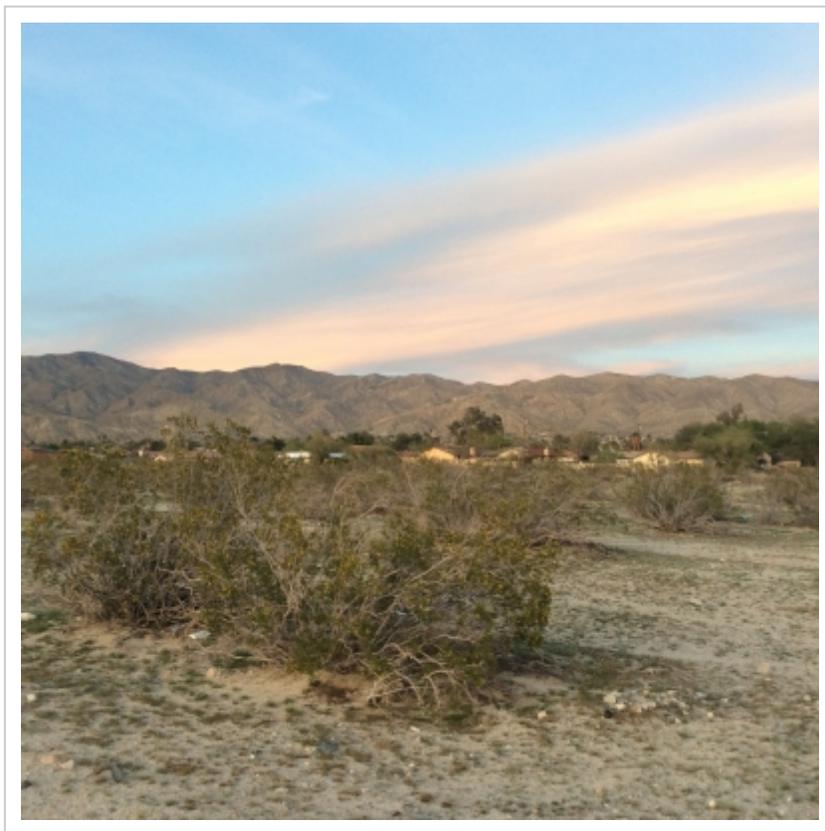


# Inclusion Is Imperative: President Obama's Creation of Three New National Monuments Is Fantastic—but There Is Now a Lot of Work to Do

Written by Mati Jatovsky



The new Sand to Snow National Monument is adjacent to Desert Hot Springs

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Last month, California's Mojave and Colorado Deserts, along with the neighboring San Bernardino Mountains, became home to three new national monuments—[Castle Mountains](#), [Mojave Trails](#) and [Sand to Snow](#)—thanks to President Barack Obama's use of the Antiquities Act.

Together, these new monuments protect 1.8 million acres of desert and mountains. These new monuments will help preserve the ecological integrity of a region under tremendous pressure from two of the country's fastest-growing urban regions, Los Angeles and Las Vegas. By connecting existing protected areas, plants and animals will have a better chance to move to cooler and wetter climates as our deserts become hotter and drier due to climate change. These new monuments will help to ensure that California's magnificent deserts and neighboring mountains are healthy and whole for years to come.

The monuments also protect a region that's brimming with stories of the diverse people who've made their homes here.

Castle Mountains provides an important buffer between an old gold mining site and the Mojave National Preserve. Prospectors first flocked to the Castles in 1908. The boomtown of Hart grew from nothing to 1,500 people in just a few months. Today, the site is barely perceptible: One can find just a chimney, tin cans and memories. When Interstate 40 was completed in 1973, the busy roadside services of US Highway 66 in Mojave Trails disappeared overnight. Proprietors simply walked away from their cafes, service stations and motels. Now these remnants of history are slowly turning to dust, even as this lonely stretch of the "Mother Road" attracts tourists from all over the world. Black Lava Butte and Flat Top Mesa in Sand to Snow host village sites that are thousands of years old. Numerous petroglyphs, pictographs and grinding stones found there offer a glimpse into the life of Native Americans before contact with the Spanish.

However, the creation of these new national monuments is just the beginning. As communities across the desert rightfully celebrate the designation of these monuments, the exciting work of making them more than lines on a map begins. Local elected officials, business leaders, tribes, recreational interests, conservation organizations and others should join together to ensure that adjacent communities such as Barstow, Needles, Morongo Valley and Desert Hot Springs, along with tribes such as the Morongo Band of Mission Indians and the Fort Mojave tribe, receive the full economic, educational and recreational benefits of the newly protected public lands.

Advocates for the new monuments have long highlighted the economic benefits that conservation would provide, and there are numerous studies to support this. However, without proper signage, well-marked trail-heads, adequate parking areas, strategically located front-country campgrounds and good maps, it will be difficult to attract visitors. To realize true economic benefits, it will take infrastructure improvements, marketing and personnel. There must be a significant financial investment, through a public-private partnership.

The Bureau of Land Management, in particular, is going to need an official partner to raise funds for things like the construction of visitor centers, campgrounds, wayside exhibits and signs, as well as the less-exciting, but no-less-important expenses, including operating costs and funding for education and interpretive programs. This new partner organization could work with groups that have existing relationships with the BLM and the Forest Service, like the [Mojave Desert Land Trust](#) and [The Wildlands Conservancy](#), in three areas: education, stewardship and recreation. Local schoolchildren need educational resources, and there should be interpretive programs for visitors and locals alike. Stewardship programs can connect people to their public lands, help to build and maintain infrastructure, restore damaged ecosystems, and advance knowledge through citizen-science projects. Finally, we must ensure that the multiple recreational activities permitted in these monuments are carried out responsibly, without damage to natural habitat and in respect of the sacred sites of local tribes, through programs that teach and promote responsible use of our shared natural resources.

Diversity is increasing in the desert, just as it is across the nation, but California's deserts have *always* been diverse. Of course, Native Americans have been here for thousands of years. Even in small, isolated railroad and mining towns, residents came from remarkably diverse backgrounds. For example, during Amboy's heyday in the 1930s and '40s, along Route 66 in Mojave Trails, a Greek and a Chinese immigrant each owned and operated a café, motel, gas station and garage. Hopi and Navajo railroad workers lived in town and maintained the line. Mexican Americans made up the majority of students in the Amboy School. (To learn more about the history of the Mojave Desert's mining and railroad communities check out Joe de Kehoe's book *The Silence and the Sun*.)

Ensuring that we draw Southern California's kaleidoscope of races and cultures to enjoy these new monuments is no simple task. It will require having a workforce that reflects diversity, and the creation of an environment for visitors where cultural differences are honored and embraced. To get there, we'll need conservation leaders who reflect our diverse communities. Fortunately, there are numerous examples of training programs that draw participants from diverse and often underserved communities throughout the Southland. One example is the San Gabriel Mountains Forever's [Leadership Academy](#), a rigorous program that's training a new generation of conservation advocates who better reflect the makeup of our nation.

If we want visitors to these new monuments to be as diverse as the communities near them, we have to roll out a multicultural welcome mat. We will have to address issues of access. There must be adequate and affordable transportation and a welcoming environment, including bilingual interpreters, campgrounds that can handle multi-generational visitors, bilingual signage and information, and gender-neutral restrooms to serve both families and the transgender community. Partnering with organizations like [Outward Bound Adventures](#) and the Sierra Club's [My Generation Campaign](#), both of whom are already working in the Coachella Valley, could help break down barriers, economic *and* cultural, to greater visitation by people of color.

The secretary of the interior, whose department includes the BLM and National Park Service, agrees. Secretary Sally Jewell recently signed an [order](#) in honor of the memory of Doug Walker (a long-serving member of The Wilderness Society's governing council) that will increase access to public lands by youth and young adults who are "disadvantaged and under-resourced."

Finally, it all has to start by reaching out to diverse communities to ensure that there is maximum participation in the creation of the general management plans that will guide the three new national monuments. We also must include diverse user-groups: Equestrians, off-highway-vehicle users, hunters and conservationists all have interests that must be addressed. Sooner rather than later, listening sessions should be organized throughout the desert and mountain area—something both the BLM and U.S. Forest Service have expressed their determination to do.

All of this will take years to accomplish. However, I'm hopeful that when the first anniversary of these new monuments is marked in February 2017, all stakeholders will see that significant progress has been made. I'm also sure the future of these monuments will be inclusive, reflecting the very best tendencies of Southern California and the nation.

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