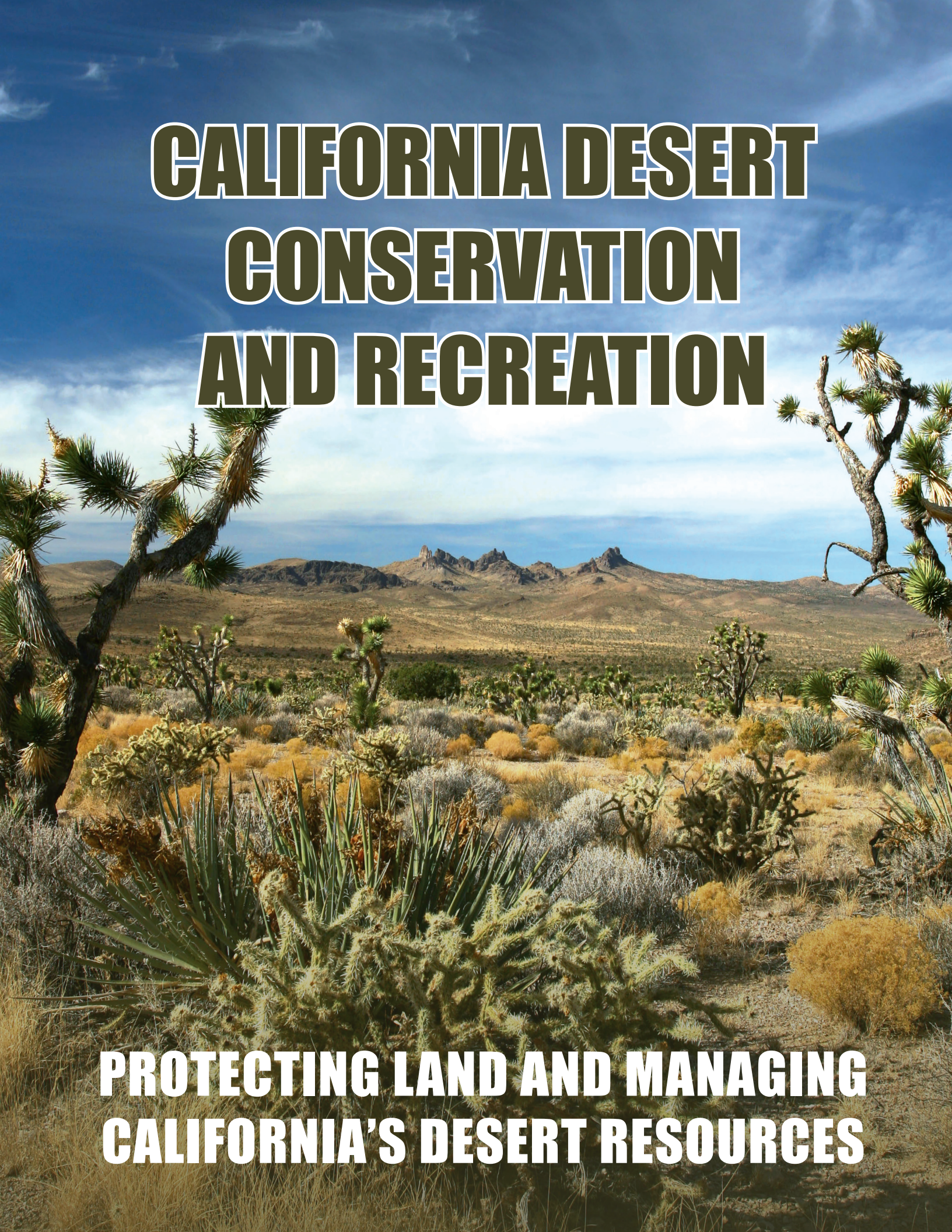
CALIFORNIA DESERT CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



PROTECTING LAND AND MANAGING CALIFORNIA'S DESERT RESOURCES

Dear Californian,

When I think of the California desert, I think of magnificent landscapes and mountain vistas. I think of beautiful species like bighorn sheep, mule deer and desert tortoises. I think of unique vegetation like Joshua trees. And I think of the long history of local Native American tribes. The California desert is a true American treasure.

The California desert wasn't always like this. I remember driving down Route 66 in the 1960s and seeing old cars, mattresses, furniture and other discarded waste. People took the desert for granted and didn't appreciate that it was a living entity, replete with beautiful flora and fauna.

We've come a long way since then, in large part due to the *1994 California Desert Protection Act.* Today, it's heartening to see a clean desert, thriving species and millions of tourists.

I've repeatedly introduced new desert legislation to build on the legacy of 1994, but it has yet to become law. This is why I asked President Obama to use his authority under the *Antiquities Act* to designate three new national monuments: Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow and Castle Mountains. I was thrilled to see him do just that in February 2016, and it gives me great pride and joy knowing that future generations will enjoy these pristine desert lands just as they are today.

But our work is not done. There are many other important provisions—which we carefully negotiated with desert stakeholders—not included in the president's designation but deserve to become law. This is why I introduced the *California Desert Protection and Recreations Act*, to balance the many uses of the desert. It is my deep hope that Congress passes this bill, as it is good for California and the country. I also hope my colleagues recognize the simple fact that desert conservation should not be a partisan issue. Over the years, legislators have come together across party lines to preserve the California desert, and I am confident we can do so again.

It's not going to be easy, and we need your help. I hope you will join us in the fight to protect this very special land.

Sincerely,

Senator Dianne Feinstein

Building on the legacy of 1994

Senator Feinstein was the lead sponsor of the *1994 California Desert Protection Act,* which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on October 31, 1994. It was the largest land conservation designation in the continental United States, protecting more than 9.6 million acres of desert and establishing the Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks and the Mojave National Preserve.

Some of the key provisions in the bill passed in 1994:

- Added 1.3 million acres of land to the existing Death Valley National Monument and redesignated the monument a National Park, with a total of 3.4 million acres.

- Added 234,000 acres of land to the existing Joshua Tree National Monument and redesignated the area a National Park, with a total of 800,000 acres.

- Established a new 1.6 million acre Mojave National Preserve.

- Designated nearly 3.6 million acres of desert administered by the Bureau of Land Management as wilderness.

- Transferred 20,500 acres of BLM land to the state of California to expand the Red Rock Canyon State Park.

New National Monument: Mojave Trails

On February 12, 2016, at Senator Feinstein's request, President Obama used his authority under the *Antiquities Act* to designate three new national monuments in the California desert, protecting nearly 1.8 million acres.

Mojave Trails National Monument

The Mojave Trails National Monument spans 1.6 million acres parallel to the iconic Route 66 between Needles and Barstow.

It encompasses sweeping desert landscapes and critical wildlife corridors between Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave National Preserve. The area includes stunning 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 and rare plants.

New National Monument: Castle Mountains

Castle Mountains National Monument

Castle Mountains National Monument is 20,920 acres and is adjacent to the Mojave National Preserve.

The landscape has unique geology, scenic vistas and grasslands formed by volcanic and granitic mountains. The area is also home to the historic mining town of Hart, and relics of the town can still be found on the land.

It's an ecologically important area, with spectacular examples of Yucca, Joshua Tree Woodland and juniper forests as well as desert species.

The area was left out of the 1994 legislation due to an active gold mine, which subsequently ceased operations.

New National Monument: Sand to Snow

Sand to Snow National Monument

The Sand to Snow National Monument encompasses 154,000 acres of land between Joshua Tree National Park and the San Bernardino National Forest, from the desert floor in the Coachella Valley to the top of Mount San Gorgonio.

It also protects 23.6 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail and the habitat for approximately 240 species of migrating and breeding birds. This area is one of the most environmentally diverse national monuments in the country, and is one of the most important wildlife corridors in Southern California.

The monument is home to mule deer, desert bighorn sheep, mountain lions, black bears, raccoons, coyotes and numerous reptiles and amphibians.

Statements of Support for Pr

"[The national monuments designation] is the pinnacle of a fifteen-year effort to preserve the physical heart of the Mojave Desert for conservation, recreation, and unparalleled inspiration, a milestone in our fifteen-year quest to preserve the heart of the Mojave Desert."
- **David Myers, The Wildlands Conservancy**

"The California desert lands are important to our community's quality of life and to our local economy. This legislation will help ensure that this legacy is protected for future generations."
- **James Ramos, San Bernardino County 3rd District Supervisor**

"For more than two decades, local communities and park visitors and supporters across the country have called for the protection of this landscape, which connects important wildlife corridors and critical habitat surrounding our desert national parks. These national monuments will play a vital role in the long-term sustainability and health of the region, and the protection of our beautiful, diverse deserts."
- **Theresa Pierno, National Parks Conservation Association**

OTECTING THE CALIFORNIA DESERT

"The conservation of the California desert honors our past and also recognizes the importance of these lands for future generations. The desert includes trails and sacred spaces that are part of Native American heritage. This bill will help protect those important places."

- **Barbara Durham, Timbisha Shoshone Tribe**

"Our region's economy depends on tourism, scientific study and outdoor recreational activities that take place in our unique and beautiful desert, so protecting these lands is an investment in our area's economic future."

- **Susan Sorrells, owner and operator at a business in the small tourist town of Shoshone, California**

"The California desert is a cherished and irreplaceable resource for the people of southern California. It is an oasis of nature's quiet beauty just outside two of our nation's largest metropolitan areas. Its historic and cultural resources tell the stories of armies, travelers, ranchers, and miners, and of the original caretakers of this land."

- **Sally Jewell, former Secretary of the Interior**

New Legislation

In an effort to build on President Obama's designation of the three new national monuments, Senator Feinstein introduced the *California Desert Protection and Recreations Act* in January 2017.

The legislation includes provisions previously introduced that the president was not able to enact through executive action.

The bill would add lands adjacent to the Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks:

- 39,000 acres added to Death Valley National Park.
- 4,500 acres to Joshua Tree National Park.

In terms of other land conservation, the bill would:

- Designate 77 miles of waterways as **Wild and Scenic Rivers**, including Deep Creek and Whitewater River in and near the San Bernardino National Forest and the Amargosa River and Surprise Canyon Creek in and near Death Valley National Park.

- Designate five new **BLM wilderness areas**, covering approximately 230,000 acres of wilderness.

- Establish 18,610 acres of the **Alabama Hills National Scenic Area** in Inyo County, protecting the iconic western landscape at the foothills of Mount Whitney.

- Require the Interior Department to take additional steps to protect areas in San Bernardino and Imperial County containing **petroglyphs and other cultural resources.**

Recreation Provisions

The California desert is a popular location for off-road motorists. This bill would improve recreational access by permanently designating existing areas for off-road vehicle use. The bill would give motorists certainty that their use of the desert will be protected in a manner similar to conservation areas.

Specifically, the bill designates five existing BLM Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Areas, covering approximately 142,000 acres of California desert in San Bernardino County, as permanent Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Areas. Additionally, the bill designates more than 18,000 acres of BLM land in Inyo County as the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area, preserving it for continued recreational use.

Land management would remain as it exists today, but BLM would be give increased discretion on managing those areas.

Renewable Energy Development

This bill takes a balanced approach to renewable energy development through several provisions. For example, the bill:

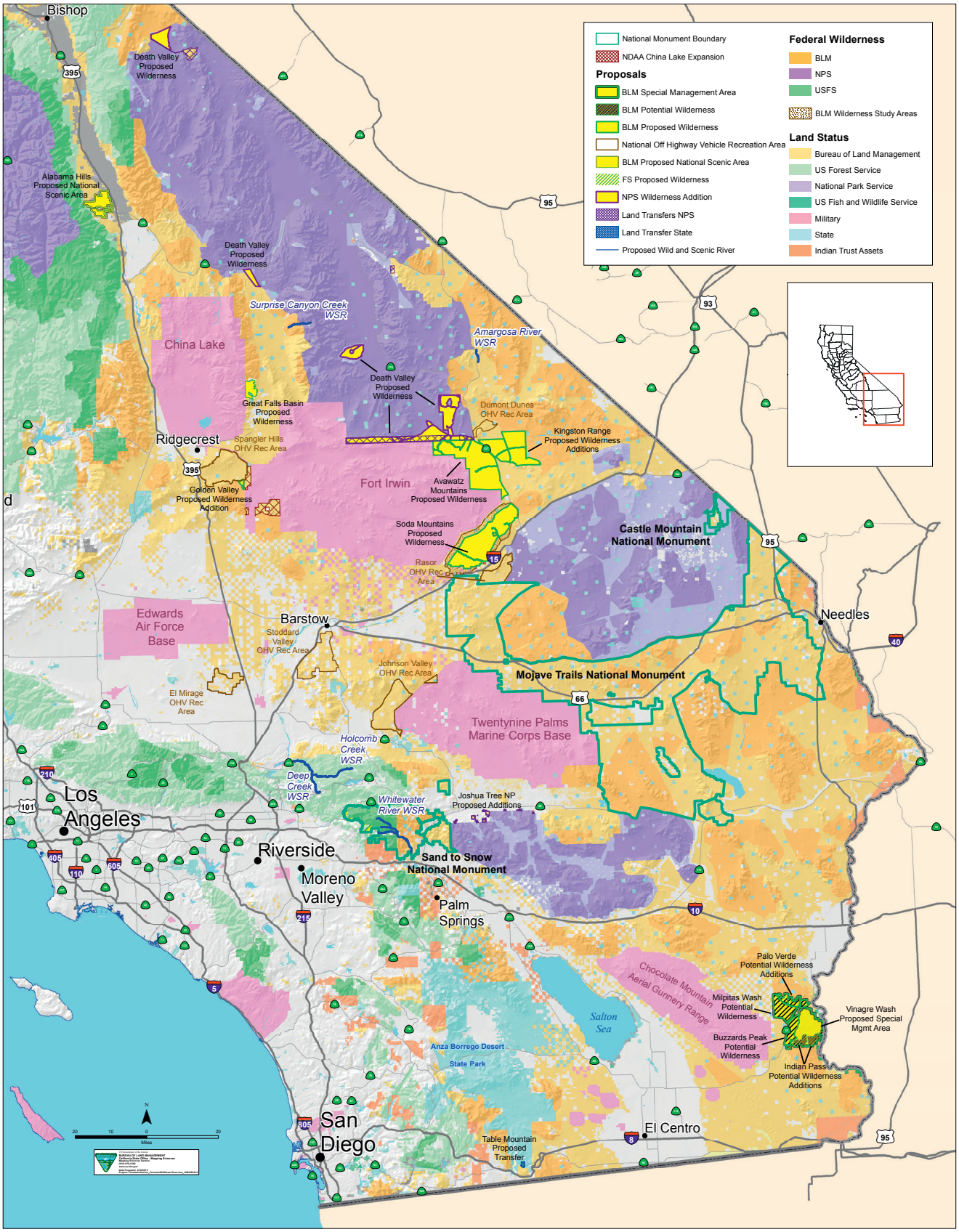
- Gives solar companies displaced by the Mojave Trails National Monument the opportunity to relocate to zones already developed by the federal government; it provides right of first refusal and expedited approval of projects in zones that Department of Interior has already found no conflicts through environmental impact studies.

- Requires the exchange of hundreds of thousands of acres of isolated state parcels currently surrounded by national parks and wilderness, providing the state with lands that could be used for renewable energy, recreation or conservation; and

- Allows for upgrades to transmission lines necessary to bring clean energy from new desert solar and wind farms to urban areas, while still protecting pristine landscapes.

More broadly, by designating the highest priority conservation areas as monuments, wilderness and areas of critical environmental concern, the bill makes clear what areas of the desert solar and wind projects should avoid.

Overview Map



18,610 acres of land containing the Alabama Hills in Inyo County would be designated as a National Scenic Area if this legislation becomes law. The legislation would protect the area for recreational use by the public and for future generations.

Senator Feinstein's proposed legislation would designate 77 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers, including this part of Whitewater River near the San Bernardino National Forest.

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