



October 22, 2004

✓ Robert Garcia, Executive Director
Thomas R. Freeman
Center for Law in the Public Interest
3250 Ocean Park Boulevard, Suite 300
Santa Monica, California 90405-3219

Re: Public Access to Westridge-Canyonback Wilderness Park and "Big Wild"

Dear Mr. Garcia:

Cal/EPA Secretary Terry Tamminen has forwarded to me your letter regarding your well-founded concern over the public's right of access to public parklands. In particular, you describe a homeowner's association effort to privatize the Canyonback Road access to the "Big Wild" area of the Santa Monica Mountains.

The "Big Wild" represents approximately 21,000 acres of public land owned by state and local agencies, including the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, and the City of Los Angeles. As you so eloquently describe, this beautiful wilderness is a recreational jewel that lies virtually in the heart of the Los Angeles metropolis, and public access should be enhanced, not discouraged. As your letter indicates with the excerpt from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's response, "The imposition and intimidation to legitimate public parkland users, posed by having to push a button to seek a remotely-stationed security guard's permission to enter the street, is not acceptable."

As I understand the situation today, there has been a halt to the street privatization and construction of a guard gate since the City Attorney's further review of the City's legal obligations for maintaining public streets. And as you know, Attorney General Bill Lockyer has also written to indicate his objection to limiting public access to public land.

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Mr. Garcia and Mr. Freeman
October 22, 2004
Page 2

I very much appreciate your resolve and efforts on behalf of the public's right to have reasonable access to its parklands, and I will be following this issue. Please let me know should it again arise. I have requested that the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy continue to monitor the Canyonback Road issue, and work with your organization, the many other interested groups, and the City for maintaining trail access to this part of Santa Monica Mountains trail system.

Sincerely,



Mike Chrisman
Secretary for Resources

Cc: Joseph T. Edmiston, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
Ruth Coleman, California Department of Parks and Recreation

8.14.04