

**Testimony of**

**Senator Barbara Boxer**

**Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining**

**Hearing on  
S. 771, the Soledad Canyon Settlement Act  
and  
S. 483, the Berryessa Snow Mountain  
National Conservation Area Act**

**Wednesday, November 20, 2013**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding today's hearing and for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of two bills on today's agenda that I have written: S. 771, the Soledad Canyon Settlement Act, and S. 483, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Act.

**S.771, the Soledad Canyon Settlement Act**

I would like to begin my remarks in support of S. 771, which resolves a fourteen-year-old mining dispute between the City of Santa Clarita and the mining company, CEMEX USA. This bill is a reasonable compromise that solves a difficult problem. Since 2004, I have been working with the affected parties to not only solve a long-term dispute, but also protect the economic interests of the contract holder, meet the long-term needs of the community, and facilitate the preservation of fragile natural resources.

**[Chart #1]**

S.771 cancels CEMEX's mining contracts with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to mine sand and gravel from the Soledad Canyon site immediately east of the City of Santa Clarita, and permanently

withdraw this area from mining. The bill also directs BLM to sell federal lands previously identified for disposal, and use the proceeds to fairly compensate the mining company.

**[Chart #2]**

The rapidly changing dynamics of this community no longer make this area conducive to a large mining operation. Since BLM awarded the mining contracts in 1990, the size of the city has increased 33 percent and the population has more than doubled, making Santa Clarita the fastest growing city in the State of California.

**[Chart #3]**

If the Soledad Canyon Mine opens, Santa Clarita Valley would see considerable increases in traffic congestion, as well as harmful impacts to the air quality - exceeding California's air quality standards. My constituents are concerned that going forward with the mine would affect their quality of life, leading to increased noise pollution, adverse affects on real estate values, and hindering local economic growth.

**[Chart#4]**

The proposed Soledad Canyon mining site sits within an area identified by BLM itself (the same agency that issued the mining contracts), as well as the National Park Service, and the U.S. Forest Service as important for natural resource preservation, habitat connectivity, and biodiversity. Mr. Chairman, the federal government should not allow this mine to be developed, especially in light of its own concerns about the importance of preserving the environmental integrity of Soledad Canyon and the Santa Clara River.

After years of extensive negotiation, my bill has the support from CEMEX, the City of Santa Clarita, the environmental community, Senator Dianne Feinstein, Congressman Buck McKeon, and most recently, the State of California with John Laird, the Secretary for Natural Resources saying, "The City of Santa Clarita will greatly benefit from improved quality of life derived from large-scale mining operations moved to a more

appropriate location.” Mr. Chairman, I whole-heartedly agree, and I would like to submit his support letter to the record. Both the State’s and CEMEX’s support shows enough mining resources exist elsewhere, without the need for the Soledad Canyon mine. In addition, I would like to add Senator Feinstein’s statement in support of this bill into the record as well.

**[Chart #5]**

**S. 483, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act**

Mr. Chairman, I am also here to testify on behalf of another bill that I have sponsored, S. 483, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Act. Congressman Mike Thompson has joined me as a sponsor of this legislation in the House.

S. 483 designates 350,000 acres of existing federal lands, stretching over 100 miles throughout parts of Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Solano, and Yolo Counties of northern California as a National Conservation Area, or NCA.

My bill does not add any new lands to the Federal government – the lands included in this NCA are already managed by the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation. The NCA designation would require the federal agencies to develop guiding principles and goals, in consultation with stakeholders and the public, to improve multi-agency coordination on wildlife preservation and habitat restoration, preventing and fighting forest fires, combating invasive species and water pollution, and enhancing recreational opportunities. The NCA will allow these agencies to have a coordinated approach and more easily share resources.

**[Chart #6]**

The proposed NCA region is one of the most beautiful and ecologically diverse areas in California, including the existing Snow Mountain, Cache Creek, and Cedar Roughs Wilderness Areas. The area's rich biodiversity is home to dozens of rare plant life found nowhere else in the world, as well as a variety of wildlife, such as bald and golden eagles, black bear, mountain lion, and tule elk. The topography contains numerous creeks, ridges, and canyons among its many pristine and diverse landscapes.

**[Chart #7]**

This bill will put the Berryessa Snow Mountain region on the map as a destination for families and recreation enthusiasts, and it permanently protects this area for future generations to enjoy. Even though the region is one of the most beautiful and diverse, it is also one of the least known regions of California. An NCA designation will raise the area's profile, reaching out to more diverse audiences, allowing people from all walks of life to better appreciate this truly amazing and awe inspiring area.

Creation of this proposed NCA has strong local support. It is the culmination of concerned citizens taking the initiative to care for the beautiful areas in their communities, and I am proud to support their work and commitment.

Mr. Chairman, once again, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of my two bills, S.771, the Soledad Canyon Settlement Act, and S. 483, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act. I stand ready to work with you to advance these very important pieces of legislation, and I urge my colleagues for their support.

Thank you.

# S. 771 – Soledad Canyon Settlement Act

- Resolves a 14-year mining dispute between Santa Clarita and CEMEX.
- Cancels the 20-year long mining contract between BLM and CEMEX.
- Withdraws the Soledad Canyon site from future mining.
- Fairly compensates CEMEX for the value of the cancelled contracts.
- Preserves a positive quality of life for nearby residents and businesses.
- Preserves fragile natural habitat and ecological resources.
- Has the support from CEMEX, City of Santa Clarita, State of California, and environmental community.

# Santa Clarita Valley

- The population has more than doubled since mining contracts were awarded in 1990
- Third Largest City in Los Angeles County  
(behind L.A. and Long Beach)
- Ranks Top 5 Percent of Largest Statewide Municipalities
- The Fastest Growing City in California  
(as identified by the California Department of Finance)

# Opening the Soledad Canyon Mine

## 1) Increases Traffic Congestion:

At full operational levels, 1164 extra truck trips from the mine would daily subject local residents to increased traffic and longer commutes.  
(figures derived from BLM Environmental Impact Statement - 2000)

## 2) Harms Air Quality:

A 2004 analysis determined the mine would increase particulate matter, exceeding California's air quality standards.  
(South Coast Air Quality Management District's Santa Clarita Subregional Analysis - 2004)

## 3) Affects Quality of Life:

Mining would increase noise pollution, deter residential and economic growth, and negatively affect local real estate values.  
(Claremont McKenna College's Economic Impact Analysis – 2007)

## 4) Impacts Natural Resources:

The area has been identified by Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service for its habitat value and biodiversity.

# Federal Studies Highlighting Ecological Importance of Soledad Canyon

## South Coast Resource Management Plan (Bureau of Land Management – Interior Dept.)

- Identifies the Santa Clara River as one of the last free-flowing rivers in southern California.
- “...the BLM parcels near the river have become important for maintaining wildlife corridors and habitat in the region.”

## Rim of the Valley Corridor Resources Study (National Park Service – Interior Dept.)

- “The Upper Santa Clara River contains some of the highest quality, least disturbed and biotically intact acreage of big-cone Douglas fir-canyon oak forest, riparian forest and woodlands, coastal sage scrub, and alluvial fan sage scrub” along with over 2,500 species of invertebrates.

## San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study (National Park Service – Interior Dept.)

- Highlights the Santa Clara River as “the last unchannelized riparian and wildlife corridor in the region, providing the primary remaining east-west biological connection between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Pacific Ocean.”

## East Santa Clarita Land Conservation Concept Plan (collaboration with U.S. Forest Service – USDA)

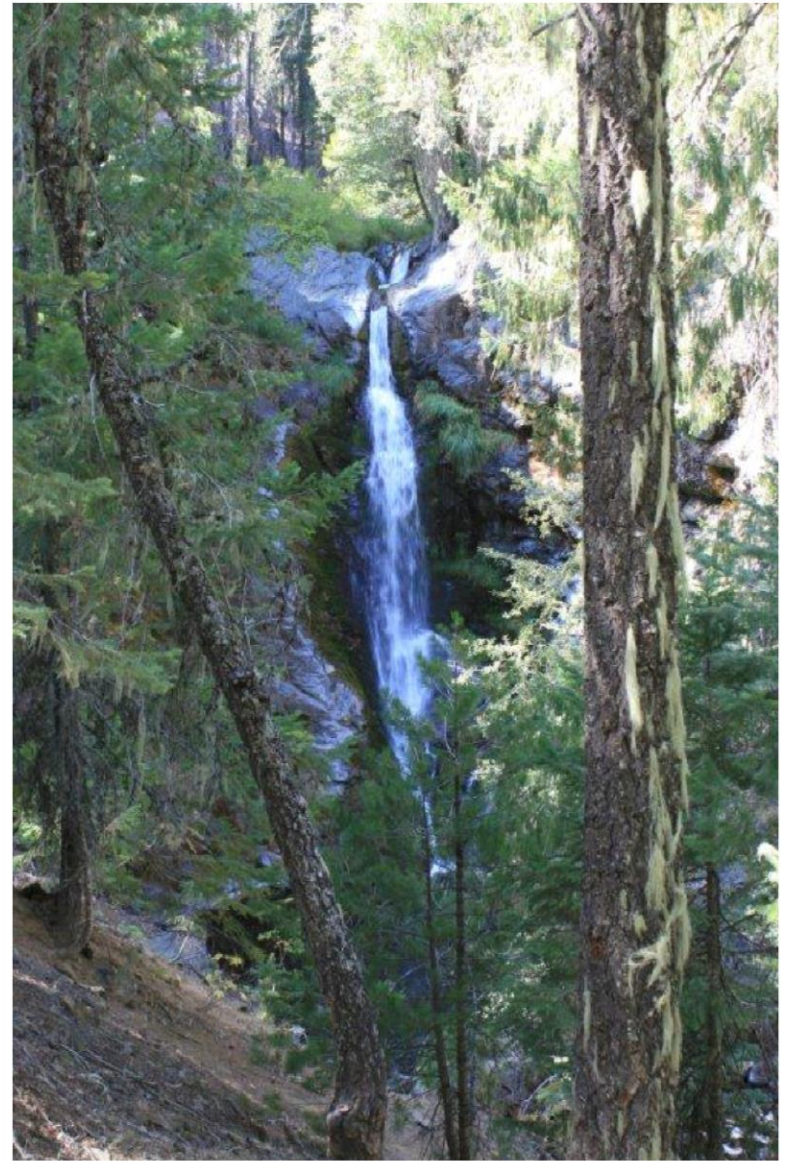
- Identifies the importance of connecting the northern and southern sections of the Angeles National Forest, which surrounds the City of Santa Clarita, to facilitate critical wildlife linkages and habitat preservation. The Soledad Canyon mining site is located within the study’s planning zone.





**S. 483 - Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area Act**

# Berryessa Snow Mountain's Pristine Wilderness



# Berryessa Snow Mountain's Diverse Landscapes

