

## Community Volunteers and Leaders Applaud U.S. Senator Alex Padilla For Sweeping Wilderness and Public Land Legislation

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Community volunteers and leaders from Nature For All joined with other organizations Monday to applaud U.S. Senator Alex Padilla for introducing sweeping legislation that will protect one million acres of public land and over 500 miles of rivers in California. The Public Lands Act (S. 1459) will safeguard public land in the San Gabriel Mountains, the Central Coast and Northwest California.

“We value and commend Senator Padilla's leadership as he commits to safeguard over 1 million acres of California public lands and over 500 miles of rivers,” said **Belen Bernal, executive director of Nature for All**. “This action permanently protects critical drinking water sources and access to healthy activities in the San Gabriel Mountains that will benefit all Californians, including those in many of the state's economically disadvantaged areas and communities of color. Thank you for ensuring access to nature for all, Senator Padilla.”

“Our public lands are one of our state’s greatest gifts – from the San Gabriel Mountains, to the Central Coast, and through Northwestern California’s forests and rivers. It is incumbent upon us to be thoughtful stewards of these special places so that our communities can enjoy them and benefit from America’s natural resources for generations to come,” said **Padilla**. “And we must do so in a way that reverses racial and economic disparities in access to nature and parks. Some of the protected land in this bill serves densely populated areas of the state that don’t have equal access to nature, which will help rebalance this historic disparity in access to untouched wilderness.”

“Thank you to Senator Padilla for being a champion for protecting and providing access to California’s public lands and rivers,” said **Thomas Wong, board chair, Nature for All**, and Board President, San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District. “Senator Padilla’s leadership on this important bill will ensure our communities in Los Angeles and throughout the state can experience nature and enjoy its benefits for generations to come.”

The public land that will be protected and preserved by the legislation provides many community benefits, including respite and tranquility for many people who live in dense urban areas and have limited access to enjoy nature in parks or other public outdoor spaces, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“These mountains are the lungs to Los Angeles, providing us with clean air that we breathe,” said **Severiana Pablo, Panorama City, Nature For All community ambassador**. “This is especially important for the children and the elders in my community, many suffer from asthma or other respiratory illnesses due to excessive smog and other pollutants found in our community. Thank you, Senator Alex Padilla for your support for the conservation of the San Gabriels.”

"Our health outcomes should not be determined by what zip code we live in," said **Vanessa Aramayo, executive director, Alliance for a Better Community, and board member, Nature for All**. “Everyone in Los Angeles and throughout our state should have equitable access to health and wellness - and this includes access to nature. Thank you, Senator Padilla, for your support and leadership in protecting these beloved places for us **all** to enjoy long into the future."

The legislative package of S. 1459 and H.R. 803 (which itself combined with key bills from the U.S. House of Representatives) would protect and preserve public land in California. The bills included in S. 1459 are:

San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act, Rep. Judy Chu (D-Pasadena)

Central Coast Heritage Protection Act, Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-Santa Barbara)

Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act, Rep. Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael)

H.R. 803 passed the full House earlier this year. The Biden Administration announced full support of the bill package, giving added momentum for approval of the bills in the Senate following the House vote.