



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504

<http://feinstein.senate.gov>

August 3, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

I write to request your administration use its authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906 to designate three national monuments in the California desert: the Mojave Trails National Monument, the Sand to Snow National Monument and Castle Mountains National Monument.

My request is based on my enduring commitment to protect California's magnificent desert landscapes. Two decades ago, I was proud to author the California Desert Protection Act, which raised the protection level for nearly 9.6 million acres of public lands, established Death Valley National Park, Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave National Preserve, and designated over 7.6 million acres of public lands as wilderness. At the time this bill was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on October 31, 1994, it was the largest land conservation legislation enacted in the history of the continental United States.

As time went on, it became evident that substantial land within the desert remained at risk due to the checkerboard ownership of private lands granted to the railroads during westward expansion in the later 19th century. These lands, owned by the Catellus Corporation, spanned across the desert, covering hundreds of thousands of acres within and south of the Mojave Preserve. Thanks to generous support from private citizens and federal Land and Water Conservation dollars, approximately 600,000 acres of Catellus lands were acquired or donated to the federal government between 1999 and 2004 for the purpose of permanent conservation and the enjoyment of the American public. However, in the absence of specific statutory authority or executive action to preserve these lands in perpetuity, they face continued threats from solar and wind energy development.

Since 2009, I have introduced legislation three times to establish the Mojave Trails National Monument to protect these former railroad lands as well as create the Sand to Snow National Monument, designate wilderness areas and preserve existing off-road recreation areas. The legislation has received broad support from diverse stakeholders because it has always been premised on carefully balancing conservation, recreation, energy, military and other land use needs in the California desert. Additionally, both state and federal agencies involved in developing the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan have concurred with the conservation of proposed monument lands.

While I intend to continue to work with my colleagues in the Senate and House to advance this important bill and the national park additions, recreation area designations and other conservation provisions that cannot be implemented through the Antiquities Act, I request that the administration begin conducting the necessary due diligence to designate the Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow and Castle Mountains as national monuments.

The Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow and Castle Mountains monument proposals are truly deserving of Antiquities Act protections. Though all three areas are within the California Desert Conservation Area, they are quite distinct from one another in terms of their topography, ecology and history, meriting their independent consideration.

- Mojave Trails - The proposed Mojave Trails monument would encompass sweeping desert landscapes in the East Mojave along historic Route 66. Monument designation would protect prized Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-administered public land such as Sleeping Beauty Valley and the Cady Mountains, as well as critical wildlife corridors between Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave National Preserve. The Mojave Trails area includes iconic desert vistas, majestic mountain ranges, prehistoric lava flow areas, extinct volcanoes and fossil beds. It is home to desert tortoise, bighorn sheep, fringe-toed lizards, a portion of California's largest cactus garden and rare plants, such as the crucifixion thorn that dates back to the ice age. The BLM currently manages much of this area to protect the desert environment through administratively-created Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Desert Wildlife Management Areas protecting the habitat of the threatened desert tortoise and many other listed and sensitive species.

- Sand to Snow - As proposed in the legislation, the Sand to Snow National Monument would cover 135,000 acres of BLM and Forest Service land between Joshua Tree National Park and the San Bernardino Mountains, from the desert floor in the Coachella Valley to the top of Mount San Gorgonio, the highest peak in Southern California. Located at the convergence of the Mojave and Sonoran deserts, this area would be among the most biologically national monuments in the country, and is one of the most important wildlife corridors in Southern California. The area is home to approximately 250 species of migrating and breeding birds, mule deer, desert bighorn sheep, mountain lions, black bears, raccoons, bobcats, coyotes, and numerous reptiles and amphibians. Approximately 24 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail are included within the proposed monument boundaries. Serrano Indians inhabited this area centuries, including in Big Morongo Canyon which was designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern by the BLM in 1982.
- Castle Mountains - Proposed as an addition to the Mojave National Preserve in the legislation, this area northeast of the current Preserve boundary was left out of the 1994 California Desert Protection Act due to an active gold mine which ceased operations in 2001. This landscape has unique geology, highly scenic vistas, and grasslands formed by volcanic and granitic mountains. The area is also home to the historic mining town of Hart, which in the early 1900's had up to 1,500 residents; relics from the township can still be found on these lands. This is an ecologically important area as well, with spectacular examples of Yucca, Joshua Tree Woodland and juniper forests, important habitat for desert tortoise, resident and migratory herds of desert bighorn sheep and endemic plants, such as a species of penstemon. Because these lands are not contiguous with either the proposed Mojave Trails or Sand to Snow monuments, I urge you to consider designating the Castle Mountains as its own national monument.

In addition to these areas, I request the administration consider designating adjacent public lands in order to protect resources consistent with the purposes of the Antiquities Act. These include the following areas:

- Black Lava Butte and Flat Top Mesa – This area northeast of the proposed Sand to Snow National Monument includes two volcanic rock formations unique in the geology of southern California. Approximately 1,700 petroglyphs and other important cultural sites within this area are threatened by potential development. There are several springs in the area, which

provide habitat for the endangered Least Bell's Vireo and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, along with a host of other resident and migratory birds. These lands are proposed as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern in the legislation; however, I urge you to consider including them as part of the Sand to Snow National Monument.

- Cadiz Valley – The lands south of the proposed Mojave Trails National Monument provide important desert tortoise habitat and serve as a critical wildlife corridor between the Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave National Preserve. The area also contains unique Aeolian dune features, as well as lands used by General Patton's Armored Divisions during World War II for desert warfare training, making it both scientifically and historically significant. I urge you to consider including this area as part of the proposed Mojave Trails National Monument.
- Sacramento Mountains - Lands east of the legislative boundary for the proposed Mojave Trails National Monument are sacred to many Mojave and Lower Colorado River tribes. Sadly, vandalism has led to the destruction and even theft of petroglyphs in this area. Protection of these important cultural resources is precisely the purpose of the Antiquities Act. Such protection would also protect critical habitat for the desert tortoise as well as the Le Conte's thrasher, prairie falcon and pallid bat. I urge you to consider including this area as part of the proposed Mojave Trails National Monument.

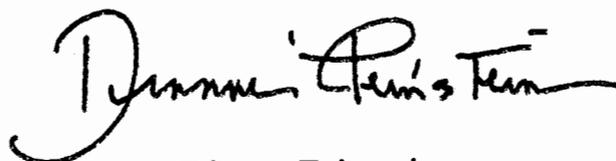
Designating these national monuments will not only ensure the protection of important natural and cultural resources, but provide significant economic benefits to the region. Tourism and recreation spending related to nearby national park lands provide enormous economic benefits to the region. For example, recently released data from the National Park Service found that last year, the 3.2 million visitors to Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave National Preserve spent \$191 million in communities near the parks. That spending supported 2,751 jobs in the local area and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of nearly \$214 million. Similarly, the Santa Rosa San Jacinto National Monument in Riverside County has contributed to the multi-billion dollar tourism economy in the Coachella Valley since bipartisan legislation established that monument in 2000.

As you consider this request, I encourage you to seek input from all the stakeholders that have worked diligently with me and my staff for years to craft

and continually improve the legislation. These include state and local officials, tribes, off-highway recreation advocates, local and national conservation organizations, California's public utilities, renewable energy companies, hunters, ranchers, mining interests, local businesses and community members. I would also urge you to seek broader public input and would welcome the opportunity to jointly host a public meeting with administration officials on the proposed monuments.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to working with you to protect California's majestic desert.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dianne Feinstein". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "D".

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator