

California Desert Conservation and Recreation Act Bill Summary

Section 1: Short Title; Table of Contents

TITLE I: California Desert Conservation and Recreation: Amendments to the California Desert Protection Act of 1994

Title XIII: Mojave Trails National Monument.

- Establishes a national monument managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) protecting 942,000 acres of federal land between Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave Preserve along historic Route 66 in San Bernardino County.
- Protects approximately 196,000 acres of land that were donated to or purchased by the federal government over the last decade for conservation.
- Maintains existing recreation uses, including hunting, vehicular travel on existing open roads and trails, grazing, camping, horseback riding, rock collecting, etc.
- Permits the construction of transmission lines to facilitate the transfer of renewable energy generated in the California desert and adjacent states.
- Provides solar energy companies with potential projects currently proposed inside the monument boundaries to relocate to federal solar energy zones being developed by the Department of the Interior.
- Establishes an advisory committee to develop the management plan for the monument. The committee will be comprised of representatives from local, state and federal government, conservation and recreation groups, and local Native American tribes.

Title XIV: Sand to Snow National Monument

- Establishes a national monument covering approximately 135,000 acres of federal land between Joshua Tree National Park and the San Bernardino National Forest in San Bernardino and Riverside counties.
- Maintains existing recreation uses, including hunting, vehicular travel on existing open roads and trails, camping, horseback riding, rock collecting, etc.
- The monument would be jointly managed by the BLM and the Forest Service with management guidance from an advisory committee comprised of local, state and federal government, conservation and recreation groups, and local Native American tribes.

Title XV: Wilderness

- Designates approximately 250,000 acres in five BLM Wilderness Study Areas near Fort Irwin as wilderness as well as portions of Death Valley National Park (41,000 acres) and the San Bernardino National Forest (7,100 acres).
- Releases approximately 126,000 acres in the Cady and Soda Mountains that were designated wilderness study areas in the 1994 California Desert Protection Act, thereby allowing vehicular access to these areas.

Title XVI: Vinagre Wash Special Management Area

- Designates a “special management area” covering a total of 81,000 acres in eastern Imperial County in order to conserve, protect and enhance plant and wildlife management as well as nationally significant ecological, recreational, archeological, and cultural resources. The area also contains approximately 49,000 acres of potential wilderness and approximately 12,000 acres of former private land donated to the federal government for conservation.
- Permitted uses would be hiking, camping, mountain biking, sightseeing, hunting, off-highway vehicle use on designated routes and horseback riding. Prohibited uses would include new mining, permanent roads, commercial uses, or activities that would preclude the potential wilderness areas from becoming wilderness in the future.

Title XVII: National Park System Additions

- Adds approximately 74,000 acres of land to the National Park System, including:
 - Death Valley: Approximately 39,000 acres, including a narrow strip of land between the southern boundary of the park (33,000 acres known as the “Bowling Alley”) and Ft. Irwin that was designated a wilderness study area by the Desert Protection Act and a former mining area (6,400 acres known as the “Crater Area”) in the north that is entirely surrounded by park wilderness.
 - Mojave Preserve: Almost 30,000 acres on the northeastern corner of the park known as Castle Mountain, which was left out of the Desert Protection Act due to an active mine which has ceased operations.
 - Joshua Tree: Approximately 2,900 acres in multiple small parcels of BLM land on the northern boundary of the park that have been identified for disposal. Another 1,600 acres from the Mojave Desert Land Trust would expand the park boundary in three locations.

Title XVIII: Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Areas

- Designates four existing, administratively designated off-highway vehicle areas in San Bernardino County, covering approximately 135,000 acres, as permanent off-highway vehicle recreation areas. Land management would remain as it exists today, but the BLM would be given discretion whether to require a new site specific management plan or simply modify its existing desert-wide management plan.
- Requires the Secretary to conduct a study to determine what, if any, lands adjacent to these recreation areas would be suitable for inclusion and authorizes the Department to do so.

Title XIX: Alabama Hills National Scenic Area

- Designates 18,840 acres of BLM land in Inyo County as a National Scenic Area in order to preserve it for recreational use by the public and future generations.
- Guarantees that all recreational activities currently taking place in the Alabama Hills will continue, including hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, hunting, fishing, recreational prospecting (rock-hounding) and authorized motorized vehicle use.
- Authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to add approximately 132 acres of BLM land to the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone reservation to protect culturally sensitive lands.

Title XX: Miscellaneous

Sec. 2001: State land transfers and exchanges.

- Transfers 934 acres currently designated as a BLM wilderness study area to Anza Borrego State Park to be managed as state wilderness, which surrounds it on three sides.
- Requires the Department of the Interior to work with local government to potentially transfer BLM lands for municipal infrastructure needs.

Sec. 2002: Ensures continued military training activities.

- Ensures the right of the Department of Defense to conduct low-level overflights over wilderness, national parks and national monuments.

Sec. 2003: Climate change and wildlife corridors.

- Requires the Department of the Interior to study the impact of climate change on California desert species migration, incorporate their results and recommendations into land use management plans, and consider the study's findings when making decisions granting rights of way for projects on public lands.

Sec. 2004: Prohibited uses of donated and acquired land.

- Prohibits the use of donated or acquired lands for development, mining, off-

highway vehicle use (except designated routes), grazing, military training and other surface disturbing activities. This prohibition would apply only to public lands within the California Desert Conservation Area.

- The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to make limited exceptions in cases where it is deemed in the public interest. Comparable lands would have to be purchased and donated to the federal government as mitigation for lost acreage.
- Authorizes the Secretary to accept easements and deed restrictions on donated lands within the California Desert Conservation Area in the future.

Sec. 2005: Tribal uses and interests.

- Requires the Secretary to ensure access for tribal cultural activities within national parks, monuments, wilderness and other designated within the bill.
- Requires the Secretary to develop a cultural resources management plan to protect a sacred tribal trail along the Colorado River between southern Nevada and the California-Baja border.

Sec. 2006: Black Lave Butte and Flat Top Mesa ACEC.

- Designates approximately 6,500 acres of land near Joshua Tree National Park and Wildlands Conservancy-owned land as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern in order to preserve and protect roughly 1,700 petroglyphs and other cultural and biological resources.

Sec. 102: Visitor Center.

- Authorizes the National Park Service to acquire a visitor center operated by the Joshua Tree National Park Association in the City of Joshua Tree. Currently, this volunteer-run center serves nearly 150,000 Joshua Tree National Park visitors each year.

Sec. 103: California State School Land.

- Requires the Department of Interior to work with the state to complete the exchange of approximately 370,000 acres of state school lands located in California desert over the next ten years. Small isolated parcels of state land in wilderness, national parks and monuments would be exchanged for federal lands elsewhere that could potentially provide the state with viable sites for renewable energy development, off-highway vehicle recreation or other commercial purposes.

Sec. 104: Wild and Scenic Rivers.

- Designates 77 miles of wild and scenic rivers, including Deep Creek and the Whitewater River in and near the San Bernardino National Forest and the Amargosa River and Surprise Canyon Creek near Death Valley National Park.

Sec. 520: Native groundwater supplies.

- Protects the Mojave Preserve's native groundwater supplies by prohibiting the Department of the Interior from processing rights-of-way applications for nearby projects that are likely to use more groundwater than is naturally restored to the local aquifer each year.

TITLE II: Development of Renewable Energy on Public Land

- Requires the revenues generated from the leasing of federal lands within the California Desert Conservation Area to be distributed in the following manner:
 - 35% to addressing and offsetting the impacts of wind and solar development on federal lands;
 - 15% to facilitating the processing of renewable energy permits for a 10 year period, after which, these funds would be dedicated to offsetting the impacts of renewable energy project impacts;
 - 25% to the State of California; and,
 - 25% to the county or counties in which the project is located.