



NEW MEXICO

Santa Fe County

Designate Additional National Heritage Areas (NHAs)

Currently, 591 counties across the country are home to 55 National Heritage Areas (NHAs), which Congress authorizes and the National Park Service manages. If authorization of a new heritage area occurs, counties are provided with funding that supports the local economy, quality of life, and tax base through locally controlled public-private partnerships.

Because NHAs foster investment in historic preservation and natural resource conservation, they can help achieve the America the Beautiful goal. The Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area is in Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Taos counties where there are additional land and water conservation and restoration opportunities. Local communities can apply for federal grants to help them conserve their heritage and culture. Looking ahead, new NHAs would help achieve the America the Beautiful goal.

Reverse the 2020 Navigable Water Protection Rule

The 1972 amendments to the Clean Water Act established federal jurisdiction over “navigable waters,” defined in the Act as the “waters of the United States.” Many Clean Water Act programs [apply only to](#) “waters of the United States.” The Clean Water Act gives discretion to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) to define “waters of the United States” in regulations.

In 2020, the EPA modified the [definition](#) of “navigable waters,” significantly reducing the range of protected wetlands and allowing greater latitude for where pollutants could be discharged. This change removed protections for [more than 90%](#) of New Mexico’s waters, jeopardizing the health and safety of New Mexicans. Looking ahead, it’s encouraging that the EPA [has announced](#) its intention to reverse the 2020 rule and revise the definition of “waters of the United States” to better protect our nation’s vital water resources that support public health, environmental protection, agriculture, and economic vitality.





City of Las Cruces

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

Local conservationists came together to successfully advocate for the designation of the 500,000-acre [Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument](#), which includes the Organ Mountains, Desert Peaks, Potrillo Mountains, and Doña Ana Mountains. The monument preserves the area's cultural and historic legacy and maintains its diverse array of natural and scientific resources.

[Trackways National Monument](#) was established in 2009 to conserve, protect, and enhance the unique and nationally significant paleontological, scientific, educational, scenic, and recreational resources and values of the Robledo Mountains in southern New Mexico. This area preserves not only habitat but world-class fossils found nowhere else.

Otero Mesa

Looking ahead, the preservation of the 1.2 million-acre Otero Mesa could help achieve the America the Beautiful goal. While the mesa is considered North America's largest and most pristine Chihuahuan Desert grasslands, [one of the most endangered ecosystems](#) in North America, the oil and gas industry has long eyed its potential gas reserves. The area provides habitat for a broad variety of plant and animal species, including those that are threatened, endangered, or in decline. It is home to New Mexico's healthiest herd of pronghorn antelope and serves as a wintering ground for migratory songbirds, owls, and falcons. The groundwater there could supply drinking water for 800,000 people.

City of Las Cruces, New Mexico Council Member Gill Sorg said, "To me, it's a no brainer. We need to keep our biodiversity and habitat from being destroyed. Las Cruces continues to pursue locally-led efforts to preserve the many arroyos and open space in and near the city. We continue to add more park acreage as we grow as these provide unique habitat for a wide variety of birds. We also support the preservation of many Wilderness Study Areas and conservation lands across Southern New Mexico like our Sky Islands, for example."

