

McKeon rebuts critics' claims

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U.S. Congressman Howard P. "Buck" McKeon stands before a stretch of the Northern San Gabriel Mountains as he offers details of his bipartisan wilderness legislation during a press conference in Santa Clarita on Thursday, May 29. File photo

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In the wake of Congressman Buck McKeon's announcement last week that he has introduced legislation in the House of Representatives to designate 400,000-plus acres of Eastern Sierra lands as wilderness, the lawmaker is defending himself against allegations from a group he once counted among his top supporters.

Following Friday's press conference at the Eastern Sierra Regional Airport in Bishop in which McKeon offered details on his H.R. No. 6156 wilderness legislation, and a companion bill in the U.S. Senate by Barbara Boxer (D-California), Advocates for Access to Public Lands (AAPL) called the congressman's proposal a "180-shift" in policy and even a "betrayal."

McKeon expressed his disappointment Friday in Noles' views, releasing a two-page statement in which he takes to task some of the more harsh claims made by Noles in the Thursday, May 29 issue of The Inyo Register.

"He (McKeon) respects the work of certain local activists who are and will continue to be important as this bill moves forward," McKeon Press Secretary Lindsey Mask said, "but he is extremely disappointed by recent comments that were made, especially considering how hard he worked to accommodate their primary concerns."

In the response received from McKeon's office, under the heading "AAPL Member Claims About H.R. 6156 Truth Sheet," the Congressman's staff highlighted "AAPL Claims" in one column and "The Truth" in an opposite column.

The "AAPL CLAIM" is consistently attributed to quotes from Noles in the referenced

article.

- AAPL CLAIM: "...this is backdoor stuff that the public doesn't know anything about. It's a 180-degree shift on the part of Buck McKeon."

According to McKeon, various interests have been working with him for several years on the matter. "In 2004 McKeon brought together a select group of local elected officials, OHV advocates and wilderness enthusiasts to craft a compromise wilderness bill,"