

For Immediate Release  
September 22, 2014

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### **Religious Leaders Ask for National Monument**

Faith Communities seek protection and increased access for San Gabriel Mountains

7 leaders in the southern California faith community, representing over 700 congregations, joined with many different advocates as they asked President Obama to designate the San Gabriel Mountains a national monument in a letter sent to the Administration just prior to National Public Lands Day, which falls on Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup>. This letter included signatures by the heads of communion from the Los Angeles area of the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ in Southern California and Nevada, the Pacific-Southwest Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the San Gabriel Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Southwest California Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Southern California Mission Center of the Community of Christ, as well as local ecumenical advocacy organization Progressive Christians Uniting.

The protection proposal advocates for greater access to the San Gabriel Mountains, which would include increased parking options, restroom facilities, trash collection, appropriate signage, and multi-lingual rangers. Those advocating for protection alongside faith leaders include Hispanic organizations, community groups, businesses, utility companies, conservationists, schools, and municipalities.

Beyond the call to care for Creation, people of faith are concerned about this area because of the issue of equity. In a park-poor area like Los Angeles, advocates from the faith community believe all of God's people should have access to outdoor spaces for recreation and renewal. Ensuring vulnerable populations have opportunities to experience the benefits of the natural world is an effort that aligns with many faith tenets like caring for neighbors.

Reflecting on her own connection to the San Gabriel Mountains as a native Pasadenan, Rev. Wendy Tajima stated, "So many memories came to me immediately - growing up and now again living in its foothills, the way they demonstrate to me the steadfast strong presence of God, and as a public school child learning to camp and hike there. I was one of those urban lower-income children whose main contact with outdoor activities happened in those mountains."

"Many people who fill the local church pews every week have been advocates for the San Gabriel Mountains for years," stated Tricia Bruckbauer, Coordinator of Creation Justice Ministries, a national Christian environmental justice organization. "There is a keen understanding of the link between physical, emotional, and spiritual health and outdoors spaces that these communities are hoping to preserve for their children, their neighbors and for future generations."

The full text of the letter can be read below and is also attached.

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*September 22, 2014*

*Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500*

*Dear President Obama:*

*The San Gabriel Mountains, in California's Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests, carry religious nomenclature for good reason – these breathtaking public lands and rivers are God's creation, and as people faith, we believe that we have a moral responsibility to protect them for this and future generations.*

*The San Gabriel Mountains are the backyard of 17 million Americans, and offer critical wildlife habitat for Nelson's Bighorn sheep, California condors, mountain lions, and other species. Protecting the forest provides clean water and clean air for Angelenos and defends against climate change.*

*Perhaps most importantly, we have a shared responsibility to take steps to ensure equitable access to healthy outdoor recreation for all of God's people. Los Angeles is a park-poor community with high rates of obesity, heart disease and other illnesses. Protecting the San Gabriel Mountains and taking steps to ensure access for all is important to the health of our children, and our communities. The faith community has consistently advocated for justice for vulnerable populations, and this monument would ensure that all people have access to wonderful parts of Creation.*

*Please use the Antiquities Act to preserve the U.S. Forest Service-managed lands of the San Gabriel Mountains as a National Monument. This would ensure the conservation of our heritage, and enhance opportunities for local communities to access and enjoy these lands. From our collective 700+ congregations across Southern California, we thank you for considering our support.*

*Sincerely,*

*Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño  
Bishop of The Los Angeles Area of The United Methodist Church*

*Rev. Felix C. Villanueva*

Conference Minister of The United Church of Christ in Southern California and Nevada

*Rev. Wendy Tajima*

Interim Executive Presbyter of the San Gabriel Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

*Bishop Guy Erwin*

Bishop of the Southwest California Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*Rev. Don Dewey*

Co-Regional Minister-President of the Pacific-Southwest Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

*Terry Read*

President of the Southern California Mission Center of the Community of Christ

*Rev. Dr. Timothy Murphy*

Executive Director of Progressive Christians Uniting

Cc:

*Honorable U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein*

*Honorable U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer*

*Honorable U.S. Representative Judy Chu*

*Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture*

*Honorable Michael Boots, Acting Chair, White House Council on Environmental Quality*