

MARCH 21, 2023

FACT SHEET: President Biden Designates Castner Range National Monument

As part of the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to protect, conserve, and restore our country's iconic lands and historic sites for the benefit of future generations, today President Biden will sign a proclamation establishing the Castner Range National Monument, in El Paso, Texas. This action will protect the cultural, scientific and historic objects found within the monument's boundaries, honor our veterans, servicemembers, and Tribal Nations, and expand access to outdoor recreation on our public lands.

Located on Fort Bliss, Castner Range served as a training and testing site for the U.S. Army during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The Army ceased training at the site and closed Castner Range in 1966. Once the area is sufficiently remediated to be safe for public access, Castner Range will offer unique opportunities for the El Paso community to experience, explore, and learn from nature. President Biden is committed to expanding access to nature for underserved communities that have historically had less access to our public lands, like those bordering Castner Range. Protecting Castner Range connects the area with the Franklin Mountains State Park, creating continuous habitat for wildlife and improved public access for outdoor recreation. Castner Range also hosts significant cultural sites documenting the history of Tribal Nations, including the Apache and Pueblo peoples and the Comanche Nation, Hopi Tribe, and Kiowa Indian Tribe of Oklahoma.

At the White House Conservation in Action Summit today, the President will announce additional actions to conserve and restore lands and waters across the nation, including establishing Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in Nevada. The President will also direct the Secretary of Commerce to consider exercising her authority to protect all U.S. waters around the Pacific Remote Islands. These new commitments build on President Biden's record

of delivering on the most ambitious land and water conservation agenda in American history.

President Biden is committed to supporting locally-led conservation efforts. This designation advances the President's America the Beautiful Initiative, which includes our country's first national conservation goal.

Castner Range National Monument

Castner Range National Monument consists of 6,672 acres of high-desert mountains, making up the southern component of the Franklin Mountain range, just outside of El Paso, Texas. Located on Fort Bliss Military Base, Castner Range served as the training and testing site for the U.S. Army from 1926-1966. The Army ceased training at the site and closed Castner Range in 1966.

Before the U.S. Army used the lands, Castner Range was home to the Apache and Pueblo peoples and the Comanche Nation, the Hopi Tribe, and Kiowa Indian Tribe of Oklahoma. The Castner Range area contains more than 40 known archeological sites including living structures, hearths, remnants of pottery and other tools, as well as a myriad of petroglyphs and images on the rock faces that make up the canyons and mountains of Castner Range.

The local El Paso community cherishes the Franklin Mountains for their natural and ecological features. Castner Range remains an area of high biodiversity for desert species in America, including spring blooms of the Mexican Poppy. In addition to the poppies, this section of the Franklin Mountains also contains a high concentration of natural springs. Along with creosote brush vegetation, it provides important habitat to wildlife that call Castner Range home, including the American peregrine falcon, Golden eagle, mountain plover, Texas horned lizard, Black-tailed prairie dog, Baird's swallow, and the Western burrowing owl. The endangered Sneed pincushion cactus and a host of other rare or endemic plants also inhabit the area. Protecting Castner Range ensures connectivity with other protected areas and migratory corridors for species to travel without the threat of human impacts.

The U.S. Army will manage the national monument consistent with

protection of the objects of historic and cultural significance and will commence a land management planning process with robust public engagement in the next sixty days. Castner Range will continue to undergo evaluation, planning and remediation of munitions through The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) process, informed by public input and consistent with this proclamation. The Army will work with Tribes and the community to secure public access to the monument in phases, as it is safe and appropriate.

Though previous national monument designations have protected important historic military sites, this would be the first national monument directly managed by the U.S. military since national battlefields were transferred to the National Park Service in the 1930s.

Background on Antiquities Designations

President Theodore Roosevelt first used the Antiquities Act in 1906 to designate Devils Tower National Monument in Wyoming. Since then, 18 presidents of both parties, including recent Presidents Trump, Obama, G.W. Bush, and Clinton have used this authority to protect unique natural and historic features in America, including the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, and Colorado's Canyons of the Ancients.

In addition to designating Castner Range National Monument, today the President is also taking action to establish Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in Nevada. These are President Biden's second and third new monument designations, following the creation of the Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument in Colorado last fall.

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