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**COUNTY OF MENDOCINO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

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July 14, 2020

The Honorable Kamala Harris
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jared Huffman
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Subject: Support for S. 3288

Dear Senator Harris and Representative Huffman:

Your Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California (PUBLIC) Lands Act (S. 3288) will benefit Mendocino County in the following ways.

Protection of lands as wilderness: Wilderness is the highest level of protection available to federal lands under federal law. The legislation will establish two new wilderness areas on federal lands in Mendocino County encompassing over 17,300 acres along the Black Butte River east of Round Valley and at English Ridge along the Eel River north of Hearst. The bill will also enlarge the existing Elkhorn Ridge, Sanhedrin, South Fork Eel, Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel, and Yuki Wilderness areas by over 22,000 acres. Once protected as wilderness, federal lands remain open to hunting, hiking, fishing, horseback riding, camping, and other non-motorized recreation activities while being protected from road construction and other types of development. No roads or other vehicle routes that are open to the public will be closed by these proposals and no private lands will be impacted.

Protection of streams as wild and scenic rivers: Wild and scenic river status is the highest form of protection available for streams under federal law. Once a stream is designated as a wild and scenic river the construction of new dams and new major diversions are prohibited. Existing dams and water rights are unaffected. Federal public lands within the corridor are managed to protect the free flowing character and outstanding natural and cultural values of the river. S. 3288 would protect over 83 miles of stream in Mendocino County as wild and scenic rivers, including South Fork Eel River, Elder Creek, Cedar Creek, East Branch South Fork Eel River, Elk Creek, Eden Creek, Deep Hole Creek, Indian Creek, and Fish Creek.

Establishment of the Sanhedrin Conservation Management Area: The Sanhedrin Ranch east of Willits in the Mendocino National Forest is in the process of being sold and/or donated to the Forest Service and the current owner wants to ensure that the land is appropriately managed once it becomes federal land. The bill will protect the Sanhedrin Ranch as a "conservation management area" where public access would be allowed for the first time and the land would be managed to promote conservation, sustainable public recreation and other activities. This proposal has the strong support of the current owner of the Sanhedrin Ranch.

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Identifying and restoring sites on federal lands impacted by trespass cannabis cultivation: The legislation will establish a federal, state, local, and tribal partnership charged with identifying and restoring sites impacted by trespass marijuana cultivation on federal public lands. There will be no impact on private lands. This is important because our federal public lands have been plagued by illegal marijuana cultivation since at least 2001. There are now literally thousands of sites on our public lands strewn with trash, tainted by toxic chemicals and suffering other impacts from trespass grows. The Mendocino National Forest was at one time the most grown-upon area of public land in the United States. It is time to clean up the backlog of old grows and to prevent the establishment of new ones.

A study of the Bigfoot National Recreation Trail: The legislation would require a study of the feasibility of establishing a 360-mile “Bigfoot National Recreation Trail” that would run from the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness in the south to Redwood National Park in the north. The trail is meant to celebrate and highlight the world-class ecological diversity that occurs in the region. It would connect to the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail that runs from Mexico to Canada. The proposed trail would begin in Mendocino County’s remote Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness. Even though it is only in the conceptual stage, the proposed path is already attracting visitors from around the world.

Trails study: The bill requires the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service to conduct a study of existing trails and potential new trails for hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and off-highway vehicle use in northwestern California, including Mendocino County. This is important because even communities with ample nearby public lands such as Round Valley, Potter Valley, Laytonville, and Leggett lack easily-accessible trails for recreation. The trails study will provide stakeholders with a “menu” of options for new and existing trail opportunities that can be pursued in the future.

Economic benefits: S. 3288 will boost tourism and outdoor recreation by providing more protected wild places as recreation destinations and boosting regional trails. Residents of the 2nd Congressional District spend \$1.93 billion on outdoor recreation each year. Camping, trail sports, and water sports are the most popular activities in the district, which is home to at least 134 outdoor companies. Visitors who recreate in roadless areas spend \$38 per person for day trips and \$85 for multi-day trips. The bill will also increase employment opportunities for forest restoration and the remediation of illegal marijuana grows.

Partnerships for public land stewardship: The legislation will authorize the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service to work with non-profit organizations and other entities to help care for trails, roads, campgrounds and other federal assets. This is critically important given the many unmet maintenance needs on our public lands.

S. 3288 is undoubtedly one of the most collaboratively-developed public lands conservation bills in California history. For example, you:

- Enlisted local people to spend 3 years asking an extremely diverse array of stakeholders why they value public lands, and what policy issues should be addressed in public lands legislation
- Used the input to craft draft proposals meant to address a variety of issues raised by stakeholders
- Released a draft bill for public review and left it online for over a year to solicit public comments
- Held four public meetings about the draft bill in 2018 in Crescent City, Eureka, Ukiah, and Weaverville that were attended by over 550 people
- Made many changes to the draft bill before introducing it
- Made it clear that you would consider additional changes even after introduction

This sort of transparency and collaboration in developing federal legislation is quite unusual.

Because of the benefits to Mendocino County's people and public lands we are pleased to strongly support S. 3288. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any further assistance in passing the measure.

Sincerely,

John Haschak, Chair
Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

CC: California State Association of Counties
Rural County Representatives of California