



June 17, 2008

Senator Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C.
20510

Dear Senator Feinstein,

I am writing regarding the “Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act”, an important piece of proposed federal legislation with potentially significant impacts to trails and outdoor recreation here in Mammoth Lakes.

The Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Foundation (MLTPA) was born out of the kind of recreation and land management conflicts that can plague our community. For MLTPA, it was a private gate being built across a public road by several homeowner associations attempting to deal with parking issues involving backcountry skiers and snowboarders on their way out of the Sherwins Range. The issues were ultimately resolved, but with much expense of time, effort, money and acrimonious debate within the community. There are several ongoing and persistent situations with similar characteristics sapping the community’s energy and resources, and MLTPA is working hard to find new solutions to these ongoing and any potential future sources of conflict.

To this end:

- MLTPA initiated a multi-partnered trails planning effort in the Mammoth Lakes region and has secured over \$300,000 dollars of financing for the project. Jurisdictional Partners are the Town of Mammoth Lakes and the USFS; Funding Partners are the Town of Mammoth Lakes (\$100,000); Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (\$100,000); and The Developers’ Forum (\$50,000); Planning Partners are the Town of Mammoth Lakes, USFS, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, and MLTPA.
- MLTPA secured a \$120,000 grant from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) through California Proposition 84 monies for public outreach, data collection and development, and ongoing services and capacity in support of this trails planning effort.
- MLTPA lobbied for – and was instrumental in the passage of – Measure R, a local .05% sales tax initiative for the specific benefit of recreation, trails, and parks. Measure R required a 2/3 plus one vote to pass, and the Mammoth Lakes community, in these challenging and uncertain economic times, responded on June 3rd by passing Measure R with 72% of the vote.

Our concerns with the “Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act” are as follows:

- The net effect of proposed wilderness in the Mammoth Lakes region could exacerbate user conflict by denying already eligible landscapes to specific user groups with the unintended effect that these same user groups will then have no choice but to recreate in areas already crowded with other – mostly incompatible – recreation users.
- Placing significant local acreage into Wilderness will deny land managers important tools that are needed to plan and program multiple outdoor recreation activities, and will run the risk of institutionalizing user conflict through land use designation.
- Existing Wilderness boundaries are well defined by natural topographic features – high alpine ridges, for example. Proposed Wilderness boundaries would be located without logical or natural topographic reference, meaning that additional resources will have to be found for enforcement, public education, and outreach. These resources are not locally available, and I am not sure they are represented in the proposed legislation. Absent these resources, opportunities for Wilderness violations and ensuing conflicts and confrontations are rife.
- The Mammoth Lakes community has made it unequivocally clear – by the passage of Measure R – that we are willing to commit financial resources to the recreational infrastructure of our region. It would be unfortunate if this willingness to extend stewardship and the opportunities to build constituencies for this majestic landscape were to be squandered through years of future acrimony and conflict due to the imposition of unenforceable and perhaps arbitrary boundaries.

It is my understanding that the final ingredients of the proposed legislation have yet to be all brought together. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions about these comments or concerning the enclosed map, which we have also prepared.

We live in this region because of Wilderness; it is the defining character of our landscape. All of our interests lie in the success of Wilderness, and the opportunities it offers every citizen.

Respectfully -

John Wentworth
President, MLTPA Foundation