

RE: Oppose any amendments to block new national monuments and parks in the Interior Appropriations bill

June 14, 2016

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the dozens of undersigned organizations and our millions of members across the country, we write to strongly urge you to OPPOSE any amendments offered to the FY 2017 Interior and Environment appropriations bill that would undermine the Antiquities Act and block the establishment of new national monuments.

Since it was signed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, the Antiquities Act has been used on a bipartisan basis by 16 Presidents (8 Republicans and 8 Democrats) to protect America's most iconic natural, cultural, and historic places including: the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, Fort Monroe, the Pacific Remote Islands, and Acadia, Zion and Olympic National Parks.

The sheer diversity of historic, cultural, and natural treasures that have been protected by the Antiquities Act is the reason why groups representing sportsmen, cultural heritage organizations, faith organizations, conservation, recreation businesses, historic preservation, and many others all oppose efforts to undermine this vital law.

Yet even during the year in which the American public celebrates the centennial of the National Park Service, well over 20 bills and amendments have been introduced to undermine the Antiquities Act, which is responsible for protecting nearly half of our national parks.

Not only do national monuments protect our irreplaceable natural, historic, and cultural resources for future generations, they benefit local economies today. Following the March 2013 protection of Rio Grande del Norte, visitation to the area increased by 40% and Taos, New Mexico saw an increase in lodgers' tax and the hospitality sector's gross receipts tax. A recent report released by Small Business Majority finds that the 10 natural and cultural monuments protected by President Obama are responsible for \$156.4 million in annual economic benefits for local communities and that visitation to these lands drastically increases following designation with national monument visitation resulting in approximately \$58 million in labor income and supporting 1,820 jobs. Further, the study finds that this economic activity is particularly beneficial to small businesses in these predominantly rural communities.

Attempting to block the designation of new national monuments is wildly out of step with the American public's interest in protecting our special places – especially apparent given the groundswell of positive support for our national parks shown during the celebration of the centennial year. According to Colorado College's Conservation in the West Poll released earlier this year, 80% of western voters support "future presidents continuing to protect existing public lands as national monuments." This poll reinforces other surveys documenting widespread public opposition to congressional attacks on new parks.

Regardless of their scope, attacks on the Antiquities Act are a clear effort to block new parks and not an effort to protect local input. Recently successful community-led efforts to protect treasured public lands like Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument show that local collaboration and community input remain at the forefront throughout the monument-designation process, with robust public meetings prior to designations, thousands of public comments, and close contact with stakeholders to help guide management plans for newly protected sites and make recommendations for recreation and other uses.

For these reasons and many others, we urge you to OPPOSE any amendments offered to the FY 2017 Interior and Environment appropriations bill in the upcoming markup that would prohibit or hinder future use of the Antiquities Act.

Sincerely,

The Wilderness Society
Conservation Lands Foundation
American Rivers
National Parks Conservation Association
Los Padres ForestWatch
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Natural Resources Defense Council
Scenic America
Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks
Crow Canyon Archaeological Center
The Ocean Project
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Conservation Alliance
Californians for Western Wilderness
Wildlands Network
National Trust for Historic Preservation
Friends of Ironwood Forest
The Wildlands Conservancy
Mojave Desert Land Trust
Friends of the Desert Mountains
New Mexico Wildlife Federation
Partnership for Responsible Business
Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce
Santa Fe Green Chamber of Commerce
Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection
Islanders for the San Juan Islands National Monument
Tuleyome
CalWild
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
League of Conservation Voters

Conservation Law Foundation
Vet Voice Foundation
National Audubon Society
The Amargosa Conservancy
WILDCOAST
Trust for Public Land
Defenders of Wildlife
Greenpeace
Alaska Wilderness League
Clean Water Action
Klamath Forest Alliance
EPIC-Environmental Protection Information Center
Utah Diné Bikéyah
Oceana
Next 100 Coalition
Association of Zoos & Aquariums
Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship
Marine Conservation Institute
Hispanic Access Foundation
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
CLLARO (Colorado Latino Leadership, Advocacy and Research Organization)
HECHO (Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors)
Hispanic Federation
GreenLatinos
Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council
Archaeology Southwest
Wilderness Workshop
American Fly Fishing Trade Association