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President could declare San Gabriel Mountains monument as final act, Rep. Judy Chu says



Bicyclists compete in the 4.25-mile course up Glendora Mountain Road in the Angeles National Forest above Glendora during the first day of the San Dimas Stage Race on Friday, March 28, 2014. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda/ San Gabriel Valley Tribune)

By Steve Scauzillo, San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Mountain bikers, clergy and a super-majority of Los Angeles County residents are joining the push to turn 532,000 acres of the San Gabriel Mountains into a national monument.

But the most important sponsor, President Barack Obama himself, has so far remained mum on whether he will designate a large swath of the transverse mountain range from Castaic to Mt. Baldy as the nation's 110th national monument.

During a visit before this news group's editorial board this week, chief congressional sponsor Rep. Judy Chu, D-Pasadena, said she's spoken to the president's staff about designating the vast, mostly untouched treasure a national monument and that he is genuinely interested.

"We are in a special place where we have the interest of the administration," Chu said.

She intimated that Obama, who designated the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks national Monument in New Mexico only four months ago, may have the San Gabriel Mountains on his list before he leaves office in January 2017.

"We could be one of the lucky ones," Chu said. "It could be the last one he designates."

John Podesta, counselor to Obama, was quoted in the Seattlepi.com on Sept. 19 as saying the president wanted to preserve more of America's treasured wild lands. He said the president "has his pen and intends to use it," according to the news organization story.

The story also says there are only two more possible candidates on the president's list, the first being Idaho's

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Boulder-White Clouds region, a designation favored by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho. The second most likely choice would be the San Gabriel Mountains, according to the article.

Chu said she is reaching out to the communities on the San Bernardino County side of monument. San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors voted to oppose the designation earlier this month, calling Chu's move an end run around the Congress and the people of San Bernardino who have not had a chance to respond to the potential impacts and benefits of a national monument.



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Later this month, the Rancho Cucamonga City Council voted in favor of national monument status. The City Council asked to be included in Chu's original proposal for a San Gabriel Mountains National Recreation Area, because they said it would bring extra federal resources such as rangers to help deal with the onslaught of visitors to Cucamonga Canyon.

"We have some serious challenges today in the Cucamonga Canyon area and this designation might give us the resources we finally need to do the job that needs to be done out there," said Mayor Dennis Michael.

An August poll released by Chu's office Tuesday conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, a Republican polling firm, found 80 percent of Los Angeles County voters supported protecting the San Gabriel Mountains and rivers. Of that, 88 percent of Latino voters were in support.

Chu's bill was the result of an 11-year process for a national recreation area that would also include foothill areas, the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo rivers and a large portion of the Puente-Chino Hills. But on Monday, Chu told the editorial board that her bill was going nowhere in Congress and she needed to change tactics.

Because of congressional "gridlock," she has asked the president to include much of the same area and provisions into a national monument designation. Such a proposal would only include federal forest land and would not include the rivers along the 605 Freeway nor the Puente-Chino Hills along the 60 Freeway.

Chu said both the NRA and the national monument would add resources to the twin forests, such as more bathrooms, better signs and more rangers, although she could not say how much more.

Other areas after being declared a national monument by either the president or Congress saw improvements, she said. "The national monument at Fort Ord saw an increase in their budget for the coming year," she said.

Both proposals would protect existing water rights, allow for governmental agencies to run dams and reservoirs for water storage, and allow continued recreational opportunities such as fishing, hunting and mountain biking, she said.

Chu has met with the Mount Wilson Bicycling Association and the Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association since members of the group attended a town hall Aug. 26 in Baldwin Park.

"The cyclists' concerns about a national monument were addressed when it was explained that mountain biking is very compatible with a national monument designation," Chu said in a statement.

The congresswoman also said the monument status would have no impact on "valid, existing, mining rights" but that it would prohibit new mining.

Also, in an effort to continue the use of motorized four-wheelers and pickup truck mud racing in San Gabriel Canyon's OHV areas, the designated area off Highway 39 above Azusa and an area near Little Rock were excluded from the national monument boundary, according to the group the San Gabriel Mountains Forever, a supporter of the measures.

On Sept. 22, religious leaders from seven different faith communities in Southern California representing 700 congregations wrote a letter in support of the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument to President Obama. Signees included Bishop Minerva G. Carcano of the Los Angeles Area of The United Methodist Church and Rev.

Wendy Tajima, interim executive presbyter of the San Gabriel Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Organizations that signed the letter included Progressive Christians Uniting and Creation Justice Ministries in



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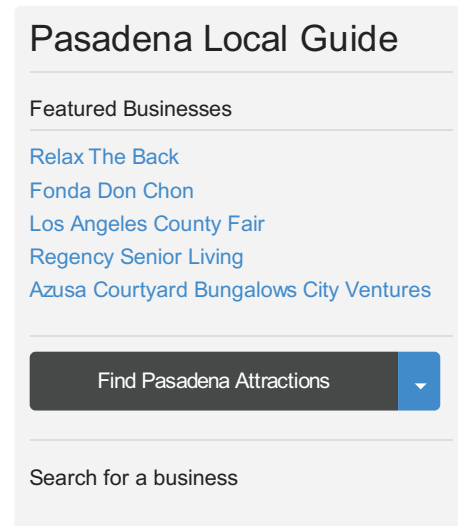
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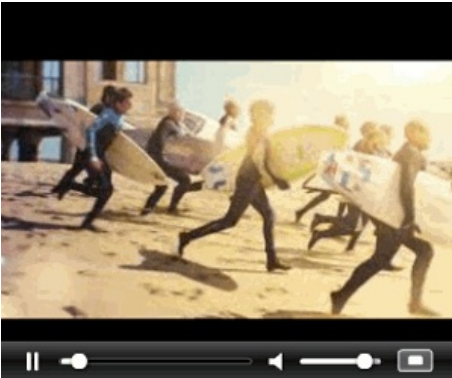
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