

Randy Banis
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 857
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Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to offer input on H.R. 857, the California Off-Road Recreation and Conservation Act. I'd like to thank Representative Paul Cook for introducing the legislation, and Chairman Rob Bishop for scheduling it for this hearing today.

My name is Randy Banis and I serve on the all-volunteer Desert District Advisory Council of the Bureau of Land Management where I represent the interests of recreation's stakeholders in the California desert. I've worked at length in hope of creating a sustainable future for motorized recreation in the desert, and I'm very pleased how far H.R. 857 goes to making that future a reality.

Within the California desert are tens of millions of acres of federal lands featuring some of the most extraordinary and unspoiled landscapes in the world. Dotted across these lands are unique destinations of interest to many Americans, such as abandoned ghost towns, spectacular sand dunes, desolate dry lakes, colorful mineralogical deposits, and vast valleys blanketed with wildflowers.

One thing in common among environmentalists and off-road vehicle enthusiasts is that we both enjoy these same treasures. A second, is our support of H.R. 857.

Born out of a deeply collaborative process involving diverse interests across the California desert, H.R. 857 is a tide that will rise all boats. First, it designates some 329,000 acres as wilderness, most of which are already within Wilderness Study Areas and being managed as wilderness. Yet in doing so, H.R. 857 provides all the necessary wilderness corridors that keeps the existing legal motorized route networks in tact. Visitors will retain access to enjoy their favorite destinations while these special lands receive the durable protection of congress.

Most special to off-road vehicle enthusiasts are the 143,000 acres that would be designated National Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Areas. Although these five areas are currently managed as off-highway vehicle recreation areas, since just 2012 they have suffered a 30% loss in acreage due to competing uses. To rectify this recent loss, the act immediately adds 12,000 acres of new off-highway vehicle recreation lands, and provides a mechanism to add up to 52,000 additional acres after a two-year study. Through H.R. 857, our highly popular Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Areas are protected for the enjoyment of generations to come.

Why is this important? Off-road vehicle recreation has long been an essential thread within the multiple use fabric in the California deserts. Americans crave and demand access to their public lands for healthy, family oriented outdoor activities and in the California desert, motorized recreation is most often their choice. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in a 2016 report

noted that of all recreation visits to BLM managed lands in California, 79% were motorized recreation visits.

In addition to being a growth engine for the manufacturing and sales of outdoor oriented vehicles and equipment, off-road vehicle recreation also helps sustain economic opportunity in many struggling desert communities that rely on public lands visitors for much of their commerce.

Designated off-road recreation areas have proved to be essential tools for the management of conservation areas. Providing the public with meaningful and managed opportunities to enjoy off-road recreation on public lands helps to contain high impact activities to where they are most appropriate.

It is also important because H.R. 857 exemplifies the broad outreach to stakeholders and widespread local collaboration that we all want to see in a federal lands bill. Representative Cook and his staff sought and received input not only from the off-roading and conservation communities, but also from tribal representatives, utilities, local governments, branches of the military, rural residents, chambers of commerce, mining and other industries. Although not everything from everyone's wish list made it into this bill, H.R. 857 comes as close to a consensus product as one can get.

Thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to any questions you might have.