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Padilla, Butler, Ruiz Introduce Legislation and Call on President Biden to Establish the Chuckwalla National Monument



Padilla, Ruiz call on the Administration to designate Chuckwalla National Monument

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, U.S. Senators Alex Padilla and Laphonza Butler (both D-Calif.) and Representative Raul Ruiz (D-Calif.-25) announced bicameral legislation to create the Chuckwalla National Monument and expand Joshua Tree National Park. The lawmakers also urged (<https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Padilla-Ruiz-Chuckwalla-Antiquities-Letter-04.16.24.pdf>) President Biden to use his authority under the *Antiquities Act of 1906* to designate the monument. Padilla and Ruiz also attended a press conference this morning to push for the establishment and expansion of national monuments in California, including the Chuckwalla National Monument.

This bill would establish a new Chuckwalla National Monument in eastern Imperial and Riverside counties to protect approximately 627,855 acres of California's vast desert landscape. It would also expand Joshua Tree National Park by approximately 17,915 acres of previously designated public lands, as recommended by the National Park Service (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectId=59291>).

“Establishing the Chuckwalla National Monument across California’s vast desert landscape would help us fight the climate crisis, protect critical wildlife corridors, preserve sacred tribal sites, and improve equitable access to nature for our local communities,” **said Senator Padilla**. “Our proposal reflects the input of tribal leaders who have fought for years to protect

these sacred landscapes, and from our partners in the energy industry who worked with us to carefully craft the Monument's boundaries to ensure we can meet our shared clean energy goals. I look forward to working alongside federal officials, tribes, veterans, and local businesses to secure these protections as soon as possible."

"Honoring Indigenous lands goes hand in hand with our broader conservation efforts, and establishing the Chuckwalla National Monument is so important for the region," **said Senator Butler**. "I'm proud to work with the tribal communities and advocates on this legislation to protect their sacred spaces while strengthening public access to nature. I urge President Biden to designate this monument."

"I am honored to introduce the Chuckwalla National Monument Establishment and Joshua Tree National Park Expansion Act of 2024, alongside California U.S. Senators Alex Padilla and Laphonza Butler. I am particularly proud of the collaboration and leadership from a robust coalition, including local tribal leaders, conservationist groups, members of the renewable energy industry, utility companies, community organizations, and youth leaders. They have built the necessary momentum and agreements to ensure this project's success," **said Dr. Ruiz**. "The Chuckwalla National Monument is good for the environment, the economy, and the public's health. It aims to protect pristine wildlife habitats, endangered plants and animals, and sacred sites of significant spiritual importance to local tribes, crucial for their cultural preservation. Additionally, it will enhance tourism and economic opportunities in our region and provide a new venue for constituents to hike, bike, and enjoy the breathtaking landscapes and natural beauty of our desert. This monument will play an important role in addressing California's and our nation's climate change goals while promoting the growth of renewable energy. I am thrilled that we have reached this milestone together and call on President Biden to use the Antiquities Act to expedite the creation of the monument."

"This bill protects a remarkable natural area in our state with important cultural sites and sensitive ecosystems," **said California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot**.

"Designating this area as a National Monument will protect these important lands while boosting outdoor access for communities across the region. I'm proud to support tribal leaders and community-based organizations who driving this effort, and thank Senator Padilla and Congressman Ruiz for championing this important proposal."

The lands within the proposed national monument include the homelands of the Iviatim, Nūwū, Pipa Aha Macav, Kwatsáan, and Maara'yam peoples (Cahuilla, Chemehuevi, Mojave, Quechan, and Serrano nations). Designating the Chuckwalla National Monument would help to protect important spiritual and cultural values tied to the land such as multi-use trail systems established by Indigenous peoples, sacred sites and objects, traditional cultural places, geoglyphs, petroglyphs, pictographs, and native plants and wildlife.

"For thousands of years, the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians have called the lands in the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument home," **said Chairman Thomas Tortez Jr. of the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians**. "The area contains thousands of cultural places and objects of vital importance to the history and identity of the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians. We strongly support the designation of the Chuckwalla National Monument and thank Senator Alex Padilla and Representative Raul Ruiz for championing this effort."

"The Cahuilla Band of Indians is in strong support of the creation of the Chuckwalla National Monument," **said Erica Schenk, Chairwoman of the Cahuilla Band of Indians**. "The area includes village sites, camps, quarries, food processing sites, power places, trails, glyphs, and story and song locations, all of which are evidence of the Cahuilla people's and other tribes' close and spiritual relationship to these desert lands."

"These lands encompass our origins, history, songs, religious ceremonies, ancient sites, trails, petroglyphs, artifacts, and intaglios that are spread throughout our traditional territories,"

said Jordan D. Joaquin, President of the Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe. “Our footsteps are etched into the landscape since the beginning of time and we continue to persist in modern times, still providing stewardship over these lands. We are wholeheartedly in support of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument.”

The protection of these public lands would help ensure more equitable access to nature for eastern Coachella Valley communities and surrounding areas. The vast desert landscape included in the monument proposal is already cherished for outdoor recreation activities like hiking and rock climbing and is home to habitats critical for the survival of the Chuckwalla lizard and the endangered desert tortoise. Some popular trails and places of interest that would be protected as part of the monument include Painted Canyon and Box Canyon in the Mecca Hills area, Corn Springs campground, and the Bradshaw Trail.

The proposed monument is also critical to California’s efforts to fight climate change and conserve biodiversity. Given the size of the monument, it would contribute significantly to state and federal commitments to protect at least 30 percent of public lands and coastal waters by 2030.

Protecting these public lands in the desert helps provide a buffer for present-day military installations from development that may interfere with military operations.

The proposed Chuckwalla National Monument upholds and supports the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP), which identified areas suitable for renewable energy development as well as lands that should be safeguarded for their biological, cultural, recreation, and other values. The proposed monument does not conflict with the development of renewable energy and, in fact, the monument boundaries were specifically drawn to avoid areas identified in the DRECP as suitable for development. The DRECP also identified many of the lands in the proposed monument as being important to conserve for their biological values. Permanently protecting these lands will help to fulfill the DRECP’s goal of balanced development and conservation.

“This legislation is a testament to the reality that conservation and renewable energy progress go hand in hand,” **said Raisa Lee, Sr. Director of Development, Clearway Energy Group.** “We are grateful to Senator Padilla, Senator Butler, and Representative Ruiz for their tireless and collaborative work to protect biological and cultural areas while advancing our county’s clean energy goals. We join lawmakers in urging President Biden to designate this monument.”

“Achieving California’s decarbonization goals by 2045 requires rapidly expanding the energy grid to connect solar, wind and other renewables. The Chuckwalla National Monument will protect environmental resources and tribal lands while creating an energy corridor for the electric power lines essential for the state’s clean energy future,” **said Pedro J. Pizarro, President and CEO, Edison International.**

“The solar and storage industry commends Senator Padilla and Representative Ruiz for their efforts to ensure we balance our clean energy, conservation, and environmental justice goals in the Chuckwalla National Monument proposal,” **said Abigail Ross Hopper, President and CEO of the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA).** “SEIA worked closely with these groups to reach an agreement that will help achieve our nation’s clean energy goals on public lands and make sure we preserve areas of biological and cultural significance. Today’s legislation is an important step toward this vision.”

“The Large-scale Solar Association, representing solar energy developers who produce clean energy in the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan area in California, appreciates the valuable assistance of Senator Padilla and Representative Ruiz in incorporating into their bills the agreements that all the stakeholders reached in working on the Chuckwalla National

Monument proposal. Today's legislation and map address our concerns about potential conflicts between a national monument and adjacent solar development focus areas and needed transmission pathways. The agreement will help ensure that the State's plan for 100% renewable energy is successful, that Congressional and Administration goals for renewable energy on public lands are met, and that land with biological and cultural resource value is conserved. Thanks again to Senator Padilla and Representative Ruiz for their support," **said Shannon Eddy, Executive Director of the Large-scale Solar Association.**

"This compromise achieves conservation interests while enabling the buildout of solar generation and clean power transmission necessary to achieve California's renewable energy goals. We greatly appreciate Sen. Padilla, Sen. Butler and Rep. Ruiz working with all stakeholders to achieve an outcome that advances the state's clean energy and environmental future," **said Jason Grumet, CEO of the American Clean Power Association.**

"EDF Renewables appreciates the hard work by Senator Padilla and Representative Ruiz and all the stakeholders who have worked on the Chuckwalla National Monument proposal. Today's legislation and map address our initial concerns about potential conflicts between a national monument and adjacent solar development focus areas. The state of California and the Biden Administration share a commitment to rapid renewable energy deployment and land and tribal resource conservation. We have engaged in this process with balancing those imperatives and appreciate the dedicated and detailed work to meet those objectives in this proposal," **said Virinder Singh, Vice President, Regulatory and Legislative Affairs, EDF Renewables.**

The proposed national monument has garnered diverse local support, including from current and former local elected officials, the Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe, the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians, the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Cahuilla Band of Indians, the cities of Banning, Cathedral City, Desert Hot Springs, Indian Wells, Indio, and Palm Springs, SoCal Edison, Imperial Irrigation District, the Metropolitan Water District, over 100 local businesses, Chambers of Commerce, and residents of the eastern Coachella Valley and neighboring areas.

A list of supporter quotes is available [here \(https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Protect-Chuckwalla_Quote-Sheet-2024-Bill-Intro-.pdf\)](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Protect-Chuckwalla_Quote-Sheet-2024-Bill-Intro-.pdf).

In addition to Senator Padilla, Senator Butler, and Representative Ruiz, Representatives Nanette Barragán (D-Calif.-44), Julia Brownley (D-Calif.-26), Salud Carbajal (D-Calif.-24), Tony Cárdenas (D-Calif.-29), J. Luis Correa (D-Calif.-46), Jim Costa (D-Calif.-21), Robert Garcia (D-Calif.-42), Jimmy Gomez (D-Calif.-34), Jared Huffman (D-Calif.-02), Ro Khanna (D-Calif.-17), Barbara Lee (D-Calif.-12), Mike Levin (D-Calif.-49), Ted Lieu (D-Calif.-36), Doris Matsui (D-Calif.-07), Kevin Mullin (D-Calif.-15), Jimmy Panetta (D-Calif.-19), Katie Porter (D-Calif.-47), Adam Schiff (D-Calif.-30), Brad Sherman (D-Calif.-32), Eric Swalwell (D-Calif.-14), Mark Takano (D-Calif.-39), Mike Thompson (D-Calif.-04), and Juan Vargas (D-Calif.-52) also signed the letter urging President Biden to designate the Chuckwalla National Monument.

Senator Padilla has been a leader in increasing protections for public lands and access to outdoor recreation. Padilla [introduced legislation \(https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bill-to-protect-1-million-acres-of-california-public-lands/\)](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-introduces-bill-to-protect-1-million-acres-of-california-public-lands/) to restore and expand protections for over 1 million acres of California's public lands, which [advanced \(https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-committee-advances-padilla-bills-to-protect-california-public-lands/\)](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-committee-advances-padilla-bills-to-protect-california-public-lands/) out of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) last year. Padilla has also called on President Biden to expand two California national monuments. Last October, Senator Padilla, along with Representatives John Garamendi (D-Calif.-08) and Mike Thompson, [led a letter \(https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-garamendi-thompson-reiterate-calls-urging-biden-administration-to-expand-the-berryessa-snow-mountain-national-](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-garamendi-thompson-reiterate-calls-urging-biden-administration-to-expand-the-berryessa-snow-mountain-national-)

monument/

#:~:text=For%20several%20Congresses%2C%20we%20have,Forest%20Service%20to%20improve%20tribal)

President Biden and Interior Department Secretary Deb Haaland urging the Administration to use its authority under the *Antiquities Act of 1906* to expand the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument to protect the entirety of Molok Luyuk. In June 2023, Senator Padilla and Representative Judy Chu (D-Calif.-28) were joined by elected officials and community leaders in urging (<https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-chu-call-on-the-biden-administration-to-expand-san-gabriel-mountains-national-monument/>) the Biden administration to expand the boundary of California's San Gabriel Mountains National Monument by issuing a presidential proclamation under the *Antiquities Act of 1906*.

A map of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument and Joshua Tree National Park expansion is available [here](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Chuckwalla-Map-4.12.241.pdf) (<https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Chuckwalla-Map-4.12.241.pdf>).

Full text of the bill is available [here](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Chuckwalla-Legislation-4.12.241.pdf) (<https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Chuckwalla-Legislation-4.12.241.pdf>).

Full text of the letter is available [here](https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Padilla-Ruiz-Chuckwalla-Antiquities-Letter-04.16.24.pdf) (<https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Padilla-Ruiz-Chuckwalla-Antiquities-Letter-04.16.24.pdf>) and below:

Dear President Biden and Secretary Haaland:

We write to request that you issue a proclamation under the Antiquities Act of 1906 to designate the Chuckwalla National Monument in eastern Imperial and Riverside counties in California.

We have introduced the "Chuckwalla National Monument Establishment and Joshua Tree National Park Expansion Act of 2024" to conserve iconic and sensitive California landscapes, foster Tribal collaborative management of sacred public lands, and increase recreation and equitable access to the outdoors. Our bill would establish a new Chuckwalla National Monument to protect approximately 627,855 acres of public lands while also expanding Joshua Tree National Park by adding approximately 17,915 acres of previously designated public lands. We request that you use your authority under the Antiquities Act to protect these iconic landscapes included in the map titled "Proposed Chuckwalla National Monument and Joshua Tree National Park Expansion" and dated April 12, 2024. We also request that you visit the proposed designations and would be happy to host you for the visit this spring.

Our efforts enjoy broad support from federal, tribal, state, and local officials, and was crafted in close coordination with affected communities and key stakeholders after years of grassroots advocacy to bring greater protections and recreation opportunities in the California Desert. Our legislation also carefully balances the land use needs of the energy industry so that as we protect our most sensitive landscapes, we also ensure that California and the nation are able to meet our clean energy goals. Our bill has earned support from numerous elected officials, businesses, conservation and outdoor recreation organizations, and key partners in the energy industry. We are proud of the support we have built to date and are confident that any Antiquities Act designation would enjoy equally broad support.

The proposed Chuckwalla National Monument's vast desert landscape spanning the area along Joshua Tree National Park's southern boundary, along Interstate 10 from the eastern Coachella Valley, and all the way to the Colorado River are worthy of permanent protection. This area has a unique, biodiverse ecosystem, is home to habitats for species like the Chuckwalla lizard and the endangered desert tortoise, and contains critical migration corridors for desert bighorn sheep. This area is also cherished for outdoor recreation activities like hiking and rock climbing.

Preserving this vast desert landscape will help ensure more equitable access to nature and recreation, protect biodiversity, and preserve decades of cultural riches, particularly for the local tribal communities.

The lands we are proposing for protection include the homelands of the Iviatim, Nüwü, Pipa Aha Macav, Kwatsáan, and Maara'yam peoples (Cahuilla, Chemehuevi, Mojave, Quechan, and Serrano nations). Designating the Chuckwalla National Monument would help to protect important spiritual and cultural values tied to the land such as multi-use trail systems established by Indigenous peoples, sacred sites and objects, traditional cultural places, geoglyphs, petroglyphs, pictographs, and native plants and wildlife. Our legislation would also further our shared goals to honor Tribal sovereignty and advance cooperative management of federal public lands by allowing Tribes to voluntarily engage in cooperative management of the public lands within the National Monument. We hope that any presidential proclamation under the Antiquities Act would include similar direction for the Bureau of Land Management to provide ample opportunity for federally recognized tribes to co-steward the Monument. Finally, our legislation directs Interior to conduct an ethnographic study and cultural resources survey for the land within and adjacent to the proposed Monument to assess the importance of these lands to affected Indian Tribes.

Establishing the Chuckwalla National Monument would contribute to the Administration's goal under Executive Order 14008 of permanently conserving 30 percent of the United States lands and coastal waters by 2030, as well as the Administration's America the Beautiful initiative, which is intended to address the three interlocking crises of nature loss, climate change, and inequitable access to the outdoors.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you to permanently conserve this unique desert landscape in California for future generations to enjoy, and we would be pleased to host you for an in-person visit in the near future.

Sincerely,

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Related Issues

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