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Guest opinion: We must preserve vital public lands for future generations

Opinion **OPINION** |

Kathy Chandler-Henry and Michael Naft

Guest Opinion



President Joe Biden speaks Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2022, at the Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument signing ceremony. The monument honors the legacy of the 10th Mountain Division soldiers who trained there to fight in Italy in World War II. *Chris Dillmann/Vail Daily*

For decades, a growing coalition of dedicated community leaders, Indigenous peoples, business owners, elected officials, and others have been working tirelessly to protect ecological, cultural, and historic landscapes across the western United States. Last October, the Biden administration heeded the calls from Colorado veterans, elected officials, business owners, hunters and anglers, and other community members, and [designated the Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument](#). Now, with the [recent designations of Avi Kwa Ame](#) and Castner Range national monuments, the president has taken another important step to preserving our land and our heritage for generations to come.

Avi Kwa Ame, the Mojave name for Spirit Mountain, is located in Clark County, Nevada, protecting over 500,000 acres just south of Las Vegas and surrounding the town of Searchlight. This landscape not only represents the origin place for nearly a dozen Yuman-speaking tribes, but is a source of life and livelihood for these Indigenous communities and a sacred place for Hopi and Chemehuevi Paiute people. It is also home to some of the world's rarest species of flora and fauna, desert tortoise and bighorn sheep, and the world's largest Joshua Tree forest.

We are grateful President Biden has designated Avi Kwa Ame National Monument. This area in Clark County is rich in both history, wildlife, and beauty. For years, Tribes, local elected officials, community leaders, and businesses have supported the creation of a national monument because protecting the area is both the right thing to do and the economically beneficial approach. Nearby communities like Searchlight and Laughlin will benefit from the financial impact of achieving monument status.

[Camp Hale-Continental Divide also has cultural significance](#), as it represents a place of cultural, military and ski industry history. This history is not only appreciated by the residents of Colorado, where the monument is located, but by veterans from across the country since soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division trained here. This space of storied army history now stands as a center for the booming Colorado ski industry, founded by soldiers returning from World War II. Last year's national monument designation protects both our cultural heritage and our local economies.

Eagle County is thrilled with this designation for Camp Hale and the Ten Mile Range. This new national monument is a testament to the original Ute inhabitants of the area, as well as the grit, perseverance and foresight of the 10th Mountain Division troops. We are protecting the birthplace of the ski industry and important environmental and heritage landscapes. Stakeholder groups throughout Eagle and Summit Counties have worked to protect these lands for over a decade. We appreciate Rep. Joe Neguse and Sen. Michael Bennet for their tireless efforts on behalf of these lands and our communities and are grateful to President Biden for this monument designation.

These national monument designations, along with the Castner Range national monument designation, stand as a testament to the president's dedication to conservation and preservation as outlined in his broad America the Beautiful Initiative. National monuments and protected public lands are tremendous assets to the nation. They support our health, economies, and well-being.

Communities across the country are asking President Biden to protect more public lands and waters through national monument designations. These include [Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma](#), the site of the Springfield Race Massacre in Illinois, and the expansion of Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument to include Molok Luyuk in California.

Preserving our public lands safeguards these areas for all Americans. It protects these areas from overdevelopment and exploitation. In Colorado and Nevada, these designations will also help these states remain powerhouses in the outdoor recreation industry while empowering Indigenous stewards and honoring the role of specific landscapes in history.

In a time when our nation and its leaders face a deluge of problems and where campaign promises are too often forgotten after election day, we stand together to thank the Biden administration and the congressional leaders behind the efforts to designate Camp Hale-Continental Divide, Avi Kwa Ame, and Castner Range national monuments. We look forward to President Biden conserving more vital places across the country to fulfill our obligations to current and future generations.

Kathy Chandler-Henry serves on the Eagle County Board of Commissioners. Michael Naft serves as a commissioner for Clark County, Nevada.



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