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Morongo Valley Celebrates 2nd Anniversary of California Desert National Monuments *Natural desert beauty of 3 new monuments attracts visitors, supports growing tourism economy*

MORONGO VALLEY, CA – Local businesses, conservation groups, elected officials, community leaders and residents came together Friday to celebrate the 2nd Anniversary of San Bernardino County's California Desert National Monuments. The Mojave Trails, Castle Mountains, and Sand to Snow National Monuments were designated by President Barack Obama on February 12, 2016 — two years ago today — and have since proven a growing attraction for recreationists and tourists who come to experience the extraordinary beauty of the California Desert.

“Since these three desert monuments were created two years ago, we have been grateful to experience a considerable increase in tourism,” said **Jerry Mattos, Chair of Joshua Tree Gateway Communities**. “Local businesses and community groups have done a great job publicizing the stunning beauty of these new monuments, and as Joshua Tree National Park continues to break attendance records, many visitors are curious to explore the new, nearby national monuments. The California Desert monuments have fulfilled their promise and become a tremendous economic asset for the region.”

The event, held at the popular Cactus Mart nursery in Morongo Valley, featured a broad spectrum of guest speakers including:

- Meg Foley, Executive Director, Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve
- Kelly Crawford, Owner, Joshua Tree Excursions
- Diana Marlo Noll, Executive Director, Joshua Tree Gateway Communities
- Mark Lundquist, Field Representative for James Ramos, Third District Supervisor of San Bernardino County
- Jacqueline Guevara, Director of Public Engagement, Mojave Desert Land Trust
- Robin Kobaly, Executive Director, Summertree Institute.

“I have lived in the Morongo Valley for more than three decades and have an unbounded passion for the preservation of the lands surrounding Joshua Tree National Park, said **Meg Foley, Executive Director, Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve**. “Many of us in the Morongo Valley share a deep caring for this land and we anticipated the formation of Sand to Snow, Mojave Trails and Castle Mountains National Monuments with great hope. Not only do these newly-protected desert landscapes contribute to an unparalleled quality of life, their beauty also graces so many desert communities with growing economic prosperity.”

All three California Desert monuments provide visitors with outstanding hiking, camping, hunting, rock-hounding, exploring on designated off-highway routes, and more. Mojave Trails, which connects Joshua Tree National Park with the Mojave National Preserve, includes vital wildlife habitat, desert vistas, important Native American cultural sites, and features the longest undeveloped stretch of America's historic Route 66. Rising dramatically from the Sonoran Desert floor in the east to the snowy peaks of Mount San Geronio, Southern California's tallest mountain, the Sand to Snow boasts rare desert rivers, over 1,700 Native American petroglyphs, and is the most biologically diverse of any U.S. national monument, with plants and animals found nowhere else on Earth. The more remote Castle Mountains National Monument is home to rare native desert grasslands, sacred tribal sites, and includes the historic gold mining ghost town of Hart.

"We must continue protecting our natural landscapes now more than ever," said **Third District Supervisor of San Bernardino County James Ramos**. "Each of our national monuments reflects the natural resources, culture and historical heritage of our great county. We are charged with preserving their pristine conditions by maintaining these monument designations for future generations."

The designation of the monuments was initiated by California's U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who wanted protection for lands not included in the 1994 California Desert Protection Act. Working with business organizations, veterans, faith leaders, tribes, Latino groups, conservationists, and others, she eventually asked President Obama to create the three monuments connecting existing parks and wilderness areas.

Unfortunately, the anniversary comes at a time when the current administration in Washington, D.C., is taking unprecedented steps to reduce the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments in Utah, considering the resizing of other monuments, and opening up public lands with important natural and historic features to oil and gas development. Both Sen. Feinstein, Sen. Kamala Harris and others have condemned President Trump's actions, and reaffirmed that national monuments are built upon the support of local communities and are economic drivers across the United States.

"The Mojave Desert is truly one of the last great intact open spaces left in the American West," said **Breanne Dusastre, Director of Marketing for the 29 Palms Inn**. "Our monuments, valleys, dunes and oases contain some of the most amazing plants and wildlife on earth, species that are able to survive through enormous heat and little rainfall. We are blessed to live and work here and we invite visitors to come and share the incredible natural beauty of the California Desert."

Please visit the media [Dropbox](#) for the event to access photos from the 2nd anniversary celebration. All photos are approved for digital and print publication.

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