

NEWS RELEASE

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Christian Communities Rejoice over Establishment of California Desert Monuments *Monuments Protect God's Creation for Generations to Come*

Washington, DC – Christian communities are rejoicing over the announcement of President Obama's historic action to permanently protect public lands in the California desert for future generations. We celebrate the establishment of three new national monuments in the California desert – Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow, and Castle Mountains.

Creation Justice Ministries is also grateful to Senator Dianne Feinstein for her consistent land conservation advocacy. The leadership of U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack were also crucial to the establishment of these monuments.

Protecting these places is important to our spiritual life. Out of reverence for the dignity and culture of those who have answered the divine call to till and keep this land for generations before, we are grateful for preservation of Native American cultural sites in these monuments. We also value wild places to encounter God.

The **Rev. Murray D. Finck, Bishop of the Pacifica Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** expressed his understanding of the significance of the monument designations: "From the days of antiquity, people and pilgrims have journeyed into the beauty, quiet, and solitude of the desert to encounter their Creator God and search the inner depths of their souls. Numerous biblical accounts tell us of many people of faith, including Jesus, who sought respite and rejuvenation in the desert wildernesses, discovering sacred sanctuaries in such still and silent places. We give thanks for every effort that preserves the deserts of this nation. We are deeply grateful for the commitment of President Obama and Senator Feinstein as they protect these natural environments for this generation and those following."

The chances of survival of many of God's beautiful and unique creatures also got better today. Future generations have a better chance to experience wonder and awe at the bighorn sheep, desert tortoise, golden eagles, mountain lions, and bobcats, among others.

Creation Justice Ministries director Shantha Ready Alonso said: "In 2016, many churches will reflect on *Care for God's Creatures* for Earth Day Sunday. Many in California will offer prayers of thanksgiving for the important preservation of wildlife habitat in Sand to Snow, Castle Mountains, and Mojave Trails. Our lives are mysteriously bound up with a diversity of creatures. As Ecclesiastes 3:19 tells us: 'the fate of humans and the fate of the animals are the same: as one dies so does the other; both have the same breath.'"

On this monumental occasion, we call on Christian communities to deepen appreciation of the ecological and cultural wonders of the California desert, as well as celebrate God's beautiful creation, by visiting these newly designated monuments.

Creation Justice Ministries represents the creation care policies of 38 Christian communions, including Baptist conventions, mainline Protestants, Historically Black Churches, Peace Churches, and Orthodox communions. Learn more at www.creationjustice.org