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***Land Swap Secures Wash Plan Implementation, Infrastructure, Habitat Protection***

*A bi-partisan bill introduced today in Congress expands sensitive habitat and critical water recharge efforts while ensuring long-term viability of mining operations. Industry and environmental interests call it win-win for everyone.*

*REDLANDS, Calif.* — A bill introduced in Congress today calls for an exchange of land that would protect environmental, community and economic interests in the eastern San Bernardino Valley, while providing environmental clearance to complete the final link of the Santa Ana River Trail.

The Bill supporting the Upper Santa Ana River Wash Plan, introduced by U.S. Reps. Pete Aguilar (D-Redlands) and Colonel Paul Cook (R-Apple Valley), would facilitate an exchange of land between the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District and the Bureau of Land Management to allow for a change in land use to protect environmentally sensitive habitat, enhance the district's ability to recharge water into the basin and ensure the longevity of existing mining operations that will provide \$36 million in payroll annually and provide \$8.5 million in local infrastructure as well as local aggregate for construction projects throughout the region.

The 4,500-acre Wash Plan exchanges heavily disturbed BLM land near existing mining operations to the water conservation district, which in turn would transfer to the BLM land that is superior for habitat protection and management. The exchange is necessary because of a 1908 act of Congress that set aside certain lands for water recharge but not mining on the BLM land.

The plan reflects the work of a task force established in 2002 by the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District and restarted in 2013 following several other unsuccessful attempts at addressing competing land use needs at the wash. Members included the district, County of San Bernardino, cities of Highland and Redlands, the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, East Valley Water District, two aggregate miners (Robertson's Ready Mix and CEMEX), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife.

"I'm glad to have the opportunity to work with Rep. Cook and our local businesses and environmental groups to make this land transfer a success," said Aguilar. "The Wash Plan will empower industries to

take root and flourish, continue investments in our transportation and infrastructure, and preserve our environment and regional wildlife. This is an important step forward for the Inland Empire Community.”

Rep. Cook called the project a win for the economy and a win for the environment. “This will align local land ownership with appropriate uses, setting aside already disturbed land for aggregate mining and setting aside important habitat for conservation purposes,” he said.

San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District General Manager Daniel Cozad said the land exchange will lead to more protection efforts for habitat, improved connectivity in the wildlife corridor, expanded water recharge and storage capacity, and the future establishment of public access and trails which, once built, would connect and help complete the Santa Ana River Trail.

“This project has been 15 years in the making,” Cozad said. “Doing a Habitat Conservation Plan with this many Task Force Members is unusual, particularly when you consider each has a different mission to implement.”

Christine Goeyvaerts, property manager for Robertson’s Ready Mix, said the Wash Plan represents the best of all options.

"Robertson's has been an integral part of the growth of Southern California for more than 30 years. We put a value in helping not only to support the local construction industry, but also in the role we play promoting jobs and projects that bring about a higher quality of life to the region. The Wash Plan provides a viable solution for both industry and environment by balancing all needs into one project that will protect nature, augment habitat, expand on our environmental resources and still protect the future of the largest industry in the Inland Empire," she said. "This project is a win-win for everyone."

Dan Silver, a regional habitat conservation plan expert who volunteered to participate in the project’s development, agreed.

“The Wash Plan protects and manages a rare community of life along Santa Ana River, and simultaneously ensures compatible economic activity,” he said. “It also shows how the Endangered Species Act can be successfully implemented when there is local leadership and collaboration.”

While the bill is in the legislative process the BLM will review and process the exchange and the state and federal agencies will review to ensure it complies with federal and state endangered species acts. When the Bill is signed and the environmental documents are certified the exchange can be completed.

#### **About the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District**

The SBVWCD serves an area totaling 50,000 acres within unincorporated San Bernardino County as well as portions of the cities of San Bernardino, Loma Linda, Redlands, and Highland. The water recharged by the District serves 227,580 people in the District who use well water through partner water agencies. In addition, cities and agriculture in Riverside County pump and use water recharged by the District. SBVWCD recharges native river, creek, and State Project water on behalf of its customers and water partners.