

**DRAFT — FOR SIGN ONs**

April XX, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and the millions of members and supporters we collectively represent, we urge you to designate Castner Range as a national monument through the powers granted to your office under the Antiquities Act of 1906.

This action would affirm your commitment to protecting our national treasures as well as help counteract a history of inequitable access to the outdoors. We greatly appreciate your administration's commitment to preserve 30 percent of America's land and waters by 2030 in an equitable way as outlined in your *America the Beautiful* initiative. Permanently protecting Castner Range through executive action as authorized by the Antiquities Act is an essential step towards making that initiative a reality. We thank you and your Administration for the attention you have paid to the community thus far including Secretary Haaland's recent visit.

Castner Range, located near El Paso, Texas, is home to 11 square miles of West Texas beauty and forms a picturesque backdrop to the world's largest binational community. This unique landscape is rich with rare and endangered wildlife as well as dozens of sacred Native American sites including rock shelters, petroglyphs, bedrock mortars and habitations dating back 10,000 years. Castner Range National Monument would improve the region's local economy and reinforce local and national pride in an area of the country that has endured hardship in recent years.

In addition to the undersigned organizations, the Castner Range National Monument designation is supported by the people of El Paso, its business community, and its elected legislators including U.S. Representative Veronica Escobar, who has led efforts to secure this designation through legislation in Congress. We echo the sentiments of the tens of thousands of letters of support delivered to your and previous administrations as well as the recent letter to you from Congresswoman Escobar. Communities in and around El Paso have been leading the effort to preserve Castner Range for more than half a century. We stand with these local communities, diverse organizations, and the Black, Indigenous, and people of color in Texas who have been tirelessly fighting to permanently preserve and provide equal access to this beautiful area.

In order to make your *America the Beautiful* initiative a reality, millions of acres of public and private land must be protected. As we protect more land and waters, we also must prioritize correcting environmental injustices, addressing inequitable access to the outdoors, protecting biodiversity and ecosystem stability, and addressing the climate crisis. Designating Castner Range as a national monument would be an important step in addressing each of these priorities in West Texas.

**Correcting Environmental Injustices and Addressing Inequitable Access to the Outdoors:**

## **DRAFT — FOR SIGN ONs**

The people of El Paso, Texas should have more access to open space. Most nearby state and local parks charge admission fees that create a significant additional barrier in equitable access. According to the United Nations most recent data, El Paso has 3.01 square meters of green space per capita compared to 3,856.79 square meters per capita in the more affluent city of Houston, Texas. The land was used by Fort Bliss army post, but the army stopped operations there in 1966 and declared the land excess in 1971. While the army has conserved and protected the area, it is inaccessible to the community. We ask your administration to set forth a plan to safely turn the military installation into an area for recreation, solace, comfort, and equitable access to the outdoors, and we urge your administration to work with local communities and native tribes as an integral component of ongoing management.

### **Protecting Biodiversity and Ecosystem Stability:**

Mexican poppies bloom annually in the arid desert creating a unique ecosystem and dramatic landscape that is the pride of El Paso. The proposed monument will connect to the Franklin Mountains State Park, making a contiguous piece of habitat for a diverse array of wildlife. Castner Range and its surrounding area are home to a variety of beautiful plants and wildlife, some of which are endangered. Because Castner Range has been officially closed to the public for decades, little is known about what species reside there. Some old records indicate 743 species of plants have been recorded from Castner Range, including the endangered Sneed's pincushion cactus (*Escobaria sneedii*). The Texas horned lizard (*Phrynosoma cornutum*), a Texas state listed threatened species, has been recently seen on open lands within Castner Range.

### **Addressing our Climate Crisis:**

The nature crisis and the climate crisis are two sides of the same coin. We cannot stabilize the climate without increasing protections for nature. One of the most cost-effective strategies for mitigating climate change is to protect more land and water. Castner Range is a natural flood buffer and water filtration system.

Ultimately this land belongs to our children and future generations. Designating Castner Range as a national monument would not only permanently protect the area from future development but will illustrate a significant step to expand conservation education to marginalized communities who disproportionately bear the brunt of climate impacts and historically have less access to nature.

As you move to make your vision for *America the Beautiful* a reality, we urge you to use powers granted to your office under the Antiquities Act to designate Castner Range as a national monument. Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to our public lands.

Sincerely,

(The undersigned)

**DRAFT — FOR SIGN ONS**

CC: The Honorable Debra Haaland, Secretary of the Interior  
The Honorable Veronica Escobar, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Brenda Mallory, White House Council on Environmental Quality