

INDIAN WELLS CITY COUNCIL

November 2, 2023



To: City Council
From: City Manager Department
Prepared by: Kristen Nelson, Senior Management Analyst
Subject: **Resolution Supporting the Establishment of the Proposed Chuckwalla National Monument and Expansion of Joshua Tree National Park via an Adjacent National Monument**

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Council **ADOPTS** Resolution supporting the establishment of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument and expansion of Joshua Tree National Park via an adjacent National Monument; and

AUTHORIZES and **DIRECTS** Staff to send a copy of said Resolution to United States President Joe Biden, Representative Dr. Raul Ruiz, Representative Ken Calvert, Senator Laphonza Butler, and Senator Alex Padilla.

BACKGROUND:

On September 21, 2023, Congressman Ruiz introduced H.R. 5660, the Chuckwalla National Monument Establishment and Joshua Tree National Park Expansion Act of 2023, a bill to "provide for the protection of natural and cultural resources, Tribal collaborative management, sustainable economic development, enhanced recreation, and equitable access on Federal lands in eastern Imperial and Riverside counties, California, and for other purposes." This included a request to President Biden to use authority granted by the Antiquities Act to establish the Chuckwalla National Monument as well as an additional national monument adjacent to Joshua Tree National Park to be managed by the National Park Service.

National monuments can be established in two ways: through federal legislation or, more commonly, through presidential use of the Antiquities Act. Given current gridlock in Congress, the coalition is pursuing the latter option and seeks to work closely with Congressman Ruiz and California senators to advocate with the Biden Administration on a proposal to conserve federal public lands in Riverside and Imperial Counties for present and future generations to enjoy.

The proposal would designate a new Chuckwalla National Monument that would border the southern edge of Joshua Tree National Park and permanently protect recreational access to popular places like the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains. The proposed protections would honor and recognize the cultural histories of Indigenous peoples, enhance access to world-class nature for local residents and visitors, protect fragile desert wildlife by providing connectivity between existing protected lands, and help boost local economies.

The proposal was also crafted to be complementary to the goals of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan. All areas prioritized for renewable energy development were purposefully excluded from the proposed national monument boundaries.

National Monuments generally permit existing recreational uses to continue and in fact provide a better experience for users with increased signage for improved access and interpretation. The draft proposal will benefit Riverside and Imperial Counties in several ways, including:

- Protecting crucial plant and wildlife habitat and migration corridors;
- Safeguarding indigenous sites, landscapes of importance, and other significant cultural resources;
- Protecting important historic sites and landscapes;
- Enhancing equitable and sustainable recreation access to federal public lands;
- Boosting local economies by attracting visitors (Attachment No. 4); and
- Promoting tourism and recreation.

The coalition of organizations supporting the proposal is currently reaching out to local elected officials, community leaders and stakeholders to solicit their input and support. Cathedral City, Desert Hot Springs, Banning, and Palm Springs have recently adopted resolutions or letters of support.

Staff is recommending that the City Council approve a Resolution (Attachment No. 1) supporting the designation of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument and expansion of Joshua Tree National Park, and direct Staff to forward the Resolution to President Biden, Representative Ruiz, Representative Calvert, Senator Butler, and Senator Padilla.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No Fiscal Impact.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution
2. Map of Proposed Chuckwalla National Monument and Joshua Park Expansion
3. Chuckwalla National Monument – Proposal Summary
4. Economic Benefits of Conservation Lands