

Supervisors again endorse Berryessa Snow Mountain conservation area

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Yolo County supervisors have once again endorsed legislation that would designate the Berryessa Snow Mountain region as a National Conservation Area.

By a 3-2 vote, supervisors on Tuesday urged Congress to pass legislation introduced by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., and Rep. Mike Thompson, D-St. Helena, designating close to 350,000 acres of federal lands in Yolo, Lake, Mendocino, Napa and Solano counties as a new national conservation area that would stretch more than 100 miles from Putah Creek to the peak of Snow Mountain.

The area is home to a wide variety of wildlife and plant life and is also used extensively for hiking, camping, rafting and horseback riding.

Under the proposed legislation, the Bureau of Land Management would oversee all of the federal land within the area.

Supervisors endorsed a resolution in February calling for the creation of the national conservation area with a request that staff return to the board with the actual legislation, including language that Thompson had said would be added to specifically protect private property rights.

As they did in February, Supervisors Don Saylor and Jim Provenza of Davis as well as Mike McGowan of West Sacramento voted to endorse the legislation Tuesday while Matt Rexroad of Woodland and Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th District voted against it.

Chamberlain again expressed concern that formally designating the region a national conservation area would just serve to increase the number of visitors, which could end up hurting the land, he said.

“They call it a conservation area but how will encouraging more people to go up in there and wander around in there (lead to conservation)?” he asked Tuesday, adding that he has property in Glenn County that borders Bureau of Land Management property, “and people come down out of the hill and don’t even know where they are.”

But Bob Schneider, senior policy director for Tuleyome, said more and more people are visiting the area now, “and we can better manage the impact” if the area is designated an NCA.

“We’ve been strong advocates for permanent protection of federal land in the Snow Mountain region,” he said. “We’re happy to see this move forward.”

Schneider added that previous concerns about the impact on private property owners in the area have been addressed.

Specifically, the legislation now contains language that nothing in the act requires private property owners to allow public access to their land, nor does the act create a protective buffer around the conservation area. Additionally, private property within the boundaries of the NCA can only be acquired through exchange, donation or purchase from a willing seller.

In addition to weighing in on that federal legislation, county supervisors on Tuesday also took a stand on a state constitutional amendment introduced by state Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis.

SCA 10 would require all state legislation, except emergency bills, to be in print and online for three days prior to final passage by the Senate or Assembly.

Provenza noted that particularly when it comes to budget trailer bills, “no one sees them before they’re voted on,” even though they often have a significant impact on counties.

“This is a very simple constitutional standard,” he said. “Everything they vote on has to be in print for three days so everyone in the state has a chance to see it.”

Rexroad was the lone supervisor on Tuesday voting against a resolution endorsing SCA 10, saying he didn’t think the county should be taking a position on another legislative body’s processes.

Saylor said he agreed with Rexroad in concept, but that “on issues affecting the county... it’s appropriate.”

The final vote was 4-1 in favor.