Outdoor Alliance is encouraged by the tremendous breadth of community support for a San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, and we look forward to working with the administration, agencies, and other stakeholders in developing management to protect and enhance opportunities to enjoy this superlative landscape.

Best regards,

Adam Cramer  
Executive Director  
Outdoor Alliance

cc:

Brady Robinson, Executive Director, Access Fund  
Wade Blackwood, Executive Director, American Canoe Association  
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater  
Michael Van Abel, Executive Director, International Mountain Bicycling Association  
Mark Menlove, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance  
Lee Davis, Executive Director, The Mazamas  
Martinique Grigg, Executive Director, The Mountaineers  
Martin Palmaz, Executive Director, United States Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association