



## **Senator Padilla Champions Protections for Central Coast Lands and Rivers**



Bryant Baker, Los Padres ForestWatch

### **Companion legislation to Representative Carbajal's Central Coast Heritage Protection Act introduced**

*By the Central Coast Wild Heritage Campaign*

Senator Alex Padilla has introduced the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act, a bill that will protect special places in the Los Padres National Forest and Carrizo Plain National Monument for their ecological, cultural, and recreational values. The bill also prohibits future oil drilling in certain places, improves equitable access to the outdoors, and benefits local and statewide economies.

The bill incorporates Representative Carbajal's Central Coast Heritage Protection Act, which passed the House of Representatives in February. It designates more than 245,000 acres of wilderness and 400 miles of the Condor National Scenic Trail, and creates two scenic areas encompassing 34,500 acres and safeguards about 159 miles of wild and scenic rivers.

"I'm pleased that Senator Padilla has reintroduced legislation in the Senate that will include Representative Carbajal's Central Coast Heritage Protection Act," said Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks. "This important legislation will permanently protect valuable wildlife habitat and increase habitat connectivity for imperiled species that live in the Los Padres National Forest, including the California Condor and Steelhead trout. I'm also thrilled about the prospect of having the 400-mile-long Condor National Scenic Trail, that would span the length of the Los Padres National Forest, come closer to reality." The designation of the Condor Trail as a National Scenic Trail, the same designation as the Pacific Crest and Appalachian Trails, would connect the northern and southern portions of the Los Padres by a single hiking route.

The Los Padres is the only national forest in the state with active oil development, and Carrizo Plain National Monument is bordered by some of the most intensive oil development in the country. A new oil well and pipeline were proposed within the monument boundary during the former administration. Future oil drilling will be prohibited on all lands in both regions that are protected by Senator Padilla's bill.

During the last Congress, then-Senator Kamala Harris championed similar legislation co-sponsored by Senator Dianne Feinstein. Advocates are celebrating the fact that Senator Padilla is reintroducing the bill so soon after taking office, and that Senator Feinstein is co-sponsoring the legislation again. The Central Coast provisions are part of a larger legislative package that will protect public lands and rivers in Northwest California and in the San Gabriel Mountains near Los Angeles.

Both the Los Padres and Carrizo Plain are home to Native American cultural sites and an incredible diversity of plant and animal life. The Los Padres, California's second largest national forest, rises from the Pacific Ocean to over 8,800 feet in elevation and provides habitat for 468 species of wildlife, including the endangered California condor and the southern steelhead. The Carrizo Plain contains one of the largest concentrations of threatened and endangered species in the U.S., such as the San Joaquin kit fox and blunt-nosed leopard lizard.

For Central Coast cities that have limited parks and open space, the bill protects public lands and rivers that are close by and will increase equitable access to the outdoors.

"With outdoor recreation often privatized, this legislation is a step in the right direction in protecting open spaces and securing everybody's right to the outdoors," said Rebeca Garcia, Santa Maria Policy Advocate with Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE). "Accessible outdoor spaces are a crucial contributor to improving the overall health of our working class and immigrant families. Communities of color are also often most at risk to unsafe living conditions, and this act will ensure our communities have clean air and water from Los Padres National Forest and the Carrizo Plain National Monument. Thank you to Senator

Padilla for fighting for equitable access to outdoor spaces and clean water for our vulnerable communities."

Prior to the pandemic, the Central Coast was a top tourist destination because of the region's iconic scenery and world-class restaurants, wineries, and breweries, which yield clear benefits for the local economy. Increased tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities through public lands protections will provide an additional economic boost to local communities, particularly in the area surrounding the Los Padres, as communities work to recover from the pandemic.

## TAKE ACTION

Send a message of support to Senators Padilla and Feinstein:

<http://centralcoastwild.com/get-involved/sign-the-petition/>

*The Central Coast Wild Heritage Campaign comprises more than 500 civic groups and leaders, landowners and inholders, businesses, elected officials, schools, farmers, ranchers, and recreation leaders who support the efforts of Congressman Carbajal and Senator Padilla to protect special places, safeguard clean water sources, boost local economies, and enhance recreational opportunities. Learn more: [centralcoastwild.org](http://centralcoastwild.org).*