

# *The California Desert Protection Act of 2011*



*Ensuring Responsible Land Use  
in the California Mojave Desert*



Dear Californian,

There are many places in the California desert where development and employment are essential and appropriate. But there are also places that future generations will thank us for setting aside.

In 2009, I discovered that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was accepting applications to build huge solar and wind projects on most federal lands in the Mojave Desert. Some of these lands had been acquired through \$40 million in private contributions, and \$18 million in taxpayer funds – for the purpose of conservation. In my view, we have an obligation to honor our commitment to conserve these pristine lands. I believe we can accomplish that goal while also fulfilling California’s commitment to develop a clean energy portfolio.

During the last Congress, I introduced legislation that would balance the need to protect the California desert while encouraging development of renewable energy projects on suitable lands. In January 2011, I reintroduced the conservation and recreation portions of my bill and will work with my Senate colleagues to draft separate legislation to help address a range of renewable energy issues.

The legislation, called the California Desert Protection Act of 2011, would:

- Designate two new national monuments—the Mojave Trails and the Sand to Snow National Monuments;
- Add adjacent lands to the Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks and the Mojave National Preserve;
- Permanently protect 5 wilderness study areas as designated wilderness, and protect 4 important waterways, such as the Amargosa River and Deep Creek, as Wild and Scenic Rivers;
- Improve and accelerate the process to permit large-scale wind and solar development on suitable public and private lands in the California desert; and
- Enhance recreational opportunities in the desert, while ensuring that the training needs of the military are met.

The bill is supported by a broad coalition, including: local governments, environmental groups, off-road enthusiasts, renewable energy companies, and others.

The legislation builds upon the legacy of my 1994 California Desert Protection Act, which protected over 7 million acres of unspoiled desert. It was the largest such designation in the history of the continental United States – and established the Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks, two of California’s most treasured landmarks.

We are continuing to build support in the House and Senate, and we need your help. I urge you to write your local member of Congress and ask them to get behind this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dianne Feinstein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Dianne Feinstein

# Building on the Legacy of the 1994 Desert Protection Act

*The desert tortoise, an endangered species found in the Mojave Desert, is known to live for as long as 100 years.*



Senator Feinstein was the lead sponsor of the 1994 California Desert Protection Act, which protected more than 7 million acres of pristine California desert. It was the largest such designation in the history of the continental United States and established the Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks and the Mojave Natural Preserve.

The California Desert is home to remarkable archaeology, beauty and wildlife – some of the last remaining dinosaur tracks, Native American petroglyphs, abundant spring wildflowers, and threatened species including the bighorn sheep and the desert tortoise, an animal known to live for as long as 100 years.

The 1994 California Desert Protection Act ensured that these lands would be preserved for years to come.

In total, the Act raised the protection level for 9 million acres of parks and wilderness.

Specifically, the Act:

- Designated nearly 3.5 million acres of desert administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as wilderness.
- Added 1.2 million acres of land to Death Valley National Monument and redesignated the monument a national park.
- Added 234,000 acres of land to Joshua Tree National Monument and redesignated the area a national park.
- Established a new 1.6 million acre Mojave National Preserve.
- Transferred 20,500 acres of BLM land to the state of California to expand the Red Rock Canyon State Park.

# The California Desert: The Need to Manage Precious Resources

*Joshua trees, a species of yucca plants found in the Mojave Desert, are threatened by climate change.*



California's Mojave Desert is a unique and special place, but it is also home to many competing interests.

Some believe the lands should be used for large-scale solar and wind facilities and transmission lines. Others would like to conserve critical habitat for threatened and endangered species. Some would like more acreage available for grazing or for off-road recreation. Finally, some would like to see additional lands made available for military training and base expansion.

To balance these priorities, Senator Feinstein and her staff spent countless hours in discussions with key stakeholders, environmental groups, local and state government officials, off-highway recreation enthusiasts, hunters, cattle ranchers, mining interests, the Department of Defense, wind and solar energy companies, California's public utility companies, the Department of the Interior, and many others.

The end result is a bill designed to help manage California's desert resources with a well-planned approach—one that carefully balances conservation, recreation, and renewable energy development.

The bill also helps address the need for renewable energy development in the desert.

- The legislation releases approximately 126,000 acres of existing wilderness study area that could be used for renewable energy development or transmission.
- The Department of Interior is required to work with the state to exchange approximately 370,000 acres of small, isolated parcels of state land for federal lands elsewhere, providing the state with sites for commercial purposes including clean energy.
- The bill is endorsed by California's leading public and private energy companies including Southern California Edison, Sempra Energy, Pacific Light & Gas, and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

# The Proposed Sand to Snow National Monument

*The proposed Sand to Snow National Monument would protect roughly 134,000 acres, including the Big Morongo Canyon.*



The California Desert Protection Act includes several important conservation provisions. Among these is the establishment of the Sand to Snow National Monument, encompassing roughly 134,000 acres of land from the desert floor in the Coachella Valley up to the top of Mount San Gorgonio, the highest peak in Southern California.

The boundaries of this second, smaller new monument would include:

- Two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern: Big Morongo Canyon and Whitewater Canyon,
- The BLM and U.S. Forest Service San Gorgonio Wilderness,
- The Wildlands Conservancy's Pipe's Canyon and Mission Creek Preserves, and;
- Additional public and private conservation lands, including two wildlife movement corridor areas connecting the Peninsular Ranges with the Transverse Ranges.

This area would arguably be the most environmentally diverse national monument in the country. It serves as the intersection of three converging ecological systems – the Mojave Desert, the Colorado Desert, and the San Bernardino mountains – and is one of the most important wildlife corridors in Southern California.

This monument designation would protect 23.6 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail and the habitat for approximately 240 species of migrating and breeding birds, the second highest density of nesting birds in the United States. It also serves as a home and a crucial migration corridor for animals traveling between Joshua Tree National Park, the oasis at Big Morongo, and the higher elevations of the San Bernardino Mountains.

The Sand to Snow Monument, if enacted, would unify lands that are operated by a number of distinct entities in the region, including the BLM, Forest Service, National Park Service and private preserves and conservation agencies.

# Conservation: Other Key Provisions

*The legislation would designate more than 74 miles of important waterways as Wild and Scenic Rivers, including the Amargosa River.*



The legislation also includes a number of other important conservation provisions. This includes:

- Adding adjacent lands to Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks and the Mojave National Preserve:  
  
Roughly 46,000 acres added to Death Valley National Park, including former mining areas where the claims have been retired and a narrow strip of BLM land between National Park and Defense Department boundaries that has made BLM management difficult.  
  
About 29,000 acres added to the Mojave National Preserve. This land was not included in the original Monument because of a former Viceroy gold mining operation. The mining operations ceased several years ago, and the reclamation process is nearly complete.  
  
More than 2,870 acres in Joshua Tree National Park in multiple small parcels of BLM land identified for disposal on its periphery.
- Protecting more than 74 miles of important four waterways as Wild and Scenic Rivers. This includes Deep Creek and Whitewater River in and near the San Bernardino National Forest, and Amargosa River and Surprise Canyon Creek near Death Valley National Park.
- Designating five new wilderness areas.  
  
Designates approximately 248,000 acres of BLM wilderness areas near Fort Irwin, most of which had previously been designated as wilderness study areas until base expansion was completed. The one new proposed wilderness area not previously designated as under study is the 21,633 acre Golden Valley parcel, located near Ft. Irwin.
- Enhancing recreational opportunities, while ensuring that the training needs of the military have been met. The bill would designate the five existing OHV areas in the California desert as permanent OHV areas, providing off-highway groups some certainty that these uses will be protected as much as conservation areas. Collectively, these areas could be as much as 313,800 acres, depending on what, if any of Johnson Valley, is ultimately needed by the Marines.

# The Proposed Mojave Trails National Monument

*The cornerstone of the legislation is the creation of the Mojave Trails National Monument, which would ensure that hundreds of thousands of acres of former Catellus lands that were donated to the federal government for conservation would be protected for future generations.*

*The Cady Mountains, right, would be protected as part of the Mojave Trails Monument.*



Following the passage of the 1994 Desert Protection Act, Senator Feinstein worked closely with the Department of the Interior, the Wildlands Conservancy and Catellus Corporation (the real estate division of the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Railroad) to develop a plan to conserve hundreds of thousands of acres of privately held land that checker-boarded much of the eastern Mojave.

Approximately \$40 million of private donations and \$18 million in federal Land and Water Conservation grants were spent to purchase these lands, with the intent of conserving them in perpetuity. The purchase of 600,000 acres of former Catellus lands was one of the largest nonprofit land acquisition donations to the United States in history. Most of the Catellus lands were acquired and donated to the federal government between 1999 and 2004. This included nearly 100,000 acres of land to the National Park Service, over 210,000 acres in 20 wilderness areas to the BLM, and hundreds of thousands of acres of important habitat for threatened and endangered species.

The cornerstone of the California Desert Protection Act of 2011 is the creation of the Mojave Trails National Monument, which would ensure that hundreds of thousands of acres of these former Catellus lands, which were donated to the federal government for conservation, would be protected for future generations.

The new monument would cover approximately 941,000 acres of federal land, which includes approximately 194,000 acres of the former Catellus-owned railroad lands along historic Route 66. Senator Feinstein visited the area in the spring of 2009 and was amazed by the beauty of the massive valleys, pristine dry lakes, and rugged mountains.

# ment: Conserving the Former Catellus Lands

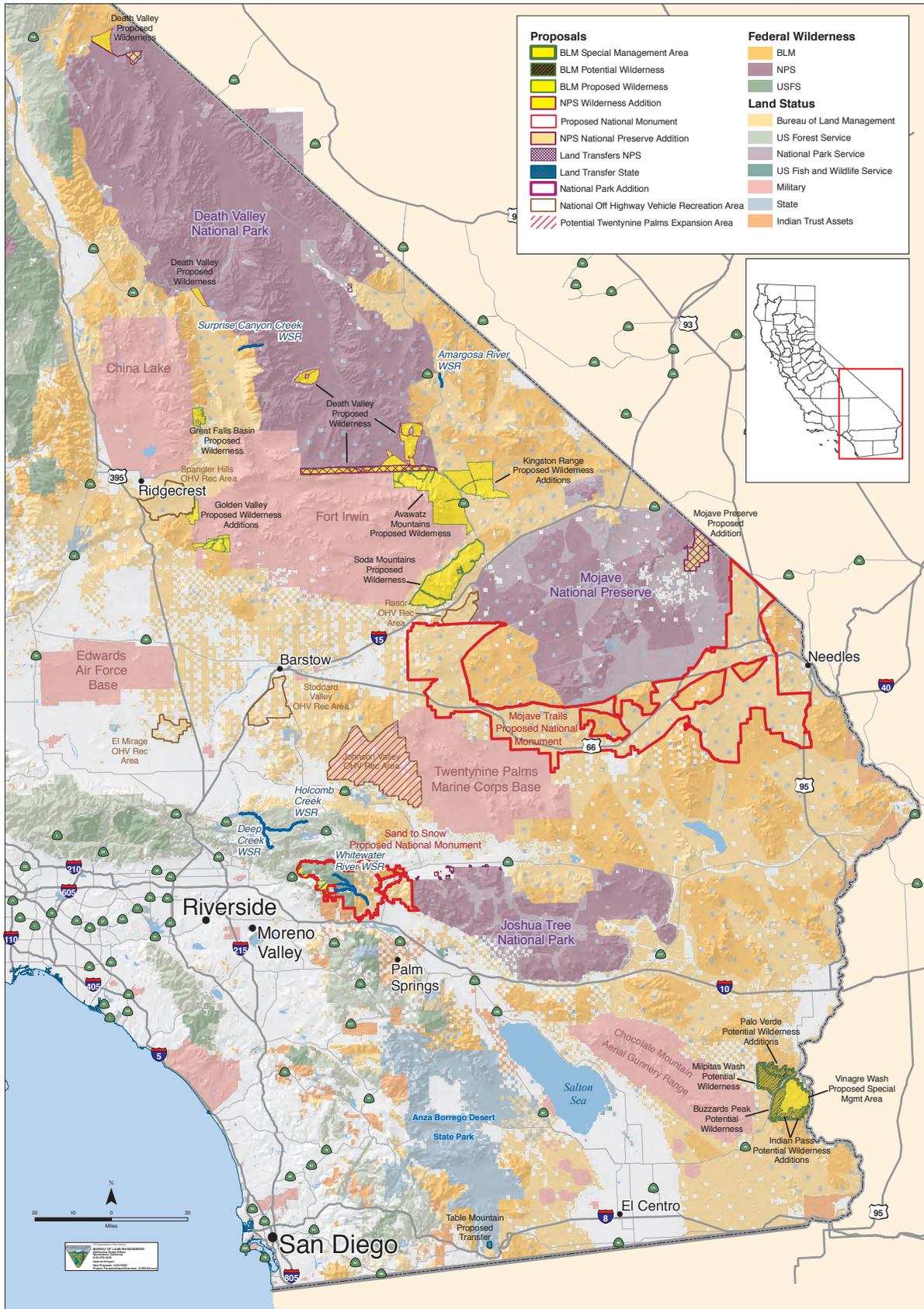


In addition to its iconic sweeping desert vistas and majestic mountain ranges, this area of the Eastern Mojave also contains critical wildlife corridors linking Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave National Preserve. It also encompasses hundreds of thousands of acres designated as areas of critical environmental concern, critical habitat for the threatened desert tortoise, and ancient lava bed flows and craters. And it is surrounded by more than a dozen BLM wilderness areas.

Under the legislation, the BLM would be given the authority to both conserve the monument lands, and also to maintain existing recreational uses, including hunting, vehicular travel on open roads and trails, camping, horseback riding and rockhounding.

The bill also creates an advisory committee to help develop and oversee the implementation of the monument management plan. It would be comprised of representatives from local, state and federal government, conservation and recreation groups, and local Native American tribes.

# The California Desert Protection Act of 2011: Map Overview





U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
[www.senate.gov/~feinstein](http://www.senate.gov/~feinstein)