



Preserving Bahsahwahbee as a National Monument

By Neal Desai

In eastern Nevada, near Great Basin National Park, Tribal nations are leading a campaign to preserve and commemorate a significant place of memory as a new national monument within the National Park System. Through the leadership of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation, the Duckwater Shoshone Tribe and the Ely Shoshone Tribe, the sacred Bahsahwahbee site could be America's next national monument.

Bahsahwahbee (locally known as Swamp Cedars) was once a ceremonial and pilgrimage site where thousands of Indigenous Newe Peoples gathered every year. But during the 19th century, this valley became killing fields as the Newe suffered 11 massacres. Bahsahwahbee is at the heart of the three largest massacres, one being the largest known American Indian massacre in U.S. history, which all occurred at times of religious gatherings.

continued on back page

Top: A Chuckwalla (*Sauromalus obesus*) basks on a rock in near triple digit heat
Right: Protect Chuckwalla Logo showing the reptile that the monument would share its name with ©Protect California Deserts

A Monumental Campaign for the California Desert

By Luke Basulto

In the early afternoon of Sept. 25, surrounded by indigenous leaders, tribal governments and numerous environmental organizations, Rep. Raul Ruiz, D-California, announced that he will introduce a bill to establish two new national monuments in the California Desert: Chuckwalla National Monument, a 660,000-acre swath of breathtaking and significant landscapes, and a National Park Service-managed monument that would eventually expand the acreage of Joshua Tree National Park by about 17,000 acres. Spirits were high, and enthusiasm and passionate conversations about desert protection and partnership were plentiful.

NPCA has been involved with this campaign since its inception and has worked alongside an outstanding coalition of partners, both local and national, to build a movement that may very well lead to a monumental and historic leap forward in preserving the California Desert for generations to come. When you look at the area being proposed for the new monument in context with the deserts' already protected landscapes, most immediately the 800,000-acre Joshua Tree National Park and the 450,000-acre Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range, it is clear that the proposed Chuckwalla



National Monument is a vital missing puzzle piece with regard to landscape connectivity. From a mile-high point of view, imagine an interconnected and protected desert landscape that spans the southeastern part of the state beginning just north of the U.S.-Mexico border and reaching all the way up to the northern most point of Death Valley National Park. This contiguous landscape would provide a safe passage to iconic desert wildlife like the bighorn sheep and mountain lion.

More specifically, try to envision a gorgeous desert landscape stretching from the Coachella Valley, along the southern boundary of Joshua Tree National Park, to the Colorado River—a landscape that holds a remarkable collection of opportunities for

continued on page 6

FIELD REPORT

Winter 2023

Pacific Regional Office Staff

PO Box 11332 • Santa Rosa, CA 95406
510.368.0115

Ron Sundergill

SR. REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Neal Desai

SENIOR PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Alana Weinroth

REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Kati Schmidt

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Caitlyn Burford

SR. COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Alexandra Utts

SR. COORDINATOR

Julie Hogan

SR. DIRECTOR, FOUNDATION RELATIONS

Charlie Olsen

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS LIAISON
CLIMATE POLICY MANAGER

Jarrod Fasching

MAJOR GIFTS OFFICER FOR SOUTHWEST
AND PACIFIC REGION

Los Angeles Field Office

767 N. Hill Street • Suite 302
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213.482.0642

Dennis Arguelles

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DIRECTOR

Sally Garcia

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

California Desert Field Office

61325 29 Palms Highway • Suite D
Joshua Tree, CA 92252
760.600.0038

Chris Clarke

RUTH HAMMETT ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Lucas Basulto

PROGRAM MANAGER

Sierra Nevada Field Office

Sacramento, CA
559.385.6148

Mark Rose

PROGRAM MANAGER

NPCA Membership Services Team

800.628.7275
npca@npca.org

npca.org

MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

By Ron Sundergill

I think the time has come to require a reservation system at certain times of year in some of our national parks. I have reluctantly come to this conclusion because I always thought that our parks should be fully open. But in some cases, we must face the reality that our parks are suffering from too many visitors.

Yosemite is one of those parks.

The story by Mark Rose provides an update on where things stand at this point. At Yosemite National Park, all those visitors are creating a negative experience for many people. They experience unacceptable delays getting into the park, and once they get to



Yosemite Valley it is often jam-packed with no parking available. The large numbers of people are also hard to manage, and some of the natural and cultural resources of Yosemite are at risk.

We look forward to seeing what will come of the current effort by Yosemite leadership to address this problem. They conducted pilot visitor reservation systems during the pandemic, so there is some

good experience already that the park staff can learn from. I am hopeful, and I urge our members to weigh in with the National Park System in its planning for a new and comprehensive visitor reservation system at Yosemite.

Above: Ron Sundergill



Above: Yosemite Valley view, National Park, California ©Helena Bilkova | Dreamstime

Youth Advocacy in National Park Preservation

By Sally Garcia

Park advocacy and lobbying can seem like daunting actions for those who have never ventured into the realm of policy and politics. The intricacies of legislative processes, the complexity of environmental issues, and the idea of voicing concerns to lawmakers can be intimidating barriers for newcomers. However, in Los Angeles, our NPCA LA Young Leaders Council is dismantling these preconceptions and demystifying the world of park advocacy. With an energetic group of passionate young adults at its core, this council not only opens doors to advocacy but also empowers individuals to become effective champions for our national parks and the natural world they represent.

A fundamental aspect of our YLC meetings is the educational component, where we provide our participants with a look into what advocacy and park advocacy entail and how NPCA drives forward our campaigns. Often, we serve as the initiators, introducing YLC members to the world of advocacy and lobbying. This year, we had the privilege of taking two YLC members to Washington, D.C., for our annual meeting week. Additionally, in late June, four more of our YLC members joined us for a full day of lobbying at the California state capital, followed by a trip to Pinnacles National Park.

These experiences are essential in transforming apprehension into empowerment, setting the stage for a fresh wave of dedicated park advocates in the making. During our time at the state capital, we engaged in discussions with representatives who shared the concerns of each YLC member. This exposure allowed our YLC members to gain firsthand experience of navigating the world of meetings, covering topics ranging from local bills like AB 1573 which helps reduce unnecessary outdoor water use by using local native plants and SB 337, which codifies a goal to conserve 30% of CA land and coastal waters by 2030, ensuring that each discussion resonated with the passions and interests of our YLC members.

Reflecting on her first experience with lobbying, YLC member Danika Jensen, manager of Annual Giving Programs at the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association who has been a member of the council since 2021 shared her insights: “I was grateful to be able to attend this trip to Sacramento to speak with elected officials alongside fellow members of the YLC. It was a great opportunity to advocate for green spaces and national parks in person at our state

Capitol. I educated myself on the projects that NPCA is currently working on in the greater Los Angeles area, as well as national issues affecting our parks. I also learned that advocacy is very personal, and that childhood and life experiences greatly influence the climate issues that inspire passion in each person. It was so rewarding to hear other members of the YLC discuss their commitment to better composting, increasing equity and inclusion in the creation of green spaces, and the importance of preserving native plant and animal species to create healthy ecosystems.”

After our time at the capital, we headed toward Pinnacles National Park—a first for all of us—and we spent two full days

connecting, debriefing our time at the Capitol and overall enjoying a new national park. We even got to see a condor and a bald eagle.

These experiences emphasize the importance of engaging in lobbying efforts for the issues that deeply resonate with us. Advocacy isn't just about raising one's voice. It's about actively participating in the democratic process and influencing the decisions that shape our communities and environment. By advocating for what we believe in, we not only become advocates for national parks but also champions of the causes closest to our hearts, fostering a sense of purpose and responsibility that transcends any single issue.



Above: CYLC members Kelli Hailey, Francesca Ruiz, Danika Jensen and Jesse Jenn at Pinnacles National Park ©Sally Garcia **Below:** YLC Member Danika Jensen, Senator Maria Elena Durazon, YLC member Francesca Ruiz, Sally Garcia, YLC Member Jesse Jenn and YLC member Kelli Hailey at Senator Durazo's office in Sacramento. ©Sally Garcia



Yosemite's Crowds Justify a Permanent Reservation System

By Mark Rose

This past summer, for the first time since the start of the pandemic, Yosemite National Park was once again open to the public without a reservation system to limit the number of vehicles in the park. The results were disastrous. Visitors traveling from around the world arrived at the gates of the park expecting a once-in-a-lifetime Yosemite experience. Instead, they were too often greeted with excessively long wait times at entrance stations—in some cases lasting over three hours. Once they made their way into the park, visitors likely encountered parking lots that were completely full and regularly closed off to new vehicles by early morning. By mid-morning, cars were being turned around and prevented from entering the popular eastern portion of Yosemite Valley. Once visitors did finally make their way through the traffic and discovered a place to park, they then had to deal with overcrowded trails, bathrooms, shuttle buses, visitor centers and other facilities jampacked with far more frustrated parkgoers than Yosemite was designed to handle. These are just a handful of the numerous overcrowding issues that understaffed and overworked park employees had to navigate this summer. The impacts on visitors' experiences and the park's natural and cultural resources were numerous and could have been avoided.

Other national parks like Rocky Mountain and Glacier decided to keep their pilot reservation systems in place this summer while working on more permanent solutions. Yosemite, however, did away with their pilot reservation system despite previous iterations having successfully kept both visitation levels and local COVID outbreaks in check from 2020-2022.

Looking ahead, we think that it is imperative that the park bring a reservation system back online by next summer's busy season. Officials must also begin working on a formal and permanent solution to address the decades-long overcrowding issues that are having serious impacts on the park's resources, employees and visitors. Taking the lessons learned from other parks and previous iterations of Yosemite's reservation system, we believe it is entirely feasible to design a permanent solution that properly balances park access with the protection of park resources. This past summer put on full display that we have few other options beyond a reservation system if we wish to ensure Yosemite and its plentiful natural wonders can be enjoyed in all their glory by this and future generations of park visitors.



Top: Crowds overlooking tunnel view in Yosemite **Above:** Sign closing Yosemite Valley to additional cars **Below:** Traffic Jam in Yosemite Valley • Photos by Alicia Acevedo



Fires Hit Mojave Preserve Again

By Chris Clarke

Those of us who love Mojave National Preserve scarcely had time to adjust emotionally to the changes the August 2020 Dome Fire wrought upon the landscape when, in late July 2023, news of the York Fire hit the internet. Roughly adjacent to the 43,000-acre footprint of the Dome Fire, the York Fire covered more than twice as much area—93,078 acres, about 9,100 of those acres in Nevada.

While wildfire is beneficial for many western landscapes, the Mojave Desert has not historically been subjected to wide-ranging wildfires: a lightning strike or carelessly abandoned campfire in the Mojave in 1850 might have burned one or two trees before snuffing itself out, unable to spread across the desert's bare mineral soil. Over the course of the 20th Century, invasive plants—mainly grasses—filled the unvegetated spaces between the native plants, allowing fires to spread widely and rapidly. The Mojave's plants haven't had nearly enough time to evolve resistance to fire, so wildfires can cause permanent changes to the landscape.

Crews are still sifting through the data collected in surveys done the first few weeks post-fire, so it's difficult to assess the scale of the damage the York Fire did. Sparked on private land at the west end of the New York Mountains in the preserve, the York Fire burned at a high intensity in some places but apparently left some spots within the footprint largely unaltered. Some parts of the York Fire saw complete destruction of historical artifacts such as wooden barns, sheds and mining infrastructure. Other buildings in the fire footprint escaped with inconsequential damage, if any. The same can be said of prehistoric cultural resources. Some petroglyph sites in the preserve burned quickly enough that the flames had insufficient time to damage the rock art. Others didn't fare as well.

The York fire burned over several areas that had been biologically unique. Caruthers Canyon, a north-south running cleft in the New York Mountains that boasted a collection of coastal California native plants such as live oaks, manzanitas, coffeeberry and ceanothus, burned during the fire's first full day, its abundant piñon, juniper and white fir trees contributing to intense flames firefighters described as more than 20 feet high. That coastal Caruthers Canyon flora is, or was, a relic of times when the Mojave's climate more closely resembled the mild California coast. Since much of



Some parts of the York Fire saw complete destruction of historical artifacts such as wooden barns, sheds and mining infrastructure. Other buildings in the fire footprint escaped with inconsequential damage, if any.

coastal California burns regularly and plants have adapted to frequent fires, there is a chance that the unique assemblage of plants in Caruthers will survive in some form.

Other native plants may not be so lucky. The preserve's beloved eastern Joshua trees, along with the blackbrush that shelters Joshua tree seedlings until they can withstand the desert's rigors, took heavy damage in some parts of the York Fire footprint. Joshua trees have a hard time surviving hot fires: mortality of 90-95% after even moderate fires is not unusual. Blackbrush, meanwhile, won't come back from fire at all.

Mojave National Preserve wasn't the only desert treasure injured by the York Fire, which spread into both Castle Mountains National Monument and Nevada's Avi Kwa Ame National Monument. Fortunately, a combination of summer rain and the heroic efforts of firefighting crews kept the flames from reaching Avi Kwa Ame's beloved Walking Box Ranch, built as a desert retreat by silent film stars Rex Bell and Clara Bow. The new monument's signature collection of eastern Joshua trees in Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness was likewise spared.

2005 saw the first massive fire in Mojave National Preserve, the 70,736-acre Hackberry

Fire. Since then, the Dome and York Fires have added another 136,000 acres to the burn total. In a National Park Unit stretching over 1.6 million acres, 206,000 acres burned may not seem too catastrophic. For perspective, though, the cumulative area burned by those three fires in the last 18 years makes up an eighth of the preserve, an area significantly larger than New York City. What's more, all three fires burned in the vegetatively diverse upper elevations of the preserve, meaning the fires had an ecological impact larger than their size alone would indicate.

It's an object lesson for those of us in the land protection business. No agency offers more stringent protection to natural resources under its management than the National Park Service, and yet these destructive fires have happened anyway despite the Park Service's best efforts. Inside or outside of the parks, we need to find a way to protect the Mojave Desert from the ravages of not only climate change, but also of climate-adjacent phenomena like wildfires. Getting the land into the hands of the National Park Service is only the first step.

Above: The Kousch House, a historic structure in Mojave National Preserve that was completely destroyed by the July 2023 York Fire ©NPS

A Monumental Campaign for the California Desert

continued from page 1

outdoor enthusiasts from all walks of life, is a haven for biodiversity and a climate-resilient landscape preserved for generations to experience, enjoy, and connect with. Moreover, this landscape is culturally important to numerous tribes whose history and traditions are engrained in the area. That is what has been envisioned for Chuckwalla National Monument. That is why it is so important to set this land aside as a monument.

This proposed monument is poised to become the largest protected area of the Colorado Desert bioregion. It would play a crucial role in safeguarding the delicate habitats of the Mojave Desert tortoise as well as several imperiled species of plants, some of which can only be found there and nowhere else on the planet. The proposed

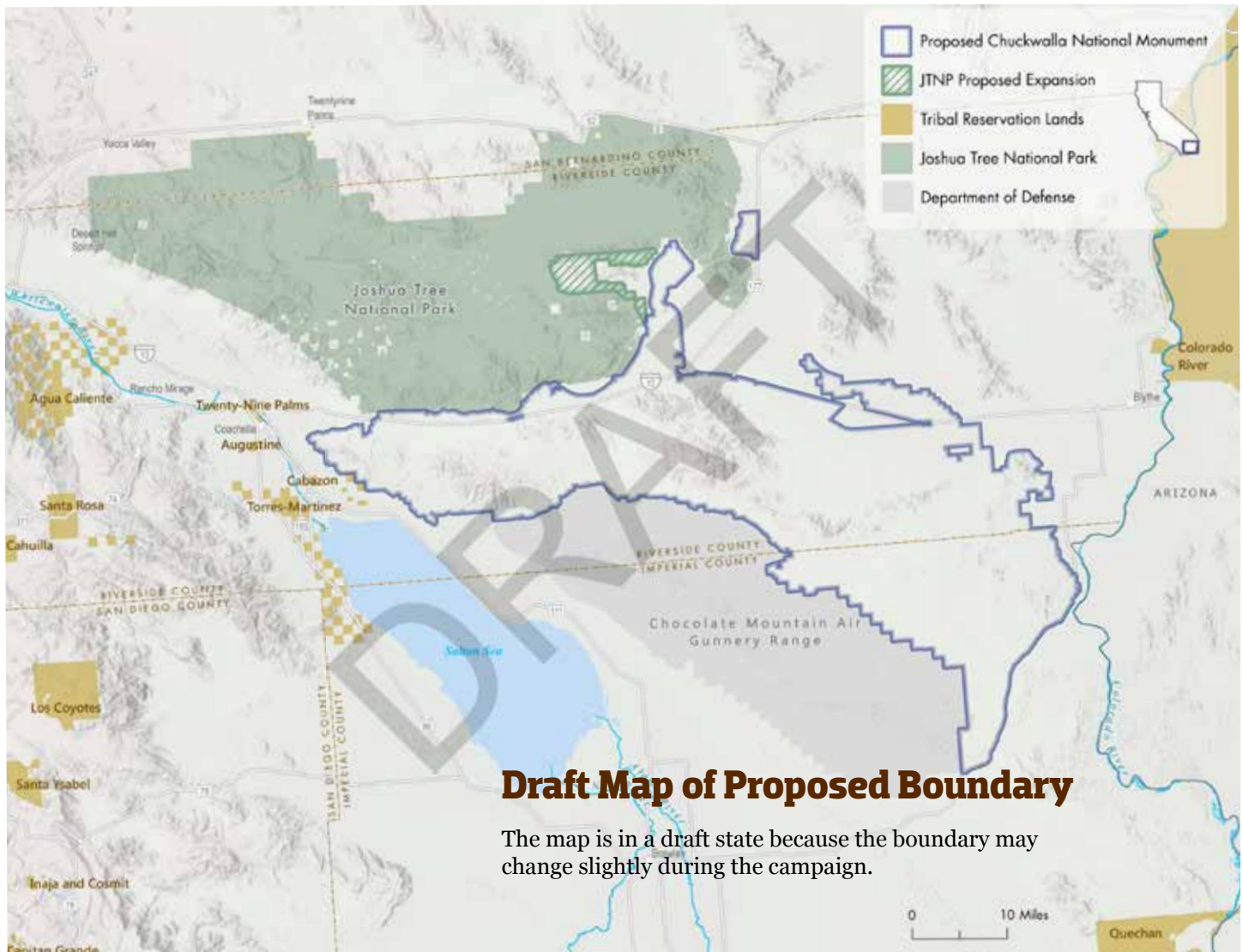
monument would also provide invaluable habitat that could make the reintroduction of the Sonoran pronghorn possible in California's deserts. The campaign to designate this monument has garnered the support of nearly all the tribes with connections to this beautiful part of our state, and continued tribal involvement is built into the framework of the campaign and paramount to it moving forward.

The proposed Chuckwalla National Monument is home to beloved outdoor recreation areas like Painted Canyon and the historic Bradshaw Trail. Its establishment would create more equitable access to the beauty of the California Desert landscape for nearby urban and often overlooked communities. For the residents of these neighboring communities, heat, pollution, and environmental risks are harsh everyday realities. These new protections will provide

residents with much-needed respite and also support local economies. The park expansion component of this bill seeks to bring land into the protection of the National Park System. The area in question is important to the park's bighorn sheep and has a rich mining history that would add to historical programming at Joshua Tree, as well as an influx of funding to one of the country's most visited National Parks units.

There is still a lot of work to be done before we see this new monument become a reality, but the future of the California Desert looks promising, and the people working toward its establishment are about as resilient and charismatic as the lizard the monument is named for.

To follow this campaign and learn more, please visit www.protectchuckwalla.org.



NPCA Travel Collection 2024

By Jared Dial



Our small-group tours are guided by passionate experts who bring the stories of our national parks to life.

California's Desert Landscape: Joshua Tree and Death Valley March 16-22, 2024

Spend time in the stunning Mojave Desert to uncover a plethora of desert phenomena and enjoy a behind-the-scenes look at the newly established Avi Kwa Ame National Monument.

Geothermal Explorations and Ancient Migrations: The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem June 2-8, 2024

Traverse the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to experience some of the most concentrated geothermal activity in the world.

Bears, Whales and Glaciers: Kenai Fjords and Lake Clark National Parks (Waitlist Only) July 13-20, 2024

Spend time with a bear-viewing expert in two of Alaska's most stunning national parks—Kenai Fjords and Lake Clark.

Exploring Alaska's Coastal Wilderness Small-Ship Cruise August 25-September 1, 2024

Head deep into southeast Alaska's wilderness to sail amid coves, fjords, tidewater glaciers and waters teeming with marine life.

Acadia to Katahdin: Exploring Maine's Waterways, Woodlands and Wabanaki Cultural Heritage September 22-28, 2024

Immerse yourself in the vibrant landscapes and remote wilderness of Acadia National Park and Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

Fa'a Samoa: The National Park of American Samoa (Waitlist Only) October 10-17, 2024

Join the waitlist! Visit all of the islands that comprise the National Park of American Samoa to engage with local families, hike the lush mountains, and enjoy abundant flora and fauna found nowhere else in the world.

On the Road to Freedom: Understanding Civil Rights Through Our National Parks and Heritage Areas (Waitlist Only) November 13-18, 2024

Join the waitlist! Embark on a remarkable journey through some of the most significant sites associated with the American civil rights movement.

For more information or to book online, visit www.npca.org/trips or contact NPCA's Educational Travel Program at 1.800.628.7275 or travel@npca.org.

.....
Top: Mount Katahdin in Maine ©Denis Tangney Jr. | iStock **Bottom Left:** A colony of Steller Sea Lions (*Eumetopias jubatus*) in the Inian Islands in Tongass National Park, Alaska ©Lindblad Expeditions **Bottom Center:** Death Valley in California ©freebilly | iStock **Bottom Right:** A large male bison blocking a road in Yellowstone National Park ©Inger Eriksen | iStock





PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE STAFF
LOS ANGELES FIELD OFFICE
767 N. Hill Street • Suite 302
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
OAKLAND, CA
PERMIT #2030

Preserving Bahsahwahbee as a National Monument

continued from page 1

For Tribal nations, Bahsahwahbee is singular as a place of religious gathering comparable to the Vatican, a place of genocide similar to Auschwitz, and a mass graveyard not unlike Arlington National Cemetery.

The Newe hold that the sacred grove of Swamp Cedars embodies the spirits of the men, women and children who were killed. Indigenous peoples from across the Great Basin still go to Bahsahwahbee to visit their ancestors, pray and hold healing ceremonies. Vital to their customs and traditions at Bahsahwahbee are the globally unique groves of swamp cedars (a shallow-rooted Rocky Mountain juniper tree), sacred springs and spring-fed areas, the biodiversity and climate refugia those areas provide, medicinal plants and other sacred objects.

Tribal nations are now calling for these federal public lands to be commemorated



and preserved as a national monument within the National Park System. Tribes have secured the support from U.S. Senators Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen, the Nevada State Legislature and many others. Tribes and the senators are calling on President Biden to establish this national monument using the Antiquities Act, which presidents have used to protect public lands and sites of great historical significance.

Show your support by signing a petition at www.swampcedars.org asking our leaders to designate the Bahsahwahbee National Monument.

Above: The late-Goshute Tribal Elder and Chairman Rupert Steele at Bahsahwahbee
©Monte Sanford



Printed on 100% post-consumer content