

NATIONAL MONUMENTS: THE HEART OF THE WEST



Sand to Snow National Monument, California | Photo Credit: Mason Cummings

*The Vital Role of National
Monuments to Western Local Elected
Officials and Communities*

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Gold Butte National Monument, Nevada | Photo Credit: Bob Wick

INTRODUCTION

Our nation's protected public lands, including national monuments designated through the Antiquities Act, are at the heart of Western communities. These landscapes contribute significantly to local economies and culture by giving people the chance to connect with the land. They also help to conserve biodiversity, making them critical for wildlife protection and mitigation of the effects of climate change. Furthermore, they offer unmatched opportunities for scientific discoveries in the natural sciences and archeology, including the growth of Indigenous knowledge as many culturally significant sites fall within their boundaries. Given all that these landscapes provide Western communities, the protection of more public lands as national monuments is integral to the vitality of the region.



Photo Credit: Bureau of Land Management

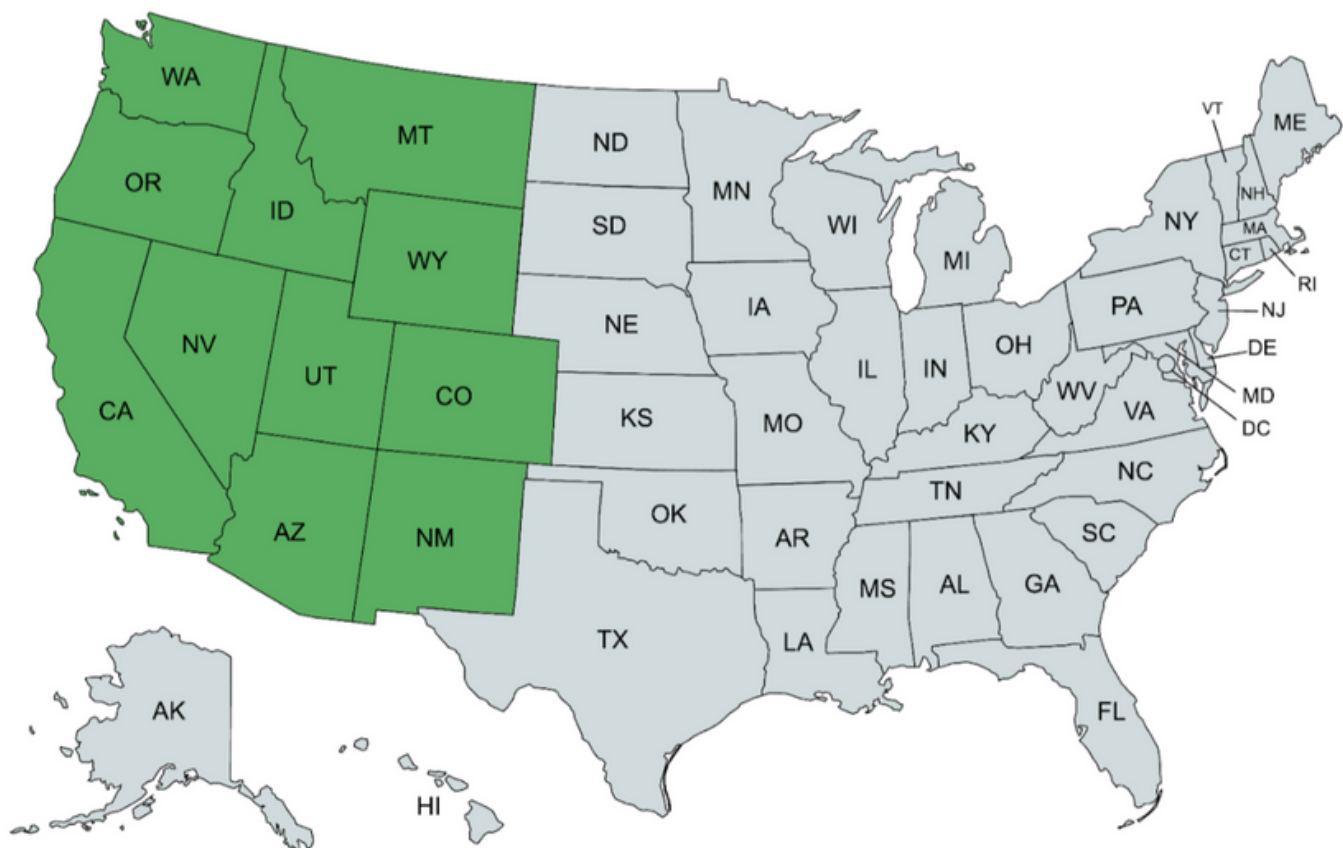
Ironwood Forest National Monument

The West's national monuments include some of the most inspiring mountains, breathtaking canyons, and expansive deserts in the world. Bordered on the east by the Rocky Mountains, on the west by the Pacific Ocean, on the north by Canada, and on the south by Mexico, this region not only includes many

longitudes and latitudes, but also many elevations. The highest mountains in the lower 48 are found here, as is California's Death Valley, the lowest point in North America. This diverse geography has led to many unique ecosystems that need to be protected, both to preserve biodiversity and cultural resources, and for the enjoyment of future generations.

INTRODUCTION

At The Mountain Pact, we work hard to ensure that these landscapes are protected through advocacy and outreach with local elected officials in the mountain communities that call the West home. By uniting and highlighting voices from across this region, we are able to build momentum for national monuments and other important protections for national public lands. This report details why national monument protections support communities; how they can help tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis; and how protected public lands contribute to local economies.



 The 11 state region that makes up the Western US

INTRODUCTION - National Monuments & the Antiquities Act

Congress passed the Antiquities Act in 1906 during the Presidential administration of Theodore Roosevelt. Since then, many presidents, including Roosevelt himself, have used the Antiquities Act to respond to the conservation needs of their time. In total, eighteen presidents - nine Democratic and nine Republican - have established over 160 national monuments.

The Antiquities Act is responsible for protecting many of our country's most iconic and treasured places. Among these are landscapes that were originally national monuments but ultimately became some of the country's most famous national parks, including Grand Canyon National Park, Olympic National Park, Zion National Park, and Grand Teton National Park. Other well known national monuments include the Statue of Liberty, Bears Ears, Muir Woods, Devils Tower, and Dinosaur. These protected landscapes are managed by different federal agencies, including the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and others.

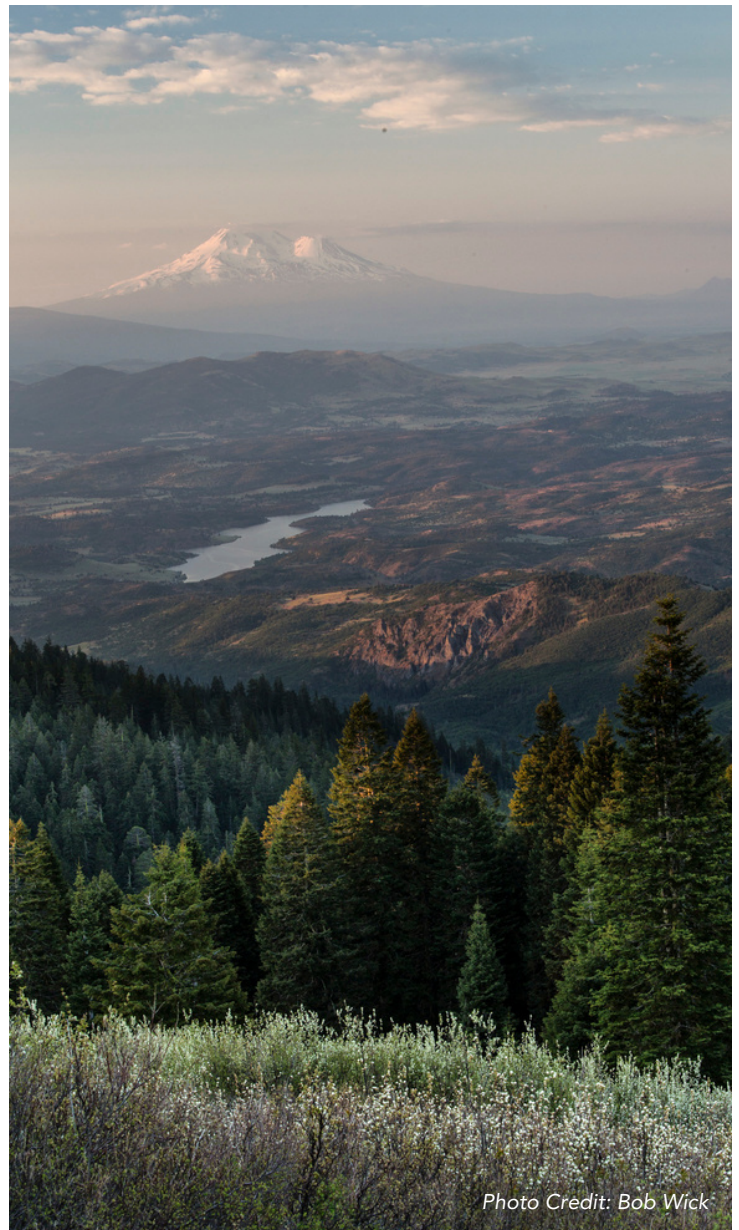


Photo Credit: Bob Wick

Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument

INTRODUCTION - National Monuments & the Antiquities Act

During his presidency, President Joe Biden has used the Antiquities Act to both restore and designate national monuments. He restored protections for Bears Ears; Grand Staircase-Escalante; and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine national monuments. As of January 2024, he also designated Camp Hale-Continental Divide; Avi Kwa Ame; Castner Range; Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley; and Baaj Nwaavjo l'tah Kukveni - Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon national monuments.

Protective outcomes achieved under the Antiquities Act can ensure more equitable access to nature; address the climate crisis; restore America's biodiversity and wildlife; and begin to reckon with historic and present injustices. Through the use of the Antiquities Act, some of the most important resources in our nation are preserved for the betterment of all. These are among the many reasons that our work concentrates on encouraging greater use of the Antiquities Act. This report highlights the significantly positive impact that monuments designated through this act have had, and continue to have, on communities across the Western US.



Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument | Photo Credit: Bureau of Land Management

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS: Protecting Biodiversity, Public Health, and Taking Climate Action

We must do more to address the compounding threats of climate change and the rapid loss of biodiversity. Mitigating these issues can improve public health by safeguarding America's lands, water, and wildlife, as well as the ecosystems, and the clean air and flood mitigation that they provide.

Science tells us that worldwide biodiversity is deteriorating at a faster rate than at any other time in human history. From 2001 to 2017, more than 24 million acres of land were lost to human development in the lower 48 United States. This equates to the loss of one football field-sized patch of land every 30 seconds.

Many scientists continue to warn that we must conserve and restore at least 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030 if we want to preserve biodiversity and ecosystems, support an increasing global population, and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Among the threats of human encroachment upon wildlife habitat are increased risk of the transmission of infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and SARS. Furthermore, vector-borne diseases like West Nile virus are increasing due to climate change. These diseases can be deadly and their increasing prevalence is already affecting parts of the West.



Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument | Photo Credit: Lisa Phillips

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS: Protecting Biodiversity, Public Health, and Taking Climate Action

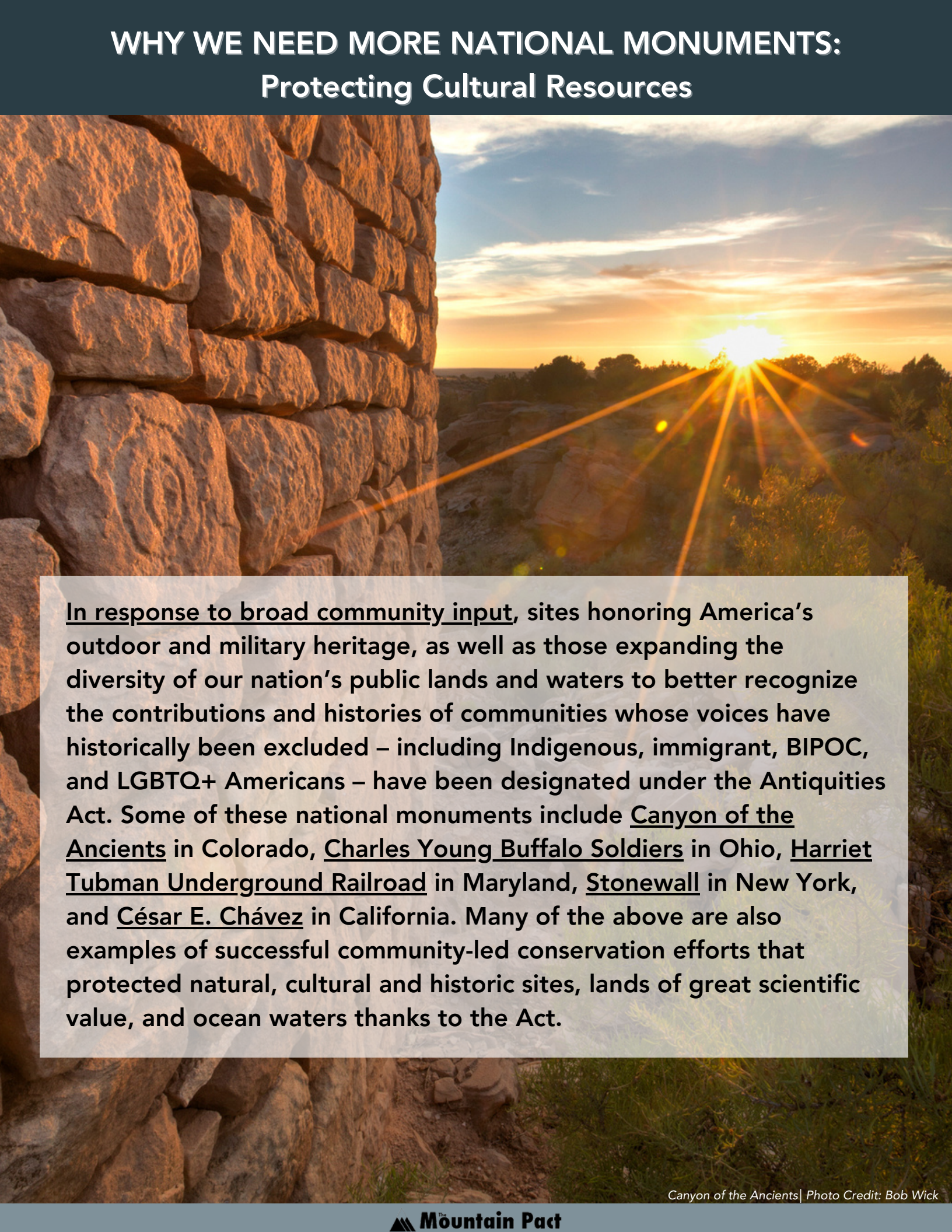
The preservation of public lands can have direct effects on climate change, since fossil fuel extraction on these landscapes generates 25 percent of the United States' climate change causing emissions. Greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, a fact that could be mitigated by conserving and restoring public lands. Science backs this up, showing that conserving nature can provide over one-third of the cost-effective climate mitigation needed through 2030 to hold warming below 2°C.

Our natural places help provide food security, clean air to breathe, and clean water to drink while offering us a wide range of health benefits. Regardless of race, background, or economic status, everyone should have access to close-to-home opportunities to get outside in nature. The protection of more public lands through the designations of more national monuments is one way to achieve all of these goals.



Browns Canyon National Monument | Photo Credit: Bureau of Land Management

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS: Protecting Cultural Resources



In response to broad community input, sites honoring America's outdoor and military heritage, as well as those expanding the diversity of our nation's public lands and waters to better recognize the contributions and histories of communities whose voices have historically been excluded – including Indigenous, immigrant, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ Americans – have been designated under the Antiquities Act. Some of these national monuments include Canyon of the Ancients in Colorado, Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers in Ohio, Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad in Maryland, Stonewall in New York, and César E. Chávez in California. Many of the above are also examples of successful community-led conservation efforts that protected natural, cultural and historic sites, lands of great scientific value, and ocean waters thanks to the Act.

Canyon of the Ancients | Photo Credit: Bob Wick

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS: They are Popular! Polling

In addition to helping curb the climate and biodiversity crisis, protecting public lands, and honoring our country's history, more national monuments should be designated because they are popular with the American people. In the 2023 Conservation in the West Poll from Colorado College's State of the Rockies program, it was found that 84% of Westerners, including 71% of Republicans, were more likely to support presidents continuing to use their ability to designate existing public lands as "national parks, national monuments, and national wildlife refuges and Tribal protected areas to protect historic sites or areas of outdoor recreation." Monument designations maintain public access to public lands and protect ecosystems and wildlife for future generations, which are important reasons why this type of protection is popular.

More generally, this poll also found that 77% of Western voters favor elected officials who want to designate new national parks and monuments. This favorability also aligns with the fact that 82% of those polled see the loss of natural areas as a problem. A slightly higher number, 83%, also see declines in fish and wildlife populations as an issue that needs to be dealt with. Protections, like national monuments, are one of the best ways to stop this loss, and are aligned with the 93% of respondents who wish to conserve wildlife habitat and migration routes, the 91% who think helping threatened wildlife is important, and the 85% who support the construction of wildlife crossings.

A large, stylized number '77' is displayed in a light blue color. The number is composed of two '7's, each with a white outline and a slight shadow, giving it a 3D appearance. The background of the number is a semi-transparent image of a mountain range under a blue sky with light clouds.

77 percent of Western voters favor elected officials who want to designate new national parks and monuments.

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS: They are Popular! Polling

The 2022 and 2023 Winning the West Polls also found broad support among Western voters for protecting public lands. While the Conservation in the West poll showed favorable views of elected officials who protect new landscapes, this poll found that 76% of Western voters approve of President Biden's America the Beautiful Initiative, which, among other goals, aims to protect 30% of America's lands by 2030. These trends continued in the 2023 Winning the West Poll, with 71% of voters polled saying they would support a candidate who prioritizes the creation of new parks and monuments and would stop the overdevelopment of these landscapes. Those who responded to this poll also want to make sure that these areas allow recreation in a way that centers conservation, with 73% saying the government should do more to maintain national parks, public lands, and national monuments.

Countless resolutions, letters, and supportive statements from local elected officials across the west and the country show strong support for existing and new national monument designations.



73

percent of recent poll responders agreed that the government should do more to maintain national parks, public lands, and national monuments.

Bears Ears National Monument | Photo Credit: Tim Peterson

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS: Importance of Outdoor Recreation

Many Americans with a deep connection to the natural world grow this connection through outdoor recreation. Conserved public lands are the backbone of the rapidly growing outdoor recreation economy.

Moreover, economists and scientists have found that the global economy would continue to benefit from the creation of more protected areas on both land and at sea.



Photo Credit: Bob Wick

Canyon of the Ancients National Monument

A connection to the natural world is just one of the benefits of participating in outdoor recreation, as these activities can also contribute to the developmental health of children, lifelong well-being, and community resilience. The 2023 Outdoor Industry Association Outdoor Participation Trends Report shows that

the number of people participating in outdoor activities is growing.

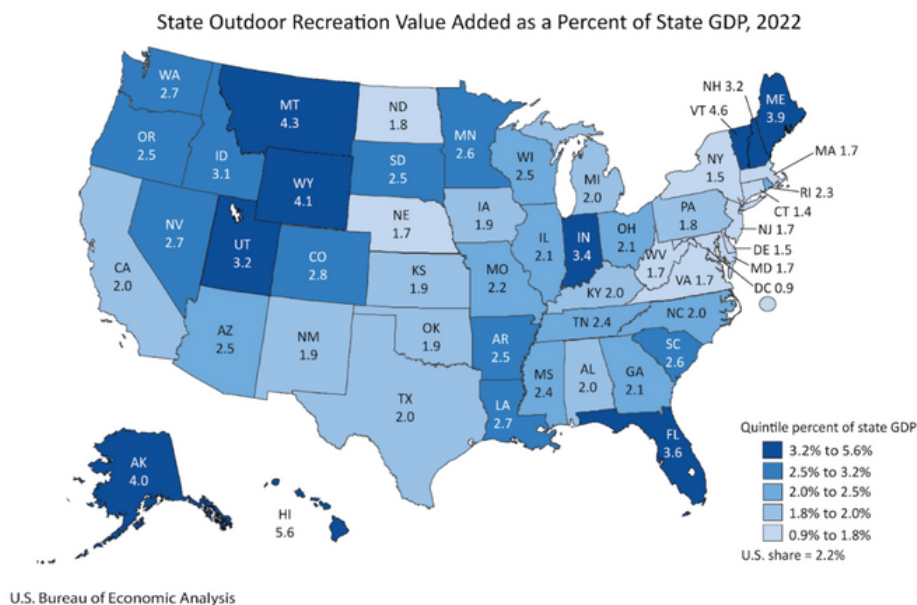
According to this report, in 2022, participation across the country grew by 2.3% to 168.1 million people which accounts for 55% of the US population who are 6 years of age or older. This growth continues an eight year trend of increases in outdoor recreation participation rates.

The most popular outdoor activities are hiking, running, bicycling, fishing, and camping, while the fastest growing activities include snowshoeing, camping, cross-country skiing, bicycling, birdwatching, and climbing, all of which are popular across the Western U.S. As more Americans deepen their connection to nature through outdoor recreation, support for the protection of the landscapes where they recreate also grows because when outdoor recreation is important to people, so too are the places where this recreation occurs.

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS: Economic Benefits of National Monuments

In addition to the conservation and cultural importance of national monuments, these, and other protected areas, drive local economies by providing access to various outdoor recreation pursuits. As explained above, the popularity of outdoor recreation is on the rise, which means more visitors to our nation's public lands. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic supercharged the outdoor recreation economy, a 2020 study of communities near 14 national monuments designated between 1991 and 2014 demonstrated that business and job growth is associated with the growth of the outdoor recreation economy that public lands protections can bring.

America's public lands are experiencing more visitation across the board. For example, national forests and grasslands have seen the number of estimated annual visitors rise from 147 million between 2008-2012 to 156 million between 2017-2021. These visitation rates create jobs, enhance communities, and help boost local outdoor recreation economies which contributed 2.2%, or \$563.7 billion, of current-dollar gross domestic product (GDP) for the nation in 2022. In the Western U.S. this is especially true, where the majority of states derive more than 2% of their GDP from outdoor recreation.



WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS:

Economic Benefits of National Monuments

Visitation to the lands overseen by federal agencies is a significant contributing factor to the strong recreation sectors across the Western U.S. Without a doubt, some of the most popular public lands in the country are those that fall within the boundaries of the National Park System - and many national monuments. In 2022 these landscapes saw over 312 million visitors, and new data shows that this contributed 378,400 jobs and \$50.3 billion in economic output to local communities. The places that are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are also quite popular and receive tens of millions of visitors on a yearly basis - in 2022 there were over 80 million visits to BLM lands. The rate of visitation to National Park Service (NPS) and BLM lands are particularly relevant to The Mountain Pact's work, since many important national monuments are found within the boundaries of this vast network of public lands.

These numbers align with the fact that within the Department of the Interior (DOI), where both the NPS and the BLM are located, over a third of all jobs and 22.11% of all economic output were generated by recreation in 2019. In hard numbers, this resulted in \$60.6 billion in economic gains, making recreation the second largest contributor to the economy within the DOI. The majority of this revenue comes from the NPS, which generated \$41.5 billion in economic output from recreation in 2019. The BLM contributes the second largest amount via recreation, generating \$7.7 billion in economic output in 2019. This number is smaller than that generated by the NPS because many BLM lands do not require an entry fee. However, these landscapes offer more recreational opportunities than any others managed by federal agencies. The remainder of the economic activity rooted in recreation within the DOI is found with the Fish & Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation.

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS:

Economic Benefits of National Monuments

The preservation of public lands also has many economic benefits for nearby communities. Economic research shows that employment and personal income grew significantly faster in rural counties with conserved, restored, and protected public lands than in rural counties with fewer protected areas. Furthermore, in 2017 the National Conservation Lands system created 7,100 jobs and generated \$630 million to local and state economies. Much of this growth came from recreational visits to public lands.

Despite these benefits, outdoor recreation is not a silver bullet and it is important to proactively plan for how it will be implemented. The recent Amenity Trap report from Headwaters Economics provides insight into how to spot and mitigate the issues that may arise with the growth of nature focused economies. The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable's Rural Development Tool is another helpful resource for sustainably planning recreation development. The 15 principles in this toolkit act as a template that can be adapted to meet the needs of a community as their economy is diversified to include outdoor recreation.



Mojave Trails National Monument | Photo Credit: Bob Wick

WHY WE NEED MORE NATIONAL MONUMENTS: Economic Benefits of National Monuments

Diversity in sectors, industries, and roles is a key component of a thriving economy. Outdoor recreation can help create economic diversity because it supports organizations and roles within many sub-sectors, including arts and entertainment, retail and wholesale trade, manufacturing, transportation, real estate, and more. Outdoor recreation is, therefore, a powerful driver of economies, a fact that is reflected by the growth that medium sized cities with natural amenities have experienced over the past decade.

Some of these cities are those that are located near protected public lands. There is evidence that the designation of national monuments helps local economies by encouraging the opening of new businesses and the creation of new jobs. In a summary of the evidence for positive economic effects on communities from the implementation of these protections, Headwaters Economics researchers write that the designation of national monument “does appear to spur business and job growth and reduce the rate of business closures in the years following monument designation.” This is also demonstrated by the fact that counties with at least 100,000 acres of protected public lands have on average a per capita income of \$4,360 higher than those that do not. The designation of national monuments is therefore not just critical to protecting ecosystems, cultural resources, and wildlife, but also important for ensuring the vitality of western communities and economies.

THE MOUNTAIN PACT and WESTERN STATE SPECIFICS

Protecting more landscapes through national monument designations is one solution to the climate and biodiversity crises we face. Moreover, these protected landscapes support a robust outdoor recreation economy that has large benefits for small mountain towns across the West. The Mountain Pact encourages President Biden to continue using the Antiquities Act to designate national monuments to protect more places with cultural heritage and landscapes with scientific and historical value. These designations will help connect more people to the natural world in a sustainable way; help with the influx of new residents, visitors, and overcrowding in currently protected places; and grow local economies as more people come to these places to experience our public lands, culture, history, science, and the outdoors.

The Mountain Pact has sent letters to the Biden administration including one signed by 150 Western state legislators, county commissioners, mayors, and council members from all eleven Western states urging the President to use the Antiquities Act to protect more lands as national monuments.



Photo Credit: Bureau of Land Management
Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

The letter states, "As local elected officials, we are tasked with finding creative solutions to the many challenges that come with the ever-increasing popularity of our public lands; our growing infrastructure needs; lack of access to parks and open space by historically under-served communities; as well as the devastating and expensive impacts of climate change. With these reasons in mind, we ask you, President Biden, to use the Antiquities Act to protect more of our public lands by designating them as national monuments."

THE MOUNTAIN PACT and WESTERN STATE SPECIFICS

"National monuments are important to Western communities. Protecting public lands has always been a bi-partisan effort and one that all Americans can celebrate. The Antiquities Act conserves vital places so our stories can be told and experiences can be shared for generations to come.

Historically, presidents from both parties have used the Antiquities Act to designate national monuments an equal number of times. It's rewarding to see how many of the important places that so many of us flock to and revere across the West have been protected by both Republican and Democratic presidents. We have found that the support from Western county commissioners, mayors, and council members to be just as strong.



We continue to urge President Biden to use his authority under the Antiquities Act to protect more places with cultural and scientific significance as national monuments."

Anna Peterson, Executive Director of The Mountain Pact



www.TheMountainPact.org



Bears Ears National Monument | Photo Credit: Mason Cummings