

CAMPAIGN FOR THE CALIFORNIA DESERT

Protecting Our Legacy, Strengthening Our Future

CALIFORNIA DESERT PROTECTION ACT OF 2011 – A SUMMARY

The conservation and recreation portion of the California Desert Protection Act of 2011 (specifically, Title I of the legislation) will improve protection for approximately 1.6 million acres of federal land. Specifically, it will:

- Establish the 941,413-acre Mojave Trails National Monument in eastern San Bernardino County along the longest undeveloped stretch of historic Route 66;
- Designate the 133,524-acre Sand to Snow National Monument that stretches between Joshua Tree National Park on the east and the high country of the San Gorgonio Wilderness in the San Bernardino National Forest to the west;
- Add three areas encompassing 173,861 acres to the National Wilderness Preservation System, including the Avawatz Mountains Wilderness (86,614 acres), Great Falls Basin Wilderness (7,871 acres) and Soda Mountains Wilderness (79,376 acres);
- Enlarge four existing wilderness areas by 172,247 acres, including the Death Valley National Park Wilderness (90,152 acres), Golden Valley Wilderness (21,633 acres), Kingston Range Wilderness (53,321 acres) and San Gorgonio Wilderness (7,141 acres);
- Establish the 75,575-acre Vinagre Wash Special Management Area in Imperial County where many ecologically and culturally sensitive areas would be protected from development and vehicle use, including 48,699 acres that would essentially be managed as wilderness;
- Enlarge Death Valley National Park by 40,740 acres, Mojave National Preserve by 29,246 acres and Joshua Tree National Park by 2,904 acres;
- Add over 70 miles (22,400 acres) of stream to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System along the Amargosa River, Deep Creek, Surprise Canyon and the Whitewater River;
- Permanently prohibit the staking of new mining claims on approximately 10,000 acres of land sacred to the Quechan Tribe in Imperial County;
- Mandate the study and protection of a cultural trail and the features associated with it along the Colorado River that is sacred to several tribes;
- Make it more difficult for developers to exploit groundwater in or near the Mojave National Preserve;
- Transfer a 994-acre Bureau of Land Management holding in San Diego County to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and require the state to manage the land as wilderness;

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- Protect land from development that has been donated to or acquired by the federal government for conservation purposes; and
- Require the Department of the Interior to study the future impacts of climate change on the California desert, to mitigate these impacts and to identify and protect important wildlife migration corridors in the region.

In addition to these protective measures, as a political compromise Title I will also:

- Withdraw protection from 33,571 acres of the Soda Mountains Wilderness Study Area;
- Withdraw protection from the 84,400-acre Cady Mountains Wilderness Study Area (however, all but 5,500 acres of the area will be included in the Mojave Trails National Monument);
- Facilitate the transfer of isolated parcels of state-owned land that are surrounded by desert wilderness areas and parks in exchange for federal assets, potentially including parcels of federal land;
- Turn five existing administratively-designated off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation areas into legislatively-designated OHV areas;
- Require the Secretary of the Interior to study the possibility of expanding these OHV areas; and
- Allow for the expansion of a small airport in Imperial County.

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