

# CAMPAIGN FOR THE CALIFORNIA DESERT

## Protecting Our Legacy, Strengthening Our Future

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**REGIONAL LEADERS APPLAUD FEINSTEIN EFFORT TO PROTECT CALIFORNIA'S  
SPECTACULAR DESERT HERITAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

*Bill would expand Death Valley, Joshua Tree N.P. and protect lands for recreation, wildlife and tourism*

Community, business and conservation leaders from the California desert region are applauding a new proposal by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) that would increase protections for approximately 1.6 million acres of desert landscapes celebrated both for their contributions to America's natural and cultural heritage and to the regional economy.

The proposed legislation, known as the California Desert Protection Act of 2010 (S. 2921), would create two new national monuments—the Mojave Trails and the Sand to Snow National Monuments—and expand Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks and the Mojave National Preserve. It would also designate several new wilderness areas and protect important waterways like the Amargosa River and Deep Creek as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

"This makes our welcome sign shine a whole lot brighter," said Wayne Austin, president and CEO of the San Bernardino Convention and Visitors Bureau as well as the California Welcome Center. "People from all over the world come to the California desert. Protecting these spectacular landscapes is just good common sense."

Buford Crites, former mayor of Palm Desert and vice president of Friends of the Desert Mountains added, "The new Sand to Snow National Monument will be a perfect companion to existing conservation lands in and around the Coachella Valley. It will protect wildlife corridors and the Pacific Crest Trail and preserve the scenic backdrop for many desert communities."

While local leaders are widely supportive of Senator Feinstein's leadership and dedication to conserving California's desert, many have concerns about provisions of the bill related to off-road vehicle use, new rights-of-way on National Monuments, and removing protection for Wilderness Study Areas. "I applaud the Senator's longstanding leadership and commitment to protecting the jewels of our desert," said Jim Dodson, retired deputy comptroller of Edwards Air Force Base. "But I do have concerns that her bill could open up new areas of the desert to off-road vehicle damage. I am hopeful that interested citizens can work with Senator Feinstein to address these issues as the bill moves forward."

### **A Natural and Cultural Treasure**

From painted mountains to hidden springs, from world-famous wildflowers to herds of majestic bighorn sheep, Americans have long been drawn to the stark beauty of California's desert. But the desert is being squeezed by two of the fastest growing regions in the nation, putting those resources and the economic opportunities they create at risk.

"The desert is home to trails and sacred places that are an important part of our Native American heritage," stated Barbara Durham, Tribal Preservation Officer of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe. "Conservation honors our ancestors. It is also a gift to our children and grandchildren."

Among the other historic treasures that would be protected is Route 66, which Smithsonian Magazine recently named as one of the '10 Must-See Endangered Cultural Treasures' and which is a magnet for tourists wanting to relive California's pioneering past.

"The story of Route 66 is a genuinely American story set in a uniquely American landscape," explained Jim Conkle, chair of the Route 66 Alliance. "We're preserving an important link to our past and investing in our future."

### **An Economic Boost**

The California desert is one of the top outdoor recreation locations in the continental United States and its national parks alone bring nearly three million visitors each year. It is estimated that outdoor recreationists spend more than \$230 million annually visiting the region, according to data from the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service.

"The beauty of the California desert and the wide range of outdoor experiences it provides make this region a popular place to visit and a great place to live and work," said Susan Sorrells, owner and operator of Shoshone Village, a desert community and tourism destination.

George Kopp, president of the Joshua Tree Chamber of Commerce, went even further. "The California Desert is the lifeblood of our economy," he explained. "This is the kind of economic stimulus that doesn't cost taxpayers anything and will benefit our region for many generations."

The bill also represents a unique opportunity for California to protect its most important and sensitive desert areas, while leaving available suitable lands to meet its renewable energy commitments. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is currently assessing the suitability of 351,000 acres in the California desert for potential renewable energy development, significantly more than experts estimate is needed to meet state renewable goals. None of the lands in Senator Feinstein's proposal are within these BLM study areas.

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