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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

January 28, 2002

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Jeanine A. Derby
Forest Supervisor
USFS
Los Padres National Forest
6755 Hollister Ave., Ste. 150
Goleta, California 93117

Dear Ms. Derby:

I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the Los Padres National Forest Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As the U.S. Representative of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, I am concerned about this proposal to open pristine Los Padres National Forest land to oil and gas development. More importantly, I oppose the development of this EIS before the Los Padres National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan is completed in 2004.

As you know, the U.S. Forest Service is updating the Land and Resource Management Plan to create a comprehensive map focusing on the next decade of activity on the 1.75 million acre forest. This management plan will guide the direction the forest takes across the counties of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Kern and Monterey. The protection of the forest's resources and uses is crucial to its health. Neither resources nor uses can be separated from the whole when developing the best planning decisions for the national forest. I am concerned that decisions based on the oil and gas leasing EIS will fracture the forest assets into smaller segments for consideration while ignoring the health of the whole to the detriment of the forest. The U.S. Forest Service must not take this action.

Providing for the health of our forest vastly outweighs the negligible benefits of pumping oil and gas in the Los Padres National Forest. This point is especially relevant when considering economic impacts. Many high-tech firms and the tourism industry rely heavily on the beauty of the Central Coast's coastline and mountain ranges. Oil and gas development offer no benefit to the biological health of the forest, but can cause irreparable damage to the fragile habitat. We can not justify risking the forest's environmental assets for an estimated one percent of the country's oil and 6/100 of one percent of the country's natural gas underlying federal lands. The people of the Central Coast are unwilling to sacrifice their pristine natural resources to support an ever consumptive oil industry.

I request the Forest Service delay the decision to open Los Padres National Forest to Oil and Gas Leasing and incorporate the proposal into the Los Padres National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan for consideration.

Sincerely,



LOIS CAPPS
Member of Congress

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