

House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation  
Testimony on H.R. 1025 by Rep. Thompson and  
Judy Ahmann, Napa Land Owner and Rancher  
July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013

Congressman Mike Thompson's testimony as prepared for delivery is included here:

*"Thank you Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and subcommittee members for holding today's hearing on H.R. 1025, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act.*

*"This legislation would designate the Berryessa Snow Mountain Region as a National Conservation Area (NCA).*

*"The Berryessa Snow Mountain area in Northern California encompasses more than 350,000 acres across Napa, Mendocino, Lake, Solano and Yolo Counties. The area is rich in biodiversity, including bald eagles, black bears, mountain lions, elk, and rare plants found nowhere else on Earth.*

*"This is one of the largest regions of relatively undisturbed public lands in California and can be easily visited from both the Sacramento and San Francisco areas. This makes it an ideal area for wildlife and public recreation.*

*"Under this designation, all current federally owned lands located within the proposed NCA boundary would be permanently protected as a conservation area and united under one management plan. This would allow the region to be managed according to the site-specific needs located there.*

*"Establishing this NCA would improve coordination among federal agencies; protect essential migratory corridors for wildlife; keep water clean; and may lead to federal funding opportunities for conservation protection, invasive plant eradication, recreation management, and a coordinated multi-agency fire management plan.*

*"It is important to note that the proposed NCA would only apply to federal lands and would not impact in any way, other lands located within its boundaries, including private property. As a result, current access to, and uses of, private land would not be affected by this proposal.*

*"In addition, no legally open roads or motorized vehicle trails would be closed as a result of this proposed NCA designation. The NCA designation would also not impose any new regulations on hunting, fishing, or firearm use located there.*

*"Over the last three years, in developing this legislation I have worked closely with all stakeholders in the Berryessa Snow Mountain region, held public meetings for residents to express their views, and updated the bill based on their feedback. In fact, the bill you are considering today reflects changes I promised my constituents at town hall meetings last year.*

*“These changes include additional bill language to further clarify that the proposed NCA designation would not impact the use of private property in the region, and additional language to ensure that the legislation would not impact motorized recreation on Lake Berryessa.*

*“I also updated language at the suggestion of local farmers and ranchers to ensure that all existing grazing located within the proposed NCA will continue unchanged.*

*“As the committee knows, outdoor recreation and protected lands help the local economy. Jobs and personal income often rise in local communities after nearby areas are permanently protected. That same potential is offered in the Berryessa Snow Mountain region.*

*“H.R. 1025 has broad local support. It is supported by Boards of Supervisors, Chambers of Commerce and local cities.*

*“It is also supported by more than 65 local elected officials; more than 200 businesses representing all five involved counties; nearly 30 landowners and farmers; and more than 35 recreation and conservation groups.*

*“The Berryessa Snow Mountain Region is a national treasure. We have a responsibility to preserve it and make sure the region is managed efficiently and responsibly.*

*“Designating the region as a National Conservation Area would preserve the land, help our local economies, and benefit those who live in and visit the Berryessa Snow Mountain Region.*

*“Thank you again for holding today’s hearing and I welcome any questions you may have.”*

Thompson was joined by Judy Ahmann, a Private Land Owner and Rancher from Napa at the hearing. Her testimony, as prepared for delivery is included here.

*“Thank you Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today regarding H.R. 1025, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act. I would also like to thank Congressman Thompson for introducing this important legislation as well as Ranking Member Grilajva, and Representatives Huffman and Garamendi, and the other bill co-sponsors.*

*“My name is Judy Ahmann and I am a private landowner and rancher from Northern California. I have been actively involved in the California Cattlewomen’s Association and have served as the President at the local and state levels. I have also served on the Executive Board of American National Cattlewomen. I am a member of the Napa County Farm Bureau and donate time and raise money for scholarship funds for the local 4H and Future Farmers of America groups.*

*“My husband, John, and I operate a 3,000 acre cattle ranch, Running Deer Ranch, located on the northeastern shoreline of Lake Berryessa in the Blue Ridge, which we have recently gifted to our three daughters. Our ranch is directly adjacent to Bureau of Land Management lands that are proposed to be included in this national conservation area. We are strongly supportive of the*

*Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act because we believe this legislation will help forever preserve this wonderful place and our way of life.*

*“I live and work in an incredible place. Deer and black bear freely roam the steep hillsides while bald and golden eagles, osprey and falcons soar on rising thermals. We love the blue oak woodlands and marvel at the rare plants found on the serpentine soils. A national conservation area designation will keep the region the way it is, creating a lasting legacy of public enjoyment of the outdoors for activities like hunting, grazing, hiking, and rafting.*

*“There are many benefits to a national conservation area, but one that is of particular importance to me is that this designation will require the three federal land managers – the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Reclamation – to develop a cohesive and comprehensive management plan for all the federal lands in the conservation area. A comprehensive management approach will allow the federal agencies and the local community to better coordinate on important regional land use issues such as fire management, noxious weed control, and eradication of illegal marijuana production.*

*“As a rancher, I am supportive of the grazing language included in the legislation. The legislation does not impact existing grazing operations. The legislation also permits new grazing within the conservation area, so long as it is consistent with existing law and the purposes of the area. Grazing may also be used as a management tool for activities such as noxious weed control or fire suppression.*

*“As a private land owner, I am supportive of the private property language within the legislation. The legislation applies only to Federal lands and does not impact any non-federal land, including private property. Nothing in the legislation requires a landowner to allow public access to private property. And, the land management agencies must continue to provide adequate access to private holdings within the conservation area.*

*“Representative Thompson and his staff worked closely with local stakeholders to personally hear their thoughts and input, and to incorporate many of their ideas and suggestions. Because of this, H.R. 1025 has strong public support. Cities, counties, chambers of commerce and businesses throughout the region recognize the economic potential of this land designation. Landowners, farmers, and ranchers throughout the region support the bill because they see the value in preserving this area and their way of life. Recreation users from horse riders, to off road vehicle users and mountain bikers, to anglers, birders, hikers, and sportsmen treasure the region and are supportive of the proposed conservation area to maintain their recreational access. I have a list of supporters for this bill that I would like to submit with my testimony for the record.*

*“By being a grandmother, protecting our public lands for future generations is important to me. I want to make sure that this scenic treasure is permanently protected so that it can be enjoyed by my grandchildren and their grandchildren. I am proud to say that my husband and I have been able to do just that. We have placed a conservation easement on Running Deer Ranch to ensure permanent protection of our ranch and the valuable habitat it provides, it is important to us to know that our ranch will remain a ranch as it is into the future.*

*“In addition to permanently protecting the open space of our ranch, we also put a trail easement on our property to open public access to 9,100 acres of Bureau of Land Management federal public lands that had been landlocked. Today, the public can hike a path up to the Berryessa Peak public lands, legally, for the first time in 150 years. Breathtaking vistas, camping opportunities, rugged cliffs and seasonal creeks all can be enjoyed by the public now and for many years to come. I look forward to my grandsons hiking this trail with their Boy Scout troops.*

*“In conclusion, the Berryessa Snow Mountain region deserves to be permanently protected for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future generations. I strongly support H.R. 1025 to protect the Berryessa Snow Mountain region and urge favorable and swift action on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.”*