ONLY ONE DESERT:

CONFLICT, COMPROMISE, AND CONSEQUENCE IN THE EAST MOJAVE

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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of

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in

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DEDICATION

For Michael.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how efforts to reshape arid landscapes have repeatedly fallen short in the eastern Mojave Desert of southeastern California. An environmental history, "Only One Desert" combines close readings of archival records, government reports, land and water law, periodicals, maps, and oral histories with analysis of the desert's physical features and infrastructure to explain how the creation of Mojave National Preserve in 1994 reflected national debates about public land use in the West. This dissertation argues that land-use conflict in the East Mojave emerged from struggles over water, mobility, and authority to regulate access in an ecologically dynamic desert.

In the early-twentieth century, desert homesteaders and cattle ranchers competed to control scarce groundwater and to stabilize an arid environment through pipelines, windmills, wells, dry-farming practices, and land claims. Drought in the 1920s exposed the fragility of these efforts, as litigation, intimidation, and violence revealed how survival depended on access to water. Conflict during this period emerged from attempts to impose fixed property regimes and agricultural stability on a hydrologically uncertain landscape.

Later in the twentieth century, conflict unfolded around access. After World War II, *Desert Magazine* and four-wheel-drive vehicles fostered an access-based conservationist ethic rooted in engagement with the desert. This dissertation reframes automobility as central to desert conservation rather than merely a force of environmental degradation. Roads, jeeps, and off-road motorcycles expanded who could claim use of the desert and under what terms, compelling federal land managers to confront competing mobility-based visions of use, preservation, and enforcement.

The 1981 California Desert Plan and the 1994 California Desert Protection Act attempted to reconcile these tensions through zoning and compromise, creating Mojave National Preserve as a hybrid landscape of Wilderness Areas, private property, off-road trails, and grazing permits. Early policing methods underlined mutual distrust between the National Park Service and resentful locals. By 2005, large fires exposed the ecological consequences of earlier management decisions and the difficulty of restoring a "natural" desert through administrative decree. This dissertation finds that late-twentieth-century western land conflict stemmed from political expedience, competing conceptions of ecological knowledge, and conflicting visions for land use.

CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

We started the Mojave Road at sunrise by dipping our fingers in the Colorado River, just within Nevada's southernmost tip. The bluish-green American Nile was a fitting start to two days in a land with little water. Satisfied that we could claim we "did the whole thing," my partner and I loaded into Randy, our trusty pickup truck, performed one last radio-check, and I then tapped the accelerator. Randy, never too quick off the line, lurched forward and kicked up wisps of dust through which our caravan followed. Four trucks, each loaded to the gills with water, extra gasoline, food, and camping gear, began the more than 130-mile trek into the lonely triangle between Interstate-40, Interstate-15, and US-95.

Leading the trip, I drove while Kat read Dennis Casebier's *The Mojave Road Guide* through our walkie-talkie. The young couples in the two vehicles immediately behind Randy, friends from Los Angeles, asked questions as we entered a landscape unknown. The last truck in our troupe, Mojave National Preserve residents call-signed "Juniper Ranch," chimed in when they thought I was driving too fast or with expansions on what Kat had relayed from Casebier. We rose from the river and up the mountains to our west, bouncing through loose sand punctuated with exposed bedrock and soon crossed US-95 seconds into southeastern California, the last pavement for more than sixty miles. Five slow miles later, we crawled into the Piute Mountains and entered Mojave National Preserve, a landscape shaped not by a linear shift from use to preservation, but by persistent conflicts over water, access, and incomplete human mastery over a powerful environment.

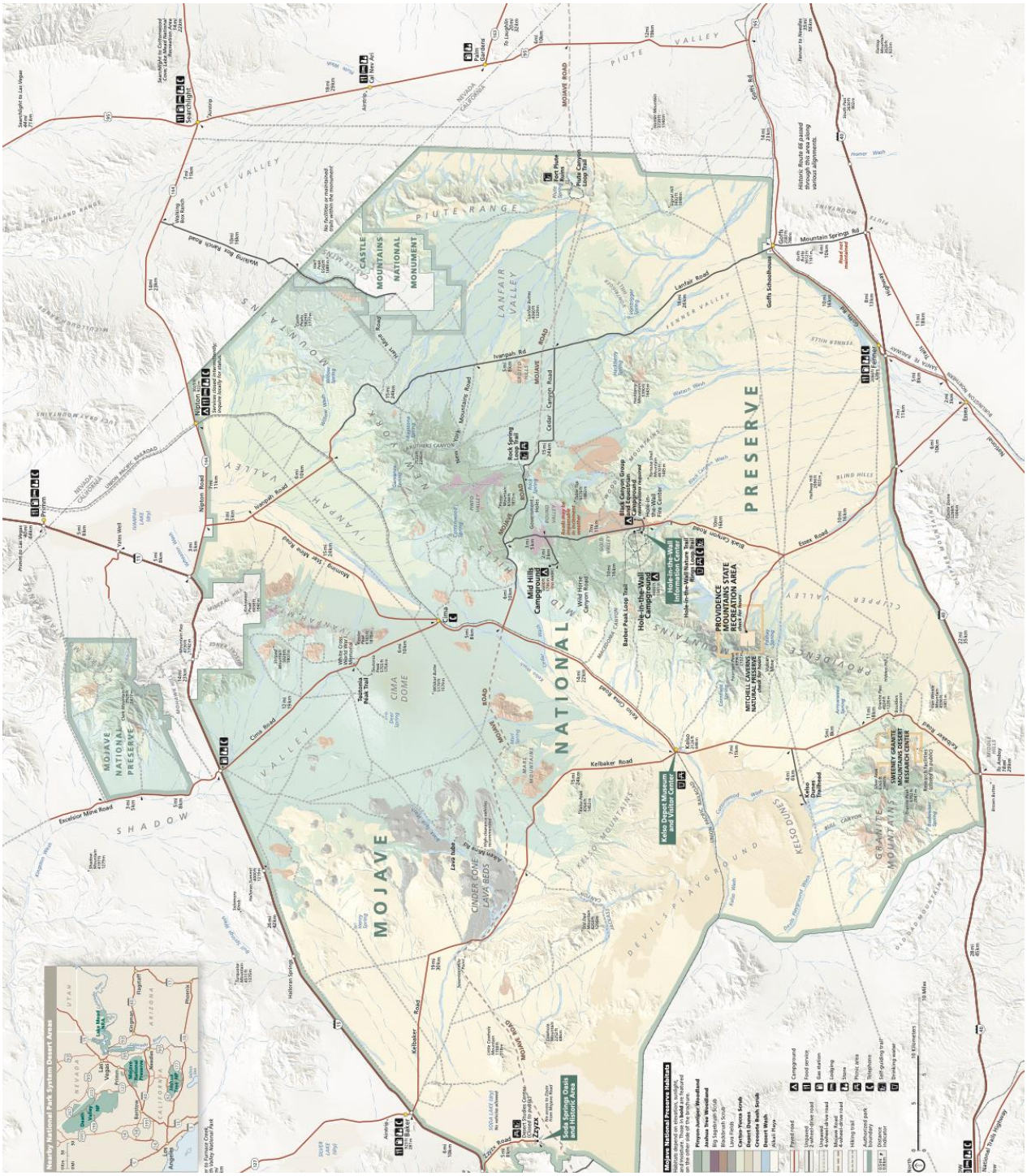


Figure 1: Mojave National Preserve. National Park Service.

Two hours south of Las Vegas and five hours east of Los Angeles, Mojave National Preserve is undeservedly overlooked by the millions of motorists who drive past it each year. People flock to Joshua Tree for rock climbing and the luxury culture of Palm Springs; more than a million visitors to Death Valley each year brag about having been in the world's hottest place. The Delaware-sized Preserve hides in plain sight. Using the Preserve as a shortcut between Palm Springs and Las Vegas, most visitors come as motorists, speeding past the Kelso Dunes, along the western face of the Providence Mountains, and through an exceptionally dense and sprawling Joshua tree forest before connecting to the surrounding interstate highways. A transitional zone between the Mojave, Great Basin, and Sonoran Deserts rewards those who spend time in the backcountry, with endemic plants, eight mountain ranges, countless buttes, rolling sand dunes, low scrubland, high-altitude forests, and sweeping vistas greeting those who leave the few paved roads. Long and varied human histories reveal themselves through petroglyphs carved into rocks, creaking windmills by watering troughs, and thousands of miles of dirt roads zig-zagging toward distant horizons. Our trip embraced these markers of the past.

We took our first extended break and walked the ruins of the 1860s U.S. Army fort at Piute Creek, enjoyed snacks and water in the shade of large cottonwoods, and once again dipped our fingers, albeit in a decidedly smaller stream than that which had started the day. Back in the vehicles with passengers and drivers swapped, we ascended the rocky route through the mountains. Lanfair Valley greeted us on the other side of the Piutes, a 14-miles-wide by 30-miles-long valley that slowly inclines through creosote scrubland and then Joshua trees to the New York Mountains on its western edge. Cutting across the valley, which required only two-wheel-drive and a willingness to keep up our speed, we visited the homesteads of Estella Baker

and her father Richard Wesley Hodnett, the latter of which had a large backpile of sand that testified to a group of Black homesteaders' unsuccessful effort to drill a well in 1914. A mile or so later, we walked out into the Joshua trees and creosote and relocated the foundation of the Lanfair school, now just a concrete walkway surrounded by artifacts of the early-twentieth century: purple solarized glass, Prince Albert tobacco tins, and a piece of white school chalk forgotten under a burro bush. Holding the nub of chalk between their fingers, one of our traveling companions asked a simple, if driving, question: "so what were people doing out here?"

This project attempts to answer that question. Many things brought Americans to the East Mojave over the last century and a half, and each new group of users brought their own vision for the desert. This dissertation argues that a diverse array of ranchers, four-wheel-drive enthusiasts, landowners, environmentalists, and federal land managers each experienced their own desert, shaped by their respective uses of it. These varied interactions produced a National Park Service unit that uneasily encompassed conflicting points of view around ecological knowledge, political expedience, and competing visions for land use. Mojave National Preserve is a diagnostic landscape for understanding western public land conflict. The Preserve concentrates, in one place, the tensions between access, water scarcity, federal authority, and competing environmental ethics that define much of the modern West.

We climbed back into our rigs and headed west on Cedar Canyon Road. After ascending through Joshua tree forest for ten miles, we took the cut toward the southwest that trimmed a half-mile off our trip but added a half-hour as we each descended the sharply incised fifty-foot drop into Watson Wash. With three vehicles worth of spotters providing guidance, one truck at a time descended the hillside, lifting multiple tires off the ground as each crawled. At least one

skid plate earned its lunch by protecting an oil pan from a jagged boulder. All safely down, our caravan parked at four “NO PARKING” and “NO CAMPING” signs in the wash. We walked beyond the signs and settled for lunch at Rock Springs.

Sitting around the water hole in the narrow shade of the rock outcrop, we talked about the many histories of this little puddle. The retreat of glacial lakes 10,000 years ago emplaced water where the rock outcrop and surrounding alluvial fan met. Over centuries, Rock Springs hosted indigenous Chemehuevi and Mohave rancherias, provided for a mid-nineteenth century U.S. Army camp, supported miners in the late-nineteenth century and again in the 1920s, filled water tanks for homesteaders living east in Lanfair Valley, and served as the namesake watering source for one of the nation’s largest cattle operations, the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company. As automobiles brought recreationists, ranchers, biologists, botanists, and land managers into desert spaces, Rock Springs became a required stop on any four-wheeled backcountry adventure. By the late 1970s, jeep-carried conservationists mapped where Rock Springs needed to be closed as an “Area of Critical Environmental Concern” so that less-attentive four-wheelers would not damage its natural and cultural resources. National Park Service employees removed many vestiges of earlier periods and installed those “NO” signs after their agency took over the East Mojave in the 1990s. Cattle tracks around the spring belied its ongoing use for local ranching operations, as our clever cut-through also proved the area’s continuing stopping power for travelers to one of the lower-48’s least visited NPS units. With turkey sandwiches in our stomachs, we left Rock Spring and considered the landscape more carefully for signs of these histories.

Following the small rock cairns that denoted our trail, we witnessed the results of 150 years of overlapping land uses, with markers as diverse as the Americans who made them. Everywhere, the seemingly timeless desert showed human activity. Squares of land cleared of Joshua trees demonstrated the labor of dry-farming homesteaders in the 1910s. Shot-up water tanks at cemented-in-place windmills testified to early ranching and showed the trouble both the Bureau of Land Management and NPS experienced trying to rein in the destructive impulses of Americans who thought they could shoot freely since they were in the middle of nowhere. Dead cottonwoods testified to the dropping water table and removal of water improvements around which local wildlife and range cattle had congregated in previous decades, reflecting how the NPS attempted to institute some idea of non-human nature in the humanized backcountry. On the lookout for a good campsite, we found small rock-lined firepits tucked into the shade of juniper trees and nestled into the innumerable rock outcrops along the trail. Frequent "WILDERNESS: NO MOTORIZED VEHICLES" signs reminded us that this was *something* like a National Park, after all. Abiding by the approved cherry-stem through Wilderness Areas, our vehicles surfed over the countless undulations that came with a climb up the 15-mile-wide Cima Dome uplift, pulling into the unofficial campground at the base of the Marl Mountains just as the sun dipped behind the horizon.

Having slept under the stars in a sandy wash beside the Marls, we rose slowly and stiffly, and ate a breakfast of bacon, eggs, beans, and coal-black coffee. Within five minutes of good light, we saw the blackened scar of the 2020 Dome Fire that torched an estimated 1.3 million Joshua trees, many of which stood to our north like charred scarecrows. The more than 43,000-acre burn zone viscerally demonstrated the layers of human management. Although the cattle

industry likely brought highly flammable red brome, cheatgrass, and other invasives into the East Mojave by the late-nineteenth century, the fires also demonstrated some of the costs of making a National Preserve around competing ideas of wilderness, ongoing productive use, historic preservation, and recreation. Most significantly, the Dome Fire and others like it since the creation of Mojave National Preserve in 1994 laid plain the Park Service's incomplete ability to impose legally defined Wilderness ideals on a dynamic environment it struggles to understand.

Hiding in plain sight, Mojave National Preserve has been a laboratory for testing human intention, understanding, and intervention. The 1.6-million-acre NPS unit in southeastern California – about two-thirds the size of Yellowstone or twice the size of Yosemite – shows how the modern dichotomy of human culture and non-human nature incompletely accounts for the non-human actors that shape not just the physical world but how humans understand its interconnectedness.[1] Relationships between alluvial fans, brush fires, four-wheel-drive vehicles, ideas about preservation, and lingering cattlemen of the East Mojave reveal a landscape in which human and non-human actors exist in dynamic relation to one another; rather than discrete and separable pieces, they are components of a whole.[2]

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[1] Latour described how the dichotomy of nonhuman nature and human culture was a misguided work of purification. He instead advocated for a work of translation, in which humans seek to understand the interconnectedness between anything or idea capable of affecting another ("actant") thing or idea, including humans. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Harvard University Press, 1993), 8.

[2] Fabio Valenti Possamai, "Recognizing the Dualism to Overcome It: The Hybridization of Reality," *Green Humanities* 1 (2015): 106; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 200, 229. Latour wrote, "no interaction is what could be called *isotopic*. What is acting at the same moment in any place is coming from many other places, many distant materials, and many faraway actors." For more on the historiography of hybridity, see Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (University of Washington Press, 1999); Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (Hill & Wang, 1996); Paul Sutter, "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History," *The Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (2013): 94–119. For a historiographical counterexample, see Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

The specifics of those relational webs do not complicate the many histories of the East Mojave, but instead make them clearer and more traceable. For example, things and ideas interacted to give the Rock Spring Land & Cattle Company control over much of the region's groundwater in the early-twentieth century. Quickly draining sandy alluvium within a geology with many internal sinks situated water in hyperlocal tables. First shovels and then boring machines committed the energy needed to establish wells, with human activity both implementing and responding to new technologies. Windmills drew water by capturing the wind's kinetic energy and allowed for passive stock-watering. Equally important to, and intertwined with, these physical relations were the ideas and social systems in which they operated, which were shaped and reinforced by the seemingly more physical actants. Progressive Era ideas about conservation motivated the development of water sites in the arid West and drew competing homesteaders to the company's traditional range. Something toward a folk hydrology developed around lessened spring discharges, water dowsers, ideas of private property, and climate patterns. Drought did not just limit homesteaders' ability to access groundwater, nor did it impose dryness on southeastern California's range. Rather, the relational web of humans such as the cowboys of the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company, non-humans such as horned cattle, the Sierra Nevada rain shadow, and drought-resistant but not drought-proof plants, technologies such as windmills, and ongoing legal and social ideas of appropriate land use combined to shift how competing American land users lived on and with the desert.

Meandering over Cima Dome and through the dozens of black volcanic cinder cones to its west, we contributed to and were influenced by these same, if also different, networks. People, plants, soils, politics, weather patterns, and technologies affected our trip on the Mojave

Road as surely as our tires pressed into the soft two-track. We had come to experience our idea of a desert. Although plants and wildlife have evolutionarily adapted to the desert's characteristic heat and aridity, our trip epitomized what brings so many Americans to Mojave National Preserve: to experience a place capable of overpowering us if we did not play by its rules. That our trip on the Mojave Road was recreative underlined the historical changes in land use over the previous century. Cheating the game, like so many Americans who come to the desert backcountry, we relied on four-wheel-drive, embraced and reproduced cultural ideas of desert conservation and recreation, and wondered at the apparent openness of a landscape cleared of human imprints. We did not see all the interwoven historical layers that created the landscape through which we meandered but glimpsed major shifts visible in the occasional abandoned mine, collapsed corral, faded two-tracks behind bulldozer-placed boulders, and burned Joshuas and junipers.

Mutually exclusive visions for land use shaped the boundaries and regulations of today's Mojave National Preserve. As chapter two discusses, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century conflict over water established both ranching's dominance through the mid-century and the hydrological limits of development, with the landscape incapable of supporting the industrialization of western ranching.[3] Most years, it was just too dry for homesteaders or 10,000-strong cattle herds to survive. Once second only to Miller & Lux in size, the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company split into three smaller if still substantial ranches in 1931, just as other Americans were embracing their own non-commercial uses for the desert. Shaped by romantic desert writers John Van Dyke and Mary Hunter Austin, Randall Henderson and a

[3] David Igler, *Industrial Cowboys: Miller & Lux and the Transformation of the Far West, 1850-1920* (University of California Press, 2005), 4, 9–11, 45–57.

growing cohort of travel writers for his *Desert Magazine* worked to spread news of a "second desert," distinct from the unfamiliar, prickly, and barren image that dominated the national consciousness.[4] As *Desert* and the nation experienced World War II, writers repositioned spaces such as the East Mojave as quiet refuges from a loud and bleeding world. Chapter three of this project analyzes the wartime-inspired ethics and technologies that reshaped the desert.

Four-wheel-drive importantly reoriented how Americans accessed, touched, and learned to appreciate the desert backcountry. Earlier two-wheel-drive travel along main desert roads was common, but prone to mechanical failures and becoming stuck in mud or sand, and often featured a push or pull when rocky inclines overwhelmed traditional drivelines. As crowded urban spaces in the West increasingly pushed people into surrounding public lands, miners, ranchers, scientists, journalists, hikers, artists, and self-described explorers all adopted the split-gear transfer case capable of propelling both front and rear wheels in locked proportion.

Proponents of desert conservation and recreation spurned eastern wilderness advocates' villainizing of the automobile and modern road networks.[5] Historians have written extensively on automobiles, roads, and their effect on American society, but a lacuna persists within the historiography around off-pavement automobile use that obscures how access undergirded different relationships with the land.[6] It was only after four-wheel-drive became commonplace that a conservation ethic developed through access and engagement began to challenge production as the desert's most prominent use. Four-wheelers challenged the windshield

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[4] Mary Hunter Austin, *The Land of Little Rain* (Houghton Mifflin, 1903). Missing pub data, but Van Dyke, *The Desert*.

[5] Paul S. Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*, with William Cronon (University of Washington Press, 2005), 14.

[6] Amanda Katz, "Miracle Miles: Road Building to American Highway Engineering, 1898-1933" (Ph.D. dissertation, Carnegie Mellon University, 2021); Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History*, Reprint edition (University of Washington Press, 2013).

wilderness described by David Louter, where National Park administrators in the Pacific Northwest curated both visitors' access to and their footprint on places deemed wilderness.[7] Rather than merely spectators, motorists became part of perceived wilderness by traversing deep into the backcountry. By the 1950s, population increases in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Phoenix drew thousands of off-roaders to seemingly open spaces, creating new and varied relationships with the desert.[8]

In the face of growing urban populations in the West, motorcyclists in the 1960s similarly escaped urban commotion and learned the East Mojave one trail or tank of gas at a time. By the end of the decade, organized if unauthorized off-road motorcycle races like the Barstow-to-Vegas cross-country run galvanized debates over the management of public lands. Groups such as the Sierra Club publicized the damage to natural and cultural resources through the "hare and hound" track. Chapter four shows how California's deserts became a battleground in growing environmental and regulatory debates, with an increasingly professional BLM staff formalizing recreation's importance to Americans' understanding of desert spaces and why they should be trodden carefully. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 legislated the creation of a California Desert Plan to formalize management for the desert. A staff of geologists, GIS analysts, archaeologists, and botanists worked with an advisory commission of motorized and non-motorized recreationists, miners, ranchers, environmentalists, and land managers to consider input from dozens of public meetings, more than 50,000 written responses,

[7] David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (University of Washington Press, 2009), 7, 38, 72,133.
[8] John M. Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000* (University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 178; Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*.

and millions of dollars of studies to shape a master plan for the desert. Multiple use centered this compromise-driven land policy, to the chagrin of environmentalists.

Environmentalists who themselves arrived in the desert in four-wheel-drive Toyota 4Runners and pickup trucks rejected the California Desert Plan as insufficiently protective of natural and cultural resources and coalesced into a movement for a Mojave National Park. As Sierra Club trip leader Judy Anderson remarked on the growing network of two-tracks in the East Mojave, "does every valley have to have a road down the middle of it?"[9] Chapter five examines this new, second range conflict, with local ranchers, recreational four-wheelers, and residents resisting environmentalists' call to reshape the East Mojave to fit ideas of wilderness. Family cattle operations that worked the same lands, wells, and corrals developed by the Rock Springs outfit argued for the value they brought to an otherwise valueless land and that they raised "American beef for the American people."[10] The BLM contended they were fully capable of instituting stricter enforcement of growing environmental regulations. Despite this resistance, environmentalists used national media to lobby for further protection and NPS management of the eastern Mojave Desert. When newly elected senator Diane Feinstein compromised with special interest groups, the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 passed, upgrading Joshua Tree and Death Valley from National Monuments to National Parks and creating Mojave National Preserve. Mojave National Preserve is not a landscape where preservation supplanted use, but one where multiple, historically contingent ways of knowing the desert collided and

[9] Judith Anderson, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, May 22, 2025, Oral History Colleciton (henceforth, OHC), Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association (henceforth, MDHCA).
[10] Gary Overson and Linda Overson to Alan Cranston, January 30, 1987, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, Alan Cranston Collection (henceforth, ACC), Bancroft Library Univesity of California-Berkeley (henceforth, BL-UCB).

were never fully reconciled as some ranchers maintained grandfathered rights to graze, lobbyists cut out mountains from the proposed Preserve for mining gold and rare earth elements at Castle Mountain and Mountain Pass, respectively, and hunters kept highly contested quail, deer, and bighorn sheep seasons.[11] Local landowners found themselves boxed in by a new landlord.

The early administrators of Mojave National Preserve adhered to their mixed mandate but struggled to square legislative directives with the dynamic landscape. Well-intentioned public land management had led to unforeseen social and environmental consequences elsewhere in the West.[12] Buying out ranchers, removing cattle, and deconstructing historical ranching developments was meant to remove the sense of human activity on the land. Wilderness Areas closed hundreds of thousands of acres to motorized travel, slowing the encroachment of new two-tracks and creating the feeling of an untrammeled landscape. Blocking unauthorized travel routes was supposed to take an abused space and make it more like a park, if not a Park.

Chapter six argues that the National Park Service struggled to anticipate how management decisions to reinstitute a more "natural" Preserve would reshape the desert. The NPS and the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep blamed each other when the delayed inspection of a faulty wildlife guzzler deep within a newly designated Wilderness Area resulted in the death of a herd of bighorn sheep in 1995. Elsewhere, newly installed signage and heavy-handed law enforcement techniques generated enmity between in-holding landowners and the incoming NPS team. Framed within the rise of modern conservatism and government responses

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[11] Frank Wheat, *California Desert Miracle: The Fight for Desert Parks and Wilderness* (Sunbelt Publications, 1999), 234.

[12] Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West* (University of Washington Press, 1995), 274–78; Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 228–29; Marsha L. Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country.* (University of Washington Press, 2011), 184.

to right-wing extremism, residents feared being feared.[13] When a flak-jacketed ranger told Sandy McIntosh in-holders seemed dangerous, the retiree with a small house in Fourth of July Canyon chided him "we aren't going to go to jail just because you drove up the wrong road."[14] Most significantly, and most apparent as we drove over Cima Dome, changes in land management to inculcate a more seemingly natural desert contributed to the East Mojave's conversion to an increasingly fire-tolerant landscape.



Figure 2: Charred Joshua trees two years after the Dome Fire. Author's image.

When Kat walkie-talkied that this was the world's largest and densest Joshua tree forest, Juniper Ranch chimed in "or at least it used to be." Passing the western edge of the fire scar, we

[13] Betsy Gaines Quammen, *American Zion: Cliven Bundy, God & Public Lands in the West* (Torrey House Press, 2020); Jennifer Anne Dunn, "A Tangled Path to Extremism: Desperation, Resentment, and Rebellion in Rural Montana" (Ph.D. dissertation, Montana State University, 2023).
[14] Sandy McIntosh, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, July 22, 2025, OHC, MDHCA.

acknowledged a burnt-out windmill as we left the historical range of the Rock Spring Land & Cattle Company. Speeding on, we kept our eyes on the road and on whatever the desert would become.

CHAPTER TWO

"NO RAIN": WATER CONFLICT IN THE EAST MOJAVE

The sun was already low in the November sky when Matt Burts pulled up to Government Holes for water in 1925. Burts had come to know Government Holes and its windmill, cottonwoods, cabin, and corrals well over the last decade. A career tough guy from Hamilton, Texas, Burts first served four months for a train robbery outside of Cochise, Arizona, before turning state's witness and earning a pardon from territorial Governor Nathan Oakes Murphy.[1] He joined the local Rock Springs, or "88," cattle outfit in the East Mojave shortly after his second release from the Yuma Prison, a one-year sentence for assault with a deadly weapon.[2] Driving friends in his overheating Ford Model T, Burts arrived with steam billowing from his engine. He hollered toward the cabin that he needed water for the radiator.

It was a bold request from the former Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company line rider. He had recently left the outfit but remained in the area, possibly moonshining in the hills.[3] His former employers assumed that Burts also made his living by stealing their cattle and selling it to homesteaders. The 88 had already hired his replacement, Bill Robinson, and stationed him at Government Holes to watch over their well and building.[4] Rumors swirled that Robinson had

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[1] "Bold Train Robbery," *The Arizona Republican* (Phoenix, AZ), September 11, 1899; "The Cochise Hold-Up," *The Arizona Republican* (Phoenix, AZ), September 12, 1899.
[2] "Description of Convict: Matt Burts, #1716," Territorial Prison at Yuma, A.T., n.d., Matt Burts Subject Folder, Dennis G. Casebier Collection (henceforth DGC), MDHCA; "Description of Convict: Matt Burts, #2814," Territorial Prison at Yuma, A.T., n.d., Matt Burts Subject Folder, DGC, MDHCA. Burts seemed to change during the first decade of the twentieth century, with prison officials marking his habits as "temperate" in 1900 but "intemperate" in 1909.
[3] Betty Pettit Papierski, *Flat Tires & Coffee Fires: Being Tales from the 7IL Ranch*, 1st edition (Tales of the Mojave Road Pub. Co, 1993), 66.
[4] Newspapers referred to him as both Bill Roberts and Bill Robinson.

been tasked with ridding the 88 of their onetime employee.[5] Surprisingly, Robinson responded that Burts could come inside and fetch some water from the well.



Figure 3: Windmill, cistern, and building at Government Holes, c. 1946. As of December 2025, the windmill and tank still stand, but the building has been deconstructed or otherwise removed and the large cottonwood tree has died and fallen for lack of water. California Department of Fish & Game, MDHCA.

As Burts entered the cabin, nearly a dozen shots rang out and both men soon lay dead. Although range intrigue swirled around the violence, the 1925 shootout at Government Holes was not spontaneous frontier lawlessness.[6] Rather, the duel was the result of a predictable

[5] "Range Gossip Is Said Cause of Death Duel," *San Bernardino Sun*, November 12, 1925; "Desert Duel Charges Drop," *Stockton Independent*, November 12, 1925.
[6] *San Bernardino Sun*, "Range Gossip Is Said Cause of Death Duel"; "Old Feud Idea As Duel Cause Again Revived," *San Bernardino Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), November 14, 1925; "Two Cowboys Fight Duel to Death in Cabin," *Fresno Morning Republican*, November 11, 1925; "Fulton Youth Gives Coroner Story of Duel," *San Bernardino Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), November 11, 1925; Earl E. Buie, "'Man Who Did Not Run' and Foe Aim True: Another Dramatic Chapter of Desert History Is Written with Lead," *San Bernardino Sun*, November 10, 1925.

collision among infrastructure, aridity, geomorphology, and land law across a hybrid landscape on which humans failed to live within the desert's starkly drawn limit.[7]

Ranchers and homesteaders engaged landscapes that melded the human and non-human, as well as the material and semiotic, to try to live within the region's environmental limits. Humans deployed physical infrastructure, legal systems, labor, and non-human animals within a network of climatic aridity, hydrologic drainages, and sandy soils to stabilize water access in a dry land. Using windmills, wells, troughs, specific seeds and planting methods, iron pipeline, and layered legal systems, early-twentieth century Americans in the East Mojave attempted to make water reliably predictable, property boundaries legible, and settlement permanent. The resultant hybrid landscapes of both ranchers and homesteaders show not just how ranchers dug holes for water, or that homesteaders worked to retain soil moisture through dry-farming, but that climate, water tables, cattle, crops, and topography shaped how people worked on, lived within, fought over, and eventually left the East Mojave for want of water.[8]

Non-fixative Relationships with Water

Earlier modes of living on the desert stressed mobility over fixity to adapt for seasonally and annually variable water sources. The historical Chemehuevi, who had settlements in the Ivanpah, New York, Providence, Piute, and Old Woman ranges in the East Mojave, lived on their

[7] For more on the formation of hybrid networks, see Possamai, "Recognizing the Dualism to Overcome It: The Hybridization of Reality," 106; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 200, 229. For more on the historiography of hybridity, see Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*; White, *The Organic Machine*; Sutter, "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History." For a counterexample, see Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*.
[8] For material conditions shaping human behavior, see Timothy J. LeCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 142–47, 150–53.

feet.[9] Living on a landscape defined by extreme aridity and jagged topography, Chemehuevi lifeways revolved around seasonal travel between ephemeral springs and food caches across southeastern California, southern Nevada, and northwestern Arizona.[10] Chemehuevi songs reflected both territorial claims and intratribal group divisions. The right to sing hereditary songs, sung when traveling through specific areas, denoted one's right to hunt in the area, with major songs such as the Deer and Mountain Sheep Songs passing patrilineally until contact with Euro-Americans, after which, descendants without indigenous fathers could inherit songs from their mothers.[11] Archaeological evidence suggests the well-traveled Chemehuevi utilized a far-reaching trade network with tribal groups hundreds of miles away.[12]

Indigenous governing systems sustained communities because they eschewed permanent infrastructure. In spring, when agave plants were most ready for harvest, the people stayed on mountainsides. Chemehuevi camped on the plains during summer, when grasses drew game, including mule deer, bighorn sheep, and desert tortoise. Following ripe pine nuts and fattened deer as autumn turned to early winter, they camped in the juniper-piñon forests on the high plateaus and lived off caches throughout winters and droughts.[13] They similarly traveled between

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[9] Clifford E. Trafzer, *A Chemehuevi Song: The Resilience of a Southern Paiute Tribe* (University of Washington Press, 2015), 30.

[10] Carobeth Laird, *The Chemehuevi* (Malki Museum, 1976), 3. For more from Laird on the Chemehuevi, see Carobeth Laird, "Chemehuevi Myth as Social Commentary," *Journal of California Anthropology* 4, no. 2 (1977): 191–95; Carobeth Laird, "Chemehuevi Religious Beliefs and Practices," *Journal of California Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (1974): 19–25.

[11] Laird, *The Chemehuevi*, 18–20; Trafzer, *A Chemehuevi Song*, 30–31.

[12] For more on Chemehuevi travel networks, see N. Nelson Leonard and Christopher E. Drover, "Prehistoric Turquoise Mining in the Halloran Springs District, San Bernardino County, California," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1980): 247; Christopher E. Drover, "The Ethnohistory of Turquoise Mining in Southeastern California," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1980): 257–60. Anne Colberg Sigleo, "Turquoise Mine and Artifact Correlation for Snaketown Site, Arizona," *Science* 189, no. 4201 (1975): 459–60.

[13] Catherine S. Fowler and Don D. Fowler, "Notes on the History of the Southern Paiutes and Western Shoshonis," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1971): 38; Matthew Hall, "Appendix 2: Inventory of Spring/Seep Locations in the East Mojave Desert Region," in *Background to Historic and Prehistoric Resources of the East Mojave Desert*

seasonally active springs.[14] To successfully navigate hundreds of miles across the desert, the Chemehuevi deployed their extensive knowledge of the region's hydrology to travel between ephemeral water sources.[15] These indigenous water systems did not eliminate scarcity or conflict, but native people limited vulnerability to environmental variability by resisting infrastructure and permanence.

The Chemehuevi lived within a system that maintained flexibility rather than control, stressing movement patterns at odds with arriving American land law and conceptions of private property. A series of intertribal and imperial conflicts ended indigenous control over the East Mojave during the middle of the nineteenth century.[16] The passage of California into American control and the discovery of gold in 1848 drew labor, funding, and attention to the suddenly celebrated if relatively unknown territory and "interrupted the traditional lives of the Chemehuevi" and Mohave peoples by affecting the local balance of power.[17] The subduing of indigenous peoples in the East Mojave replicated models of eradication occurring elsewhere in California, specifically, and the West, broadly.[18] The federal government both directly and

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Region (Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, California Desert Planning Program, 1981), 10–12, 54–69; Trafzer, *A Chemehuevi Song*, 30–34. For a detailed list of food resources used in the eastern Mojave, see Appendix 1 of King and Casebier (1981).

[14] George Edwin Roth, "Incorporation and Changes in the Ethnic Structure: The Chemehuevi Indians" (Northwestern University, 1976), 82. Roth argued that "the territory of the Chemehuevi changed considerably both prior to white settlement in 1859 and afterwards." Dean Michel's upcoming work describes how Chemehuevi's experienced the Bureau of Indian Affair's termination policy.

[15] Hall, "Appendix 2: Inventory of Spring/Seep Locations in the East Mojave Desert Region," 72.

[16] Kenneth M. Stewart, "The Aboriginal Territory of the Mohave Indians," *Ethnohistory* 16, no. 3 (1969): 260–61.

[17] Trafzer, *A Chemehuevi Song*, 12.

[18] For examples of settler colonial processes and the legacies of American conquest of indigenous peoples, see Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1987); Ryan Hall, *Beneath the Backbone of the World: Blackfoot People and the North American Borderlands, 1720-1877* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (Yale University Press, 2008); Pekka Hamalainen, *Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power* (Yale University Press, 2019); Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Verso, 2019); Margaret D. Jacobs, *After One Hundred Winters: In Search of Reconciliation on America's Stolen Lands* (Princeton University Press, 2021); Anne F. Hyde, *Empires,*

indirectly supported what some historians have called a "genocide" of California's indigenous peoples for the purpose of opening occupied lands for white American settlers.[19] The U.S. Army was the spear that overwhelmed native people but also the implementer of a new hybrid water regime that shifted away from seasonal travel patterns and toward permanence of both people and water. As the sound of American rifles and mining explosions replaced the songs of the Chemehuevi against echoing canyon walls, the relationship between humans and local hydrology became more vulnerable because of newly instituted fixity.

Efforts to make water access permanent in specific places responded to the East Mojave's highly variable and localized water tables. Over millennia, as powerful yet sporadic rains struck the hard sand and rock of the Mojave's steep mountainsides, quick-moving water and debris drained downhill, forming debris flows that spread out in wide, fan-like sediment deposits rich in coarse-textured soils and colluvium.[20] Geomorphologist Adrian Harvey demonstrated that fluvial systems (those that move and deposit water) respond to local topography and shape both

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Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800-1860, History of the American West (University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

[19] In *An American* Genocide, Madley argues that "federal decision makers often appeared to abdicate responsibility to state officials but in fact provided legislative, military, and financial support that made this genocide possible." Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (Yale University Press, 2016), 14. For more on "genocide" in the West, see Jeffrey Ostler, "Denial of Genocide in the California Gold Rush Era: The Case of Gary Clayton Anderson," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 45, no. 2 (2021): 81–101; Gary Clayton Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 192–206; Jeffrey Ostler, *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas* (Yale University Press, 2019), 364–68; Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 43–70, 271–312; Margaret D. Jacobs, "Genocide or Ethnic Cleansing? Are These Our Only Choices?," *Western Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2016): 444–48; Gary Clayton Anderson, "The Native Peoples of the American West: Genocide or Ethnic Cleansing?," *Western Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2016): 417–21. Other historians side-stepped the use of "genocide" and frankly described campaigns against indigenous peoples as exterminatory. See Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), xii–xiv, 291.

[20] Eric V. McDonald et al., "Regional Response of Alluvial Fans to the Pleistocene-Holocene Climatic Transition, Mojave Desert, California," in *Paleoenvironments and Paleohydrology of the Mojave and Southern Great Basin Deserts*, ed. Yehouda Enzel et al. (Geological Society of America, 2003).

hyperlocal and regional drainage basins.[21] Many resulting alluvial fans[22] in the desert aggrade water, buffering (adding water to) the system by trapping coarse sediment and isolating the fluvial system.[23] Although some alluvial fans develop fanhead trenches, or downhill drainages, many tectonically and fluvially deposited fans in the East Mojave aggrade, depositing water tables closer to the surface in often-hyperlocal sinks than can be found elsewhere, such as on flat plains.[24] Sculpted from thousands of years of geological change, sharp peaks and sloping fans dictated where Americans fought over water in the early-twentieth century and compelled their shared need to make its access predictable.

The Army attempted to stabilize both American governance and water across the East Mojave through the second half of the nineteenth century. To solve the seasonal variability of springs, the military dug wells on water-bearing alluvial fans like the one at Government Holes. Forts and camps guarded readily available water at the few perennial springs and streams across the desert. Patrols accompanied both mail and settler wagon trains between known watering sites. In doing so, the Army cemented American physical dominance over the desert and its people by interrupting traditional Chemehuevi living spaces and restricting their ability to move through song-affiliated territories.[25] By the 1860s, an in-rush of American miners killed or

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[21] Adrian M. Harvey, "Effective Timescales of Coupling within Fluvial Systems," *Geomorphology (Amsterdam)* 44, no. 3 (2002): 176, 179. Harvey overviewed how fluvial systems and resulting alluvial deposits coupled water deposits to the base of slopes in arid and semi-arid spaces.

[22] Also called inland deltas.

[23] John A. Izbicki, "Geologic and Hydrologic Controls on the Movement of Water through a Thick, Heterogeneous Unsaturated Zone Underlying an Intermittent Stream in the Western Mojave Desert, Southern California," *Water Resources Research* 38, no. 3 (2002): 2-1-2–14.

[24] Geologists have demonstrated that alluvial fans are highly permeable, allowing for easy infiltration of water into shallow aquifers. Ofer Dahan et al., "Direct Measurements of Floodwater Infiltration into Shallow Alluvial Aquifers," *Journal of Hydrology* 344, no. 3 (2007): 157–70. Harvey, "Effective Timescales of Coupling within Fluvial Systems," 186. For more on alluvial fans, see Sam Boggs Jr., *Principles of Sedimentology and Stratigraphy*, Fifth edition (Prentice Hall, 2012), 211–15.

[25] Estes, *Our History Is the Future*, 72. Estes wrote that "Indigenous nations…had come to know the United States…best through its army." For more on how settler colonial systems operate, see Kyle Whyte, "Settler

expelled most Chemehuevi from the high country, including through the leaving of strychnine-laced sacks of sugar across the desert, with many Chemehuevi relocating to Palm Springs.[26] Despite relocating, the Chemehuevi legacy of an alternative way of living in the desert endured.[27] Through the next half-century, as ranches developed the desert's open range after the retreat of an active military presence, Americans installed new relationships with local hydrology that depended not on finding water but on making it available for use.[28] Insisting on water's fixity, Americans created a system that was made durable in its infrastructure yet vulnerable in its dependence.

Ranching and the Stabilizing of Water

Ranching was the first economic system to stabilize unpredictable cycles of aridity in the East Mojave to make use of an apparent wasteland.[29] Agrarian-minded Americans in the

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Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," *Environment and Society* 9, no. 1 (2018): 125–44; Lorenzo Veracini, "Introducing Settler Colonial Studies," *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 1–12; Patrick Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 866–905; Lorenzo Veracini, *The World Turned inside out: Settler Colonialism as a Political Idea* (Verso, 2021), 3–5, 202–9.

[26] Lowell J. Bean, "Indians of California: Diverse and Complex Peoples," *California History* 71, no. 3 (1992): 302–23; Chester King and Dennis Casebier, *Background to the Historic and Prehistoric Resources of the East Mojave Desert Region*, Prepared for the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, California Desert Planning Program (Archaeological Research Unit, University of California Riverside, 1976), 222–24; Dennis G. Casebier, *Tales of the Mojave Road: The Military*, Tales of the Mojave Road (Tales of the Mojave Road Publishing Company, 2006), 163. For more on the mining history of the Mojave Desert, see Gary L. Shumway et al., *Desert Fever: An Overview of Mining History of the California Desert Conservation Area*, Prepared for Desert Planning Staff CA.060.CT7.2776 (Bureau of Land Management, 1980).

[27] The last Chemehuevi to live traditionally within today's Mojave National Preserve died in 1909, and his people hosted a great mourning celebration on the western face of the Providence Mountains by Arrowweed Spring. David Nichols, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, (Essex, CA), January 15, 2026, OHC, MDHCA.

[28] By "open range," I refer to the unfenced nature of cattle ranching through the entire period of activity by the RSLCC. After the RSLCC's dissolution, finalized around 1930, and sped further by the regulations of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, the succeeding Valley View, Kessler Springs, and OX ranches added an "extensive system of fencing stretching for hundreds of miles." Erica Owens, *Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company*, Cultural Landscapes Inventory, with Dewey Livingston and Shaun Provencer (National Park Service, Pacific West Regional Office, 2007), 18.

[29] Diana K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*, History for a Sustainable Future (The MIT Press, 2016), 21.

nineteenth century likened much of the Great Plains and trans-Rockies West to an American Sahara, ill-suited for agricultural development.[30] Henry Nash Smith noted that nineteenth century Americans considered the space between western Kansas and the Pacific Ocean as "a scene of desolation scarcely equaled on the continent."[31] Ranching offered a use for the Great American Desert if cattlemen could make predictable the region's water supply.[32]

The Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company (also referred to by its registered brands, the "88" and "53") controlled large portions of the East Mojave from the 1890s through its dissolution in 1931. Founded by Earle Greening, after whose death control passed to his eldest son Walter, the Rock Springs outfit ranged over 1,600 square miles, covering most of today's Mojave National Preserve with additional rangeland reaching toward Searchlight, in Nevada.[33] With parts of their rangeland active since the 1860s, the RSLCC was the largest, oldest, and most powerful ranch in the eastern desert high country, much of which represented the last unfenced range in the American West. The 88 outfit monopolized watering sites that allowed it nearly uncontested use of the range through a patchwork of legal claims, alluvial fans, labor, wells, windmills, pipes, and troughs. Once water was secured through infrastructure and law, it became a territorial resource.

C.W. Clarke submitted a forest lieu claim in June 1899, proposing to exchange forest scrip from Oregon first filed by W.L. Diel, B.W. Cody, F.C. Wilder, and Flora Sherman for 400 acres split across nine parcels in the New York Mountains of southeastern California. Clarke

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[30] Erik Lee Altenbernd, "Great American Desert: Arid Lands, Federal Exploration, and the Construction of a Continental United States" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 2016), 30–34.
[31] Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Vintage Books, 1950), 204.
[32] Frank H. Spearman, "The Great American Desert," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 77, no. 458 (1888): 232–45.
[33] John Sherwood Snorf, *Early Days at Hart: Being the Reminiscences of John Sherwood Snorf*, ed. Dorothy Nelson Snorf, Tales of the Mojave Road 18 (Tales of the Mojave Road Pub. Co, 1991), 69.

applied for title to the claims in Oregon and the General Land Office approved Clarke's selected exchange on May 19, 1900.[34] One of countless forest script exchanges instigated under the Forest Lieu Act of June 4, 1897, Clarke quickly sold the exchanged 400 acres and an additional 160-acre quarter-section to the Rock Spring Land & Cattle Company for $2,066.66.[35]

Despite the apparent straightly forwardness of this succession of land transfers, Clarke's sale to the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company represented a coordinated manipulation of the federal land system to secure water sources across the desert. As Desert Land Act (1877) and later Enlarged Homestead (1909; Stock-Raiding Homesteading Act in 1916) claimants took up parcels in surrounding valleys, the Rock Springs outfit resented encroachments into what had been one of the last open ranges in California. Employing forest script exchange, desert land entries, homestead claims, and substantial litigation, the cattle operation secured private control over water sources along the desert's water-bearing alluvial fans. While fraudulent, the Rock Springs' efforts to secure full control over the region's hydrologic resources can be understood as rational behavior within a system of land management that rewarded consolidation.

In December 1912, the General Land Office in Independence, California notified Clarke that special agent C.R. Arundell had been assigned to investigate his exchanges. The Washington office suspected that his selections were "fraudulent and illegal in that the lands offered as base for same were procured through fraudulent and corrupt practices."[36] Specifically, the government alleged that Diel and Cody illegally acquired their land "for the use and benefit of C.W. Clarke."

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[34] Walter Greening to State Land Board of the State of Oregon, February 11, 1915, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA; To C. W. Clarke, June 20, 1900, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA.
[35] J. F. Johnson and H. E. Higbey, "Transfer of Deed," October 17, 1901, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA.
[36] General Land Office, Washington "'FS' 59897 PIB," to General Land Office, Independence, January 15, 1914, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA.

Worse, the GLO alleged that F.C. Wilder was "a fictitious person" and believed it "doubtful as to whether or not Flora M. Sherman…did in fact exist," and that both were invented to defraud the State of Oregon to benefit Clarke and his co-conspirator, land speculator F.A. Hyde.[37] Although Sherman revealed herself to exist, she confirmed that she filed for base lands in Oregon on behalf of Hyde, her brother-in-law.[38]

For its part, the cattle company contended that it had purchased the questioned parcels "in good faith" and that the base land in question "was selected by C.W. Clarke upon his own account and not at the solicitation or in the interests of the" company.[39] The United States disagreed.[40] On April 22, 1920, *The United States v. C.W. Clarke, et al.* listed Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company as a co-defendant, alleging they had conspired to defraud the forest script exchange system.[41] In testimony, witnesses described that Clarke's acquired lands "would be held for future speculation, that his people in California were large ranchers, and some time this

[37] General Land Office, Independence to C. W. Clarke, December 11, 1912, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA. The Hyde Fraud Combine encompassed a scheme by Hyde and others to "obtain state school lands within the boundaries of national forests, and exchange them for more valuable federal land, using the indemnity selection process of the Forest Lieu Act." Because purchases of Oregon land were limited to 320 acres for personal use, not speculation, Hyde paid Oregonians as dummy applicants to avoid these limitations. For more, see background section of *State of Or. By and Through Div. of State Lands v. Bureau of Land Management, Dept. of Interior, No. 87-4096 (U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit July 31, 1989); State v. Hyde et Al. (Supreme Court of Oregon January 8, 1918); Hyde v. United States, 225 U.S. 347 (U.S. Supreme Court June 10, 1912).* Clarke apparently loaned Hyde $64,000.00 for the purpose of buying speculative lands within the anticipated Cascade reserve, to be repaid at 1.5% per month interest.
[38] "Statement of Flora M. Sherman," with C. R. Arundell, January 14, 1912, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA.
[39] George M. Brown to G. G. Brown, March 31, 1915, Folder 1, Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company Subject Files, DGC Collection, MDHCA; Walter Greening to State Land Board of the State of Oregon, March 15, 1915, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA.
[40] Igler, *Industrial Cowboys*, 151, 173. Numerous ranching companies found themselves indicted after associating with F.A. Hyde, including Miller & Lux's Pacific Livestock Company, although that lawsuit centered on the illegal fencing of public domain. Igler argues that Miller & Lux employed a scheme like that for which RSLCC was indicted.
[41] Prosecutors also accused Clarke, et al. of filing for land exchange on lands that were mineral in character, thus ineligible for the exchange system. 40 of the 400 acres within the RSLCC's purchase of Clarke's exchanged lands contained copper.

land might be valuable."[42] However, insufficient evidence led to the case's dismissal on April 30, 1924.[43] Although prosecutors failed to successfully prove the 88's involvement with C.W. Clarke and F.A. Hyde's extensive land speculation scheme, their splitting of forest script into parcels most advantageous to water capture epitomized land fraud in the American West, where environmental conditions encouraged consolidation and law acted as hydrologic infrastructure.

Since settlers first crossed the Proclamation Line of 1763, there has been an American tradition of bending and breaking public land laws.[44] Paul Wallace Gates established the exploited holes of the preemption, homesteading, mining, and desert land laws.[45] The Homestead Act of 1862 standardized some of the tools used to illegally obtain federal land, namely the payment to false (or "dummy") entrymen who had no intention of patenting claims for which they had been paid to file.[46] Across the West, cattlemen employed dummy claimants to file homestead claims near water sources.[47] Large cattle operations similarly manipulated the Desert Land Act and corruptible forest lieu exchange system to maximize their holdings.[48] Noted cattle operation Miller & Lux "employed front men to buy public domain acreage," who, upon proving

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[42] "Extract from the Testimony of Thomas McCusker, given in the Criminal Case of United States v. F.A. Hyde, et Al.," c 1912, 2. McCusker's testimony describes an elaborate system of finder's fees, doctored filings, and $5 payments to false applicants.
[43] George Wickham "Independence 04781 'H' JJW," to General Land Office, Independence, June 25, 1924, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA.
[44] Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 62–81; Karl S. Hele, *The Nature of Empires and the Empires of Nature: Indigenous Peoples and the Great Lakes Environment* (Wilfrid Laurier University PRess, 2013), 109–36; Taylor Spence, "Spatial Survivance: Haudenosaunee Active Presence in the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands," in *Reconsidering Regions in an Era of New Nationalism*, ed. Anne F. Hyde and Alexander Finkelstein (University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 177.
[45] Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development. Written for the Public Land Law Review Commission* (Government Printing Office, 1968), 219–48, 387-396. 460-508.
[46] Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 148.
[47] Ibid., 150.
[48] For more on the process of dummy claims, see Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development. Written for the Public Land Law Review Commission*, 466.

up their claims, transferred their patents to cattlemen's land agents for a nominal price.[49] In California, officials generally ignored restrictions meant to curtail script fraud, allowing Golden State applicants to freely subdivide their claims many more parcels than original script exchange laws allowed.[50] The Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company followed this model of land appropriation to secure much-needed watering sites. Rather than aberrant behavior, the legal manipulation was adaptive behavior within a system that rewarded consolidation of water access.

A patchwork land system empowered the "88" outfit to expand its control over forage and water. The Homestead Act allowed for claimants to take up 160 acres if they met some basic requirements and paid a small fee. The Mining Act of 1872 offered between 20 and 160 acres for placer claims and placer claim associations. The Desert Lands Act of 1877 allowed claimants to file on up to 320 acres for the purpose of reclamation and cultivation through irrigation. When Congress turned to enlarging the size of homestead claims at the turn of the century, filers could convert 320, and soon thereafter, 640 acres of federal land into private property.[51]

Overlapping legal mechanisms bestowed further control of the East Mojave to major ranchers. When the GLO rejected one of Rock Springs outfit's applications, the company felt secure that they would not lose access to the water for which they had placed claim on the land. The GLO ruled that a parcel on the southeastern face of the New Yorks had mineral potential, but RSLCC simply withdrew their entry, "made for the purpose of covering certain water rights

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[49] Douglas R. Littlefield, *Ruling the Waters: California's Kern River, The Environment, and the Making of Western Water Law* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2020), 78.
[50] Donald J. Pisani, *Water, Land, and Law in the West: The Limits of Public Policy* (University Press of Kansas, 1996), 90; "Desert Springs Support Cattle. Rock Springs Land & Cattle Co. Has Large Range and Many Cattle," *Searchlight Bulletin* (Searchlight, NV), March 22, 1907. The *Searchlight Bulletin* described how the RSLCC "secured government patents on all permanent water on surveyed ground by use of Forest Reserve script."
[51] For a focus on the various homestead laws within the context of overlapping and sometimes contradictory public land law, see Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development. Written for the Public Land Law Review Commission*, 497–516.

developed by tunnel," as "we have this water covered by state water filings which is sufficient to protect our interests."[52] The legal landscape around California's water was convoluted. The 1886 *Lux v. Haggin* California Supreme Court case established that prior appropriate (water rights based strictly on chronological establishment of rights and without restrictions to account for downstream users) and riparian rights (water rights based on landownership adjacent to waterways with restrictions to allow continued use by downstream users) could coexist in the Golden State. However, by confirming "riparian owners who took title from the state or the United States did so subject to any earlier appropriations," the *Lux v. Haggin* decision "endorsed a concept of private property that included water as a usufruct and that allowed landowners" to claim access to water that had no "obvious beneficial purposes."[53] As Miller & Lux increasingly reshaped the Central Valley, water users throughout California contested the mixed decision and organized irrigation districts.

Water law and its effects were hardly clearer elsewhere in the West. Water conflict over the Snake River Valley of Idaho demonstrated the convolutions of water law and use. Irrigators and water managers in the Snake region struggled over water, with distinctions between natural flow and stored water exacerbating relationships between communities and straining farmers' ability to withstand periods of drought.[54] Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, the newly instituted Reclamation Bureau installed dozens of dams on western waterways

[52] John F. Duling "In RE: Serial No. 020127," to General Land Office, Sacramento, June 3, 1932, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA.
[53] Littlefield, *Ruling the Waters: California's Kern River, The Environment, and the Making of Western Water Law*, 91, 94.
[54] Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*, 98–105.

between 1902 and 1935, but the grandeur of western water projects belied the limited availability of water for small-scale farms and the increasing shift toward industrialized agriculture.[55]

Cattle operations in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries replicated transformations in other industries across the West. The nation's largest cattle operations, including Miller & Lux, engaged a laborious struggle to reshape the region's landscape for efficiency and consolidation.[56] Combining physical labor, intensive litigation, and lobbyists, large-scale ranches successfully came to dominate both access and water rights across millions of acres of federal land. Rather than having immense water projects piped to the irrigated fields of large farms, the lack of viable water storage and transmission projects within the desert drove the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company to find, seize, and develop local water for their wide-ranching operation.

Whereas ranchers across the Great Plains used illegal fencing to enlarge their holdings, the 88 founded its control of the high-altitude valleys of the desert on a network of water developments.[57] With only one permanent stream and a collection of seasonally variable springs, and lacking the intensive federal investments in projects that recreated much of the West into a "hydraulic society," the outfit dug wells to supply their cattle with reliable water.[58] Ranging up to 10,000 cattle over more than a million acres with minimal access to groundwater, ranchers in the

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[55] Donald J. Pisani, *Water and American Government: The Reclamation Bureau, National Water Policy, and the West, 1902-1935* (University of California Press, 2002), 6, 17, 30–31. Pisani also described how interagency rivalries cast an "administrative morass" across western water projects, and that "the Reclamation Service produced competent designs, but politics took precedence over innovation." Pisani, *Water and American Government,* 98. Marc Reisner's chapters on the "go-go" years of western dam building similarly describes how considerations of "good" water projects fell victim to political vicissitudes. See Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*, 145-168.

[56] Igler, *Industrial Cowboys*, 4. For more on Miller & Lux, see Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (University of California Press, 1999), 29–39.

[57] For ranchers' fence lines incongruence with property boundaries, see Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development. Written for the Public Land Law Review Commission*, 473.

[58] Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*, 7.

East Mojave committed substantial labor and financial resources to the installation of wells, piping, tanks, and windmills.[59] Rarely placed more than six miles apart, developed water sources allowed ranches to freely graze their cattle, confident that as their herds moved between elevations with the seasons, water would be waiting for them.[60] Often the 40-acre parcels claimed by Rock Springs or their dummy-applicant employees focused on what could be less than an acre on which a promising spring or well might be exploited. By exchanging forest script for small acreage allotments where water sat near the surface, the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company employed land law as a hydrologic technology similar to how they installed wells, pipelines, and concrete troughs.

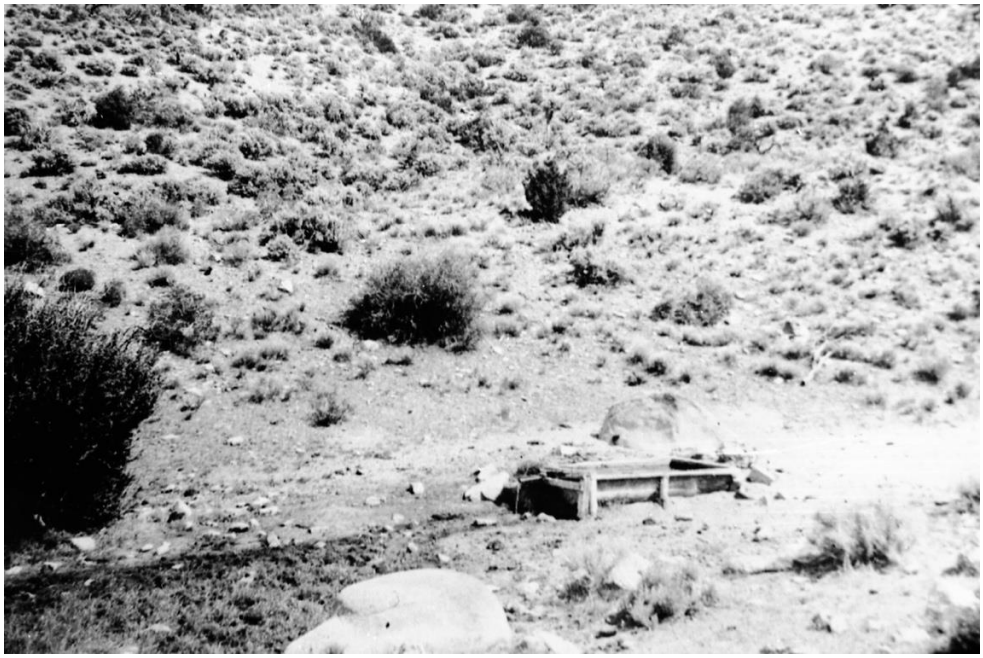


Figure 4: Cottonwood Spring concrete trough. Image captured March 1946. CDFG Collection, MDHCA. Reproduced with permission.

[59] Walter Greening and A. Morrison "Re: Serial 020127, Visalia 011942, Independence 04759," to General Land Office, Sacramento, August 10, 1927, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, p. 4, MDHCA.
[60] Jacob Overson, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, August 2, 2025, OHC, MDHCA.

The parcels Clarke proposed to exchange in 1899 demonstrate an attempt to monopolize local hydrology. One of the contested parcels proposed for forest lieu submission sat within one mile of six developed springs on the western edge of the New York Mountains.[61] The claimed exchange of the southeastern-quarter of the southeastern-quarter of Section 5, Township 13 North, Range 15 East, San Bernardino Meridian, was within roughly a mile of Butcherknife Spring, Cottonwood Spring, Myrtle Spring, Howe Spring (Noyer No. 2), Bathtub Spring (Noyer No. 1), and Strayhorse Spring. The Rock Springs outfit developed these springs, with redwood cribbing installed to hold water at Butcherknife Spring, piping connected a trough to Cottonwood Spring water, and Bathtub Spring housed a trough. The most extensively developed site, Howe Spring had a hand-dug shaft, windmill, tank, and water trough.[62]

Other applications for pieces of the public domain similarly demonstrated the Rock Springs outfit's focus on the few places that contained accessible water. Although undeveloped by the company, Patton Spring sat within a quarter section of another proposed exchange parcel, and water at nearby Mail Spring likely serviced the 88's needs. The last of Clarke's proposed exchanges also existed within 1.5 miles of multiple springs with water developments likely installed by the Rock Spring outfit. Nearby Malpais Springs (both Nos. 1 and 2) fed into a concrete trough and Dove Spring No. 1 was also piped to the concrete trough at Malpais. Two miles to the west of the proposed exchanged land, the Rock Spring outfit had installed two tanks and a windmill at Stage Coach Spring. Dove Spring No. 2 and Coats Spring sat within two of the

[61] The claimed exchange of SE1/4SE1/4Sec.5, Tp. 13N., R. 15E, San Bernardino Meridian was within a mile of multiple springs, per Hall, "Appendix 2: Inventory of Spring/Seep Locations in the East Mojave Desert Region," 122–24.
[62] Dewey Livingston, *Draft Landscape Inventory and Assessment: Valley View Ranch*, #P8380020127 (Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Mojave National Preserve, CA, 2003), 121–25.

RSLCC proposed exchanges, and the company had developed these springs by digging a small pool and tank fed by Dove Spring No. 2 and installed a tank, shaft, pump, and windmill to draw water from Coats Spring.[63]

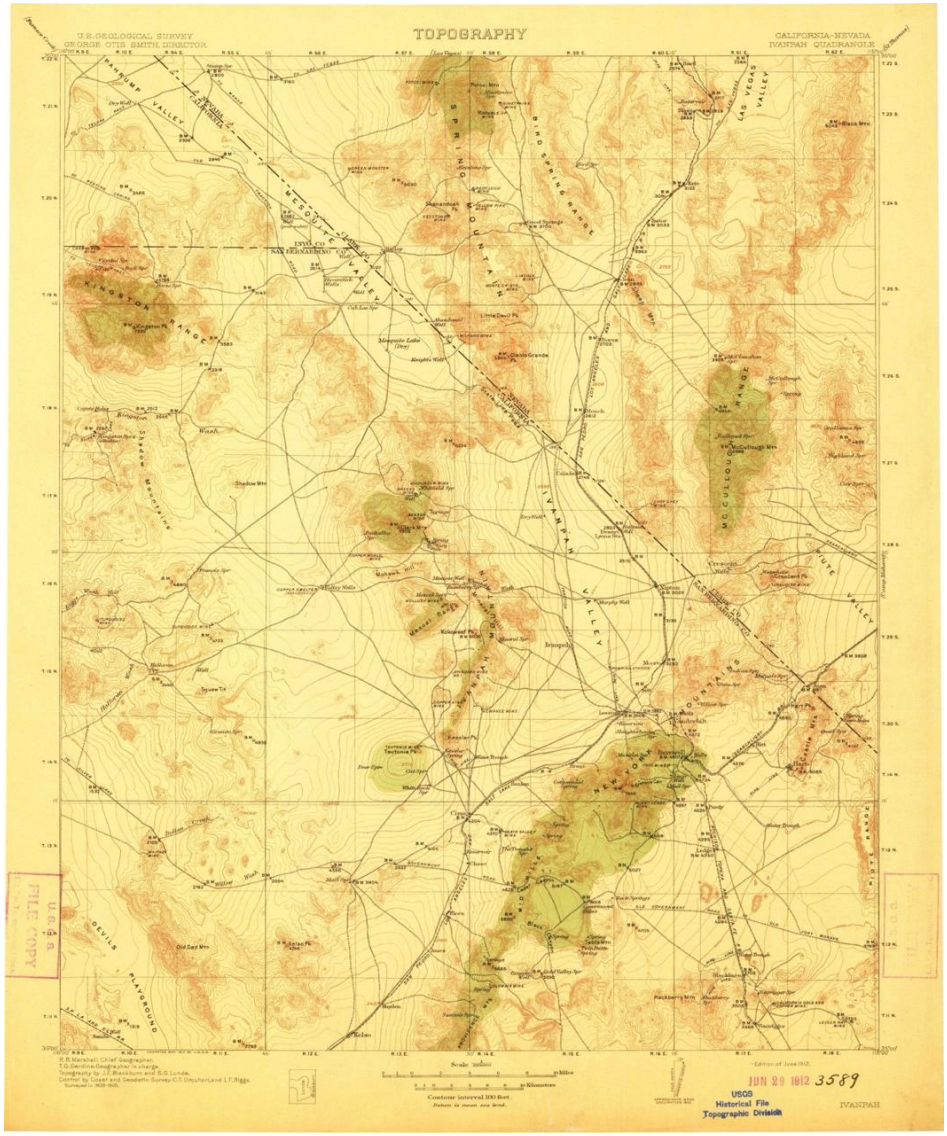


Figure 5: Map approximating the Rock Spring Land & Cattle Co.'s western rangelands. Ivanpah, USGS, 1912, 1:250,000.

[63] For spring data, see Hall, "Appendix 2: Inventory of Spring/Seep Locations in the East Mojave Desert Region," 104–11. For the tying of spring locations to RSLCC's proposed forest exchanges, see Greening to State Land Board of the State of Oregon, February 11, 1915.

Similar diggings and claim systems dotted Cima Dome, a 15-mile-wide granite uplift that overlooks the surrounding Joshua tree-filled Kelso and Ivanpah Valleys and marked the western edge of the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company's range. Joshua Trees lacked dense canopies, so the forest floor grew extensive grasses in the bright sun. However, ranchers needed to dig and develop water across the large uplift. In places where water sat near the surface, such as Deer Spring, ranchers only dug six feet before hitting water, allowing them to run heavy iron pipe from this developed spring to an adjacent corral, where a cement-lined and rail tie-posted water trough provided essential hydration to cattle.[64] Two miles northeast of the dome's summit, RSLCC employees hand-dug an eighty-foot-deep well that reliably produced water. Another mile south, the company installed a well, concrete trough, and railroad tie corral on the seasonally active Cut Spring.[65] On the southern terminus of the Ivanpah Mountains, ranch-related developments around Kessler Spring allowed the 88-outfit to range in both Shadow Valley, to the west, and Ivanpah Valley, to the east.[66] By 1912, when most homesteaders began filing Enlarged Homestead applications, the Rock Spring outfit had already dug wells at Deer Spring and Cut Spring, and connected Kessler Spring to a water trough on the eastern side of the Ivanpahs through miles of iron pipeline.[67]

[64] Livingston, *Draft Landscape Inventory and Assessment: Valley View Ranch*, 37–39.
[65] Ibid., 43.
[66] Ibid., 32.
[67] *Ivanpah*, USGS, 1912, 1:250,000; *Ivanpah*, USGS, 1922, 1:250,000. Historical maps accessed via USGS TopoExplorer and EarthExplorer platforms.



Figure 6: The Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company used concrete, railroad ties, and legal claims to develop water at sites such as Cut Spring. Author's image.

Most homesteaders arrived in the eastern Mojave Desert too late to shape the region's water regime. Dominant cattlemen had already converted localized springs and water tables into a durable system of control enforced by infrastructure and law. The established water regime mattered, and it structured the legal and hydrological limits of irrigation and domestic supply. Homesteading unfolded in the East Mojave after its hydrological and legal possibilities had already been constricted by ranchers' conversion of its limited water into a private resource.

Dry-Farming as Adaptive Regime

Beginning in the 1890s but accelerating after the doubling of claimable acreage through the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, homesteaders challenged both the Rock Springs outfit and their own resilience in the East Mojave. Early-twentieth century dry-farming practices were

meant to account for the semi-arid West's aridity. Confronting a landscape that lacked both rainfall and groundwater access, desert homesteads epitomized a Progressive Era embrace of technological solutions to environmental issues.

However, homesteaders did not arrive to an open desert, but instead found a landscape already respondent to ranching developments. Entering the East Mojave a decade after the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company, homesteaders encountered water that was already claimed and defended, shaping which hybrid systems could survive. Without access to ranch-controlled water, and unknowingly claiming land far from groundwater and accessible water tables, homesteaders confronted a challenging hydrologic landscape.

Even under ideal conditions, farming the East Mojave faced severe environmental thresholds. A high-altitude valley forested with Joshua trees situated between the New York Mountains on its western and northern boundaries and the Piute Range on its eastern flank and the epicenter of early-twentieth century homesteading in today's Mojave National Preserve, Lanfair Valley averaged fewer than 10 inches of rain per year.[68] Both the scarcity and variability of rainfall made predictable planting difficult. Violent summer thunderstorms deposited inches of rain within hours, damaging crops, causing floods when forceful rain displaced poorly draining sandy soils, and most importantly, draining so quickly that little water penetrated the soil and entered local aquifers. On the leeward side of the New York Mountains, the soft, nourishing snow and misting rains of winter would often be trapped on the peaks, leaving Lanfair Valley dry.[69] Groundwater was similarly inaccessible, and one government hydrologist warned that "no

[68] David G. Thompson, *Ground Water in Lanfair Valley, California*, Water Supply Paper nos. 450-B (U.S. Geological Survey, 1920), 36–37.
[69] Ibid.

one should begin to drill a well unless he is prepared to go to a depth of 300 to 500 feet."[70] Ranchers had already captured nearby spring sites on alluvial fans and monopolized the shallow water, so homesteaders were left to drill deep, expensive wells or none at all. These combined conditions did not make homesteading impossible, but they narrowed the margins for error.

Dry-farming offered the most rational farming strategy and water system for homesteading arid spaces. Just as ranchers had secured water in wells, dry-farming attempted to maintain moisture in soil. Most widely promoted by Hardy Webster Campbell, "dry" or "scientific" farming aimed to maximize the moisture that arid soils could retain through a strict prescription of dust mulching and packing, deep plowing in the fall, tilling the soil after any precipitation, and letting fields sit unplanted, known as summer fallowing.[71] Officials in the Department of Agriculture warned against an uncritical embrace of the farming system with which "the Campbell Method" became synonymous, but Campbell and his contemporaries dominated agricultural discussion at the turn of the twentieth century.[72] Early struggles with dry farming in Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming did little to dissuade farmers from heading to arid western lands.[73] Rather, promotional organizations such as the Dry Farming Congress and

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[70] David G. Thompson, *The Mohave Desert Region*, Water Supply Paper no. 578 (U.S. Geological Survey, 1929), 672; Thompson, *Ground Water in Lanfair Valley, California*, 30–34.

[71] For a description of dry farming practices, see John A. Widtsoe, *Dry-Farming: A System of Agriculture for Countries Under a Low Rainfall*, The Rural Science Series (The MacMillan Company, 1920). For more on Campbell, see Mary W. M. Hargreaves, "Hardy Webster Campbell (1850-1937)," *Agricultural History* 32, no. 1 (1958): 62–65; David Vail, "Farming by Rail: Demonstration Trains and the Rise of Mobile Agricultural Science in the Great Plains," *Agricultural History* 38, no. 2 (2018): 155.

[72] Hargreaves, "Hardy Webster Campbell (1850-1937)"; Jeffrey B. Roet, "Agricultural Settlement on the Dry Farming Frontier, 1900-1920" (Northwestern University, 1982), 226–28.

[73] For a short literature overview of dry farming, see Marshall E. Bowen, "Crops, Critters, and Calamity: The Failure of Dry Farming in Utah's Escalante Desert, 1913-1918," *Agricultural History* 73, no. 1 (1999): 1; Marshall E. Bowen, "Bitter Times: The Summers of 1915 and 1916 on Northeast Nevada's Dry Farms," *Northeastern Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 93, no. 1 (1993): 2–26; Marshall E. Bowen, "A Backward Step: From Irrigation to Dry Farming in the Nevada Desert," *Agricultural History* 63, no. 2 (1989): 231–42; Marshall E. Bowen, *Utah People in the Nevada Desert: Homestead and Community on a Twentieth-Century Farmers' Frontier* (Utah State University Press, 1994); Mary W. M. Hargreaves, "The Dry-Farming Movement in Retrospect," *Agricultural History* 51, no. 1

western Congressmen such as Frank Mondell energetically endorsed and trumpeted dry farming's promise to grow a garden from what had been called the Great American Desert just a few years earlier.[74] Demonstration trains quickly spread these methods.[75] Although champion of dry-farming John Widtsoe described climates such as the East Mojave's as "not safe for dry-farm purposes," homesteaders flowed into Lanfair Valley by 1910.[76]

Homesteaders lived within their own hybrid landscape in Lanfair Valley. Homesteaders collected rainfall by channeling it from their roofs into cisterns, with one remembering "we had barrels and barrels and barrels and troughs so that none got away."[77] Bathwater would be reused multiple times before being poured out over gardens. Although most homesteaders practiced dry-farming, they did so out of necessity. Asked in an oral history if his family irrigated their garden when he was a boy in Lanfair Valley, one homesteader chortled, "irrigate it with what? What could we irrigate it with, that dry air?"[78] The uncertainty of water tables and rainfall dashed planned irrigation networks and reflected a hybridized agricultural landscape in which infrastructure interacted with environmental limits without dissolving them.

(1977): 149–65; Mary W. M. Hargreaves, "Dry Farming Alias Scientific Farming," *Agricultural History* 22 (January 1948): 39–56; Gary D. Libecap, "Learning About the Weather: Dryfarming Doctrine and Homestead Failure in Eastern Montana, 1900-25," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 52, no. 1 (2002): 24–33; Mary W. M. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains, 1900-1925* (Harvard University Press, 1957).

[74] For more on the Great American Desert, see William F. G. Shanks, "The Great American Desert: Railway Mileage in the Desert States.," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, June 1892; Spearman, "The Great American Desert," 232–45; Altenbernd, "Great American Desert," 152–209. For more on Mondell and the Dry Farming Congresses, see Frank W. Mondell, "The Farm Home and Its Influence on National Life," Speech, Boyd, WY, August 15, 1908; Frank W. Mondell, "To Make the Desert Bloom," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), February 24, 1907, Frank W. Mondell Collection, Box 7, Scrapbook #6, AHC; "Mondell on Dry Farming," *The Sheridan Enterprise* (Sheridan, WY), September 11, 1908, Frank W. Mondell Collection, Box 7, Scrapbook #7, American Heritage Center.

[75] Vail, "Farming by Rail: Demonstration Trains and the Rise of Mobile Agricultural Science in the Great Plains."

[76] Widtsoe, *Dry-Farming: A System of Agriculture for Countries Under a Low Rainfall*, 24.

[77] Richard Wesley Hodnett Jr., interview by Dennis Casebier, n.d., OHC, MDHCA.

[78] Ibid.

The same constraints did not operate evenly across settlers. Instead, in a landscape where survival depended on access to both water and legal protection, racial inequality reinforced environmental precarity.

Compounded Vulnerability

Like many arriving African American Californians at the turn of the twentieth century, former bondsman Howard Folke had traveled from the South, across the Great Plains, before coming further west. [79] Despite promises in newspapers published in Los Angeles as a city free of racial enmity and prejudice, soon, Folke and other black arrivals realized that the racial pressures and prejudices they had attempted to escape were replicated in the Golden State.[80] Rooting himself in a community developed across the nation and cemented in the high-altitude Lanfair Valley, Folke experienced the same environmental thresholds as white homesteaders but with fewer buffers.

Black homesteaders engaged Lanfair Valley's hydrologic limits with fewer resources to absorb failed harvests. Despite progress building homes and clearing fields, black farmers needed water. A 1911 announcement in the *Los Angeles Times* underscored the continuing lack of water, as it both celebrated the formation of the colony but warned that "all essentials except water are secured."[81] Together, the community invested in well-drilling equipment with hopes to

[79] For more on Black migration to the West, see Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 4–16, 146–59, 184–201. For an example of black migration during the Great Migration, see Brian McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (Harvard University Press, 2017).
[80] Austin Schoenkopf, "Homesteading Vegas: Promotion, Race, and Water in the East Mojave" (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2020), 66–69; W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "Colored California," *The Crisis* 6, no. 4 (1913): 191–95.
[81] "Negroes Will Form Colony," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), January 9, 1911.

irrigate their fields. In 1913, sixteen charter members incorporated the Dunbar Water Company, raising $611.00 to drill a well sufficient for irrigation purposes.[82] Likely acting for the company, one homesteader dug for a well on his tract. After three hundred feet without water, the company abandoned its mission, leaving a large back-pile of soil and gravel as an artifact of their attempt to irrigate the nearly waterless valley.[83] Fixity under aridity produced vulnerability.

When investments like those into the Dunbar Water Company failed, black homesteaders experienced greater economic strain than their white neighbors. Despite joining what was advertised as a self-sustaining agricultural colony, most black homesteaders traveled to Los Angeles or to the railroad town of Needles "to work to earn money to support" themselves.[84] Often tied to local ranching and mining ventures, white homesteaders similarly worked away from their farms to support themselves and their families, but they often had higher-value improvements on their plots and could more easily withstand periods without paid work.[85]

Racial inequality functioned as an environmental condition in Lanfair Valley. Newspapers reported that Ernest Lanfair, "in whose honor" the local train siding was named, was "opposed to having colored people in [the] valley."[86] White organizers excluded black residents from

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[82] Edwin Birge was the only white member of the board of the Dunbar Water Company. Birge was a witness for Clifford Kelley, a Black neighbor in Pasadena. Per Toenjes, personal correspondence; Dunbar Water Company Incorporation Papers, July 7, 1913, California State Archives-Sacramento.

[83] Successful wells, such as that of Mrs. Eleanor J. Jacoby on the alluvial fan that overlooked Lanfair Valley from the west, reached as deep as 879 feet and only hit water at depths exceeding 360 feet. Maud Morrow Sharp, *Maruba: Homesteading in Lanfair Valley*, Tales of the Mojave Road 10 (Tales of the Mojave Road Pub. Co, 1984), 18, 39.

[84] Employing language used by many homesteaders, Estella Baker's homestead patent is instructive. See Homestead Entry of Estella Baker, Serial Patent #855811, Box 30630, Shelf 5, Compartment 10, Row 50, Stack 15W3, RG 49, NARA. "West'rn Tuskegee Is Great Scheme: Colored Preachers Plan College of Mineralogy in Eldorado District," *Los Angeles Herald*, April 24, 1910; *Los Angeles Times*, "Negroes Will Form Colony."

[85] Sharp, *Maruba: Homesteading in Lanfair Valley*; Bob Ausmus, *East Mojave Diary* (Tales of the Mojave Road Publishing Company, 1989); Arthur H. Dutton, "The Cost of a Homestead," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 28, 1909.

[86] *Pasadena Star News* (Pasadena, CA), August 8, 1916.

attending community parties. Local newspapers underscored the distinctiveness of the black community as operating apart from others in the valley.[87] Although many black and white homesteaders mutually witnessed for each other's patent claims, as historian Eric Nystrom wrote, "in Lanfair Valley, blacks and whites could plow together, but they could not play together."[88] At least one black homesteader, Howard Frank Carter, lost his house to an unexplained fire while he was away, suggesting that racial animosity extended into violence.[89] Carter was left with little recourse but to request an extension from the General Land Office and start again. Similarly, homesteader David Spraggin had cattle run through his home, likely driven by Rock Springs cattlemen, destroying both the building and all his possessions.[90] Legal and economic marginalization reduced black homesteaders' adaptive capacity.

Different planting outcomes reflected both prior experience and rational adaptation to an unknown environment, suggesting not only an embrace of both Progressive Era visions for agriculture, but also the creation of new black and western relationships with the land.

Most homesteaders who received patents for their claims followed the lead of men such as Howard Frank Carter. Carter, the son of another homesteader (and former bondsman) William Carter, was born in West Virginia in either 1881 or 1882 and entered on his homestead in the winter of 1924 toward the end of the homesteading experiment. Rigorously adhering to the dry-

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[87] "Happenings Along the Local Branch," *Searchlight Bulletin* (Searchlight, NV), January 20, 1911; "Farming Section Being Tried Out. District Along Barnwell Branch of Santa Fe Gives Much Promise," *Searchlight Bulletin* (Searchlight, NV), July 28, 1911; "Reclaiming Land Near Vontrigger. Colored People Expect to Cause the Desert to Blossom as the Rose," *Searchlight Bulletin* (Searchlight, NV), January 6, 1911; "Happenings Along the Local Branch," *Searchlight Bulletin* (Searchlight, NV), February 3, 1911.

[88] Eric Charles Nystrom, "From Neglected Waste to Protected Space: An Administrative History of Mojave National Preserve" (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2002), 35–36.

[89] Homestead Entry of Howard Frank Carter, Serial Patent #1039916, Box 39020, Shelf 5, Compartment 28, Row 14, Stack 15W3, RG 49, NARA.

[90] Field visit to Spraggin homestead conducted by Schoenkopf and Toenjes in March 2023. Toenjes asserts Spraggin was likely a black homesteader. Personal correspondence.

farming labor practices ill-suited to the environmental conditions of the East Mojave, Carter was unable to harvest anything from his acres planted in barley, wheat, and sorghum. In 1925, Carter reaped a "very poor crop" of barley, followed by wheat and barley with "results unsatisfactory" in 1926. In 1927, when he planted 35 acres in sorghum, he finally returned "fair results," but that success did not last, as 1928, his final year of planting and a replication of the previous year's sowing, yielded "no crop, mainly owing to [the] fact that there was no rain for over a year."[91] Although the harvests were unsuccessful, Carter's planting triad of barley, wheat, and sorghum represented crops planted by twenty-two of the twenty-four successful Black homesteaders.[92] This outsized planting of these crops matches dry-farming agriculturalist John Widtsoe's "crops for dry-farming," suggesting that new, and suddenly ubiquitous, dry-farming literature may have influenced the agricultural practices of Lanfair Valley's farmers.[93]

Compared to Howard Carter, Richard Wesley Hodnett used what he knew. Born into enslavement in the Georgia Piedmont in 1850, listed on Georgia's Freedman's rolls in the early 1870s, employed as a postmaster in Arkansas in 1880, and arriving in California with Folke in 1907, Hodnett preceded the Great Migration of Black Americans into the urban centers of the North and West. Upon realizing that Los Angeles' promise of racial equity was illusory, Hodnett headed to Lanfair Valley, where settlers were experimenting with cotton and other traditional crops from the South.[94]

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[91] Homestead file of Howard Frank Carter, Serial #1039916, NARA.
[92] Corn completed the quadruple of common crops among the homesteaders, although Carter did not plant it.
[93] Widtsoe, *Dry-Farming: A System of Agriculture for Countries Under a Low Rainfall*, 59–65.
[94] "Happenings Along the Local Branch (Special Correspondence)," *Searchlight Bulletin* (Searchlight, NV), December 30, 1910. The *Bulletin* mentioned that "A negro colony in this same section will experiment with cotton."

Hodnett and his adult-age children farmed Lanfair Valley using agricultural knowledge possibly honed during enslavement. After failed plantings of corn, Hodnett sowed rye and cane in 1916. Probably building on cane-growing knowledge developed during enslavement, Hodnett harvested both a sizable rye crop (5 tons) and a respectable cane crop (3 tons). Building on multiple generations of agricultural knowledge, Richard Wesley Hodnett's children, Estella (Baker), Matthew, Ulysses, Richard Wesley Jr., and William, each followed their father's lead and planted cane, albeit without Richard Wesley's success. The unexpected deaths of Matthew and Estella underlined Richard Wesley's centrality to the Hodnett family, as the patriarch followed through on Matthew's patent and took in Estella's two young and suddenly orphaned boys. If nothing else, the desert offered space to work and live together.

John David Jones was a wild card, representing a third distinctive group of Black farmers: those who experimented. Unlike Carter, who relied on a standardized mix of crops, or Hodnett, who utilized acculturated agricultural knowledge to grow cane, Jones saw his years in the East Mojave as a time to test new crops and probe the desert environment's viability for farming. Born in 1868 in Kentucky, Jones and his family landed in Lanfair Valley by 1913. Reflecting the experimental nature of dry-farming, specifically that each environment would be better suited to certain crops, Jones diversified his plantings. In 1913, he planted 7 acres across wheat and rapeseed, without a harvest. The next year, he planted rye and rapeseed, wrestling a 2-ton harvest of rye from the sandy soil. In 1915, Jones seemingly threw convention to the wind and planted 11 acres across sorghum, sorghum subvariants, rapeseed, and beans to no effect: the harvest failed. Finally, in 1917 (after taking the year 1916 off to "work to earn money to live

on"), Jones planted sudan grass (a sorghum variant), oats, rapeseed, timothy, and beans.[95] Through changes in his yearly plantings, Jones demonstrated the uncertainty around dry-farming and the variety of strategies employed to reap harvests from America's most marginal lands. Still, variation in strategy did not overcome structural constraints.

Homesteading collapsed through a combination of environmental severity, economic precarity, and social inequality that left little room for recovery. Without the means to drill deep wells to reach local aquifers, homesteaders, and especially black homesteaders, depended on ranchers' willingness to sell water. Neither mobile like the Chemehuevi nor dominant like the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company, homesteaders adopted permanence without adequate control of water, and their fixity to their plots increased their vulnerability through dry cycles. As dry-farms faltered, earlier ranching systems reasserted themselves through conflict.

Conflict as Feedback, Not Breakdown

Ranchers predictably bristled at incoming homesteaders who competed for space and water across the cattlemen's shrinking rangeland. New fence lines closed former grazing territory. Well-drilling affected local aquifers as homesteaders, derisively called "nesters" by the cattlemen (themselves "cowpunchers"), withdrew from thin water tables and prevented access to earlier ranch-affiliated developments. Some incoming homesteaders also ran cattle, competing for crucial canyons and passes through which the Rock Spring outfit had always cycled their herds as seasons changed. Conflict emerged not only in dry seasons, but where water, land, and development made compromise increasingly difficult. When the 88 pushed back against

[95] Homestead file of John David Jones, Serial #858376, NARA.

homesteaders, violence and litigation manifested an already-stabilized hybrid water landscape's attempts to defend itself as environmental stress made accommodation impossible.

Local histories and homestead patent files suggest the 1920s were an especially dry period in the East Mojave. As the decade progressed, lessened precipitation paired with windmill-empowered water withdrawals to sharpen the effects of scarcity. Dry years affected homesteaders and ranchers alike as crops failed and cattle died at dry troughs. As more homesteaders came into the valley, new spatial markers cut into the open range, shrinking the forage and water available for cattle.

Four-string barbed wire threatened to undo the Rock Spring outfit's control. Compared to single-string barbless wire, two-, three-, and four-string barbed wire's torsion eliminated natural slackening and easy breakage, making it a reliable tool for enclosing land.[96] Its durability and light weight allowed it to quickly become ubiquitous in areas with limited woodlands for fence construction.[97] As settlers took up parcels ranging from 40-acres to 640-acre-square miles, "four-wire" cut holes out of what had been an uninterrupted range.[98] In the southern plains and Texas, ranchers had first implemented barbed wire to curtail excessive exposure to climatic extremes and the risk of losing head on the drive north to markets during the 1870s. By the end of the decade, homesteaders and other farmers began reducing viable cattle trails by enclosing their lands with the prickly iron string.[99]

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[96] Olivier Razac, *Barbed Wire: A Political History*, trans. Jonathan Kneight (The New Press, 2002), 12.
[97] Richard Hornbeck, "Barbed Wire: Property Rights and Agricultural Development," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 125, no. 2 (2010): 768.
[98] Sharp, *Maruba: Homesteading in Lanfair Valley*, 39.
[99] Razac, *Barbed Wire: A Political History*, 6–11; Harold D. Jobes, *Barbs, Bullets, and Blood: The 1880s Texas Barbed Wire Wars* (University of North Texas Press, 2025), 43.

Barbed wire reoriented spatial arrangements in the East Mojave. Although barbed fencing "was an expected sight across the western landscape" by the 1880s, the absence of fencing in the East Mojave persisted until arriving homesteaders in the 1910s felt compelled to protect their plantings from the thousands of head ranged by the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company.[100] Homesteader Maude Sharp asserted that "if a homesteader wanted to grow a crop of any kind he must put up a four-wire barbed wire fence to keep the cattle out."[101] As an increasing number of homesteads closed off high-altitude valleys with rich grasses, the 88 attempted to litigate its continuing access to water sites they had developed.

The RSLCC often protested homestead claims if they felt their water access was imperiled. Six months after their federal land fraud case was dismissed, the company requested "new land be given them instead of that originally applied for," specifically requesting land that included a series of drainage-directing hillsides, alluvial fans, and springs on the northwestern face of the New York Mountains. However, C.H. Kreidles of Cima had already claimed land within one of their selections.[102] A lengthy, and presumably costly, legal contest resulted in Kreidles maintaining his claim, but the process was indicative of the RSLCC's attempt to pressure homesteaders into relinquishing water rights. Other homesteaders similarly found their nearly patented claims contested by the cattle ranchers.[103]

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[100] Joanne S. Liu, *Barbed Wire: The Fence That Changed the West* (Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2009), 99.
[101] Sharp, *Maruba: Homesteading in Lanfair Valley*, 39.
[102] General Land Office, Independence "FLS 04781," to Commissioner of the General Land Office, March 10, 1925, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA. For an inventory and map of the spring within Sec 17, T 13 N, R 15 E, SB Meridian, see Hall, "Appendix 2: Inventory of Spring/Seep Locations in the East Mojave Desert Region," 77, 122–26.
[103] R. F. Craig, "Sacramento 020127 'K' RFC," August 27, 1932, Folder 1, RSLCC, DGC, MDHCA.

Stock-raising homesteader Bob Hollimon personified the threat to the Rock Springs' domination. A Kansan who had entered the East Mojave from Arizona with cattle, Hollimon purchased the rights and improvements to a 640-acre section of land on an alluvial fan in the southwestern corner of Round Valley that included the developed Clemett Spring and a cabin from an earlier homesteader for $332 on March 30, 1918. Within a few years, Hollimon installed multiple improvements, including a barn, shed, water trough, well, 320 feet of pipeline buried nearly three feet deep, two corrals, fencing, and a mixed-use shop.[104] Hollimon developed his small ranch to support a patch of alfalfa and 15 to 30 head of cattle as he waited for a resurvey plat to be filed at the General Land Office to file a stock-raising homestead claim.[105] With his legal status on the land being somewhere between a squatter and a claimant, Hollimon made pragmatic use of the water source on his preemption.

The Rock Springs outfit filed a protest to 40 acres in Hollimon's fenced-in 640-acre claim. The company alleged that it had used the spring for decades, presented a purchased quitclaim deed to Clemett Spring from early in 1916, and used engineering maps to legitimize their claim to have developed and owned the spring.[106] Hollimon was unable to compete with the resources of the large company and could only provide his own testimony, and law stabilized asymmetry between homesteaders and ranchers rather than resolve conflict. The RSLCC was granted ownership of and rights to use the spring, as well as ingress and egress rights, and legal

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[104] "Testimony of R.H. Hollimon before General Land Office in Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company vs. Robert Hollimon," June 12, 1927, Folder 1, R.H. Hollimon Collection, p. 2, MDHCA. Hollimon likely made other, less legal improvements, as Bob Ausmus remembered Hollimon maintaining multiple liquor stills. See Ausmus, *East Mojave Diary*, 39.

[105] "Testimony of R.H. Hollimon before General Land Office in Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company vs. Robert Hollimon," 2.

[106] Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company vs. R.H. Hollimon (Superior Court of the State of California April 23, 1919).

fees from Hollimon on April 23, 1919.[107] Despite the decision, Hollimon maintained his right to that corner of his claim and began to install additional pipeline and troughs that drew water from Clemett Spring.

A microcosm of range wars across the West, when litigation could not get the homesteading Hollimon off the land, the Rock Springs outfit searched for a more permanent solution.[108] Finding Hollimon intransigent, Rock Springs employees Pat and Roy Woods confronted him on July 2nd, 1919.[109] A shootout broke out, with Hollimon shooting the hat off Pat Woods and shooting Roy Woods' horse from under him.[110] The Woods were charged with attempted murder, but charges were later dropped.[111] Hollimon returned to his plat, emboldened that he could outshoot any threats from the cattle company.[112] It was rumored that the RSLCC surveilled Hollimon, in hopes that they could definitively prove his taking of 88-branded steer or any other provocation worth taking to court.[113] It was also "known via the desert grapevine," that a $1,500 bounty would be awarded to anybody who could "get rid of Hollimon."[114]

Other homesteaders faced similar destruction and violence at the hands of the 88 outfit. Although homebody Hollimon survived bullets when he stayed on his parcel, others faced destruction when they left their claims to either work or for gathering supplies, often finding

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[107] *Ibid., 2.*
[108] "Duello in Desert May Be Prelude to Range War," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, July 25, 1919; White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 329–30, 344–46; Igler, *Industrial Cowboys*, 138–39.
[109] "New Gun War Brewing on S.B. Desert," *The Daily Report* (Ontario, CA), July 10, 1919.
[110] "Woods Bound Over to Court," *The Evening Index* (San Bernardino, CA), July 25, 1919.
[111] "Pat and Roy Woods Freed," *The Evening Index* (San Bernardino, CA), March 2, 1920. In March 1921, the court returned a 40-60 caliber rifle and a .45 caliber revolver to the Woods after two years in evidence. "Relics of Old Feud Are Returned to Roy Woods," *San Bernardino Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), March 8, 1921.
[112] "Men of Desert in Court for Duelling," *The San Bernardino Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), July 24, 1919.
[113] Ausmus, *East Mojave Diary*, 145.
[114] Ibid., 149.

their homes "'struck by lightning' from cloudless skies."[115] Local rancher and journalist Bob Ausmus remembered how "fences were cut, allowing 88 cattle to trample the crops."[116] Homesteaders grew angry when "their fences would sometimes be brought down by the cattle and crops destroyed."[117] The Brown family, of mixed American and Mexican descent, had their cabin burned to the ground.[118] The outfit demonstrated no compunction about leaving homesteaders unhoused and attempted to drive out invading "nesters" with force.

What could not be solved with violence was again dragged into court. When Hollimon filed for a stock-raising homestead on his plot in 1923, he reasserted his right to the entire section, including Clemett Spring.[119] The Rock Springs outfit filed a protest of Hollimon's claim, again asserting their right to the 40 acres that included not just Clemett Spring, but by 1925, also Hollimon's house, barn, and numerous other improvements.[120] An inspector from the Department of the Interior opined that the cattle company seemed to center their protest on a water right that it had not actualized, as "a person [or corporation] claiming the right to use water from a spring on government land should protect [itself] by acquiring a right of way for a reservoir and ditch," which the cattle company had not done, "and if [it fails] to do this [it] should not be permitted to come in later and ask that an entry covering the land in question

[115] Ibid., 137.
[116] Ibid., 139.
[117] Sharp, *Maruba: Homesteading in Lanfair Valley*, 39.
[118] Personal correspondence with Lorilee and Chris Brown. Lorilee Brown asserted that their homestead-claiming grandmother was whipped because of a combination of economic threat to the cattle operation and for her heritage.
[119] "R.H. Hollimon Stock-Raising Homestead Entry, Serial 07740," June 4, 1923, R.H. Hollimon Collection, MDHCA. Hollimon claimed Sec. 8, T. 12N, R.15E, S.B. Meridian. It seems that Hollimon quickly relinquished this entry and refiled for the same on April 1, 1924. It remains unclear why he filed, relinquished, and refiled. The RSLCC contested his use of the norther half of the northwestern quarter of Section 8.
[120] Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company "Re: Serial 07740," to United States Land Office, Independence, CA, March 8, 1925, RHH, MDHCA.

should be cancelled."[121] By relying on existing state-issued water rights but without building a reservoir, the Rock Springs outfit insufficiently demonstrated their use and right to contest Hollimon's claim. Still, the RSLCC protested Hollimon's application for the 40-water bearing acres within his section.[122]

The spurious lawsuit demonstrated the Rock Springs outfit's use of law as a structural constraint on homesteaders. The cattle company argued that their uninterrupted use, the 1919 lawsuit's judgment, and their estimated $640.00 of improvements to the property (including a tunnel, cistern, earthenware reservoir, 400 feet of pipeline, water trough, and camp house) should be sufficient to reject Hollimon's claim.[123] More importantly, the lawsuit placed an undue burden on Hollimon to leave his ranch for court. Writing to the Land Office in Independence, CA, Hollimon claimed both his continuing presence on the land and that the water he had developed was "offered to public use at all times," asserting that to relinquish his right to Clemett Spring would affect other homesteaders who relied on the spring for domestic purposes.[124]

Hollimon saw the protest as another harassment by cattlemen. Casting his legal fight as emblematic of the cattle operation's continual denial of "homesteaders and the public the use of water on the *free* and *open* range," Hollimon accused the 88 of having "harassed and obstructed me in my peaceful efforts of making a living," and offered a signed petition by "residents of this

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[121] J. H. Favorite and General Land Office, Washington, "Re: Independence 07740," March 12, 1925, RHH, MDHCA.
[122] Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company "Re: Independence Serial No. 07740," to United States Land Office, Independence, CA, July 23, 1925, RHH, MDHCA; Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company to United States Land Office, Independence, CA, July 23, 1925, RHH, MDHCA.
[123] "Rock Springs Land & Cattle Co. Application to Contest," August 13, 1925, RHH, MDHCA.
[124] Robert H. Hollimon and General Land Office, Independence, "Re: Visalia Serial 012922," August 27, 1925, RHH, MDHCA. Witness for his claim Harry Ford wrote letters on behalf of the illiterate Hollimon. Harry Ford "Re: Serial 020653," to United States Land Office, Independence, CA, May 20, 1929, RHH, MDHCA.

country" to support his claims against the company.[125] Estimating more than $3,000 in improvements within the disputed 40 acres, Hollimon asserted that "if Plaintiff were to succeed in depriving me of the N ½ of NW ¼ I would lose everything."[126] Although ostensibly targeting access to Clemett Spring, the cattlemen threatened to take all of Hollimon's work. Rather than losing his entire claim, Hollimon instead acquiesced and granted RSLCC access.[127]

Despite Hollimon's acquiescence of the disputed spring, continued court proceedings threatened to undermine Hollimon's decade of development. When the Department of the Interior scheduled a hearing on the RSLCC's protest for May 8, 1928 in Sacramento, Hollimon responded that he was "without funds to attend said meeting at Sacramento, and [had] no money or means with which to produce witnesses thereat," and requested the meeting be moved to nearby Lanfair, CA.[128] On the morning of May 8th, Hollimon telegrammed the local register, "registered US Land Office Sacramento Calif utterly impossible for me to attend hearing. Kindly postpone for hearing later at Lanfair."[129] At the hearing, the RSLCC representative stated their reason for protesting was "not to prevent Hollimon from getting any of the section…we don't want his land, nor his buildings, nor anything like that…we merely want the right of access" to the spring.[130] Although Hollimon has kept the spring available, he had begun to fence in its southern border by spring 1928; the enclosure threatened to reduce the cattle operation's ability

[125] Hollimon and General Land Office, Independence, "Re: Visalia Serial 012922." Emphasis added.
[126] Robert H. Hollimon, "Answer by Contestee, Re: Serial No. 012922," January 20, 1926, RHH, MDHCA.
[127] "R.H. Hollimon Stock-Raising Homestead Final Proof, Serial 020653," May 20, 1929, R.H. Hollimon Collection, MDHCA; "Notice for Publication," *The Needles Desert Star* (Needles, CA), April 12, 1929.
[128] Robert H. Hollimon, "Affidavit of Robert Hollimon in Rock Springs Lands & Cattle Company vs. Robert Hollimon," April 30, 1928, RHH, MDHCA.
[129] Robert H. Hollimon, Western Union telegram to John C. Ing, May 8, 1928, RHH, MDHCA.
[130] "Transcript of Testimony Given and Proceedings Had Upon Hearing of Contest, Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company vs. Robert H. Hollimon," May 8, 1928, RHH, MDHCA.

to get skittish cattle to water as "they are afraid of an enclosure of any kind."[131] Writing a letter of support for the homesteader, Lanfair notary and mercantilist Zachary Farmer described how "Hollimon has most magnanimously given up and fenced his land, giving [the cattle company] access and egress to watering, which the court had unjustly granted them." Despite his concessions, the RSLCC were "again determined on further persecution," and Farmer asserted that "if there ever was a case of downright persecution this is IT."[132] To make the claimant "travel to Sacramento [would] work an awful hardship on him, [to] say nothing as to his inability of bringing witnesses."[133] While the Rock Springs outfit had dozens of employees, including the lawyers and engineers assigned to Hollimon's case, Hollimon stood alone and risked default judgment for non-appearance.[134] Although Farmer's support likely contributed to the scheduling of a second hearing for June 12, 1928, Hollimon faced the same issues of distance and time away from his parcel.

Managing to appear before the June 12th hearing, Hollimon asserted his concern that the protest was intended to deprive him of all his improvements, including his home. To support his claim, in deposition, Hollimon asserted that 88-branded cattle often watered at a trough developed near Clemett Spring, that the northern side of the spring was left unfenced for continued public access, and that to grant the RSLCC's protest would "take [his] house."[135] Land register John C. Ing heard the protest by RSLCC and recommended that the land office cancel N ½ NE ¼ NW ¼ and NE ½ NW ¼ NW ¼ of Section 8, leaving Hollimon's buildings under his

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Zachary C. Farmer to John C. Ing, March 20, 1928, RHH, MDHCA. Original emphasis.
[133] Ibid.
[134] John C. Ing to Zachary C. Farmer, March 22, 1928, RHH, MDHCA.
[135] "Transcript of Testimony Given and Proceedings Had Upon Hearing of Contest, Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company vs. Robert H. Hollimon," June 12, 1928, RHH, MDHCA.

ownership but removing Clemett Spring from his claim.[136] Dispossessed of Clemett Spring, Hollimon filed notice of intention to make final proof "for all of Section 8 with exception of 30 acres" noted in litigation on September 28, 1928. Hollimon relinquished Clemett Spring and instead fenced the southern boundary of the cattle company's watering trough.

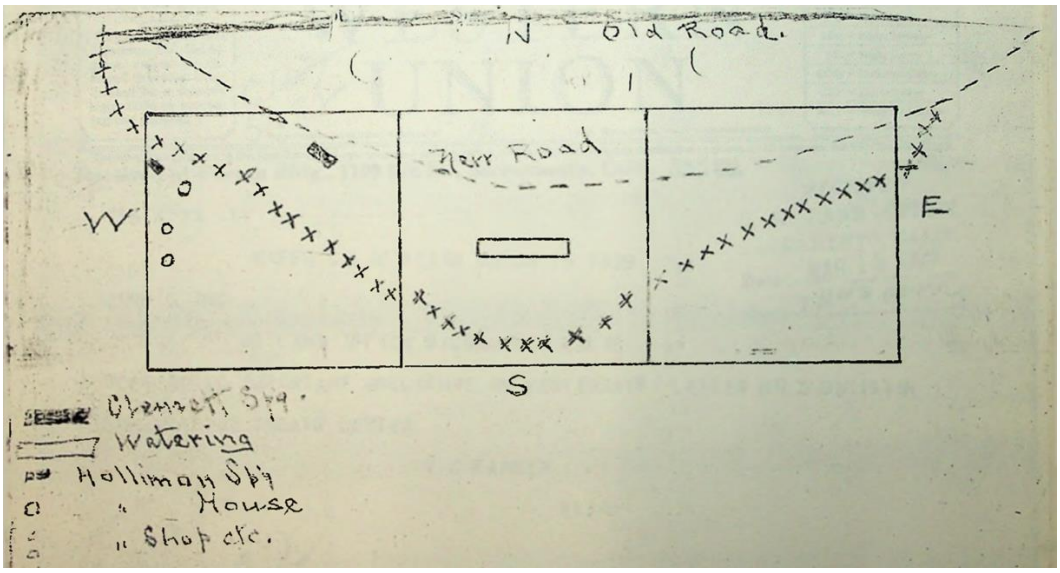


Figure 7: Map of Hollimon's amended property boundaries after RSLCC's protest of his claim on all of Section 8, T.12N, R.15E, SB Meridian. Finalized in April 1929.

Despite its ongoing litigation of Hollimon's ownership of Clemett Spring, the Rock Spring Land and Cattle Company was on the decline. Facing the same drought that limited prospect for homesteading during the 1920s, the cattle operation began to dispose of all waterings on the western side of Round Valley and placed the "whole outfit…on the market." [137] Although the cattle company sought to exhaust Hollimon financially and personally, it could not

[136] John C. Ing, "Rock Springs Land & Cattle Co. vs Robert H. Hollimon, Contest 1682 Re: Serial 020650," July 23, 1928, RHH, pp. 2–3, MDHCA.
[137] Zachary C. Farmer to John C. Ing, March 5, 1929, RHH, MDHCA.

survive "no rain to speak of for over fourteen months."[138] Despite its extensive developments, the Rock Spring outfit proved equally susceptible to the limits of local hydrology.

As the Hollimon and RSLCC shootout and subsequent legal contest demonstrated, cattle operations in the East Mojave saw the desert as a hybrid landscape developed by ranchers for their exclusive benefit. Late to the desert, arriving homesteaders during the 1910s threatened to undo its control of local groundwater, a necessary condition to successfully cattle ranch in the otherwise dry desert. As drought conditions worsened through the 1920s, ranchers found their springs insufficient to provide for the thousands of head ranging the East Mojave. Without rainfall, rich grasslands went barren, leaving cattle starved for both water and feed. Although the Taylor Grazing Act reorganized public land ranching in 1934, environmental conditions had already taken their toll on the most substantial ranch of the East Mojave. By 1931, just six years after the deaths of Burts and Robinson, the Rock Springs was broken into three smaller ranches and faded from a power on the range to a memory of an earlier era of unchecked power by hip-firing cattlemen.[139]

Both ranchers and homesteaders experienced hybrid landscapes that withdrew from available groundwater and undermined their prospects for economic success. Revisiting historical springs in the 1970s, hydrologist Matthew Hall noted evidence "that directed withdrawal affects natural discharge rates at local springs can be seen at sites where spring flow has either ceased or is markedly small in contrast with recorded large flows at the turn of the

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[138] Ibid.

[139][139] In 2007, 854,000 acres of former rangeland was nominated as the "Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company Historic District" under criterion A of the National Historic Preservation Act for its association with the growth of cattle ranching in California. Owens, *Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company*.

century."[140] Across the West, declining water tables have become what anthropologist Lucas Bessire has called "a defining drama of our times."[141] Elsewhere in North America, including recently across Canada, dried wells and empty storage tanks exposed the consequences of unfettered subterranean pumping.[142]

The dropping water table, dissolution of the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company, and abandonment of patented homesteads combined to demonstrate that land-users struggled to find enduring and profitable industry in the desert. Still, a vision for land use underscored the disparate experiences with the East Mojave. The desert may have lacked the water to make it bloom for homesteaders or to maintain large cattle operations, but most early-twentieth century Americans did not yet see the East Mojave as anything more than a difficult place to make a living. The desert needed to be used to be useful.

However, a small cadre of desert writers including Mary Hunter Austin and John C. Van Dyke began to introduce a new, second consideration for southwestern deserts. Instead of a wasteland, Van Dyke's *The Desert* (1901) posited places such as the East Mojave as spaces of profound beauty and emotional value. Austin's collection of essays, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), described the natural rhythms of the desert, how productive industries such as mining needed to coexist harmoniously with nature, and that deserts offered greater-than-human meaning as sites of life where "not the law, but the land" sets the limits for how humans might engage dry spaces.[143] As more Americans moved into the Southwest during and after World War

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[140] Hall, "Appendix 2: Inventory of Spring/Seep Locations in the East Mojave Desert Region," 76.
[141] Lucas Bessire, *Running Out* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 5.
[142] Forrest Pass, "On Drought, Dowsing, and Deep Drilling: Thinking About Groundwater History in an Age of Climate Emergency," *NiCHE*, November 28, 2025, https://niche-canada.org/2025/11/28/on-drought-dowsing-and-deep-drilling-thinking-about-groundwater-history-in-an-age-of-climate-emergency/.
[143] Austin, *The Land of Little Rain*, 3.

I and World War II, many took up Austin and Van Dyke's calls to find that second desert, where humans who lived within nature's rules could find new appreciation for the East Mojave.

CHAPTER THREE

"THERE ARE TWO DESERTS": BUILDING AN ACCESS-BASED CONSERVATIONIST ETHIC

Randall Henderson earned his title of "Mr. Desert."[1] Born into a Quaker community in Clarinda, Iowa in 1888, Henderson first peered out at the desert through the cattle car he rode west to study at the University of Southern California.[2] Unknowingly embarking on a life during which he would help redefine how the United States thought of its driest spaces, Henderson came to Southern California for a degree but also to investigate which stories of the desert rang true.

Until the turn of the twentieth century, Americans had almost exclusively written about deserts as obstacles to overcome. John C. Frémont described the arid and inland West as "dismal to look upon," an empty landscape "from which the boldest traveller [sic] turned away in despair."[3] Zebulon Pike and others posited deserts as good for little more than Indian territory.[4] Mark Twain wrote of "aching monotony" in a place best traveled when anaesthetized, where his "enthusiasm, this stern thirst for adventure, wilted under the sultry August sun."[5] By the end of the nineteenth century, a westward flow of settlers encouraged by advancements in underground

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[1] In Palm Desert, plaques commemorate Randall Henderson along with his brother Clifford ("Mr. Palm Desert"), who played a crucial role in the birth of the now-bustling desert town. Lawyer and avocational historian John Fraim remarked, "The two designations for the brothers are appropriate. Clifford Henderson promoted his town in the desert while Randall always promoted just the desert."

[2] J. Wilson McKenney, *Desert Editor: The Story of Randall Henderson and Palm Desert* (Wilmac Press, 1972), 1–2.

[3] John Charles Frémont, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont*, ed. Donald Dean Jackson and Mary Lee Spence (University of Illinois Press, 1970), 670–71. For more on Frémont in the deserts of the Southwest, see Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Desert Passages: Encounters with the American Deserts* (UNM Press, 1985), 25–44.

[4] Limerick, *Desert Passages*, 16–17.

[5] Ibid., 63–66; Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Harper, 1913), 142.

pumping, irrigation, and drought-resistant seeds resulted in what William Ellsworth Smythe described as a conquest, and hopefully an eradication, of arid America.[6]

Having read alternative visions for the arid Southwest, Henderson surely hoped that Smythe's prediction for an end of American deserts was misplaced. Henderson embraced John Wesley Powell's vision of deserts as livable spaces, Clarence King's depictions of arid spaces as sublime and bracing, and Charles Fletcher Lummis' tramping journal that emphasized deserts as spiritually restorative and culturally rich.[7] By the turn of the twentieth century, a new wave of writers began to redefine deserts not as obstacles but as places where humans could find their truer selves. John C. Van Dyke's *The Desert* emphasized the visual perception of dry spaces and redefined presumed wastelands into places of sublime beauty, even if appreciating that beauty came at bodily risk.[8] Mary Hunter Austin challenged the idea of the Great American Desert as an empty place to overcome and instead described how humans and desert springs, birds, and seeds created a morally charged landscape through constant interaction.[9] A budding journalist when he arrived in Los Angeles, Henderson embraced both Van Dyke's and Austin's reshaping of deserts as meaningful landscapes worth celebrating, touching, and respecting. He committed his life to elevating this second desert that welcomed its mindful visitors.

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[6] William E. Smythe, *The Conquest of Arid America* (The MacMillan Company, 1899); Limerick, *Desert Passages*, 77.

[7] John Wesley Powell, *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States* (Government Printing Office, 1879); Clarence King, *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872; J.B. Lippincott Company, 1963); Charles F. Lummis, *A Tramp Across the Continent* (C. Scribner's Sons, 1892; repr., University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 255–63. Although Lummis is generally complementary to the deserts of the Southwest, he described the passage through today's Mojave National Preserve as "the worst of it."

[8] Limerick, *Desert Passages*, 99–100. Van Dyke wondered at the desert's self-defenses: "It is remarkable how Nature…arms both offence and defence [sic]…They have no idea of dying without a struggle. You will find every one of them admirably fitted to endure. They are marvellous [sic] engines of resistance." John Charles Van Dyke, *The Desert; Further Studies in Natural Appearances* (Scribner, 1901), 84.

[9] Austin, *The Land of Little Rain*.

Henderson founded *Desert Magazine* in 1936 to share the idea that deserts deserved engagement, enjoyment, and respect. First focused on the modern conveniences of living in the arid parts of the West, over the next twenty years, Henderson and his magazine embraced and promoted an access-based conservationist ethic developed through engagement. Between the late 1930s and late 1950s, *Desert* redefined arid landscapes from expendable spaces into places valued for recreation, community, and moral renewal. Henderson and fellow desert enthusiasts saw deserts as places to recapture an important American connection to landscapes that offered both refuge and challenge – testing individuals and their technologies, alike. Shaped by experiences in World War II and the widespread postwar adoption of four-wheel-drive vehicles in the backcountry, a regionally specific conservationist movement argued not for the roadless wilderness advocated by groups like the Wilderness Society, but for access. As roadlessness became central to most Americans' understanding of public lands, four-wheel-drive vehicles offered a means of engaging comparably undeveloped places. As interaction shaped an ethic, that ethic seeded a regionally distinctive strain of environmentalism.

The Birth of Desert Magazine

The heat of the cattle car he took to California in August 1907 was a warm welcome to the West about which Randall Henderson had read so much. Traveling in the peak of summer, Henderson survived the multiday ride and embraced that hard travel could be worthwhile. Over the next four years, as he studied economics and sociology at the University of Southern California, Henderson took many trips to the desert backcountry, finding joy in places that made him sweat. Developing as a journalist, Henderson first worked as a sportswriter for the *Los Angeles Times* through school. Immediately after graduating in 1911, Henderson accepted a

position at the *Parker Post* in western Arizona.[10] By 1915, he owned half of the *Blythe Herald*, then under his editorship. A capable and artful writer, Henderson planted a toehold in publishing by covering Southern California's desert spaces.

World War I temporarily slowed his ambitions. Although Henderson's Quaker mother instilled a religious hatred for violence in her son, he enlisted in the Army Air Service in early 1918 and completed his flight training after the conflict's end, earning his discharge in March 1919, at the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Army Reserve.[11] Although it put his publishing on hold, that year in the service also prepared Henderson for postwar adventures.

Returning to civilian life, Henderson barnstormed across the Desert West for two years in local real estate agent Ralph Seeley's military surplus airplane.[12] On May 7, 1920, Henderson landed the Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" in Las Vegas, Nevada, marking the first time an airplane had arrived in the small railroad town.[13] Historian Joseph Corn described how airplanes "shrank…continents," and Henderson first appreciated both the vastness and diversity of places like the East Mojave, Great Basin, and Four Corners from the sky.[14] Historian of technology David Nye wrote that early-twentieth century pilots such as Henderson experienced "miniaturized landscape[s]" that elevated an American sense of the sublime.[15] Seeing that which

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[10] Henderson worked part-time as a reporter with the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Parker Post* during and immediately after his time at USC. For more on Henderson, see McKenney, *Desert Editor: The Story of Randall Henderson and Palm Desert*.
[11] Henderson was also "scornful of intemperance…never touched alcohol, ate simply, and detested the cigarette habit which claimed him most of his life." Ibid., 6.
[12] Phil Brigandi, "Randall Henderson and the Rise and Fall of Desert Magazine," *The Branding Iron*, no. 246 (Winter 2006): 3.
[13] Mark Hall-Patton, "Aviation History Museum Opens Phase II," *Jetblast: Las Vegas, McCarran International Airport* 5, no. 6 (1994): 1, 3.
[14] Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 14.
[15] David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (MIT Press, 1994), 199.

earlier explorers and travelers could only piece together, imagine, and draw on maps, Henderson's time in the air reoriented him within a landscape that was seemingly both enormous and shrinking.[16]

Henderson resolved to find all the small crooks and canyons that faded into shadows from the sky. After Seeley learned to fly, Henderson and a partner purchased the *Calexico Chronicle*, and spent the next decade publishing and hiking, horse-packing, and driving around the desert county along and across the border between Mexico and the United States. Being up-close mattered.

Through his first decade in California, Henderson learned about the United States' desert lands and peoples directly. A short-lived position with the Land Office found Henderson marking 10-acre allotments in the Colorado Indian Reservation at Parker, AZ.[17] Henderson's work at the Land office introduced him to traditional lifeways of the Mohave and Chemehuevi, instilling a lifelong appreciation for the Southwest's Indigenous peoples that he would carry and promote through his various publications. Hiking in the desert backcountry, Henderson learned about desert flora, fauna, and geology, and developed an understanding of what scientists would later call ecology.[18] Driving over granitic boulders and through loose sand drifts, he saw the desert's quiet canyons, photographed its wildlife, and began to imagine a publication devoted to the distinctive beauty and excitement offered by the nature and lore of dry spaces.

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[16] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the East in the Western Imagination* (The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 209–11.
[17] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *Desert Magazine* (henceforth, *DM*) 5, no. 11 (1942): 38.
[18] McKenney, *Desert Editor: The Story of Randall Henderson and Palm Desert*, 165. McKinney described Henderson's "consuming interest: illustrations of natural balance as life cycles, and the urgent need to preserve these places for man's survival."

By the early 1930s, Henderson had established the *Calexico Chronicle* as a regional paper of note. He continued to grow with his appreciation for arid landscapes, open vistas, and the alluring yet prickly flora of the Mojave, Sonoran, Great Basin, and Chihuahuan deserts. A young journalist, J. Wilson McKenney, joined the *Chronicle* in 1930 and took up a column on "Little Journeys on the Desert."[19] Plodding around in his 1925 Chevy, "Ol' Breezy," Henderson often joined McKenney on his weekly travels into the backcountry, sharing stories of ghost towns, lost mines, and old-time prospectors by campfire.[20]

Coming to be a backcountry expert, Henderson took trips with his teenage son, Rand, through the peaks and valleys of California's Sierra Nevada, northern Arizona, and the Colorado River Valley. The Hendersons climbed peaks in the San Gorgonio and San Jacinto ranges, slept atop Mt. Whitney, and summitted Mt. Lassen. The elder Henderson envisioned his son taking over as a future partner and successor in the publishing business.

Henderson and McKenney imagined a magazine that would publish articles on the virtues, adventures, and opportunities provided by desert living and recreating. During a 1936 camping trip in the Santa Rosa mountains, the editor and journalist agreed to divest their holdings and resign their positions. They committed themselves to a magazine on the American West's less-watered places.

In its first full-run issue, *Desert Magazine* offered a fresh, positive perspective on the American deserts.[21] Rather than seeing most of the Southwest as "a grim desolate wasteland"

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[19] J. Wilson McKenney, "Little Journeys on the Desert: Valley Beautiful," *Calexico Chronicle* (Calexico, CA), January 3, 1931. McKenney published his "Little Journeys" on a variety of desert places, including Yuma Prison, Petrified Forest, and Imperial Sand Hills. Thanks to University of California-Riverside's Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research for making the *Calexico Chronicle* available.
[20] McKenney, *Desert Editor: The Story of Randall Henderson and Palm Desert*, 70–73.
[21] Although *DM* focused its coverage on the four major North American Deserts, the Sonoran, Great Basin, Chihuahuan, and Mojave, it also explored arid-land subregions including eastern Oregon and the Colorado desert.

and "damnable country," as did many Americans unfamiliar with these spaces, this new magazine would offer a window into "the real Desert." Henderson's first editorial, "There Are Two Deserts," instead embraced its bounty:

> the Desert offers rare gifts: health-giving sunshine—a sky that is studded with diamonds—a breeze that bears no poison—a landscape of pastel colors such as no artist can duplicate—thorn-covered plants which during countless ages have clung tenaciously to life… each season sends forth blossoms of exquisite coloring as a symbol of courage that has triumphed over terrifying obstacles.[22]

Henderson promised more than its beauty, but also that the desert could offer friendship, give courage, and relax troubled minds. Recalling John C. Van Dyke, Henderson's editorial signaled that this "second desert," this immovable, seemingly unchanging landscape could elastically afford its visitors and inhabitants all that they needed.

Desert Magazine guided readers through the various landscapes of the Southwest. Launching with 600 charter members receiving copies produced in El Centro, CA, *Desert*'s first issue offered a taste of its future coverage: biographies of notable desert locals, coverage of distinctive Native traditions, legends of lost mines and miners, scenic photographs, stories of Army expeditions and misadventures, and hand-drawn maps with accompanying stories of romps across the Southwest. Not in the market for fictional stories "in which the hero carries a gun on each hip and speaks a language which was invented in Hollywood," *Desert* hoped to "impart…some of the courage, the tolerance, and the friendliness of our desert" by rooting itself in wide and knowledgeable coverage.[23]

The magazine opened a new market for desert writers and experts. Botanist Mary Beal, whose fieldwork focused primarily in the East Mojave, offered field photographs and

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[22] Randall Henderson and J. Wilson McKenney, "There Are Two Deserts (Editorial)," *DM* 1, no. 1 (1937): 5.
[23] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 1, no. 1 (1937): 38.

descriptions of rare desert plants, including seasonal wildflower predictions in the area that is today Mojave National Preserve.[24] Geologist John Hilton used commonplace language to describe the specific collecting sites, tools, and practices of an ethical rockhound. Naturalist Dr. Edmund C. Jaeger presented precise but flowing descriptions of rare desert flora and fauna, often connected with his own academic research and publications.[25] A lifelong, vocal, and proud Arizonan, future presidential candidate Barry Goldwater contributed copy and photographs from the Grand Canyon State's lesser-known backcountry sites.[26]

Desert provided readers with images and stories from the land and its people, and thus demystified the nation's dry regions. The desert scared Americans because few knew what it could be. Representative of the magazine's coverage of arid landscapes across the West, *Desert* highlighted relatively unknown places in the eastern Mojave Desert, including lands that make up today's Mojave National Preserve.

In 1939 Henderson traveled to an area just north of Foshay Pass in the Providence Mountains to visit the Mitchell Caverns. He found an attraction worth celebrating. Suggesting to his readers that the caverns offered something for all, including "motor tourists who have come to see the weird formations in the limestone caverns," "bug-hunters or botanists," and the "many

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[24] For a few examples of Beal using fieldwork and photographs from within the boundaries of today's Mojave National Preserve, see Mary Beal, "Feathery Dusters for Desert Fairies," *DM* 5, no. 6 (1942): 29; Mary Beal, "Wild Daisies of the Desert," *DM* 6, no. 3 (1943): 16; Mary Beal, "Nuts for the Native Larder," *DM* 6, no. 7 (1943): 17; Mary Beal, "Desert's Scarlet Buglers," *DM* 7, no. 7 (1944): 17; Mary Beal, "They Like a Rocky Terrain," *DM* 15, no. 7 (1952): 22. Thank you to the Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association (MDHCA) for access to Beal's papers and photographs.

[25] Dr. Jaeger's *Desert Wild Flowers* was a seminal work in California desert botany. His work in the East Mojave included differentiating between the Preserve's short, bushier Joshua Trees from the tall, spider-like Joshua Trees that lend their name to Joshua Tree National Park. His name is affixed to Mojave National Preserve's variant, *Yucca brevifolia* var. *jaegeriana*. Edmund C. Jaeger, *Desert Wild Flowers* (Stanford University Press, 1940).

[26] Phil Brigandi, "It Is Late But We Must Never Forget a Faithful, Powerful Friend," *The Sand Paper (Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association)*, February 1988, 4–5.

[who] drive long distances just to enjoy the quiet and freedom of the desert outdoors," Henderson glowed over the "beauty and symmetry of nature's handiwork" and local Chemehuevi ruins.[27] Excepting local game-hunters, as the Mitchells "rebel at the thought of killing for mere sport," all were welcome to the caverns and campground spread across Mitchell's twenty claims in the Providence Mountains. Mitchell claimed thousands of annual visitors and Henderson anticipated thousands more as the nation became familiar with the geologic oddity and unrivaled hospitality of desert people. Stories from other nearby places, such as what is now the Hole-in-the-Wall campground in the Preserve, brought familiarity to an unknown reach of East Mojave.[28] *Desert* made the East Mojave familiar in other, less direct ways. Letters to the editor often mentioned today's preserve, including a claim by Jim Ford of Banning, California, that he may have found the largest Joshua Tree ever measured in the foothills west of the New York Mountains.[29] The East Mojave, and other desert regions like it, were special.

Despite its celebration of fragile and unique spaces, *Desert* did not shun the commodity producers who worked there. Henderson joined the Sierra Club for its expedition up Mount Charleston for *Desert*'s inaugural issue, but evolving conservationist positions did not dominate its pages.[30] As proto-environmentalists challenged the primacy of best-use conservation and instead sought to center the aesthetic and intangible value of interacting with seemingly pristine areas, *Desert*'s letters to the editor balanced the opinions of often-local commodity producers

[27] Randall Henderson, "They Guard the Caves in Providence Mountains," *DM* 2, no. 5 (1939): 23–25.
[28] Walter Ford, "We Camped in Banshee Canyon," *DM* 4, no. 4 (1941): 7–10.
[29] "Letters to Editor," *DM* 5:8, June 1942, 2.
[30] Randall Henderson, "Looking Down from Nevada's 12,000-Foot Oasis," *DM* 1, no. 1 (1937): 12–13.

against often-urban recreationists who eyed spaces as parks.[31] As technological innovations expanded the diversity of lifestyles in the Southwest, Henderson and the editorial board at *Desert* knew to open a tent to both rural commodity producers and urban and suburban recreationists.

Advertising Modernity in Hot Places

To draw readers from seemingly oppositional viewpoints, *Desert* published on what united them. The desert was rich and readers could find whatever value they assigned it in *Desert*'s pages. Promoting the increased water availability of western communities could help prospective farmers and city-dwellers alike. Comfortable new housing plans equipped with evaporative coolers solved the desert's greatest obstacle, heat, while turning its perceived backwardness and lack of sophistication into part of its regional charm.

McKenney and Henderson sought to both set the region apart and bring the United States' arid places closer to the rest of the nation. *Desert* demystified arid spaces and the lives that could be lived within them. Importantly, technological innovations and the Depression-onward movement of goods, labor, and funds into the West, and California specifically, empowered *Desert* to describe arid and established urban areas as equally welcoming.

Regionally specific housing plans elevated a landscape defined by its frontier identity. Historian of the American West David Wrobel argued that western towns embraced a distinctive frontier identity by the 1890s.[32] John Findlay showed that frontier aesthetics dominated western towns and cities by the 1930s as rising municipalities such as Las Vegas utilized rustic, Old-West

[31] Debates over Anza-Borrego State Park, for example, received substantial ink. Some feared that a park would close off commercial opportunities and limit access to the backcountry. Proponents of the park feared what increasingly congested Southern California might lose if industry damaged its recreative release valve.
[32] David M. Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (University Press of Kansas, 2002), 121–28.

themes in marketing campaigns.[33] Builders cemented a frontier identity into the region's architecture.

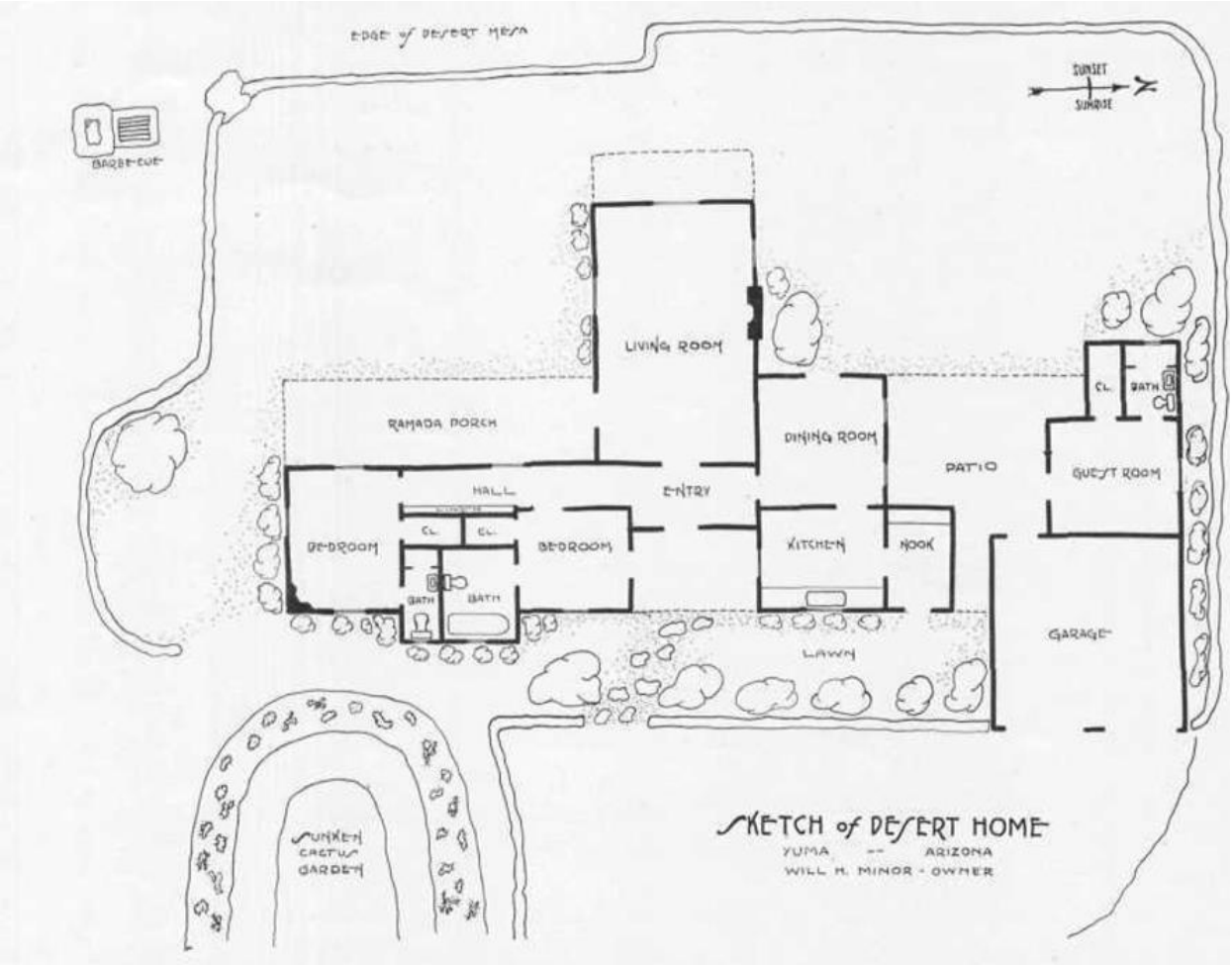


Figure 8: *Desert* highlighted the floor plans that emphasized natural light and air circulation.

Architects developed regionally distinctive plans for single-family homes that emphasized the bright light, clean air, and sweeping vistas of desert landscapes. In its second issue, *Desert* promoted the adobe home as ideal for desert landscapes. Associated with the

[33] Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000*, 83.

pueblos of New Mexico, the Adobe became popular across the Southwest. In 1937, *Desert* published a two-page spread, including a floorplan sketch of one Adobe in Yuma, Arizona.

Not only could the local cacti and creosote make for beautiful lawn features, but a design emphasis on free air circulation, natural light, and large outdoor living areas highlighted the desert's natural advantages.[34] A few years later, *Desert* advertised the *New Mexico Home Plan Book*, an "answer to many letters…inquiring as to where information may be obtained regarding pueblo architecture."[35] Relishing, if patronizing, "one of the finest contributions of the American Indian," *Desert* celebrated both the keeping of distinctive western traditions and the rise of infrastructure to propel arid living into a new age of comfort and plenty.

Crucial to solving livability concerns, water development projects provided upstart communities with previously unknown levels of security. Environmental historian Donald Worster argued that the West shifted from somewhere foreign and dangerous to "a theatre" for visions of modernity.[36] Through the construction of massive concrete dams and establishment of irrigation districts throughout the West, a previously unlivable landscape welcomed millions of new residents but at cost to local ecologies.

Western and environmental historians have written extensively on the effects of twentieth century water development.[37] Some saw the manipulation of water resources as the chief mechanism for creating a distinctive form of capitalism in the American West. Worster argued

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[34] James Gerald, "Adobe Home Typifies True Western Design," *DM* 1, no. 2 (1937): 25–26. Although *DM* might have been the most widely read coverage on the popularizing of adobe homes, other periodicals similarly covered their convenience and refined aesthetic: A. B. Lee, "Building with Rammed Earth," *Coronet*, June 1937, Adobe buildings, item a, MDHCA; Anthony M. Merrill, "Earth Blocks by 'Puddling,'" *The American Home*, June 1937, Adobe buildings, item b, MDHCA.
[35] *DM* 4:4 (Feb. 1941), 35; George Fitzpatrick, ed., *The New Mexico Home Plan Book* (Santa Fe Press, 1940).
[36] Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*, 77.
[37] For instructive examples of how water projects are might be considered natural or unnatural, see Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*; White, *The Organic Machine*.

that the technological and economic order imposed by midcentury water developments created a "hydraulic society, which is to say, a social order based on the intensive, large-scale manipulation of water and its products in an arid setting," creating a hierarchical system ruled by a power elite based on the ownership of capital and expertise.[38] Other historians focused on the specific ecological costs of water development. Phil Garone demonstrated that the Central Valley Project contributed to toxic drainage problems in California.[39] Others, yet, framed western water developments as part of an existential crisis for the region's economic and environmental sustainability. Essayist Charles Bowden described western water projects as robbing "Peter to pay Paul, stolen from the future to sustain the lusty appetites of the present."[40] Marc Reiner warned that the midcentury growth of irrigation districts, dam projects, and underground pumping explained the American West's disappearing water.[41]

Despite some historians' reservations about western water projects' long-term viability, for early-twentieth century arrivals and prospective settlers in the West, new lives demanded new water sources. For those living and investing in the development of young desert towns and cities, water could not come quickly enough, and regional boosters wanted to reassure a thirsty public. Nearly every issue for its first five years featured a major water development project, water developer, or a highlight of the fast reclamation of the West's arid lands. In one instance, *Desert* published a news bulletin celebrating thirty-two active projects across twelve western states. Anticipating 2,500,000 acres of irrigable land capable of supporting more than 31,000

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[38] Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*, 7.
[39] Philip Garone, *The Fall and Rise of the Wetlands of California's Great Central Valley* (University of California Press, 2011), 203.
[40] Charles Bowden, *Killing the Hidden Waters* (University of Texas Press, 1977), x.
[41] Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (Penguin Books, 1993).

farmsteads, *Desert* suggested there would be water for continued growth.[42] Targeting an increasingly educated and wealthy readership, *Desert* posited that both desert cities and the countryside would quickly bloom with newly harnessed water resources.[43] Once water seemed secure, those in and for the desert shifted their focus from surviving to living well.

The rapid development and deployment of evaporative ("swamp") coolers across the driest subregions of the West during the 1930s provided simple, affordable, and effective management of extreme heat. An ancient technology, evaporative coolers relied on drawing air into a room through or over a water source. During the Spanish era of the Southwest, traditional evaporative cooling practices involved wrapping layers of burlap within and around a pot of water at a window. This simple design helped interior spaces to remain livable, even during the oppressive heat of mid-summer.

During the 1930s, evaporative cooling technology advanced to a general design still followed today. Connected to a waterline, swamp coolers have a small reservoir with a water pump at their bottom. Running through rubber tubes, water is drawn up to the top of the unit, where it reaches a tray that distributes water evenly across a collection of large, cardboard-like pads that absorb and hold water. A fan is attached to the backside of these wetted pads, and through evaporation, damp, cool air can be drawn into interior spaces. Because they rely on adding humidity, these machines work best during dry months and lose nearly all effectiveness during the humid monsoon season.[44]

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[42] "Millions of Acres Now Being Reclaimed," *DM* 2, no. 5 (1939): 26.
[43] "Here Are the Answers," *DM* 2, no. 5 (1939): 26. In its annual survey for 1938, *Desert* found the median subscriber's household income to be $4,000, well above the national median of $1530. "Doctors, lawyers, engineers" and other professionals predominated their survey respondents.
[44] Jeffrey Cook, *Cool Houses for Desert Suburbs: Optimizing Heating & Cooling for Arizona's Builders* (Arizona Solar Energy Research Commission, 1979), https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/102321.

Desert was quick to promote newly improved evaporative coolers. Consecutive issues published early in the summer of 1939 trumpeted the success of swamp coolers.[45] James H. Collins wrote that thanks to advances in evaporative cooling technology, "today the average home and workshop on the desert are more comfortable places in June and July and August than dwellings in milder zones."[46] Although not as cooling as more energy-intensive refrigerated air conditioning, swamp coolers could quickly lower a room's temperature by twenty degrees with much less energy consumed.

Swamp coolers offered auxiliary benefits beyond their ability to cool and dampen the hot and dry air. Although ceiling- and window-mounted residential units came to dominate the market, early portable units were "silent, and good-looking–like a piece of furniture." Improving on the already clean desert air, the engineering behind the new types of evaporative coolers "washed the air as well, freeing it from dust, dirt, pollen, and other foreign matter, especially from the invisible things that cause hay fever, asthma, and other disorders."[47] Two one-third-page advertisements adjoined the article, for Wagner Evaporative Cooling Fans and the Defiance Fan Co. Ocean Breeze Cooler, respectively.[48] Relatively affordable, the machines could greatly improve one's comfort for "about the cost of an electric refrigerator."[49]

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[45] Evaporative coolers are also known as swamp coolers because early examples would quickly become overrun with bugs and fungi, making it smell "like a swamp." "Evaporative Coolers," accessed October 11, 2024, https://www.library.pima.gov/content/evaporative-coolers.
[46] James H. Collins, "Cooling the Desert Air," *DM* 2, no. 7 (1939): 29.
[47] Ibid., 30.
[48] Defiance Fan Co., advertisement, *DM*, May 1939, 31; Wagner Electric Corporation, advertisement, *Desert* May 1939, 31. The Ocean Breeze claimed "NO clogging of the waterline with wood particles…NO sagging pads…NO Musty Odor…No Pup Troubles," encouraging prospective customers to "be sure to see this Advanced Model of Positively Odorless Comfort."
[49] Collins, "Cooling the Desert Air," 31.

Desert posited evaporative coolers as an affordable and efficient solution to overwhelming heat. A month after Collins' lauding of evaporative coolers, "qualified engineer" L.G. Tandberg wrote a follow-up article describing the inner-workings of evaporative coolers. Tandberg colored evaporative coolers as just another among the suddenly ubiquitous home appliances of the midcentury United States:

> Considering that most persons who are prospects for evaporative coolers now own automobiles, radios, electric refrigerators, and many have electric ranges, it seems reasonable that such persons would be willing to pay a reasonable price of say $200, or thereabouts for something that will give the measure of comfort and health that a well-designed, well-constructed evaporative type cooler will provide.[50]

Swamp coolers domesticated the desert without erasing its frontier identity, allowing cities like Las Vegas and Phoenix to comfortably host hundreds of thousands of new arrivals by 1960.[51]

The popularizing of the swamp cooler signaled a monumental change in western living. Arizona historian Bob Cunningham claimed, "if discovery of gold in California caused the greatest westward migration in our history, the invention of the swamp cooler did almost as well."[52] Swamp coolers' wide and relatively affordable application made arrivals' lives more

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[50] L. D. Tandberg, "More Efficient Coolers for Desert Homes," *DM* 2, no. 8 (1939): 33. Per the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator, Tandberg's $200 in June 1939 would be valued at $4,600 in 2024, accessed October 15, 2024, https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl. Today, a window-mounted evaporative cooler for a 1,200 square-foot home would cost about $1,000.

[51] Las Vegas grew by 8000% between 1910 and 1960, increasing from 800 residents in 1910 to 64,405 by 1960, doubling approximately every 8 years during that span. The construction of Boulder (Hoover) Dam, the growth of defense-related industries around its suburbs, such as Henderson, NV., and the transformation from frontier railroad town to *Viva Las Vegas* drew thousands of new residents and spawned America's most infamous tourist town. Phoenix grew from 11,314 residents in 1910 to 439,170 in 1960. U.S. Census Bureau 2015, Annual Population Estimates. Accessed through City of Las Vegas planning office and statistics center, https://files.lasvegasnevada.gov/planning/statistics/Cities-Population-1910-to-2015.pdf. For information on the growth of Henderson, see *DM* 6:9 (July 1943), 31; for more on Phoenix, its energy systems, and the development of the urban Southwest, see Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

[52] Bob Cunningham, "The Box That Broke the Barrier: The Swamp Cooler Comes to Southern Arizona," *Journal of Arizona History* 26, no. 2 (1985): 164.

comfortable. Simple yet effective management of the desert heat opened America's warmest landscapes to year-round habitation.

Before World War II, *Desert* balanced arid western landscapes' environmental distinctiveness with the increasing comfort provided by modern conveniences. Regionally specific housing plans elevated natural advantages while water projects provided security for another century of development. Swamp coolers provided ten months of relief from the desert heat for the home, workshop, and office. With their most hazardous conditions beaten back, *Desert*'s editorial board projected, the arid lands of the United States fell within national standards of living but also offered distinctive advantages. Against the image of desert homes as comfortable and in-step with national norms, the distinctive openness, scenery, and recreational potential positioned the desert as having the conveniences of any home but with the adventures of the frontier.[53] If one had read only *Desert* magazine between 1937 and 1941, all seemed to be looking up in the world.

War, Militarization and the Desert as Moral Refuge

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 reoriented life in the West and around the nation. *Desert*'s coverage shifted throughout the war years, with much of its staff affected by military mobilization. The war changed how Henderson and the staff envisioned their celebrated landscape, shifting it from another valuable if underappreciated space to a refuge for a world thrown into disarray. The arming of American deserts worried both commodity producers

[53] The staff at *Desert* often invoked frontier language. As Frederick Jackson Turner had imagined in 1893, Henderson and his journalists used frontier language to describe the hardening and virtuous experiences of desert living. In that first editorial, "There are Two Deserts," Henderson and McKenney called arid lands in the West "the last great frontier."

and recreationists, as the military's frequent applications for larger training grounds squeezed the relatively few open spaces. As World War II intensified both the desert's use and meaning, *Desert Magazine* fought for the Southwest's quiet places in a loud and bleeding world.

Desert did its best to focus on civilian life during World War II. The February 1942 issue, the first issue to acknowledge the United States joining the global conflict, instigated its readers to hold *Desert* as a place away from war and catastrophe. Henderson swore to readers that "the war will not change the editorial content of our magazine." Seeing the war as inevitable when virtues of democracy and freedom came under threat, he positioned the deserts of the Desert West (and his friendly *Desert Magazine*) as both the source of higher virtues and a salve for a world seemingly torn in half.[54]

Henderson hoped to inspire war-weary citizens and soldiers with the timelessness and peacefulness of the American desert. In places such as the East Mojave, "the desert will still be here–long after this generation of men has finished its stabbing and shooting–and here, better than anywhere else on the face of the earth, human beings may come to regain that understanding which is so essential to the perpetuation of peace on earth."[55] Overlooking the previous hundred years of often-brutal history between American and Indigenous peoples in the United States' arid spaces, Henderson set the desert aside as a place that would remain safe.[56]

With that view of the desert close to his heart, Henderson swore to uphold arid regions' natural peacefulness for his readers. Henderson offered a complex vision for West that could

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[54] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 5, no. 4 (1942): 58.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Historians have written extensively on violence in the American West. See Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*; Ostler, *Surviving Genocide*; Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*; White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*.

both denigrate subaltern populations, slip into environmental determinism, and castigate the white-majority population and government for insufficiently accepting that there could be "integrity and goodwill in every race – just as there are scoundrels in every breed of men."[57] Uncomfortable with how quickly nations seemed to turn to bloodshed, *Desert* focused on spaces free from violence.

However, by early 1942, the war affected *Desert* in subtle ways. Letters to the editor mentioned *Desert* as the entertainment missed most in Honolulu's nighttime blackout zone, or as essential reading for a "fellow who is stuck on a submarine."[58] Small columns would support the military's mission to encourage guayule or milkweed plants for rubber production.[59] "Just Between You and Me," Henderson's monthly editorial, patriotically embraced the inconveniences of war for recreationists, including that tire restrictions might limit rockhounding in the arid backcountry, seeing that "the government plays no favorites–it is going to be just as tough for me as it is for you."[60] *Desert* echoed President Roosevelt's recognition that outdoor recreation might counter war-weariness and suggested that the war might bring more travelers to the often-overlooked region.[61] However, neither desert locals nor the publishers of *Desert* could ignore the scale by which the military reoriented arid lands for training maneuvers.

California's desert country offered "probably the largest and best training ground in the United States."[62] A month after Pearl Harbor, the War Plans Division of the War Department

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[57] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," 1942; Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 5, no. 11 (1942): 38.
[58] "Letters to Editor," *DM* 5:5, Mar. 1942, 29; "Letters to Editor," *DM* 5:7, May 1942, 28.
[59] "Desert Climate Best for Guayule Plant," *DM* 5, no. 5 (1942): 30; "Rubber Plants Suggested," *DM* 5, no. 6 (1942): 38.
[60] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 5, no. 5 (1942): 46.
[61] "President's Statement Clarifies Problem," *DM* 5, no. 7 (1942): 27.
[62] Gen. George S. Patton in George W. Howard, "The Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area," *The Journal of Arizona History* 26, no. 3 (1985): 274.

General Staff called for training in desert warfare in preparation for combat in northern Africa. Charged with organizing desert training grounds, Major General George S. Patton, Jr. selected a 10,000 square mile strip of land starting at Needles, California on Colorado River and stretching across the Mojave Desert to Desert Center, California.[63]

The Mojave Desert offered a bounty of training landscapes. Sand dunes, rocky peaks, freezing nights, sweltering days; all would prepare soldiers for the North African theatre. With its limited civilian populations, the Army freely cut new roads across the fragile desert floor and fired anti-aircraft shells without concern. Troops hardened in the Desert Training Center landed in northern Africa in summer 1942.

As the war effort expanded, so did the training operation. By October 1943, the Center was enlarged to more than 50,000 square miles, ranging from Pomona to Phoenix and Yuma to Boulder City. With more than a dozen active camps, the military dominated Southern California's desert region, and the aptly named town of Desert Center was briefly one of California's larger population centers, with more than 191,000 military members at its peak in late 1943.[64] The mobilization for World War II physically reoriented the West, especially in California and Nevada, with large swaths of land converted to military zones and training areas with minimal regard for the environmental costs to the landscapes in use.[65] Training units left lasting marks on the desert. Still visible to archaeologists during the summer of 2024, Armored Division units practicing tank maneuvers left deep tread marks from their heavy-tracked

[63] Howard, "The Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area."
[64] Ibid., 283.
[65] Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000*, 21–23.

vehicles.[66] Rock-alignments denoting airstrips and camp layouts remained visible to desert hikers near Goffs, California, legacies of when the Mojave was put to service for the nation.

Although witnessing the destruction and closure of valued desert spaces, Henderson avoided discouragement and rooted himself and his readers within the desert's perceived timelessness. The desert could survive as it always had:

> As for the desert itself, dismiss the idea that these military encampments and rolling tanks will take from the desert any of the things you and I prize so highly. No army in the world can rob us of gorgeous sunsets…or millions of acres of mountain and mesa where countless millions of tiny seeds rest snug and safe beneath the surface waiting for next season's rains. This is a big, big desert, and Nature spent millions of years creating it. In the Great Plan of the Universe, this war among men is but a trivial incident.[67]

There was enough desert to go around, for the rockhound, the Army, and the easterner dreaming of open spaces. *Desert*, like the places it celebrated, would endure. Through the war years, rockhounding, luddite living, and stories of lost mines kept readers grounded and reassured.

Still, by the end of 1942, the war began eating away at *Desert*'s staff. In May, photographer and travel journalist Hulbert Burroughs enlisted. Barry Goldwater "who [had] contributed both feature copy and photographs to Desert," entered as a lieutenant in the air service.[68] Rand Henderson joined the Marines in June 1942. Writer Paul Wilhelm left the staff for the Army in November, and in December, Randall Henderson announced his own departure for service in Africa, leaving Lucile Harris as managing editor. He promised to continue writing his monthly editorial, and to keep it as far from the war as possible.[69]

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[66] ICF Inc., "Arcadian Span 4," prepared for Arcadian Fiber Optic, forthcoming.
[67] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 7, no. 5 (1944): 38.
[68] *DM* 5:7, May 1942, 28, 30. A personal friend to Goldwater, *Desert* actively celebrated his elevation to the Senate in January 1953. *DM* 16:1 (Jan. 1953), 42.
[69] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," 1944.

Despite the rapid and substantial turnover at *Desert* and war-time paper-supply restrictions, it remained an escape for a growing and globalized readership.[70] One marine, writing from a plane "hundreds of miles above Seattle" thanked and congratulated *Desert* on its focus: "keep up the good work and keep the war out of Desert Magazine."[71] For one suburban woman from Los Angeles, *Desert*, "in fact…is my escape from a world of work and tiredness and war."[72] For some, the black-and-white photographs of the Salton Sea, Joshua Trees, and petroglyphs reminded the clamorous world that there were still quiet spaces. One especially popular serial, "Desert Refuge," followed the South family, who lived in today's Anza-Borrego State Park. The South's stories from their home on Ghost Mountain allowed readers, especially from urban areas, to live vicariously through a romanticized luddite lifestyle.

As the conflict deepened into 1943, the desert transformed into a place ripe for postwar dreams. Four-wheel-drive made the military jeep the vehicle for backcountry plans for peacetime. With its high-clearance and innovative dual-speed, four-wheel-drive, military jeeps offered unprecedented off-road capability. Unlike earlier, two-wheel-drive vehicles that pushed the vehicle from only its rear wheels, the additional front-drive allowed jeeps to overcome loose sand, wet mud, and rocky boulders. Looking beyond the devastating war, soldiers and civilians alike imagined using the four-wheel-drive for new travels across the Desert West.

By June, readers of *Desert Magazine* dreamed of a postwar future filled with desert exploration. The jeep, credited with successfully replacing the horse for backcountry access, would carry would-be travelers across rocky buttes and sandy dune fields. Writing from the

[70] By June 1942, *Desert* reduced the length of its monthly issue from 48 to 38 pages.
[71] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 5:10, Aug. 1942, 4.
[72] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 6:3, Dec. 1942, 12.

Sahara Desert, Randall Henderson remarked "this is one point on which the men in the army are almost unanimous – they all want to own a jeep when the war is over."[73] Rockhounds, cattlemen, miners, and explorers alike could make use of the four-wheel-drive and high ground clearance. Experiences in Africa, Europe, and the South Pacific collectively convinced both servicemen and the public that the jeep might revolutionize desert travel.

Vehicles developed for war would carry the weary to the healing desert. Published letters to *Desert*'s editorial board enforced the want for four-wheel-drive jeeps. In the face of rumors that only non-four-wheel-drive jeeps might return to the States, one reader celebrated *Desert Magazine*'s unofficial "'let the jeep be' campaign."[74] Some creative readers included how the vehicles might be improved for desert use after the war's end, including a wider track so that following-vehicles could bop along freshly-gnawed trails and tires capable of low-pressure riding.[75]

Through lighthearted stories of desert-servicemembers in jeeps, *Desert Magazine* connected wartime concerns with postwar dreams. In June 1943, *Desert* ran a letter from Darwin Acheson of San Francisco: "I am confident that after the war thousands upon thousands of Americans will go there for health and relaxation. No small part of this will be due to your efforts. Keep up the good work."[76] While Americans died on Pacific atolls and French pastures, the writers, editors, and readers of *Desert* lived a reverse-vicariousness, in which all the pleasures and calm of the desert might be impressed across a violent, unsettled world.

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[73] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," 1944.
[74] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 7:11, Sept. 1944, 12.
[75] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 8:1, Nov. 1944, 24.
[76] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 6:8, June 1943, 26.

Soldiers contributed letters for publication, offering that images and stories from *Desert* kept them grounded to home from afar. Writing from "somewhere in China," Sgt. Ernest C. Peterson thanked Desert Magazine for publishing "a photograph of a Nevada ghost town taken by myself in the good old days when the enjoyment of the romance of the desert was a matter of gassing up the old buggie and heading out." The letters section also allowed *Desert*'s editorial staff to imprint their vision of the desert through the voices of its readers. Looking forward to a life back home and "hoping to supply you with more pictures in the future," Sgt. Peterson's letter "from the Chinese war theater" showed readers that *Desert* and its readership were looking ahead together.[77]

The Henderson men told two stories of wartime. Writing from "the African bush country," Randall Henderson described people he perceived as primitive yet peaceful, the potential for rockhounding Africa, and the eventual comfort that came with arriving in his Sahara station. Like other servicemembers, the elder Henderson heaped praise on the jeep and its potential for backcountry travel.[78] Somewhere in the South Pacific with the Marine Corps, Rand Henderson wrote excitedly about getting home and romping across the desert in a post-service jeep. Despite being thousands of miles away, both Hendersons helped reshape the nation's appreciation for the desert, promoting postwar healing before the conflict's end.

Desert did not cover the battles, losses, or costs of war. Rather, it looked ahead to the future, only mentioning the conflict as it would shape the West after the inevitable defeat of Axis powers. In June 1944, contributing rockhound John Hilton wrote an open letter to Randall

[77] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 8:10, Aug. 1945, 17.
[78] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 7, no. 7 (1943): 38.

Henderson, entitled "the Desert is still waiting for you."[79] Rand Henderson, taking over his father's "Just Between You and Me," wrote of the potential of western spaces experienced through new technologies:

> Whenever I go out in one of these jeeps equipped with radio transmitter and receiver, I wonder about the possibilities of radio travelogs from the desert. A word picture of the scenery while jolting up a remote palm canyon, a conversation with the grizzled old prospector panning for gold beside a stream, an actual record of a typical evening around an ironwood campfire–well who knows? It's an exciting, strange new world before us. Anything is conceivable.[80]

Rand dreamed of a new, revitalizing West, hungered for bacon by campfires, and envisioned himself bopping across yet-unseen desert locations from Needles to Elko.



Figure 9: Rand Henderson served in the Pacific during World War II and imagined postwar travelogs.

[79] John Hilton, "The Desert Is Still Waiting For You (An Open Letter from John Hilton to Randall Henderson)," *DM* 7, no. 8 (1944): 14–18.
[80] Rand Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 7, no. 8 (1944): 39.

For readers of *Desert Magazine*, the October announcement of Rand's death came as a shock. Writing his son's obituary, Randall Henderson informed readers that Rand had died with fellow Marines on Saipan on July 7th, 1944. Grieving, Randall Henderson encouraged his readership to believe in the ideals that drove Rand to war and to celebrate the things that made him happiest.[81] Two months after writing, "Anything is conceivable," Rand permanently left the pages of *Desert Magazine*, "a crusader for the things in which he believed."[82]

In the months following Rand's death, *Desert* returned to business as usual–albeit in the throes of war. Still, it remained a place of peace in an otherwise disordered world. For Navy-enlistee Joseph Huffman in the Philippines, the arrival of *Desert* remained "one of the brighter moments each month."[83] Describing the magazine's effect in a letter to the editorial board, Huffman stressed the magazine's ability to soothe the sailor's homesickness: "because for a few hours I am home again traveling some of the trails I once knew, and planning jaunts on new ones. Thanks so much for making those hours possible."[84] By remaining rooted in place, *Desert* maintained the distinctiveness that its distant readers most valued.

Randall Henderson's return to California in December 1944 brought assurances of homebound soldiers causing a "deluge" of visitors to the Desert West after the war's end. Among the wartime columns Henderson developed upon his return, the search, application, and taking up of a five-acre "jackrabbit" homestead ("$5 of fun!") became a regular feature in *Desert*.[85] Henderson anticipated that many returning, injured, and otherwise recuperating veterans would

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[81] McKenney, *Desert Editor: The Story of Randall Henderson and Palm Desert*, 7. McKinney described how, upon his return from Africa, Henderson "plunge[d] himself into Herculean labors in order to compensate partially for his loss."
[82] Randall Henderson, "To Rand," *DM* 7, no. 12 (1944): 35.
[83] "Letters to Editor," *DM* 8:10, Aug. 1945, 17.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 8, no. 5 (1945): 39.

embrace the physically and emotionally healing desert landscapes.[86] Deeply traumatized by the violence they witnessed and in which they participated, soldiers came back mentally scarred and used the desert as a refuge. As psychiatrist Frantz Fanon demonstrated, the violence both suffered and perpetrated in conflicts inflicted participants long after wars had ended.[87] Quiet, relatively unpopulated, and generally ungoverned, American deserts seemed to offer an escape from a world shaped through bloodshed.

News of Japan's surrender in August 1945 spurred a rush to get back to desert lands. In its first issue with content created after the surrender, *Desert'*s October 1945 issue trumpeted the excitement brewing among desert recreationists. Contributing geologist John Hilton remarked "every blasted [rockhound] is making plans for a field trip."[88] The issue featured a special cover image of two frying pans, one with bacon and eggs and the other sausage and beans over a campfire with a tin coffee pot and cup. Henderson claimed that it had been saved for the first issue produced in peacetime; readers and recreationists could return to the desert they knew.

[86] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 8, no. 3 (1945): 38.
[87] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched Of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1963), 254–79.
[88] "Close-Ups," *DM* 8:12, Oct. 1945, 3.

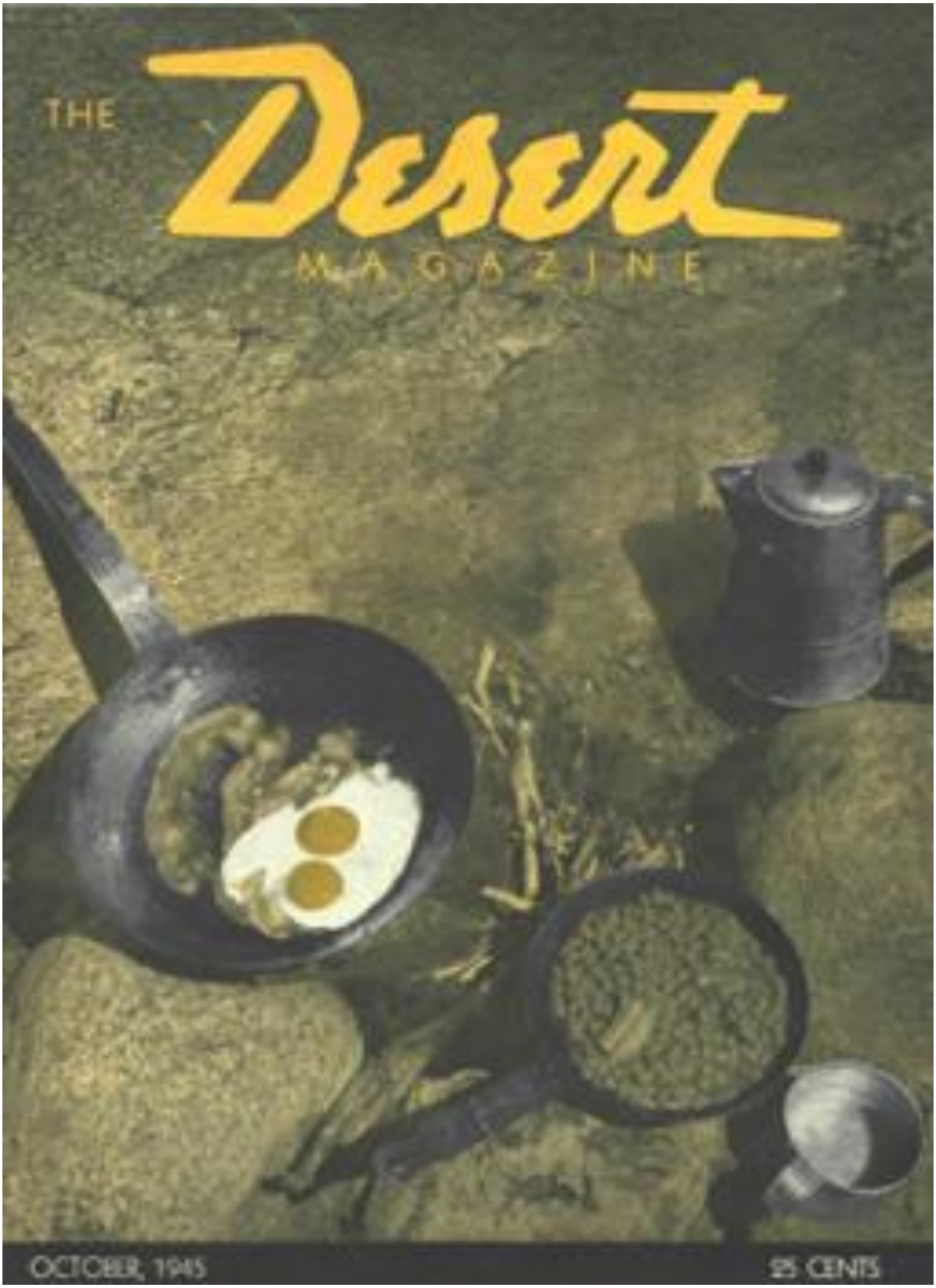


Figure 10: The first cover of the postwar period reminded *Desert*'s readers of familiar comforts.

Recreation in the Postwar Desert

The end of World War II ushered in new travelers to, and debates over, the desert backcountry. Wartime upticks in industrial mining and military installations seemed to confirm that the desert could remain productive if given the space and funding to develop. However, what must have felt to miners and ranchers like a rash of botanists, geologists, archaeologists, explorers, treasure hunters, artists, and writers argued that desert landscapes were worth conserving. Embracing a regionally specific vision of conservation defined by environment and technology, *Desert Magazine* used their substantial and increasing readership to advocate for recreation and conservation as the defining ethic guiding arid-land use.

Neither Henderson nor his staff of writers supported earlier "best-use" conservation. From the Progressive Era onward, federal land managers and policymakers, such as Gifford Pinchot and Francis Newlands, respectively, identified how to use the nation's natural resources – primarily water, timber, and rangeland – for the greatest possible good and longest possible time.[89] Mentally converting components of the natural world into abstract but measurable board-feet, acre-feet, and animal unit months, traditional conservationists identified arid-land resources and wanted to maximize their long-term economic output.

Rather than seeing potential revenue as the region's highest calling, self-proclaimed conservationists such as Henderson identified other valuables in desert spaces. Building a relationship with the landscape's recreational and aesthetic amenities offered intangible benefits. The vistas, wildlife, and history of the desert provided relaxation, peacefulness, and space to

[89] Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (1959; Harvard University Press, 1968), 5–26, 122–46.

explore oneself. Hikes among palm groves in Joshua Tree, camping under stars outside Prescott, and petroglyph-hunting in the East Mojave could not be monetized, but the invaluable mental and physical health those activities provided demanded their own conservation for the longest possible time. To protect those intangible benefits, the land needed to be kept open, accessible, and unexploited for commercial gain. Rather than extracting natural resources from the desert, the nation should save the spaces and activities that defied market value and instilled an intangible strength in its people.

Although *Desert*'s staff did not support extractive-centered conservation, they also rejected the burgeoning preservation movement's argument for less access to remote spaces. Formalized in October 1934 with the formation of the Wilderness Society, a rising preservation movement developed in response to fears over the nation's growing road network and its penetration of spaces perceived to be wild and pristine. As Americans settled across the country, the finiteness of a once seemingly empty landscape became readily apparent. Centered around the idea of wilderness, spaces it seemed neither man nor machine had reshaped, early preservationists such as forester Bob Marshall sought to prevent what they saw as the destruction of "what was left of wild America," with the automobile as the literal vehicle for that destruction.[90] However, *Desert* relied heavily on automobile-carried journalists and their field reports, demonstrating that the wilderness movement was, as historian James Morton Turner

[90] Other environmental historians have commented that elites' focus on wilderness reflected concerns about white racial vitality in the context of a closing frontier. Miles Powell examined how Nordic supremacist thinking influenced George Perkins Marsh's iconic *Man and Nature*, Theodore Roosevelt reinforced the "vitality of [his] class and gender" through hunting big game in perceived wilderness, and how zoological societies perceived the extirpation of North America's wild birds as a "dire threat to US social and racial fabric." Less convincingly, Powell also argues that Aldo Leopold's concern over human overpopulation and depopulation of natural predators was tied to fears for white racial vitality. Paul Sutter, "Driven Wild: The Problem of Wilderness," *Forest History Today*, Spring 2002, 3; Miles A. Powell, *Vanishing America: Species Extinction, Racial Peril, and the Origins of Conservation* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 39, 64, 86.

described, "unsettled by a philosophical disagreement over the purpose of wilderness."[91] Although members of the Wilderness Society and *Desert*'s readership were similarly well-educated and affluent, staff writers emphasized the virtue of a day in the field and did not struggle with the paradox of using vehicles to access "wild" spaces. Wanting to position the desert as accessible, and thus valuable, to all Americans, *Desert* instead expressed a distinctive vision of recreation and aesthetic value reliant on access and engagement. Their own vision for conservation melded the access and use modeled in best-use conservation with benefits from wild, untamed spaces championed by wilderness preservationists.

Between the end of the war and Henderson's sale of *Desert* in 1958, the magazine attempted to inculcate a distinctive and access-oriented conservationism in its readers. Four-wheel-drive vehicles carried journalists to remote canyons and rivers, where they wrote to educate the public on the importance of spaces that transcended commercial value. Remote Navajo *pueblitos* in the Rio Puerco Valley, crystal-clear springs in hidden pockets of the Grand Canyon, and the colorful Eaton's penstemons of the Providence Mountains could not be replaced. As the nation remained mobilized for the Korean War, *Desert* increasingly saw Cold War divisions between capitalist and communist systems as equally uncaring toward the natural world; duty demanded that people speak out for the desert.

Readers remained keen for stories and more knowledge on the nation's "diamond deserts."[92] Articles demonstrated the desert's uniqueness to readers. Guides to Native pottery styles and herbal practices often appeared on *Desert*'s pages. Teenagers reading *Desert* in their

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[91] James Morton Turner, "From Woodcraft to 'Leave No Trace': Wilderness, Consumerism, and Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America," *Environmental History* 7, no. 3 (2002): 472.
[92] Woody Guthrie, *This Land Is Your Land*, Folkways Records, 1944, Audio.

rooms on the East Coast could enjoy the many gem-finding and gem-cutting articles, and imagine becoming geologists in the mold of the magazine's John Hilton, or uncovering one of the many "lost mines" of the desert. Through the mid-1940s, letters to the editors frequently begged for less fluff and more "facts." Maps, photographs, and drawings further advertised the region's specialness; the desert was unique and there were diagrams to prove it.

While educating its readers, *Desert* also romanticized western desert experiences. Years-long series on rockhounding, geological phenomena, and Native history allowed people who had never seen the desert imagine themselves within a seemingly timeless place. "Desert Refuge" ran as a monthly update to the Souths and their off-the-grid, flint-napping, mescal-roasting family with three children somewhere out on Ghost Mountain. Although the South's first few years educated readers on many fine points of desert living, readers soon complained that patriarch Marshall South's writing had turned to anxiety-filled polemics – by 1945, readers often asked for the Souths to get back to their getting-back-to-the-land so that many could imagine themselves making it out on a desert range of their own.

The range never looked so welcoming as *Desert*'s coverage of arid spaces returned to familiar prewar themes, especially the livability and comfort of modern living. In a February 1946 editorial, Henderson remarked that "more than a million and a half persons [were] living in security and comfort on this great arid expanse."[93] Ads of evaporative coolers and the occasional home plan reentered *Desert*'s pages. However, Henderson both feared and applauded how postwar plenty might change Americans.

[93] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 9, no. 4 (1946): 46.

Henderson foresaw the suburban future of the Desert West and worried about what such idleness might do to bodies and ethics. Parroting early conservationists' concerns, Henderson worried that because "science has provided tools for nearly every human need except thinking," the righteous living that comes from completing one's personal chores for oneself would disappear and the region, nation, and world might yet regress into the complacency that allowed for World War II.[94] Celebrating those who "pumped water from the well in the backyard, chopped the winter's wood supply," and "walked to work," he offered that *Desert*'s focus on "hobbies that require skill of the hands or exercise of the muscle" might "keep one [and the nation] out of the rut of soft living toward which" it drifted.[95] The virtues of doing things the hard way might keep the recently won peace.

Henderson's call for American virility continued a Depression-era and prewar concern for the weakening of American bodies. Environmental historian Neil Maher argued that the strengthening of young American men was a central consideration in the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Watching the nation's men literally shrink under the scarcity of the Great Depression and the perceived emasculating effect of mass unemployment, Roosevelt's administration hoped that the CCC would keep the nation's young contributors strong, skilled, and ready for enlistment if the need arose.[96] Concerns for male vitality continued through the postwar period. Historian of masculinity Robert Griswold described a Cold War-era emphasis on hardened American bodies. As postwar suburban consumerism deemphasized intensive physical

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[94] Powell, *Vanishing America: Species Extinction, Racial Peril, and the Origins of Conservation*, 43–54; Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 9, no. 1 (1945): 46.
[95] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," 1945.
[96] Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 92–100.

labor, policymakers worked to counter the increasingly "flabby, defenseless, [and] 'womanlike,'" male populace.[97] Henderson, Roosevelt before him, and John F. Kennedy after him each alluded to the hardening, frontier experience of outdoor labor.

Desert landscapes offered Americans space to experience physical hardening that might keep the nation from slipping toward consumerist-oriented complacency. *Desert* used physical activities on the land to build readers' relationships with landscapes they often had never seen. Recreation-oriented travel logs familiarized national and international readers with desert spaces such as the East Mojave, one of the United States' least understood regions.[98] Stories from today's Mojave National Preserve appear in many issues of *Desert*. *Desert* highlighted hunting, botany, climbing, and rockhounding opportunities to develop sentimental and aesthetic appreciation for the East Mojave.

Land managers in the East Mojave developed recreational hunting opportunities. As Southern California grew increasingly crowded, sportsmen from urban areas traveled to today's Mojave National Preserve to hunt a landscape manipulated for their benefit.[99] In August 1941, *Desert* covered how agents for California's Fish and Game Division had planted wild Mexican olive (*Forestriera pubescens (neomexicana)*) and desert senna (*Senna armata*) near watering holes across the East Mojave.[100] Directly manipulating the landscape for recreation, the division

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[97] Robert L. Griswold, "The Flabby American: The Body and the Cold War," in *A Shared Experience: Men, Women, and the History of Gender*, ed. Laura McCall and Donald Yacavone (New York University Press, 1998), 325.
[98] Turner, "From Woodcraft to 'Leave No Trace': Wilderness, Consumerism, and Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America."
[99] Mark W. T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (University of New Mexico Press, 1994; repr., University of Washington Press, 2000), 228.
[100] Desert Olive, known locally as hackberry or tanglebush, was a dominant flora across the aptly named Hackberry Mountain until the 2005 Hackberry Complex Fire. Adrienne Knute, *Plants of the East Mojave*, with Carl Faber (Wide Horizons Press, 1991), 87, 89.

leaders believed that more cover growth would increase chukar for hunting season.[101] Hunters increasingly arrived in the East Mojave from Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and San Diego. Soon, direct intervention was needed to preserve hunting in perpetuity.

To that point, conservationists had a contested relationship with hunting. As historians Louis Warren and Karl Jacoby both demonstrated, early conservationists were primarily wealthy private interests concerned with what they perceived to be lower-class, rural land-users' denuding of the landscape.[102] Whereas Rockefeller and industrial elites drove the creation of private parks in Jacoby's Adirondacks, desert sportsmen in the East Mojave did not operate on a landscape generally regarded as pristine and within immediate reach of the United States' most congested urban areas. Without large private interests crying for the desert's closure to hunting, recreational hunters could harvest game until none remained.

In the years immediately following World War II, hunters nearly exhausted the available game in the East Mojave. In 1948, state game warden Leo Rossier of Essex announced Regulation 712, which closed the desert east of Daggett for five years. This closure of 10,000 square miles to hunting, however, was positioned as in favor of hunters. The state had recently stocked the area, "especially the Providence and New York mountains," and hoped that a short-term closure would allow new deer and pheasant populations to establish long-term communities that could support yearly hunts.[103] Wanting to inculcate support for seeing recreation (even if

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[101] "Here and There…On the Desert," *DM* 4:10 (August 1941), 44.
[102] Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (University of California Press, 2001); Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (Yale University Press, 1997).
[103] "No Hunting in Mojave Area," *DM* 11:12 (October 1948), 30. Editor Randall Henderson was personally against hunting in desert spaces. Once an avid bird hunter, "forty years on the desert in close association with its wildlife," had brought Henderson to "resent anyone wanting to shoot those quail," just as he would "resent anyone killing [his] pet dog." Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 15, no. 4 (1952): 42.

extractive) as a primary value of the East Mojave, *Desert* naturally posted a new bulletin on the closure. That Americans could physically engage with the East Mojave was crucial to building a mindful and respectful relationship with public lands. For Americans to value the Mojave Desert beyond its commodities, they needed to see it up close.

Limited rain, ephemeral plant blooms, and comparatively few mammals convinced drive-through travelers that the East Mojave is sterile. From highways and windows of passenger planes, the sandy landscape seems barren. But as *Desert* showed its readers, a close eye could reveal the enduring growth and beauty of desert places.

Mary Beal was the ideal guide for *Desert* readers. Born in Illinois in 1878, Beal relocated to Riverside, California, by 1906. While there, she met famed American naturalist John Muir. Following his advice for curing Beal's developing respiratory problems, she moved to Daggett, California, in the Mojave Desert east of Barstow. Starting in a tent, Beal built a cabin and permanently settled in Daggett, giving readers an in-field botany correspondent.[104]

Like her editor, Randall Henderson, Beal educated herself through years of desert interaction. Atop Dolly Varden, her horse, and with a day's chia seeds in her pocket and Jepson's *Manual* in her pack, Beal spent years in the Providence, Kelso, Granite, New York, and other unnamed Mojave mountain ranges. Along with another desert contributor, Jerry Laudermilk, Beal worked to convince Americans that the desert was vibrant and alive.

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[104] Faith Bennett, "Mary Beal," National Park Service, accessed October 26, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/mary-beal.htm; Heather King, *A Scarlet Bloom*, May 10, 2018, https://angelusnews.com/voices/a-scarlet-bloom/; Julia Sizek, "When Women Seldom Travelled Alone, This Botanist Wandered the CA Deserts in Search of Rare Plants," PBS SoCal, September 21, 2016, https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/artbound/when-women-seldom-travelled-alone-this-botanist-wandered-the-ca-deserts-in-search-of-rare-plants.

Americans only saw the Mojave Desert for its iron, gold, and ranches because they did not understand its precious, small-scale biology. Through her work in the mountains and flats of the East Mojave, Beal familiarized her readers with the desert's understated protagonists: desert tobacco (*Nicotiana trigonophylla*) across the East Mojave's canyon walls, rocky mesas, and sandy washes, wild daisies (*Erigeron uncialis*) on Clark Mountain, fire-red Eaton's penstemon (*Penstemon eatonii*) and yellow-kissed live-forever succulents (*Echeveria saxosa*) in the Providence Mountains, and Mojave Poppy (*Eschschotzia californica var. crocea*) in Wild Horse Canyon.[105] From her base in Daggett, Beal gave her readers yearly forecasts for wildflowers, focusing her coverage on the ranges within today's Preserve.[106]

Desert plants' often biannual blooms challenged the widely held perception of the region's barrenness. The white of Apache Plume (*Fallugia paradoxa*), yellows of Goldeye (*Viguera* parishii), bright orange of Globe Mallow (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*), and the periwinkle of Mojave Aster (*Xylorhiza (Machaeranthera) tortifolia*) carpeted the high elevation valleys of the East Mojave in April and May and again after summer monsoons.[107] Beal hoped that detailed descriptions of plants' habitats, blooming seasons, and seeding patterns accompanied by close images would inspire would-be desert travelers to watch where they stepped. From the bottom of the Kelso Dunes to the top of Clark Mountain, the desert showed itself to be a dynamic and engageable landscape.

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[105] Beal, "Desert's Scarlet Buglers"; Mary Beal, "Golden Desert Poppies," *DM* 10, no. 9 (1947): 27; Mary Beal, "Desert Tobacco Grows On Trees and Bushes," *DM* 7, no. 10 (1944): 2; Mary Beal, "Incense Bush," *DM* 6, no. 8 (1943): 16; Beal, "They Like a Rocky Terrain"; Mary Beal, "Parade of the Penstemons," *DM* 7, no. 8 (1944): 9.
[106] "Here's the Wildflower Forecast for March," *DM* 10, no. 5 (1947): 28; Mary Beal, "Wildflower Forecast for March," *DM* 14, no. 5 (1951): 29.
[107] Beal inspired other botanists to take up her work in the desert. Adrienne Knute's botany guide, compiled while she lived with local artist and the work's illustrator Carl Faber in Round Valley, remains the definitive comprehensive guide to the Preserve's flora. In it, Knute describes eight plant discovery walks, including the Mary Beal Nature Study Trail. Knute, *Plants of the East Mojave*.

While Mary Beal rode Dolly Varden to the high reaches of the East Mojave, others went as low as they could and back again. October 1949's *Desert* covered the descent of a team of speleologists to the bottom of the Cave of the Winding Stairs within the Mitchell Cavern complex of the Providence Mountains. The team of Sierra Club members had published their harrowing descent and retrieval from the more than 500-foot-deep cavern in *Mugelnoos*, the Club's climbing publication.[108] Ascending from the bottom of the stalactite-strewn cave "required all the skill of the expert rock climber," and those who successfully completed the trip returned to the surface with their clothes in shreds.[109] Because Jack Mitchell had closed the cavern, this skillful descent was unavailable to the public. However, Mitchell planned to retire and wished to "relinquish the caves for [state] park purposes," so *Desert* readers willing to advocate for continued access might yet explore the cave's floor.[110] From deep caves to cinder cones, geological wonders of the East Mojave brought scores of rockhounds to the desert.

Rockhounding, or mineral collecting, became very popular in the postwar West. Searching for gold, minerals, historical artifacts, fossils, and even uranium, avocational prospectors spread across the eastern Mojave and other desert spaces. *Desert* was happy to be their guide. Lead geologist in the field John Hilton led readers on expeditions to remote geode patches, such as those within the lava fields of today's Preserve. Even if the military was quickly turning rock fields to bomber ranges, as reader Marian Milligan complained that her favorite geode spot near Barstow had been exploded, geologic wonders presented themselves to those willing to spend time on the land.[111] Distant readers could also send away for wonders.

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[108] "Rock Climbers Reach Bottom of the Cave of the Winding Stairs," *DM* 12, no. 12 (1949): 26.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 6:11 (Sept. 1943), 2.

Mineral collecting offered local readers community and more distant readers physical access to the desert from afar. Every issue of *Desert* between 1945 and 1955 featured no fewer than five pages dedicated to mineralogy trips, clubs, markets, and guidance.[112] In February 1952, more than 7,000 people gathered at the First Annual Midwinter Desert Rockhound Fair at *Desert*'s recently constructed headquarters in Palm Desert, California.[113] Readers from across the country could send away for exotic minerals such as peanut pitchstone and variegated agates, subscriptions to the *Lapidary Journal*, or their own doodlebug.[114]



Figure 11: Metal detecting, or "doodle-bugging," was a popular postwar activity.

[112] Not every reader loved the increasing coverage of rockhounding. Thomas R. Gaines' letter from Pasadena, California, remarked "in spite of the space given to those rock boys, I am mighty well satisfied with Desert Magazine." "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 11:8, 30

[113] "First Rockhound Fair Brings 7000 to Palm Desert Pueblo," *DM* 15, no. 4 (1952): 39.

[114] Although every issue differed in exact offerings, *Desert* ran a monthly "Gem Mart" section. For an example, see "Gem Mart," *DM* 15, no. 4 (April 1952): 39.

Newly developed metal detectors revolutionized how amateur prospectors experienced the outdoors. Once known as "doodlebugging," metal detecting offered potential for hunting lost treasure. Journalist Walter Ford promised that doodlebugs could be valuable tools for enjoying a weekend. Important to Ford and other mineralogy writers in *Desert*, their advice was not for commercial, but moral, advantage. Ford reminded his readers:

> if the treasure hunter does not take his work too seriously, he can have a lot of fun. He may wear out much shoe leather, but he will meet some very interesting people and acquire far more desert lore than he would have done had he held to the beaten path. If he should stumble on the elusive treasure it will be just an added dividend.[115]

Rockhounding was for moral and not financial profits. Four years after acquainting readers to doodlebugs, Ford introduced readers to a new mineral for the atomic age. Motivated by the Atomic Energy Commission's offer for a $10,000 to prospectors who found domestic fields of high-grade uranium, Ford explained the latest innovation in desert prospecting, the handheld Geiger counter, and described his experience hunting for the radioactive material.[116] As with during recreational hunts for gold and geodes, the financial incentive kept prospectors focused, but did not limit their fun on the land.

Believing that education and direct experience with the desert would inculcate respect and appreciation within its readers, *Desert* highlighted the importance of enjoying one's time. Historians Phoebe Young and Warren Belasco have demonstrated how campers elsewhere in the nation expected amenities for making the outdoors accessible by the early-twentieth century. Belasco described how budding autocamp and motel infrastructure enabled a new automobile-

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[115] Walter Ford, "Doodlebug Prospector," *DM* 8, no. 9 (1945): 7.
[116] Walter Ford, "He Prospects for Invisible Wealth," *DM* 12, no. 6 (1949): 5–7; Jay Ellis Ransom, "Uranium Strike...in Petrified Wood," *DM* 12, no. 10 (1949): 10–14. A few months later, a uranium-containing carnotite strike by an amateur prospector near Grand Canyon received five full pages in *Desert*.

carried commercial and frontier culture.[117] Young explored how the automobile brought millions onto the nation's public lands. By the early twentieth century, visitors to national parks and forests expected the government to provide access to firewood, showers, and electricity.[118] Compared to the development of car-oriented camping areas around the nation, the East Mojave was for the self-reliant and those who did not need frills. Instead, the desert's simplicity made it available to anyone willing to rough it. Provided they could get there.

Four-Wheel-Drive, Jeeps, and Backcountry Experiences

Literally carrying recreationists to their desert adventures, petroleum-fired, four-wheel-drive automobiles remained necessary and much-appreciated tools for arid-land backcountry travel through the 1950s. While eastern preservationists formed their own idea of how to best manage America's public lands, desert rats fell in love with the jeep as the crucial tool of postwar recreating and spreading appreciation for what many still considered a wasteland. Four-wheel-drive greatly mitigated the distinctive challenges of accessing desert backcountry and gave recreationists new ways to connect with reality.

Earlier vehicles had proved capable of traveling across the desert within reasonable limits.[119] With a flexible steel frame, high ground clearance, and simple components easily procured across a national distribution network, the Ford Model T was unexpectedly well-suited

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[117] Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (MIT Press, 1979), 72, 79–84, 105–10, 133–34.
[118] Phoebe S. K. Young, *Camping Grounds: Public Nature in American Life from the Civil War to the Occupy Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 141.
[119] For a short survey of early American automobiles and their manufacturers, see James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (MIT Press, 1990), 46. Also see Flink, "The Rise of the Giants," in *The Automobile Age*.

to desert conditions.[120] Importantly for travel through deep sand and steep alluvial fans, the Model T could be driven at slow speed without stalling. Although dust abraded mechanical parts, motorists improvised filters from wet cloth, and the Model T's low compression engine tolerated adulterated fuel better than other, more expensive vehicles.[121] Because of its modular construction, the Model T and similar vehicles were easily repaired and modified.[122]

Pre-war off-road vehicles lacked four-wheel-drive, but recreationists outfitted them for desert travel. As they prepared to go autocamping, motorists frequently fitted oversized balloon tires and dual rear tires to more easily traverse deep sand.[123] Auxiliary fuel and water tanks allowed both vehicles and occupants to go further for longer. Welding together scrap metal, garage and backyard machinists created differential covers and other skid plates. Following game trails established by animals and prospector tracks of wagons, early desert automobiles achieved widespread use. Historian Hal Rothman described how "an automobile could go anywhere the combination of imagination, wheels, and a dirt track might lead," but the comparative underdevelopment of desert "roads" still enforced some limits.[124] With only rear wheels driving it forward, the Model T could not cross deep water, overcome steep inclines, or pull itself out of loose sand and slick mud.

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[120] David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing and Technology in the United States* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 218.
[121] For more on the agency of dust, see LeCain, *The Matter of History*, 177–78.
[122] Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 71; Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing and Technology in the United States*, 315.
[123] For more on autocamping, see Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 30–41.
[124] Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (University Press of Kansas, 1998), 148.

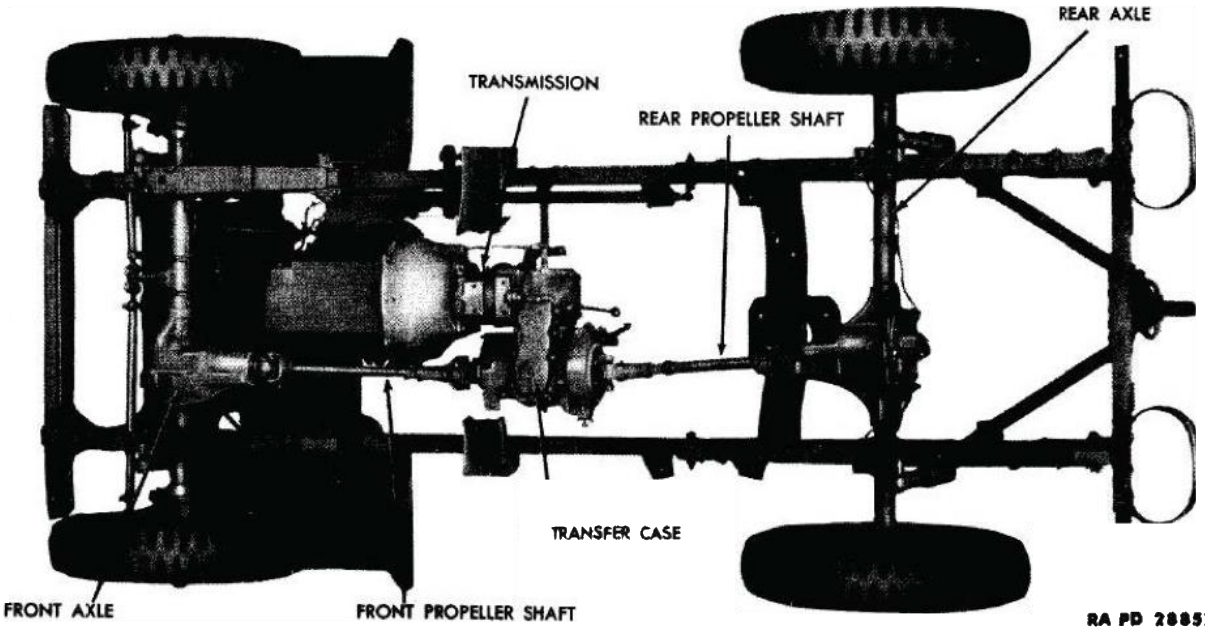


Figure 12: Ordnance Maintenance: Power Train, Body, and Frame for 1/4 Ton 4x4 Truck (Willys-Overland Model MB and Ford Model GPW), War Department Technical Manual TM 9-1803B (Department of War, 1944), 8.

The mass production of jeeps revolutionized four-wheeled travel. Early twentieth century luxury models, including the 1908 Daimler Colonial ("Dernburg-Wagen"), proved the concept of propelling all four wheels and Ford Model Ts proved sturdy if only driven by their rear wheels. However, the wartime need for a light reconnaissance four-wheel-drive quickly became a strategic industrial project assigned to many contractors, including American Bantam, Willys-Overland, and Ford.[125] The selectable transfer case in wartime and postwar jeeps enabled the propulsion of all four wheels. Power moved from the engine through the transmission, which then connected to the transfer case and split power to front and rear driveshafts, reducing the

[125] "Dernburg Car," Archive No. 2000M261, Mercedes-Benz Public Archive; Charles K. Hyde, *The Arsenal of Democracy: The American Automobile Industry in World War II* (Wayne State University Press, 2013), 148–52.

chance that any single driven wheel's loss of grip would immobilize the vehicle.[126] The driveshafts connected to axle differentials that allowed left and right wheels to rotate at different speeds while turning; later, civilians would install lockable differentials that ensured all wheels output power from the engine in equal proportion for substantial obstacles such as deep sand and loose boulders.[127]

By embracing jeeps and four-wheel-drive, Americans after World War II gained access to places previously only available to those on horseback. Treated in some cases like family members, jeeps physically brought a new wave of desert conservationists to its remote canyons, rugged mountains, and rolling sand dunes. To learn, live on, and care for the desert after World War II demanded four-wheel-drive.

Unlike east of the Mississippi River, where mobilization against automobiles and road-building instigated calls for wilderness areas as early as 1934, desert recreationists and environmental advocates did not struggle with the inherent contradictions between automobile travel and advocating for the natural world.[128] Paul Sutter's environmental and intellectual history of the wilderness movement contended that roadbuilding and the invasion of cars into the backcountry catalyzed modern wilderness advocacy, with roadlessness and wilderness becoming synonymous by the late-1950s.[129] By the late 1960s, western polemicist and wilderness advocate Edward Abbey railed against the intrusion of roads into spaces that he felt should only be

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[126] *1/4-Ton 4x4 Truck (Willys-Overland Model MB and Ford Model GPW)*, Technical Manual 9-803 TM 9-803 (Department of War, 1944), 18, 176–78. "Selectable" or "disconnect" systems allowed drives to turn off four-wheel-drive to engage and disengage the front axle as conditions required.
[127] *Ordnance Maintenance: Power Train, Body, and Frame for 1/4 Ton 4x4 Truck (Willys-Overland Model MB and Ford Model GPW)*, War Department Technical Manual TM 9-1803B (Department of War, 1944), 7.
[128] For more on the development of the movement for wilderness areas, see Sutter, *Driven Wild*.
[129] Ibid., 125, 206–7.

reached by foot or on horseback.[130] But through the late-1950s, deserts such as the eastern Mojave remained relatively inaccessible and Americans accepted off-road travel as a necessary condition for inculcating appreciation for a much-derided region.

Self-described conservationists such as Randall Henderson considered jeeps a necessary tool to make the most of desert country. His magazine importantly reoriented the desert away from business and toward personal enjoyment, allowing Americans within and outside of arid landscapes to feel a personal ownership over the desert's future; enjoying nature's bounty required automobiles. Not until the mid-1960s did wilderness become a rallying call for desert conservationists.

Four-wheel-drive automobiles offered recreationists unprecedented access to the desert's remarkable places. Environmental historian Martin V. Melosi argued that the automobile "was the single driving force in the transformation of the countryside."[131] Just as Henry Ford made cars affordable to the middle class after 1910, allowing millions of Americans new access to national parks and seemingly pristine lands, the postwar boom in four-wheel-drive vehicles opened millions of acres of the Southwest to recreation.[132]

Elsewhere in the country, four-wheel-drive was not necessary to access perceived wilderness. Historian David Louter argued that an evolving road network produced both the idea and application of wilderness in Washington's National Parks. By the 1930s, road systems became permanent park infrastructure and visitors' "automobility" shaped interactions with

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[130] Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (Simon and Schuster, 1968), 39–55.
[131] Martin V. Melosi, "The Automobile and the Environment in American History," University of Michigan, 2004, http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu/Environment/E_Overview/E_Overview.htm.
[132] Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, 19; Tom McCarthy, *Auto Mania: Cars, Consumers, and the Environment* (Yale University Press, 2007), 30.

places such as Mount Rainier.[133] As road-building increasingly gave visitors to the Pacific Northwest overlooks from which to gaze over wilderness, jeep-carried recreationists found vast, seemingly untouched spaces by driving to places without people.[134]

Writers at *Desert Magazine* embraced the need for off-road travel to properly instill environmental ethics within its readership. For much longer than elsewhere in the nation, automobiles remained the mechanical and educational vehicle for knowing nature. [135] In such a challenging landscape, the automobile was not a "glamour product," as historian Tom McCarthy showed it to be for most of the nation.[136] Given the East Mojave's varied topography, propensity for flash floods, and harrowing roads developed for late-nineteenth century mining operations, jeeps let Americans engage, appreciate, and learn from seemingly wild spaces in ways they could not in a two-wheel-drive Buick or Edsel. Further, that jeeps were modular in construction and repaired with common tools allowed drivers to take ownership of their survival.

The simplicity of jeeps allowed for comparably easy field repairs. Department of War manuals on their "¼-ton 4x4 Truck" covered both Willys-Overland and Ford GPW iterations and offered clear instructions that required simple shop tools.[137] Considered essential for "effective maintenance in the field," the standardization of parts across companies created a domestic supply chain that empowered postwar recreationists to perform repairs themselves.[138] The straightforward mechanical components of jeeps made what could be catastrophic issues repairable, even in isolated places.

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[133] Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, 30.
[134] Ibid., 63, 161–65.
[135] Ibid., 4, 19–23.
[136] McCarthy, *Auto Mania: Cars, Consumers, and the Environment*, 76.
[137] *T9-1803B*; *TM 9-803*.
[138] Frederic L. Quivik, *Rosie the Riveter National Historical Park, Ford Assembly Plant*, HAER No. CA-326-H (Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, Department of Interior, 2002), 62.

When things went awry, backcountry vehicle repairs offered opportunities to reconnect with reality. As postwar suburbanization increasingly developed "flabby Americans" and office-bound malaise, jeep travel in the desert backcountry allowed Americans to engage the desert as a place to challenge themselves and their vehicles.[139] The physical conditions of the desert – drying wind, oppressive sun, and sweltering heat – could overwhelm but they offered a stage upon which four-wheeled recreationists could demonstrate some level of competence, knowledge, and mastery. Patching tires, replacing cracked wheels, and finding clever fixes for radiator leaks required disciplined attention and practical reasoning that constituted direct engagement with material reality.[140] At a time when the national workforce shifted toward more passive "knowledge work," a process that eroded white-collar workers' agency, judgment, and sense of responsibility, jeep repairs demanded that recreationists maintain what philosopher Matthew Crawford described as "manual competence" in a built, material world.[141]

Whereas pavement reached many of the West's National Parks and Monuments by the 1920s, American deserts continued to demand more from their visitors.[142] Historians John Jakle and Keith Sculle described an American highway experience that interlinked drivers, machines, and pavement and reduced previous inconveniences of cross-country travel.[143] In spaces such as the East Mojave, off-road motorists experienced and partook in their own motorized experience, but one that tested their own skills and tools to overcome the unpredictability and danger of travel off the beaten path.

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[139] Griswold, "The Flabby American: The Body and the Cold War."
[140] Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (Penguin Books, 2009), 102.
[141] Ibid., 2, 20–21, 44–47.
[142] Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*, 153.
[143] John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Motoring: The American Highway Experience* (University of Georgia Press, 2008).

Before the decade's end, jeeps had taken over desert roads and the parking lot at *Desert Magazine*'s publishing plant in Palm Desert, California. From Randall Henderson to backcountry luddite Marshal South, *Desert*'s staff embraced the jeep's innovative four-wheel-drive transfer box, high clearance, and easy field repairs. Describing a trip through today's Anza-Borrego State Park, then just known as part of the Santa Rosa mountains, Marshal remarked "Jeeps are so efficient one can almost forgive them for the way they slaughtered up the desert scenery in war days."[144]

Jeep and other technologies developed during war reshaped both the desert's physical landscape and American civilians' perception of it. Historians of science have extensively discussed the transfer of military technologies and tactics to non-military applications. Edmund Russell showed how the war came home through chemical agents first used in the battlefield before being refined for agricultural applications.[145] Francesca Russello Ammon wrote that the bulldozer, destructive during wartime, was a central tool of order, progress, and authority in peacetime.[146] The jeep and standardization of four-wheel-drive systems offered another example of the war reaching the home front in civilian clothes. In a 1945 advertisement, Ford described their jeep as "war-proved for stamina and performance," but universally valuable for civilian tasks including pumping wells, pulling agricultural equipment, and for vacation "runabouts."[147]

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[144] Marshal South, "Desert Trails," *DM* 11, no. 7 (1948): 21.
[145] Russell Edmund, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 164–83.
[146] Francesca Russello Ammon, *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* (Yale University Press, 2016), 88–93.
[147] "A Revolutionary Vehicle for a Thousand Uses," *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 10, 1945, 92.1.1764.35, Henry Austin Clark, Jr. Papers, The Henry Ford.



Figure 13: "A Revolutionary Vehicle for a Thousand Jobs," Universal Jeep Advertisement in *The Saturday Evening Post*, 10 November 1945, 92.1.1764.35, Henry Austin Clark, Jr. Papers, The Henry Ford.

Many Americans embraced those backcountry runabouts and enjoyed the comparative ease and safety with which they could reach far and forbidding places. Compared to prewar trips, the jeep "made good time, splashing through stretches of foaming water and shouldering nonchalantly out of cavernous holes that would, in the old days of less versatile cars, inevitably have spelled disaster."[148] Four-wheel-drive successfully unlocked new treasures of the desert just as their access came under threat.

From Ethic to Activism

Desert conservationists denounced proposed industrial developments and military exclosures in the postwar West. Debates over whether wealthy private interests would prevent Jackson Hole National Monument, proposed mining in Joshua Tree National Park, the rejected damming of Echo Park in Dinosaur National Monument, and the withdrawal of millions of acres for military purposes galvanized *Desert*'s access-based conservationist positions.

Initially holding himself short of the label "conservationist" at a time when the term's meaning was quickly evolving away from production and toward environmentalism, Henderson and others at *Desert* came out strongly in favor of conservationist-labeled positions. Arguments over Jackson Hole National Monument first drew Henderson into political debates over land use. In 1943, immediately after its creation by presidential decree and at the demand of his mining and cattlemen constituents, Wyoming Congressman Frank Barret introduced a measure to return

[148] South, "Desert Trails," 21.

the recently created Jackson Hole National Monument to national forest.[149] Henderson reduced the issue to "the traditional conflict between those Americans who believe in the conservation of the natural resources, and those who would release such national assets to the exploitation of private citizens for personal gain."[150] Positioning the accumulation of wealth against the good of the nation, Henderson derided the miners and ranchers who protested the Monument for getting "in the way of progress." Rather than holding empathy for the generational work of some commodity producers, Henderson bemoaned that "the real tragedy of all this is not the displacement of the older and more primitive pursuits, but in the fact that humans find it so painful to readjust themselves to that which is new and different."[151] Caustically accusing opponents of being mired in backwardness, Henderson revealed a burgeoning mutual exclusivity between commodity producing and recreating land users during what historian Charles Wilkinson described as "the Big Buildup."[152]

By casting ranchers and loggers as backwards, Henderson illustrated sharpening lines between those with and without proximity to natural resources. John Findlay demonstrated that western anti-park miners and ranchers considered their physical proximity to and use of western lands as the highest priority for those resources.[153] Instead, rising environmentalists (then under an evolving conservationist label) believed the nation's resources should be kept available for its

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[149] *Hearing on H.R. 2241, a Bill to Abolish the Jackson Hole National Monument: Hearing before the Committee on the Public Lands*, House of Representatives Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session (1943).
[150] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 8, no. 4 (1945): 38.
[151] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 8, no. 8 (1945): 38. This sharp language foreshadowed the sharp distrust between desert park advocates and local commodity producers in the last third of the twentieth century.
[152] Charles F. Wilkinson, *Fire on the Plateau: Conflict and Endurance in the American Southwest* (Island Press, 2004), 173, 197–201, 214–19.
[153] Earlier land users in the American East regarded their physical proximity as the basis for their right to harvest game from the land. See Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*, 52–53; Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000*, 256.

entire citizenry, not just those involved in local industries. Perhaps influenced by *Desert* readers' letter-writing campaign in favor of the Monument, the measure was defeated and, in 1950, passage of legislation creating Grand Teton National Park permanently reserved the Jackson Hole withdrawal for the nation.[154] Educated by the political debates over Jackson Hole, *Desert* loudly defended the protection of similarly threatened desert monuments.

Proposed changes to Joshua Tree National Monument first motivated *Desert*'s editorial board to seize the label "conservationists." In 1947, Californian Congressman Harry R. Sheppard introduced H.R. 4703, which proposed the deletion of 310,000 acres of minable land from the monument's eastern third but also the closure of the rest of the monument to prospecting.[155] Reorganized after being dormant during the war years, mining associations resisted the proposed change. Early in 1946, the *California Mining Journal* called for the full opening of Joshua Tree National Monument. The closure of supposedly rich mining lands "to protect a few scrubby trees that are of absolutely no value–sentimental or otherwise," made no sense to miners in the Golden State. Conservationists called foul on an unfair appraisal of the desert's aesthetic and emotional value.

For the first time, Henderson stuck out his neck in the explicit name of conservation. In his monthly editorial, Henderson described how "staunch conservationists" such as himself agreed "that a limited area on the eastern side of Joshua Tree national monument should be excluded from the park reservation" for the sake of mining.[156] However, he firmly rejected that

[154] H. Duane Hampton, "Opposition to National Parks," *Journal of Forest History* 25, no. 1 (1981): 38–39.
[155] John W. Stratton, *Custodian's Annual Report for Joshua Tree National Monument* (Department of the Interior, 1946), 1, https://npshistory.com/publications/annual_reports/jotr/1946.pdf.
[156] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 9, no. 6 (1946): 46.

mining interests should reenter Joshua Tree because of a perceived lack of value – there, the *Mining Journal* took "too much territory."[157]

Henderson and other desert conservationists found their hands forced. The "immoderacy" of commodity producers' demands placed "every true conservationist in the position of having to oppose his demands."[158] Casting the mining interests as disconnected from the land, Henderson disregarded their valuation of Joshua Trees as "mere gibberish–because he does not know the meaning of [sentimentality]." Ongoing efforts to capitalize the national monument led *Desert* to defend Joshua Tree for years.

Desert conservationists did not see mining potential in the Park Service unit, but also questioned the larger motivations of uninhibited accumulation of wealth. In April 1948, Henderson struggled with sacrificing seemingly pristine lands and could not "see much sense in digging [gold] out of one hole and then stuffing it away in another at Fort Knox, Kentucky."[159] Recalling earlier attempts by miners to cast the desert as valueless, he called to "keep Joshua Tree monument as Nature created it–where the folks who have to live in crowded cities may come out and share the beauty and peace of a world that has not been disturbed by man's greed for gold."[160] For conservationists, the sentimental value of granite boulders and tall, spider-like *yucca brevefolia* outweighed any potential economic benefit.

To avoid appearing overly biased, *Desert* also published pro-development opinions. In June 1948, a letter from local mining supporter Richard Davis questioned closing the Monument to mineral extraction. Specifically, he argued most desert dwellers would agree that "there is no

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[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 11, no. 7 (1948): 46.
[160] Ibid.

more unique scenery in the east one-third of the Monument than there is on my own 160 acre homestead."[161] Although willing to concede that "scenery has an undoubtedly high cultural and recreational value," Davis held that "it will not support a payroll or win the next war." Accusing the federal government of treating his industry unfairly, Davis bemoaned that miners had developed the very roads Park Service management used to condemn their claims. It was unfair and anti-American to close out the eastern third of the monument.

Speaking for conservationists, Henderson published his reply alongside Davis' letter. Staking his "regard [for] our government as a friend seeking to protect the interests of myself and my children," Henderson held that the monument lands were for all Americans. In the face of worsening congestion across Southern California, never had the need for recreative lands been greater. Questioning the patriotism of miners who would profit from private development in a national monument, Henderson doubted an existential need for more. Mining was excluded from the remaining monument, and despite the 310,000-acre reduction, the monument would grow multiple times before its codification as a National Park with the passage of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994.

By 1950, Henderson cemented his magazine as firmly in support of efforts to preserve recreative access in the West. Perhaps the defining moment of the American Environmental Movement, preservationists rallied against the Bureau of Reclamation's proposed damming of Lodore Canyon within Dinosaur National Monument in 1950 for the Echo Park/Split Mountain project.[162] In his monthly editorial, "Just Between You & Me," Henderson bewailed the loss of

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[161] "Joshua Tree Controversy," *DM* 11, no. 8 (1948): 28.

[162] For more on the Lodore Canyon controversy and the Echo Park project as a redefining moment in the nomenclature of preservation within the budding environmental movement, see Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement*, 63–64, 70–72, 77–93, 293–94. Echo Park also permanently

"one of the most spectacular chasms along the Green River." Considering himself among the "far-visioned Americans" who found himself waging "a constant battle for preservation of the National Parks and Monuments," Henderson worried about the larger implications of damning some of the nation's most dramatic boating water. He warned his readers: "If the Reclamation Bureau can usurp the rights which have been established for you and me in the Dinosaur National Monument, then it may be expected that the invasion of other park areas will come eventually."[163] If Echo Park was not stopped, why would any project relent to environmentalists' concerns?

Henderson and others had good reason to doubt that one government project would not be the last. Over the prior decade, the military had come to control hundreds of thousands of acres of previously open desert land. Although environmentalists embraced some conveniences produced by World War II such as the jeep, they grew to strongly reject the perceived overburden of the military's public land withdraws.

As soon as the war ended, desert enthusiasts questioned when lands locked away for the war effort would be released back to the American public. By November of 1945, readers suggested *Desert* might influence the transition to peacetime. Kenneth H. Munroe of Pasadena, CA, wrote to *Desert*, asking it to sponsor a campaign to remove "keep out" signs from ranges no longer intended for bombing practice. Munroe, who saw *Desert*'s growing influence as capable of reopening some of his and his son's preferred camping areas, sympathized with the wartime

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shifted the language of "conservation" and "preservation" within the context of recreative access to the American West and the American Environmental Movement. In Echo Park, dam-builders were conservationists, in a best-use sense. Preservationists, no longer a small group of elites, and recreationists wanted to prevent the flooding of the canyon. Despite this distinction, Randall Henderson and others at *Desert* elastically used "conservation" through the 1950s to refer to the general protection or closure to development of spaces in the Desert West, which later came to be understood as environmentalism.

[163] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 13, no. 11 (1950): 46.

exigency but also worried about its future: "We don't want to be bombed, but neither do we want to be kept out of a lot of interesting country if it isn't necessary."[164] Seeing himself as in-step with *Desert*'s vision for western land use, Munroe asked his favorite magazine to petition the government on his and all desert rats' behalf.

Henderson and others pushed against the limited input with which they could affect military land decisions. Early in the war, Henderson had encouraged readers to accept the sacrifice of desert lands and not worry.[165] But as the mobilization for war continued as the United States entered the Korean War and larger Cold War, the infiniteness of desert space felt increasingly cramped.

The United States' ongoing postwar mobilization signaled the beginning of a new militarized West. Findlay argued that the mobilization of the West–especially an in-flow of laborers and federal funding–created a highly militarized and urbanized social landscape between 1940 and 2000, and especially during the first two decades after World War II, when mobilization in the West became permanent. [166] For desert recreationists like Henderson, access to many of the most remarkable desert lands disappeared in service of the nation.

Letters to the editor grumbled about the loss of public domain. In February 1950, Carl R. Englund of Fullerton bemoaned that "so much of the California desert area has been swallowed up by the military."[167] Henderson agreed and an editorial in the same issue debated the wisdom of increasing military closures. Using the example of a road connecting Blythe and Niland threatened with closure, Henderson rejected the Navy and Army's claims over the desert country.

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[164] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 9:1, Nov. 1945, 33.
[165] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 6, no. 1 (1942): 46.
[166] Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000*, 256.
[167] "Letters to the Editor," *DM* 13:4 (Feb. 1950), 22.

Although it had once been considered unfit for human habitation, "those days have passed."[168] Dismissing its image as a wasteland, Henderson warned "generals and…admirals should not get the idea that because this region is called desert, they may come out here and fence in great areas without hurting anyone."[169] Nonetheless, recreationists, commodity producers, and homeowners found themselves pushed out of their often-adopted homes.

Questioning the national security motivations behind land seizures, Henderson charged the growing military presence as antithetical to the desert's inherent value. As military installations came to dominate the landscape, they arrived "without regards for the peace-time values the terrains may have." The military had also made the land unsafe, with more than 9,000,000 acres marked for potentially unexploded ordinance, a hazard for "prospectors, tourists, and livestock."[170] Henderson and his fellow recreationists wanted "to maintain as much of the desert as possible as a place without fences and without 'No Trespass' signs," keeping it "as a sanctuary for those seeking freedom and peace."[171]

Having expected a postwar release of military-held lands, desert conservationists and recreationists grew increasingly dismayed as the nation became more entrenched in its existential and military battles against communism. After Anza Desert State Park (CA) narrowly avoided conversion to a Navy bombing range in 1952, Henderson, "at the risk of being classified as lacking in patriotism," protested "against the huge land grabs which the military forces have put over the desert country in recent years."[172] Rather than having military installations decrease, the

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[168] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 13, no. 4 (1950): 46.
[169] Ibid.
[170] "Dud War Waged in Desert," *DM* 12, no. 10 (1949): 37.
[171] Henderson, February 1950.
[172] Randall Henderson, "Just Between You & Me," *DM* 15, no. 12 (1952): 42.

nation remained embroiled in the war in Korea and "a greater area of desert land [was] posted as reserved for the armed forces and atomic energy commission than at the height of World War II."[173] Recreationists felt increasingly boxed in by bombing ranges, air fields, and military bases. Henderson wanted to warn military brass that "we desert folks do think a lot of this arid land of ours–and they cannot keep pushing us off of it without stirring a hornet's nest of protest."[174] One can imagine *Desert*'s 25,000 subscribers nodding in agreement.[175]

By the 1950s, self-described conservationists in the West could no longer quietly watch resource extraction and military installations eat away at what they perceived to be the best of arid America. *Desert* and its readers stood for a new, regionally specific conservationist identity that celebrated the desert's aesthetic, recreational, and emotional qualities. However, as more Americans moved into the Southwest over the following decades, the ramifications of desert recreation became increasingly apparent. The strain of increased use prompted federal land managers' embrace of recreation as a management goal for places like the East Mojave.

[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Desert had more than 25,000 subscriptions within a decade of its first issue. *DM* 11:1 (Nov. 1947), 46.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HARE AND THE HOUND: REGULATING RECREATION

J. Russell "Russ" Penny was the first Bureau of Land Management (BLM) state director to take seriously how Americans might keep – or ruin – the California Desert. Penny joined the federal service in 1937 as a range examiner in Wyoming for the Interior Department's Division of Grazing before serving in the Marine Corps between 1943 and 1946. After the war's end, Penny joined the newly formed BLM, received a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University in 1951**,** and wrote notable histories of the grazing district system.[1] The first BLM State Director in Idaho, Penny filled the same position in Montana and Nevada before landing in California in 1966. Large fire events shaped Penny's embrace of a holistic view of land management, a philosophy he brought to his new position in the Golden State. The 1956 Idaho fire season and the 1964 Elko Fire Storm taught Penny to improve training, equipment, and follow-up rehabilitation to protect soil and vegetative resources.[2]

Arriving in California as BLM State Director in 1966, Russ Penny quickly recognized his agency's ignorance of the desert and its recreational potential. Seen historically through mineral tonnage and animal unit months, the BLM understood the economics of mining and ranching on the desert. But could people have fun in places like the East Mojave? If so, what was that recreation worth?

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[1] J. Russell Penny and Marion Clawson, "Administration of Grazing Districts," *Land Economics* 29, no. 1 (1953): 23–34; J. Russell Penny and Marion Clawson, "Administration of Grazing Districts," in *The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain*, ed. Vernon Carstensen (University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).
[2] Stephen J. Pyne, *Between Two Fires: A Fire History of Contemporary America* (University of Arizona Press, 2015), 80.

Questions about the value of desert recreation reflected a postwar transformation of how Americans understood and engaged leisure, mobility, and the public domain. In the decades after World War II, increased standards of living brought millions of Americans into a budding middle-class embrace of leisure. Underwritten by the G.I.-bill and Federal Housing Administration loans, a newly affluent group of Americans used jeeps and inexpensive Japanese motorcycles to access distant and heretofore inaccessible spaces.[3] As Los Angeles, San Diego, Riverside, and other industrial areas grew rapidly after the end of World War II, Californians wanted a recreational outlet and escape from the congestion, smog, and drudgery of urban life.[4] The desert offered more than 10 million acres accessible within a four-hour drive of Los Angeles County, mimicking an earlier frontier ideology that saw the nation's seemingly limitless open spaces as the solution to its burgeoning population.[5]

Through an inventory and assessment of the desert's recreational value, Penny and his office learned the desert's limits. As more Californians traveled to the region, Penny warned that the landscape was not inexhaustible, but suffering under the burden of unregulated off-road motorcycle and off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel, target-shooting, and wanton destruction of both public and private resources. Penny likened the BLM's relationship with off-roading to

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[3] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Vintage Books, 2004), 113. Cohen described how "mass consumption in postwar American" was not a "personal indulgence, but rather a civic responsibility designed to 'provide full employment and improved living standards for the rest of the nation."

[4] For more on postwar western growth, see Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement*, 73.

[5] William Cronon, "Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1987): 157; Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890 - 1990* (Univ. of California Press, 1999), 1; Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000*, 82–85; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 68; Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," paper presented at American Historical Association, July 12, 1893.

grazing management when he first joined the Division of Grazing of 1937: "The users were antagonistic. There was little pertinent knowledge of the recreational resources, uses, or management needs of the public lands, nor were there pertinent rules, regulations, and laws for administration."[6] The annual "Hare and Hound" or "B-to-V" cross-country motorcycle race between Barstow and Las Vegas became a flashpoint in the struggle by federal agencies to exert control over the lands they managed.[7] Responding to the perceived damage to cultural and natural resources that accompanied the first Hare and Hound, Penny's BLM office published "The California Desert," a study of the desert's recreational value and risks with accompanying recommendations for ensuring protection. Most of these recommendations would strengthen the BLM's authority over the desert, but "The California Desert" also called for public involvement in shaping a comprehensive management plan. To put public pressure behind the protecting of places like the East Mojave from unregulated off-highway riding, Penny solicited the Sierra Club to intervene on the BLM's behalf in pending lawsuits.[8]

Senator Alan Cranston of California shared Penny's concern for the desert. Cranston successfully advocated for the California Desert Conservation Area as a component of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA). The resultant California Desert Conservation Area modeled the multiple-use principles enshrined by FLPMA, with the East

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[6] J. Russell Penny, "California Desert Program: 1966-1974," in *Opportunity and Challenge: The Story of the BLM*, ed. James Muhn and Hanson R. Stuart (Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1988), 130.
[7] First run in 1967, the Hare and Hound draw more than 10,000 participants, pit crew members, and spectators by 1974, the year that the BLM produced their first Environmental Impact Statement on the event. Concluding that no regulation could appropriately limit the environmental impact of the race, the BLM denied permits for the race beginning in 1975. That Thanksgiving weekend, several hundred riders conducted a protest ride along the race's route. By 1980, more than 2,000 riders partook in the yearly resistance ride. In the 1980s, *EarthFirst!* activists tried to sabotage the course. Policymakers sought to reel in the perceived lawlessness by drawing new lines for desert land-users.
[8] Penny, "California Desert Program: 1966-1974," 131.

Mojave as a testing ground for compromise-driven, participatory land management in which "multiple use" evolved into a system of spatially segregated uses zoned by activity level.

Guided by scientific studies and public input, the California Desert Conservation Area and its guiding California Desert Plan represented an innovative land management strategy that embraced public input and the language of multiple use while creating a novel land management land classification system that clarified which desert lands were worth protecting. Shaped by ranchers, land managers, miners, recreationists, environmentalists, and residents, the Desert Plan represented an expansion of federal authority legitimated through participation, zoning, and the selective accommodation of competing interests.

Postwar Recreation and Park Proposals for the East Mojave

If Russ Penny represented an emerging confidence in scientific planning and administrative authority, Dennis Casebier embodied a desert stewardship rooted in intimacy, access, and historical knowledge rather than regulation. Graduating from high school in Topeka, Kansas, in 1952, Casebier soon enlisted in the Marine Corps with plans to fight in the Korean War. After the signing of the armistice, he instead attended a radio-telegraph operator course in San Diego. By 1954, he settled into a field command position at the Twentynine Palms, CA, Marine Base.

As was the case for many servicemembers, the postwar shift toward permanent mobilization brought Dennis Casebier to the desert. From the late-1920s through the midcentury, the United States, and the West particularly, mobilized to fight evolving foes: poverty of the Great Depression, fascism during World War II, and eventually the perceived threat of

communism in the postwar period.[9] The federal government's subsidies for natural resource extraction, industrial expansion, and military activation altered the region's economy and social identity. Rather than being relegated to a colony of the eastern states, historian John Findlay argued, the West's industrial and militaristic might gave it an outsized power within national discourse and funding battles.[10] The influx of servicemembers to the West exposed Americans from other regions, arriving with their own ideas of proper land use, to new desert landscapes.



Figure 14: Dennis Casebier, right, in 1954, shortly after being stationed at the Marine Base in Twentynine Palms, CA. DGC Collection, MDHCA.

Between 1956 and 1960, Casebier returned to Topeka and earned a degree in mathematics and physics from Washburn University. Soon thereafter, he joined the Navy's

[9] Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000*, 1–3, 97, 164–66.
[10] For more on the West as a colony of the East, see William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (University Press of Kansas, 1994), 61–83, 121–42.

guided-missile laboratory in Corona, CA, returning to the desert on which he had become "hooked."[11] He spent his weekends in Joshua Tree National Monument. Soon, Casebier looked for less-traveled corners of arid California.

Developments within the Park Service pushed Casebier to travel away from Joshua Tree National Monument and toward the less-visited eastern Mojave Desert. Endowed with building-sized granitic boulders and tall, spidery Joshua Tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) forests, President Franklin D. Roosevelt designated Joshua Tree National Monument in 1936 to emphasize its scientific orientation as a "representative-area" of a distinctive desert landscape.[12] Historian Hal Rothman argued that the 1930s represented a period in which the Park Service became increasingly preoccupied with ecological communities, with Joshua Tree typifying this institutional shift.[13] By the 1960s, evolving regulations limited primitive backcountry camping, forcing Casebier to sleep in campgrounds and within sight of dozens of other tents.

To solve a sudden lack of solitude, Casebier explored north of Twentynine Palms into the unmarked spaces on maps of southeastern California. He found himself scaling high peaks in the Providence Mountains, laboring across the Kelso Dunes, and searching for historical Army postings in canyons across the empty eastern Mojave. Casebier found a place where he could be a good steward of the land but also be left alone. More than anything, he embraced learning all he could about the region's complex history. Keenly interested in the Old Government Road ("Mojave Road") that transected the East Mojave between the Colorado and Mojave rivers,

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[11] Sean P. Holman, "Dennis G. Casebier, 1934-2021, Has Died.," MotorTrend, February 12, 2021, https://www.motortrend.com/news/dennis-g-casebier-1934-2021/. Holman now serves as the president of the Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association, an organization Casebier helped found.
[12] Presidential Proclamation No. 2193, 50 Stat. 1760 (1936).
[13] Hal Rothman, *America's National Monuments: The Politics of Preservation* (University Press of Kansas, 1989), 171.

Casebier enjoyed work trips to Washington, D.C., where he spent his evenings in the National Archives to better understand those who traveled the desert before him. Focused weekends in the field reaffirmed his archival work, but Casebier's daughter Darelyn remembered, "my dad did not recreate. He researched."[14] Research in the National Archives took Casebier across much of the East Mojave, where local history, wildlife, and geology then spurred him to advocate for new California state parks. Two geological wonders stood out to Casebier early in his time in the desert: The Mojave cinder cones and Cima Dome.

The cinder cones bubbled out of the ground. As recently as ten-thousand years ago, lava flowed freely across the East Mojave. New formations dotted the desert, covered by small volcanoes lacking the power to burst through the surface. As lava slowly accumulated, it formed 27 nearly symmetrical hills of black basalt. Lava flows on the surface cooled on their exterior, forming long tunnels where the interior magma continued to push downslope. Mined heavily for their cinder – an important building material for budding Las Vegas – the cones risked slowly eroding under the industrial demands of the postwar West, each striation representing both a new mining road and risk to their survival. Hiking washes adorned with petroglyphs on basaltic sidewalls, Casebier knew the cinder cones deserved more appreciation.

Casebier also embraced Cima Dome. Underlain by quartz monzonite and covered by coarse sand and gravel alluvium, the fifteen-mile-wide granite uplift gently rises above the surrounding valleys and offers a high-altitude refuge for local wildlife escaping the summer heat. It gave Casebier the "impression of 'being on top of the world.'" [15] Sited within the world's

[14] Darelyn Casebier, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, March 11, 2025, OHC, MDHCA.
[15] Dennis G. Casebier, "The Cima Dome: A New State Park?," Article-length manuscript, Norco, CA, 1965, Folder 1, Cima Dome, DGC, MDHCA.

largest and densest Joshua tree forest, which gave the area a "park-like appearance," Cima Dome epitomized the East Mojave's beauty.

Casebier advocated for including the East Mojave within the California State Parks system. In November 1965, he wrote to the California Department of Parks and Recreation in Sacramento, suggesting that both the Mojave Cindercones and Cima Dome be set aside as parks. Supervisory project planner Richard May responded that the Mojave Cindercones covered more than 25,000-acres of federal property, making them an unlikely candidate for inclusion. Laws limiting the yearly acreage available for federal-state land swaps for recreational purposes restrained the agency from making endless and ever-growing requests for federal lands. May warned Casebier that the Cindercones, though distinctive, lacked the access, flora, and fauna of other "equally or more worthwhile areas" under similar consideration across the state.[16]

[16] Richard A. May to Dennis Casebier, December 10, 1965, Folder 1, Cima Dome, DGC, MDHCA.



Figure 15: The Cinder Cone area's distinctive lava formations. Author's image.

Apparently, Cima Dome was one of those "equally or more worthwhile areas." One of ninety areas under consideration for the 1966-1967 budget through the 1964 State Park Bond Act, Cima Dome's possible project area totaled 31,290 acres.[17] Including some local landmarks, such as Teutonia Peak, Wildcat Butte, and Kessler Peak, while avoiding others such as Marl Spring and Casebier's Old Government Road, the Cima Dome project had potential to provide the desert recreation "sought by a large segment of the state."[18] Envisioning overnight camping, a

[17] The State Beach, Park, Recreational, and Historical Facilities Bond Act of 1964 (California Proposition 1) (1964).
[18] Ibid.

trail system, and a "scenic road development," May informed Casebier that Cima Dome was under consideration for "receiving a high priority placement" for future projects.[19]

California State Parks had plans for Cima Dome. In February 1966, the agency released a report, "Lower Colorado River and Desert Study," that proposed Cima Dome's inclusion as part of a five-unit addition to the state park system.[20] With an on-site headquarters, the proposed 31,290-acre Cima Dome State Park would include overnight campgrounds, day-use areas, and scenic overlooks placed along "a comprehensive network of presently non-existent roads."[21] The granite uplift might become the epicenter of recreation in the East Mojave.

Casebier held reservations about the state agency's optimistic figures for anticipated use and published his concerns in *Desert Magazine*.[22] Citing statistics that would "be difficult to comprehend for anyone who has enjoyed the seclusion and privacy of the Cima Dome," Casebier outlined that the state planned 2,000 campsites and 300 picnic sites, expecting 350,000 annual visitor days at the campsites and 100,000 at the picnic sites.[23] How could the expected masses all fit into a space defined by its emptiness? It seemed to Casebier that he had brought his problems from Joshua Tree north into the East Mojave.

The proposed Cima Dome State Park never happened, but its evaluation as recreational space reflected the rise in outdoor recreation across California and the nation. The postwar period

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[19] Ibid. The road loop suggested exemplified the "Meineckizing" of access loops through national forests, national parks, and state parks during the twentieth century. See Young, *Camping Grounds*, 153.
[20] *Lower Colorado River and Desert Study* (California Division of Beaches and Parks, 1966).
[21] Casebier, "The Cima Dome: A New State Park?," 7.
[22] Ibid., 1, 4–6; Dennis Casebier, "Look To the Cima Dome," *DM* 30, no. 4 (1967): 8–10. Although editors Jack and Choral Pepper whittled down Casebier's manuscript submission, it retained its informative but wary stance toward the proposed Cima Dome State Park; the article's closing line warns about the 350,000 estimated visitor days in the proposed Cima Dome State Park: "for those who enjoy seclusion and adventure in remote places, this is a fearsome prospect."
[23] Ibid.

gave a rising American middle class previously unknown levels of financial security. Historians have described that the G.I. Bill and other veterans' benefits tied citizenship, consumption, and prosperity in a state-building project that especially targeted white servicemembers to the exclusion of Black soldiers and sailors.[24] Readily available mortgages from the Federal Housing Administration paired with mass production home construction techniques brought millions of Americans into both the middle class and the nation's quickly sprawling suburbs, albeit to the detriment to the decaying communities in inner-cities.[25] Within a milieu defined by consumption and markers of modernity, rising standards of living and increased free time encouraged Americans across the nation to embrace what historian Becky Nicolaides described as a "twentieth-century shift from 'work ethic' to 'leisure ethic.'"[26] Americans' midcentury leisure was neither episodic nor elitist, but democratized, expected, and increasingly played out across western public lands as urbanites traveled into the countryside.

Economic prosperity and the leisure time that came with it became expectations in the postwar era.[27] Historian William Philpott demonstrated how postwar consumerism reshaped the American landscape in rural western spaces like the Colorado high country, reframing middle-class forays into the Rockies as restorative and morally improving, explaining how a "republic of

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[24] Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 18; Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*, 111–13. For the segregated application of the G.I. Bill, see Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The G.I. Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Brassey's Inc, 1996), 150–51; Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 114–26. Importantly, Mettler does not link the G.I. Bill to other New Deal programs, but an earlier antecedent of "social provision geared for citizen soldiers."

[25] Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3, 15–21, 28–35; Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (1985; Oxford University Press, 1987), 204–9; Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 186.

[26] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 67–68.

[27] James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 321.

consumers" played out on the landscape, and arguing for a suburbanization of nature.[28] The onrush of visitors, though, did not come without cost, and Robert Gottlieb linked drives through the country and other everyday activities to both the degradation of environments and regulatory responses to that degradation, a process exemplified by the popularizing of cross-country motorcycle races and the BLM's push to understand and control them.[29] Whether on dirt-bikes or in tents, Americans' engagement with the outdoors after World War II reflected a rise of "the good life" underwritten by federal programs, rising standards of living, and a national embrace of consumer culture.

Of the many expressions of this new leisure ethic, camping stood out as an example of how practices long embedded in the practical history of the outdoors shifted from vocational, subsistence, or political purposes to recreational. Generally, from the nineteenth century through the second half of the twentieth century, camping evolved from a place of woodcraft and confronting the hardening effects of living off a presumably hostile nature to an activity of leisure and relaxation.[30] Especially for working class visitors vacationing on a budget, the desert and other public lands offered financial, physical, and moral benefits.[31] Southern California's climate reinforced the outdoors as a year-round escape from urbanity.[32] Although a small number of recreationists enjoyed the desert with their balloon-tired Fords and other early automobiles,

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[28] William Philpott, *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country* (University of Washington Press, 2013), 5, 130–31.
[29] Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Island Press, 2005), 115–18, 399–400.
[30] Turner, "From Woodcraft to 'Leave No Trace': Wilderness, Consumerism, and Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America," 464.
[31] Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 157, 177.
[32] Turner, "From Woodcraft to 'Leave No Trace': Wilderness, Consumerism, and Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America," 464.

the civilian adoption of the jeep after World War II dramatically increased visitation to Southern California's arid spaces and more Americans used the desert to "think about their relationship to nature, the nation, and each other."[33] While some Americans had come to embrace motel and other auto-lodging options, primitive campsites in the desert offered space to get away from modern consumerism and return to a romantic, presumably self-sustaining life with the wild.[34]

Despite issues of access and an increased likelihood of vehicle breakdowns on remote two-tracks, the desert demanded little else from its visitors. In her study of how companies both profited from and influenced Americans' outdoor identities, historian Rachel Gross argued that seemingly practical items from the buckskin shirt to Gore-Tex rain jacket reflected ideals of rugged masculinity, the importance of material things in the outdoors, and the tight connections among consumerism, the outdoors, and American national identity.[35] The desert's simplicity allowed for more to be included in its recreation boom. Sun cover, water storage, and good boots could get most visitors through a weekend in the desert. Except for the monsoon and rolling, wet gray of January and February, travelers did not need rain slickers with the newest waterproofing. The vast expanses of the East Mojave offered space for both the uninitiated and under-packed novice and the expert touting the latest equipment. Needing little to enjoy the desert, the growing masses of southern California increasingly turned to the desert for their kicks.

Understanding and Managing Desert Recreation

[33] Young, *Camping Grounds*, 5.
[34] Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 19–40, 170–72.
[35] Rachel S. Gross, *Shopping All the Way to the Woods: How the Outdoor Industry Sold Nature to America* (Yale University Press, 2024), 2–4, 21–35, 43.

By the 1960s, the Bureau of Land Management confronted new uses for the desert and realized a tension between non-motorized and motorized recreation. Although fewer in number than the weekend camper, thousands of motorcyclists made a loud and lasting impact on the landscape and its managers. Penny arrived months before the first running of what would become the world's largest and most prestigious cross-country motorcycle race.

Driven by the import of hundreds of thousands of inexpensive and easily customized Japanese motorcycles, riders looked to spaces where regulations such as noise ordinances and speed limits would not apply. A popular motorcycle-related periodical first published in 1962, *Cycle World* demystified Japanese motorcycles to western riders. Although before World War II, "very few people outside Japan even knew motorcycles were built in the land of the rising sun," by 1967, the industry leader Honda produced more than 150,000 motorcycles monthly.[36] Across the first six months of 1967, "Japan's makers produced 1,177,852 motorcycles," with 151,762 motorcycles (valued at $38,625,107) exported to America during that six-month period. Honda led all exporters with 322,225 motorcycles sent out of country, followed by Yamaha, Suzuki, and Kawasaki, which exported 83, 209, 83,513, and 23,013 motorcycles, respectively.[37] The time spent wrenching on their often-single-cylinder bikes shaped riders' want for freedom, with modifications meant to traverse more and quicker.[38] Connecting them to reality through both their tools and intimate relationships with dirt roads shaped by repeated trips, motorcyclists demonstrated self-reliant mechanical competence as the rest of the nation shifted increasingly

[36] W. B. Swim, "The History of Japanese Motorcycles," *Cycle World*, November 1, 1967; W. B. Swim, "Report From Japan," *Cycle World*, November 1, 1967.
[37] Ibid.
[38] For more on how, "the work a man does forms him" see Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*, 73.

toward white-collar jobs.[39] An outlet from cubicles and cities, with its open space, bounding trails, and minimal policing, the desert called.

On Saturday, November 26, 1967, between 500 and 1,650 entrants kicked off the first Pacific Southwest Championship Race, better known as the Hare and Hound, or simply, the "B-to-V" (Barstow-to-Las Vegas).[40] Traversing 178 miles of desert country, the B-to-V race forced the BLM to confront that recreation was no longer incidental to desert management, but a land use demanding its own classification, oversight, and control. Penny requested and was granted $25,000 from the national office to initiate a wide-ranging study into the recreational uses of the desert. By the second running of the Hare and Hound, Penny wanted some understanding of what was happening on federal land.

Facing a management concern he neither understood nor controlled, Penny reached out to the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service for assistance conducting ecological, archaeological and ethnographic, geological, hydrological, and visitor-use studies across the California Desert, an area roughly spanning from Barstow to the border with Arizona. Inspired by 1964 legislation that established the Public Land Law Review Commission and the classification and land use program, and fearing the potential damage of unmitigated recreational use, Penny embraced the nation's recognition that "some of the Public Domain should be retained in the ownership of all the people and managed for multiple use purposes."[41] Although not yet

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[39] Ibid., 60–73.

[40] Wheat, *California Desert Miracle*, 2; Bureau of Land Management, *Environmental Assessment: Barstow-to-Las Vegas Motorcycle Race*, CA-060-EA0-01 (Bureau of Land Management, 1990), 1; Jack White, "Barstow-Vegas Race Draws Top Riders," Sports, *Desert Dispatch* (Barstow, CA), November 29, 1968. The competing figures are telling of those responsible for them. In Sierra Club counsel Wheat's retelling of the "Desert Miracle," the immediate and wanton destruction of desert resources was clear from the race's first running. For the BLM officials responsible for the 1990 Environmental Assessment, it was a process that grew slowly but certainly.

[41] J. Russell Penny, "The California Desert: A Recreation Study of the Desert Public Domain Lands of California under the Jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management," Bureau of Land Management, November 1968,

the world's largest motorcycle race, as it would become in the early 1970s, nor the political flashpoint it would represent through the 1980s, the Hare and Hound race worried Penny about the BLM's ability to preserve the desert for all Americans.

Tens of millions of Californians lived within a four-hour drive of the desert country. Not so remote that access limited visitation, the urban population of Southern California saw the desert as a place to which they might escape. Describing the unplanned use of the desert in the mid-1960s, Penny saw that "the ticky-tacky box dwelling, smog shrouded, freeway flocks pour out upon the desert at every opportunity to play and rest and breathe and stretch their arms, a tribute to the healing powers open land has for our society." New and returning visitors would travel to desert spaces, whether the BLM effectively planned to host them or not.

The California Desert's vastness allowed for its mistreatment. Seeming so large and remote as to have space for all people and all activities, individuals justified their own, personal abuses of desert space, confident that there was always another sandstone canyon, petroglyph panel, or patch of Mojave aster. Penny found the landscape "repetitively scarred with ever-increasing road and utility rights-of-way, pockmarked by past, present, and speculative mining operations, desecrated by substandard construction, littered with trash and debris, and plundered of its natural and scientific values, creating at times a ghetto atmosphere."[42]

Although Californians traveled to escape the dense, smog-filled cities, they brought their urban problems to the countryside. Accessing remote desert canyons demanded petroleum-fired

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Unindexed, p. 4, MDHCA; Public Land Law Review Commission, Pub. L. Nos. 88–606 (1964); Wayne N. Aspinall, "The Public Land Law Review Commission: Origins and Goals," *Natural Resources Journal* 7, no. 2 (1967): 149–52; Milton A. Pearl, "The Public Land Law Review Commission: An Overview," *Land and Water Law Review* 6, no. 1 (1970): 7–31.

[42] J. Russell Penny, "The California Desert," 2.

automobiles. As environmental historian Joel Tarr argued, all pollution must go somewhere, and the perceived cleanliness of the desert air and landscape could soon become itself littered with beer cans, refuse, and the slow but increasing effects of burning hydrocarbons; it offered an out-of-sight, if not ultimate, sink.[43] Penny warned that the ensuing masses coming to the desert "may be a fatal tribute," in which, "wherever roads and trails go on the land there are people. Where there are no roads, people are pushing over it in jeeps and on motorcycles." Aware that the desert was fragile, Penny's office undertook the first comprehensive study of the California desert country's recreational value.

Before offering suggestions on how to improve recreational enjoyment and longevity of places such as the East Mojave, Penny and his staff first recognized the limits of their understanding of desert ecologies, cultural resources, and geology; to this end, the agency studied 19 prospective "Recreation Lands," laying the groundwork for diving the landscape into spaces of protection, use, and sacrifice.

The BLM divided the recreational areas into three priority groups, assigned largely by the intensity of their use and the immediacy of need for protection. The Imperial Sand Hills, a popular off-road destination relatively close to Los Angeles, fell in Priority Group 1, whereas the relatively inaccessible Old Woman Mountains west of Needles fell into Priority Group 3.[44] Although some areas were already well-documented and studied, such as the famous ghost-town at Calico, CA, Penny called for "the [BLM] to expediously[sic] proceed with more detailed

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[43] Joel A. Tarr, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (University of Akron Press, 2010), 8. Tarr argued that "solutions for one pollution problem often generated new pollution problems in different localities or in different media."

[44] The Chemehuevi, however, have held and continue to hold the Old Woman Mountains (Mamapukaid) as their spiritual origin point. For Chemehuevi cosmology and sovereignty, see Daisy Ocampo, "Spiritual Geographies of Indigenous Sovereignty: Connections of Caxcan with Tlachialoyantepec and Chemehuevi with Mamapukaid" (Dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 2019).

studies…so that other unknown or unrecognized values can be noted."[45] Well-traveled spots such as the Mecca Hills or Rodman Mountains required immediate care; less visited locations such as the Whipple Mountains or historic Fort Piute were not in "urgent" need of protection.[46]

The eastern Mojave study area fell into Priority Group 2 and included much of what would become Mojave National Preserve. Comparatively underused, the 825,000-acre study area between Baker, CA and the Castle Mountains offered "average to outstanding geological, biological, ecological, archaeological, and historical values."[47] Protecting them required action by the federal government. Imagining interpretive sites at Cima Dome, Government Holes and Marl Spring along the Old Government Road, Kelso Sand Dunes, and Hole-in-the-Wall, the BLM suggested "designating the Cima Dome, with its Joshua Tree forest, and the Cinder Cones as National Natural Landmarks." Somewhere, Dennis Casebier might have smiled.

The report was more than an appraisal of the desert's prospective recreational value. The study contained a set of recommendations for ensuring the perpetuity of desert recreation in the context of multiple use land management and through sequestered zoning for various activities. Representing both a continuation of earlier management philosophies that supported industry and an adaptation to incorporate new uses into its management system, Penny's suggestions represented a significant enlargement of both the BLM's responsibilities and authority.

"The California Desert" called for sweeping changes to keep multiple use viable as the BLM's overarching management philosophy. Multiple use was endangered but still possible with consolidated control by the BLM. Too many disparate land users affected one another:

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[45] J. Russell Penny, "The California Desert," 320.
[46] J. Russell Penny, 260.
[47] J. Russell Penny, 319.

> The entire concept of multiple-use depends on appreciation of values and on a mutual respect for the rights of other varieties of users. Motorcycles should not be used to frighten cattle or wildlife. Grazing or speculative mining need not destroy the most spectacular of desert scenery. The possible combination of conflicts in multiple-use is almost endless.[48]

As more and disparately motivated desert land users came to spaces such as the East Mojave, the BLM's managed an increasingly active public.

To engage and control the public, the BLM first needed to solidify its control over desert spaces. It offered a simple solution: use legislation to bring most lands in their study, both public and private, under the agency's authority. Without Congressional approval, the BLM lacked the authority, land to trade, or funding to purchase or offset purchases of inholding[49] parcels within their comprehensive plan. Calling for legislation that could "expedite the judicious exchange of public and private land for more economical and efficient administration," officials targeted potential inholdings within their proposed Recreational Lands.[50]

The BLM considered their need for authority to enforce rules and regulations "mandatory."[51] The agency offered ready-to-propose language for legislation, including proposed fines and prison sentences for infractions. Land managers requested that 16 regulations take immediate effect.[52] A list of prohibited acts, "far from complete," included "polluting water

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[48] Penny, 213.
[49] Inholding parcels are private parcels surrounded by federal lands, most often in the context of NPS units.
[50] J. Russell Penny, "The California Desert," 197–98, 205. Recreation Lands was another novel land designation suggested by the BLM in 1968. Panagia showed that "land exchanges in the second-half of the twentieth century operated as "attempts to conserve natural resources." Giancarlo Panagia, "The Political History of Federal Land Exchanges," *Electronic Green Journal* 1, no. 28 (2009).
[51] J. Russell Penny, "The California Desert," 210.
[52] For a discussion of how FLPMA and other environmental laws affected BLM authority, especially in the context of transitioning from the Carter to Reagan administrations, see Karen R. Merrill, *Public Lands and Political Meaning: Ranchers, the Government, and the Property Between Them* (University of California Press, 2002), 206–9.

supplies" and destroying private or public resources, but also offenses such as "operating or using any audio device to unreasonably annoy other persons."[53]

Although it did not explicitly request arresting authority, the BLM did see a uniformed ranger force as necessary for its mission.[54] Seeking their own Stetson-touting public contact force, the BLM considered rangers' ability assist in public services and safety. Published in 1969, a revised "The California Desert" with technical supplements suggested that human life was "not [worth] very much in the California Desert." But with a ranger "out in the vast reaches of this arid land," the visitor would no longer need to "fend for himself."[55] The BLM suggested their force undertake wide-ranging responsibilities, including maintenance and the development of an interpretive program.

Controversially, surveillance was a central objective of the management plan. With uniformed staff always on site, rangers could support local recreation by protecting the nation's resources from the malfeasant few who would purposefully harm them. As physical manifestations of the government's authority over spaces such as the East Mojave, the uniformed ranger staff took on wide-ranging powers and responsibilities to exert control over the contested desert. Pointedly, the BLM recommendations for "uniformed rangers" did not specify if they would be armed.[56]

Further solidifying its prospective control of the California Desert, the 1968 BLM plan explicitly sought to push out private landholders. With more than 90,000 acres included in the

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[53] Penny, 211.
[54] "The California Desert" suggests there would be no need for "arresting authority," as BLM "employees, as well as permittees and licensees, could take the required action to identify the violation and violator." Penny, 210.
[55] Bureau of Land Management, *The California Desert: A Critical Environmental Challenge (Technical Supplements)* (Department of the Interior, 1969), 92.
[56] J. Russell Penny, "The California Desert," 213–16; 248–53.

East Mojave study area, Penny suggested the "BLM should proceed at the earliest opportunity with the elimination of the private inholdings and incompatible uses within areas having unusual or outstanding natural values."[57] Buying out local landowners would give the BLM control over contiguous land units, greatly facilitating enforcement, development, and interpretive programs across large swaths of land, generally divided into areas targeting certain activity.

Multiple use did not mean coexistence, but zoning, exclusion, and tradeoffs. Although ranching might be viable on the East Mojave, as the industry had existed for nearly a century, the area's outstanding geological, wildlife, and archaeological resources demanded an increased level of protection and a decreased level of activity. Other areas were sacrificed as OHV play areas. Some access advocates worried that the sequestering of activities to specific areas might dispossess the public of its lands.

Penny's plan for a BLM ranger force, the pressured exchange of public and private parcels, and the self-assigned authority over millions of acres exemplified what some saw as overreach. How Americans thought and spoke about land policy evolved in response to an expansion of the environmental regulatory apparatus during the 1960s and 1970s. Preservation came to replace use when discussing "conservation," "multiple use" deprioritized historically favored industries, and federal officials seemed to assert a tighter grip on the public domain.

June 12, 1960, was a black day for traditional users of the public domain. When President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act, he codified that federal lands (specifically USFS lands) were no longer reserved for those who developed them.[58] Instead,

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[57] Ibid., 321.
[58] "Development" includes ranching, mining, and other industrial use. Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960, Pub. L. Nos. 86–517 (1960).

managers needed to balance land uses, including for wildlife and scientific purposes. A milestone in federal land policy, this shift toward official multiple use policy – and away from the Taylor Grazing Act's identification of livestock grazing as public lands' dominant use – signaled preservation-focused land policy.[59]

Throughout the 1960s, the Department of Interior under Secretary Stewart Udall led a concerted effort to redefine conservation "in a way that emphasized preservation over use."[60] Although some, including House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee chairman Wayne Aspinall, posited preservation and conservation as incompatible policy aims, Udall relegated ranching to one among equal claims of how to best use the desert.[61] The passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Special Message to Congress on Conservation and Restoration of Natural Beauty" threatened commodity producers and OHV enthusiasts with reduced access to the public domain.[62]

States and individuals displayed their displeasure with the perceived overburden of the federal government in local spaces. More than any section, people in the West openly questioned the legitimacy of the federal government's authority over the land.[63] Rebellion was on the horizon as practical access considerations divided the public.[64] As land users directed their consternation at the perceived outsiders who might take away what they considered "their" lands, a growing regulatory apparatus threatened to undo traditional activity across the West.

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[59] R. Mcgreggor Cawley, *Federal Land, Western Anger: The Sagebrush Rebellion and Environmental Politics* (University Press of Kansas, 1996), 19–21.
[60] Cawley, 11.
[61] Cawley, 21–24.
[62] Cawley, 26–27; Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to Congress on Conservation and Restoration of Natural Beauty," Washington, D.C., February 8, 1965; Wilderness Act of 1964, Pub. L. Nos. 88–577, 1131–1136 (1964)..
[63] John Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California* (University of California Press, 1992), 9.
[64] James R. Skillen, *This Land Is My Land: Rebellion in the West* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 45–63.

The specter of regulation and land closure haunted western land users. Environmental historian Leisl Carr Childers described how Nevadan ranchers and miners who relied on four-wheel-drive vehicles to access their cattle and claims, respectively, feared the potential restriction of OHVs access to the Great Basin Desert during the 1960s and 1970s. When President Nixon signed Executive Order 11644 in 1972, meant to establish regulations over OHVs and their use, Nevada's Governor Donal O'Callaghan argued that the people of his state, not federal managers, should decide where vehicles should and should not travel. In Nevada, the BLM relented, opening essentially the entire state to the motor vehicles of cattlemen, miners, and recreationists.[65] The BLM's embrace of desert recreation, and regulating of events such as the B-to-V race, similarly threatened to undo the limitlessness of public land use.

Increasingly constrained by environmental law, public use advocates across the West rejected growing environmental regulation. Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (1970), the Clean Water Act (1972), and the Endangered Species Act (1973), confirming new priorities for land managers. As Betsy Gaines Quammen argued in her study of the Bundy family and its involvement in anti-government activity in the West, new laws and regulations invited a backlash in rural spaces in the American West.[66] Unfounded whispers of the government amassing arms further enflamed discontent in rural communities.[67] Preceding the Sagebrush

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[65] Leisl Carr-Childers, *The Size of the Risk: Histories of Multiple Use in the Great Basin* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 149–52; Alan Halaly, "Nevada Leads Nation in Percentage of Public Land," Las Vegas Review Journal Online, May 14, 2024, https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/local-nevada/how-much-of-nevadas-land-is-owned-by-the-feds-more-than-you-might-think-3050451/; Yoohyun Jung, "Here's How Much of California Is Owned by Different Government Agencies and Why That Matters," San Francisco Chronicle Online, January 14, 2022, https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Here-s-how-much-of-California-is-owned-by-16773882.php. Although Nevada is exceptional in the percentage (80.1%) of lands held by federal agencies, California (46% federal land) is not far behind in acreage (roughly 48,000,000 acres to Nevada's roughly 56,000,000 acres)..

[66] Quammen, *American Zion*, 140.

[67] Quammen, 141–42. Although the specific allegations against the BLM in Quammen's work proved unfounded, the military represents a large, armed federal force spread across the western states.

Rebellion by nearly a decade, "The California Desert" encapsulated many of the characteristics of perceived government overreach.[68]

However, unlike the increasingly complex and bureaucratized regulatory landscape of the 1970s, "The California Desert" invited western land users to shape the desert's future. If scientific and democratic principles could be applied to multiple use land management, the BLM could ensure that the recreational, productive, and educational desert would persist.[69] By including representatives of the various desert-using interests, the proposed planning process offered Americans a direct role in shaping the future of arid land use in Southern California.

Multiple Use and Democratized Land Management

Many of the staff responsible for the positions and information within "The California Desert" contributed to legislation for a comprehensive California Desert plan. Republican Congressman Bob Mathias refined the borders of the BLM's 1968 study and established a framework for the funding and completion of potential studies. Introduced on July 8, 1971, with 29 Californian co-sponsors, Mathias' bill, H.R. 9661, represented the first attempt to legislatively wrest control of the California Desert for the BLM. Although H.R. 9661 languished in committee, four similar bills were introduced in the House and Senate through the early 1970s.[70] All proposed specific conservation areas and called for a comprehensive plan, reflecting national consensus around the value of environmental protection.

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[68] For more on the Sagebrush Rebellion, see Skillen, *This Land Is My Land*, 45–83; Johanna H. Wald and Elizabeth H. Temkin, "The Sagebrush Rebellion: The West Against Itself-Again," *Journal of Environmental Law* 2, no. 1 (1982): 187–207.
[69] J. Russell Penny, "The California Desert," 255–56.
[70] For a legislative history of the California Desert's specific inclusion within FLPMA, see Wheat, *California Desert Miracle*, 12–16.

The legislation for a California Desert Plan coincided with debates over the impending Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. In 1974, the multiple Californian congressmen who had introduced competing desert bills found compromise with Senator Alan Cranston's S.63, which was unanimously approved by the Senate Interior Committee's Subcommittee on Public Lands for inclusion as an amendment to FLPMA.[71] An "Organic Act" for the BLM, "flipma" greatly expanded the Bureau's mandate and specifically accounted for the California Desert.[72]

FLPMA reorganized large swaths of the public domain by clarifying land management principles such as "multiple use" and "sustainable yield." Section 103 of FLPMA defined "multiple use" as "the management of the public lands and their various resources values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people."[73] An important departure from earlier legislative directives for public land agencies, FLPMA listed grazing as one among many other potential resources, including, recreation, "timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife and fish," but as also "natural scenic, scientific, and historical values." Codifying a shift away from "best-use" conservation that characterized land policy since the 1890s, FLPMA enshrined land management that prioritized "productivity of the land and quality of the environment," regardless of if future use will not "give the greatest

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[71] *A Bill to Establish the California Desert National Conservation Area, and for Other Purposes: Hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs*, Senate 93rd Congress, 1st Session (1974).

[72] Varying administrations applied FLPMA differently to service their own political ends. During Reagan's first administration, national deficit concerns prompted a review of saleable public lands. Overall, FLPMA "marked a significant change in the arena of public land policy by constraining historic public land users, including ranching and mining interests, in their assertion of influence over the policy agenda for public lands." Richard O. Miller, "FLPMA: A Decade of Management Under the BLM Organic Act.," *Policy Studies Journal* 14, no. 2 (1985): 265–73.

[73] Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, Pub. L. Nos. 94–579 (1976).

economic return or the greatest unit output."[74] Historian James Skillen described a transformed BLM, with the agency hiring "an entirely new set of professionals with backgrounds in recreation, planning, wildlife biology, and archaeology," to support its evolving mandate.[75] FLPMA also refined the meaning of "sustained yield." Aiming for the "achievement and maintenance in perpetuity," of the "output of the various renewable resources of the public lands," consistent with multiple use land management, "sustainable yield" practices considered both current economic output and future access to resources for development.

The defining of sustainable yield and multiple use significantly reshaped the legal landscape. FLPMA recontextualized wide-ranging land management laws, from the Mining Law of 1872 to the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 to Presidents Nixon and Carter's Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 (issued in 1972 and 1977, respectively, to managed OHVs).[76] FLPMA required the BLM to consider land management on a multidecadal timeframe and weigh the benefits of hyperlocal resource use against preservation. The California Desert offered a laboratory for experimenting with these new management tactics.

FLPMA established the California Desert Conservation Area, which formalized land management plans for 25 million acres of California, including 12.1 million acres under BLM

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[74] For more evolving meanings of "conservation," see Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920*, 122–46; Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development. Written for the Public Land Law Review Commission*, 762–64, 771–72; Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10–21. FLPMA § 103.

[75] Skillen, *This Land Is My Land*, 111.

[76] For an example of the interconnected legal landscape of the public domain, see Appendix E of Thomas F. King, *Cultural Resource Law & Practice* (AltaMira Press, 2013), 386–95. Within this complex legal system, specific criteria for what counts as a historical significance, environmental damage, or even a mining resource developed through negotiated processes.

control.[77] Contradictorily tasked the with "providing for resource use and development, including…maintenance of environmental quality, rights-of-way, and mineral development," the desert needed to be many things to many people.[78]

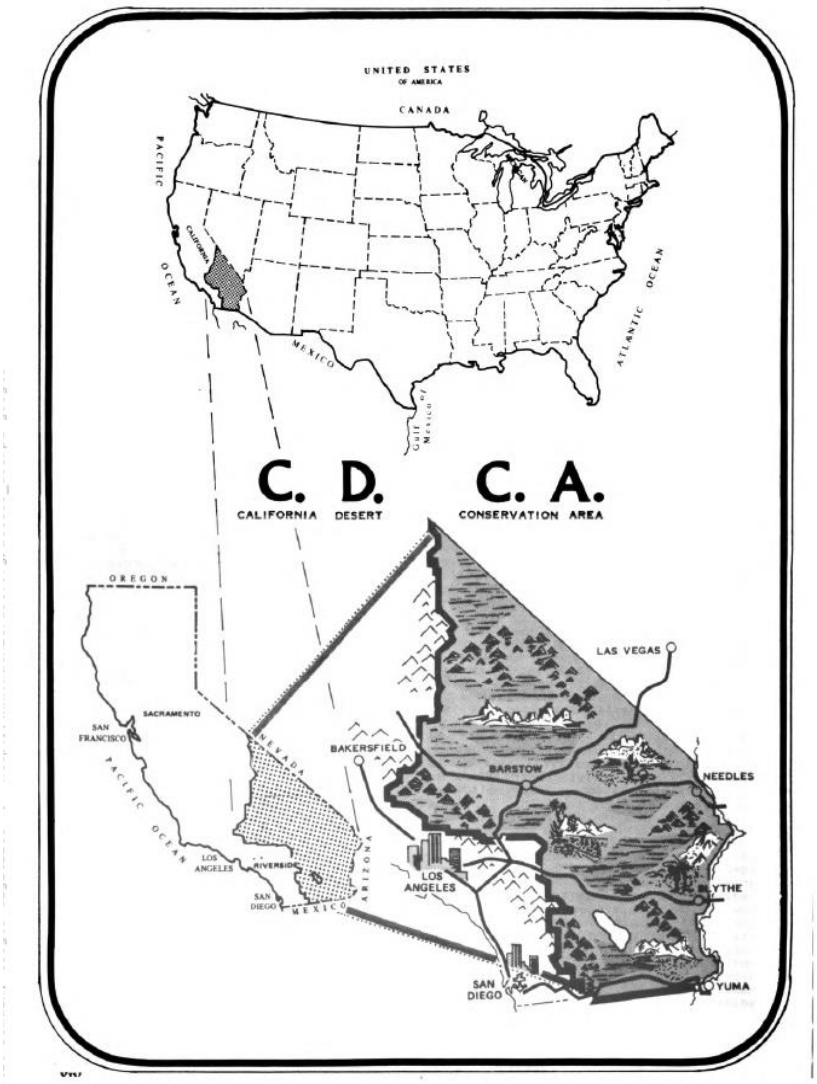


Figure 16: The 1980 California Desert Conservation Area. CDCA Final EIS and Plan, xii

[77] Skillen, *The Nation's Largest Landlord*, 110. For scale, California contains roughly 101 million acres. Of that, some 25 million acres of state, federal, and private land came under guidance of the CDCA. Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.
[78] John L. Heywood, "Off-road Vehicles and Public Opinion in the California Desert," *Leisure Sciences* 4, no. 3 (1981): 376–77.

With environmentalists and some federal land managers inclined toward conservation squaring off against four-wheelers and motorcyclists, commodity producers, and residents, land users jostled for the future of the desert. The California Desert Plan accounted for and balanced these competing perspectives. Formed to support the proposed conservation area, the Desert Planning Staff Office managed the research for, and shaping of, the plan. Beginning in 1976, Secretary of the Interior Cecil Dale Andrus appointed fifteen Californians representing the diversity of interests in the desert – ranching, mining, recreation, military training, local commerce, and wilderness advocates – to serve on a new California Desert Advisory Committee.

The fifteen-member Advisory Committee used public response to shape the desert's future. Beginning in earnest in 1977, the committee hosted 15 public forums to encourage public participation in the planning process. The BLM also hosted more than a dozen meetings in which they described their resource inventories and conducted opinion polls.[79] In December 1979, the advisory committee made a Draft Preview available to anybody who might request it and distributed more than 18,000 copies of the document over the next two months. During the 90-day comment period, February 15 through May 15, 1980, the advisory committee hosted twelve more hearings – four in major cities (Oakland, Sacrament, San Diego, and Los Angeles) and eight "hearing-workshops" held in or around the desert. Additional meetings with state, federal, and local agencies and interest groups provided further input. At the end of the comment period, the committee had heard from over 8,500 respondents totaling "about 40,000 separate comments."[80]

[79] Heywood, "Off-road Vehicles and Public Opinion in the California Desert."
[80] "California Desert Conservation Area: Final Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Plan," Bureau of Land Management, September 1980, E-6.

Generally, public feedback to the draft fell into two categories: procedural and resource-oriented. Resource concerns revolved around *what* the Plan would do – the opening of some lands to OHVs or the closure of others for habitat protection. Procedural concerns over *how* the Desert Plan would be developed and implemented reflected what seemed like an unwieldy process – some worried that the draft was impossibly difficult to understand, others decried what they considered insufficient documentation on wilderness decisions.

Comments panned the planning process as opaque and unreasonably slanted toward special interests, but disagreement about the plan revealed the successful compromise of those who formed it. Beyond its recommendation, the plan offered four alternatives.[81] Many expressed what they perceived as inadequacy within the alternatives, but from competing sides. For some, the Protection Alternative was "not protective enough"; others found it too restrictive. The public assailed the Balanced Alternative as unbalanced and overly weighted toward use and away from protection. Some commenters felt that there were not enough Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), a FLPMA-created designation for hyperlocal spaces that required special management; other commenters thought there should not be any ACECs, or that they should be individually approved by voters.[82] Together, the collective comments reflected a plan that found a middle ground.

Still, conveying complex, often technical information to the public proved difficult. Many commented that they did not understand the analysis of ecosystems in the draft; those with more

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[81] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-13-16.

[82] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-92. Following studies of potential ACECs during the 1970s, the BLM proposed 250 ACECs in its original resource inventory. Underlining the compromise-driven process, the 1981 CDP included 73 ACECs. By 1985, 77 ACECs existed within the CDCA. Bureau of Land Management, "California Desert Conservation Area: 10th Anniversary," Department of Interior, 1986, Folder 1, California Desert Conservation Area Subject File, p. 9, MDHCA.

specialized knowledge opined it seemed even the BLM had an incomplete understanding of its own analysis. Some commenters called for more information on Wilderness Areas, ACEC decisions, and mineral and other resource inventories. People wanted to know more about both the desert and the gestating plan to manage it. Others felt that the draft was already too complex, big, and bulky a document for general understanding or comment. Access advocates felt that the draft exaggerated the results of activity; environmentalists felt that the draft plan underestimated problems.[83] Resource issues defined their conflicting perspectives. Generally, public response to the draft Plan clustered around three fault lines: access, economic survival, and epistemic authority. Framed as a democratic exercise, public participation translated competing values into spatially segregated outcomes.

Debates over whether and where motorized vehicles should access the desert shaped the region's management plan. For those zooming around in dune buggies, riding on their inexpensive and endlessly customizable Japanese motorcycles, or visiting an old Army fort in a Jeep, access to the freedom and mysteries of the desert required tires to roll over the backcountry. Others, who engaged in what the BLM called "non-impacting" use, such as nature study or hiking, expressed that the seemingly unregulated cross-country travel by motorized recreationists damaged or destroyed plants, rocks, and quiet solitude that defined the desert. Arguments over where, when, which vehicles, and how they should travel in desert spaces devolved into name-calling.[84]

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[83] "Camp Rock Spring Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Management Plan," Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, California Desert District, Needles Resource Area Office, April 1981, Camp Rock Spring ACEC subject file, folder 1, MDHCA.

[84] For more on the gathering of polarized public opinion around OHV access in the CDP, see Heywood, "Off-road Vehicles and Public Opinion in the California Desert."

Comments on the draft plan's treatment of motorized vehicle access reflected a polarized public. Many commenters emotionally characterized the issue as "elitists vs. desert users" or "general public vs. vocal special interests."[85] Newspaper editorials featured "Eco-freak," "tree-hugger," and other pejoratives for environmentalists.[86] To lose vehicle access would effectively end all access, as at least a few respondents argued, "recreation in the Desert is impossible without a vehicle."[87] Only "elitists" would lock Americans out of their desert; those who traveled on the land felt they knew it best. Still, four-wheelers wanted to help advance good stewardship where they could.

The BLM leaned on the California 4-Wheel Drive Association (Cal4Wheel) to conduct field studies of the roads the agency proposed to close. Carrying BLM-supplied aerial photographs that marked the expected rights-of-way, and Cal4Wheelers spent months chasing remote desert trails and confirming or contesting whether the route was viable, preexisting, open to travel, closed to travel, or otherwise impassable. Acting in what they considered good faith to limit the damage caused by off-pavement travel, Cal4Wheel helped the BLM finalize thousands of miles of routes through the East Mojave. Recognizing that unlimited access would encourage bad behavior, Cal4Wheel volunteers even installed closure signs for the BLM with hopes that other routes might remain open.[88] Understanding the desert required partnership between OHV groups and federal land managers.

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[85] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-89-E-90.
[86] For a succinct summary of both sides of the OHV argument, see this concise editorial by Jim Matthews, "Racing Has Poor Season," *San Bernardino County Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), December 2, 1978; Richard MacPherson and Kathleen MacPherson, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, March 26, 2025, OHC, MDHCA.
[87] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-89.
[88] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.

After receiving public comments, the Advisory Commission reevaluated 33 potential areas for OHV play and included them within the final proposed Desert Plan, opening thousands of acres originally slated for closure in the draft.[89] New maps clarified what could drive where. The commission also called for more education, to increase public awareness of "the values and sensitives of the Desert."[90] Activities other than recreation also demanded four-wheel-drive vehicles. Mining claimants required drill rigs and testing equipment in remote desert locations; ranchers needed trucks to access and repair their water tanks and pipelines.[91]

Continued economic development and industrial use of the desert stood as a second pillar of the California Desert Plan. Primarily focused on mineral exploration and development, energy and utility rights-of-ways, and ranching operations, the advisory committee members weighed the desert's economic potential against the environmental and aesthetic costs of such development. As with OHV access, comments on mineral exploration and development offered polarized viewpoints. Some feedback demanded "keeping as much land area as possible" open to prospective mining; other commenters favored "rigid controls to ensure the protection of sensitive resources."[92] Calling for a minerals resource inventory and providing maps of mineable areas, the plan offered continuing support for the mining industry, albeit within new constraints.

Similarly, energy and utility rights of way met opposition from both sides. There was general disagreement about the number of corridors needed to meet future utility needs and

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[89] For more on the closure of specific areas to OHV in the CDCA, such as the Kelso Dunes or Mecca Mudhills, see MacPherson and MacPherson. Additionally, although the CDCA Final EIS & Plan "opened" areas slated for closure, it resulted in the loss of thousands of acres of play area and more than 1,100 miles of two-track.
[90] CDCA Final EIS and Plan, E-90.
[91] The drawing of wilderness areas and their impact on local cattle operations is discussed in my next chapter. In short, the width of the sharpie used to demarcate WSAs seized an additional .25 mile width from accessible public lands. For more on the need for precise definition in wilderness studies, see Kevin R. Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest: Creating Wilderness Areas in the Pacific Northwest* (University of Washington Press, 2007).
[92] CDCA Final EIS and Plan, E-8.

where to site them. Most comments on utility corridors came from the local communities such as Desert Hot Springs in the Coachella Valley and the Morongo Valley, which worried that transmission lines might cut through their neighborhoods.[93] Fearing air and water pollution, local people also protested the siting of conventional power plants within the Desert. Utility providers warned that limits on utility corridors would raise consumer costs.

[93] "Desert Hot Springs Part of Impact Study on Power Plant," A, *Desert Sentinel* (Desert Hot Springs, CA), August 22, 1974; "Sky Valley Protesting Powerline Proposal," *Desert Sentinel* (Desert Hot Springs, CA), April 7, 1977; "Local Hearing Set on Powerlines," *Desert Trail* (Twentynine Palms, CA), May 29, 1980; Joyce Malet, "Sky Valley Is Route of Last Resort," *Desert Sentinel* (Desert Hot Springs, CA), April 14, 1977.

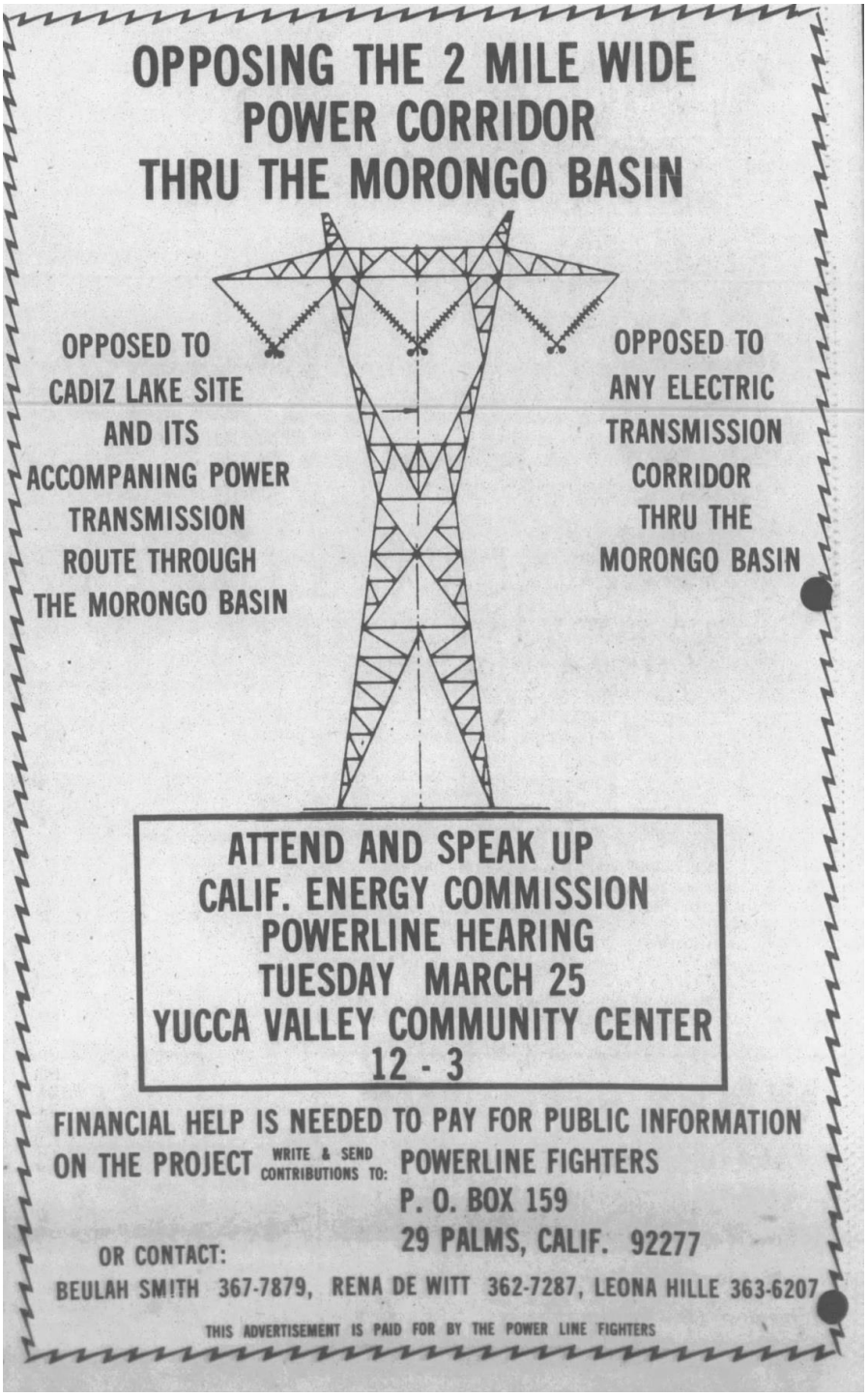


Figure 17: Notice for anti-utility corridor public meeting in Morongo Valley, CA, 1980. The Desert Trail (Twentynine Palms, CA), March 13, 1980, 1.

The final Plan leaned toward continued utility development. Although it moved some corridors to address concerns from the Coachella and Morongo Valleys, the plan proposed 16 utility corridors to "provide the flexibility for meeting future power transmission needs," and set aside a set of contingency corridors for future development. The final plan approved more than 3,500 miles of high-capacity power transmission lines and 12,000 miles of oil and gas pipelines across the California desert.[94] To serve the growing cellular telecommunications boom, the plan also approved more than 100 communication sites on ridges and mountaintops across the desert. Solar and wind studies would be conducted at locations best suited for renewable energy development. The desert would be protected, but that protection could not slow the development of communities around and beyond its amorphous borders.

As with mining and utility development, debates around livestock grazing reached a fever pitch. Many felt that the cattle industry was inherently incompatible with desert landscapes.[95] Cattle trampled desert tortoise habitat and competed with bighorn sheep for scant grasses and water. Cattlemen countered that they had been "discriminated against" in the proposed Plan Alternatives; one long-time rancher claimed that the tortoises would survive off cattle dung in dry years and their endangerment was exaggerated.[96] Reliant on the landscape, cattlemen positioned themselves as the true environmentalists; their proximity to the land gave them the most complex understanding of range management and they worried about threats to their livestock and livelihoods.[97] They argued cattle were compatible with endemic wildlife and

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[94] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," xiii.
[95] Peter Burk, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, June 23, 2025, OHC, MDHCA; Frank Buono, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, November 5, 2025, OHC, MDHCA; Judith Anderson, interview.
[96] Bob Ausmus, longtime rancher in the East Mojave, claimed tortoises would make use of cattle droppings. MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.
[97] Overson, interview.

beneficial to the landscape.[98] Diverging public perceptions of how desert ecology operated informed much of the public feedback. "Indirectly," wildlife "may have been the most discussed of all public comment."[99] Many recommended "stronger provisions to restrict grazing, wild horse and burro numbers," and preventing OHV access to "habitats of both State and federal listed species," or those that would be endangered by continued development on public lands. Others accused new regulations of overly restricting industry. Appeasing all parties was impossible.

The California Desert Advisory Committee considered feedback provided by 55 public meetings, millions of dollars of studies, and tens of thousands of responses from the public. Entering the planning process, the Advisory Committee confronted that "all competing uses" could not "be fully accommodated." Because of the mutual exclusivities of some positions – an area could be reserved for OHV, tortoise habitat, or a gold mine, but all three activities would likely be incompatible – all sides bent from their ideal land management strategy.[100]

Although employing the language of multiple use, specific and sequestered uses defined management of the California Desert Conservation Area. Novel land classifications acknowledged the reality that desert conditions varied considerably at the hyperlocal level. Specific outcomes of the California Desert Plan served the interests of specific land users in specific places. Planners resolved land use conflicts through a calculated zoning of activities.

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[98] Jennifer L. Wilkening et al., "Examining the Past, Present, and Future of an Iconic Mojave Desert Species, the Joshua Tree (Yucca Brevifolia, Yucca Jaegeriana)," *The Southwestern Naturalist* 65, no. 3/4 (2020): 220. Discussion on the effect cattle have on Joshua Tree communities is mixed, but one study suggested that the grazing of lower grasses often encourages parent-child plant growth relationships between young Joshua Trees and inedible shrubs in whose shade they grow. Overall, the future of the Joshua Tree is bleak. See Kenneth L. Cole et al., "Past and Ongoing Shifts in Joshua Tree Distribution Support Future Modeled Range Contraction," *Ecological Applications* 21, no. 1 (2011): 137–49; Andrew H. Lybbert and Samuel B. St. Clair, "Wildfire and Floral Herbivory Alter Reproduction and Pollinator Mutualisms of Yuccas and Yucca Moths.," *Journal of Plant Ecology* 10, no. 5 (2017): 851–58.

[99] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-90.

[100] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-1.

The Desert Plan signaled that multiple-use planning did not expect to make all spaces available to all activities, but that multiple-use principles demanded using lands for their perceived greatest value offered. To achieve both protective and productive goals, officials created four zoning classifications for desert lands. Class C (controlled use) recommended nearly 2-million-acres for possible wilderness designation; Class L (limited use) prioritized the protection of "sensitive, natural, scenic, ecological, and cultural resources" for nearly 6 million acres; Class M (moderate use) designated 3.3 million acres that required "controlled use that provides for a wide variety of present and future uses," including mining, grazing, recreation, and further development; and Class I (intensive use) which offered relatively unrestrained development across 500,000 acres of desert.[101] Another 300,000 acres remained unclassified to provide for "disposal" actions when in the public interest. Separately, the plan required special management consideration for 650,000 acres spread across 73 separate areas as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), a new designation resulting from FLPMA. Specific management for these sites protected historical, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or "other natural systems needing protection and special maintenance."[102]

These novel land zonings reflected individual desert areas' unequal opportunities for competing land uses. Broad stroke management of the "California Desert" overlooked nuances of southeastern California, and multiple classes of land use responded to the topographical, geological, hydrological, and cultural particularities of desert subregions. Some areas, such as the juniper-covered, vein-rich New York Mountains in the East Mojave, had traditionally supported

[101] Bureau of Land Management, "CDCA 10th Ann. Release," 8–9.
[102] Although the BLM celebrated the site-specific planning of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, only 45 of 77 management plans had been completed by 1986, a decade after FLPMA created the advisory committee.

mining and ranching but evolved during the twentieth century into favorite camping grounds for recreationists. The shift toward recreating in the New Yorks reflected what Thomas Michael Power and Richard N. Barrett described as a "post-cowboy economics" retreat from extractive industries, an ongoing trend in the American West in which public lands stage the uprooting of traditional labor systems by competing (and often, more profitable) sectors, including services, government, and amenities.[103] Other visually starker areas, such as the hills north of Barstow, were scarified to commodity production and military control. By establishing a four-tiered land designation system supplemented by ACECs, multiple-use under the Desert Plan transitioned from a management vision for land capable of supporting multiple uses to a strategy that operated around preferred uses for specific lands within the context of hyperlocal environments.

The Desert Plan's multi-tiered land designation system and the creation of ACECs established a model for balancing the needs and wants of the nation's land users. Recognizing that its varied natural resources would continue to draw commercial and recreational development, the plan offered competing land-users a framework to "resolve conflicts resulting from the multiple use and sustained yield direction" codified by FLPMA. Employing language found in many wartime issues of *Desert Magazine*, the plan served "as a blueprint for preserving the desert user's cherished sense of freedom in a sometimes crowded world" while ensuring the continuation of mining, livestock grazing, and energy and utility development.[104]

Taken in sum, the California Desert Plan added new restrictions and regulations to recreation and economic development in the desert by strengthening protections for ecological

[103] Thomas Michael Power and Richard N. Barrett, *Post-Cowboy Economics: Pay and Prosperity in the New American West* (Island Press, 2001), 156–58.
[104] Bureau of Land Management, "CDCA 10th Ann. Release," 10.

and cultural resources. Ranchers and mining interests faced a decrease in available public domain. OHV recreationists won back the Hare and the Hound race after its cancellation in 1975, but under tight provisions that limited participation and the open-country freedom felt by earlier, less restrained riders. Those with environmental concerns celebrated ACECs and other areas set aside as species-specific habitat zones, newly designated Wilderness Study Areas, and the creation of the East Mojave National Scenic Area.[105]

Productive industries experienced a sharp reduction in usable public lands. Under the approved Desert Plan, 70 percent of previously locatable mineral entry lands, 51 percent of leasable lands, and 51 percent of saleable mineral lands were eliminated from the California Desert Conservation Area.[106] It similarly reduced livestock grazing use by 20 percent on perennial rangelands, from 99,362 animal unit months (AUMs) to 74,707 AUMs, spread across 63 livestock managers. In total, 31 operators faced some form of grazing restriction, whether by herd reduction or forage closure. To balance its closure of thousands of acres to commercial development, the Desert Plan also supported the installation of water improvements for ranching and the expansion of large, consolidated mining operations.

To make more of a desert used less intensively, the plan accommodated both large-scale mining operations and an improved ranchland. With implementation of the plan coinciding with the Secretary of the Interior James Watts' push to recenter development in management of western lands, large-scale mining operations grew across California's desert country, as well-

[105] Worthy of its own dissertation, preferably from the perspectives of Native American Studies, the impact and access to indigenous religious sites also shaped the CDP. The BLM generally worked to keep religious and sacred sites available to indigenous people, but the CDP estimated its proposed plan would cause damage, destruction, or non-access issues to 20% of noted sites.
[106] Mining lands eliminated from CDCA totaled 8,373,000 acres.

funded corporations could afford the increased overhead of new regulations.[107] In 1986, the Gold Fields Mining Corporation opened the fifth largest gold mine in the world at the Mesquite Mine near Glamis, in Imperial County, next to the popular, if reduced in size, Imperial Sand Dunes OHV play area.[108] Despite losing the right to millions of acres, mining remained profitable in the desert. It similarly aimed to improve the quality of lands still available for forage and called for the development of 61 wells, 58 springs, 29 catchments, 220 miles of pipelines, 153 water troughs, and 327 miles of pasture fence with the goal of increasing animal weight gains by improving forage areas and limiting the distance between water and forage.[109] Targeting a sustainable yield, the plan reduced forage allocations on 26 allotments to 43,230 AUMs below carrying capacity to improve plant vigor, presumably improving the long-term viability of those allotments. Through an investment in the development of water resources to support increased forage and the approval on consolidated mining operations, the California Desert Plan proposed making more out of the public domain by using it less.[110]

As with extractive producers such as ranchers or miners, the plan both constrained and supported OHV users. Under the finalized plan, the share of public lands accessible to motorized vehicles decreased from 95% to 81.4%. Within the lands still available to motorized access, the percentage of those under "limited access" doubled, restraining the cross-country travel that had come to define desert recreation for many motorists. Play areas, mostly used by dune buggies,

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[107] Bill Rogers, "Commission OKs Gold Mine as Sierra Club Drops Opposition," *San Bernardino County Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), June 21, 1985; William F. Couey, "Gold Mine Operating near Kramer Junction," *Daily Press* (Victorville, CA), September 15, 1987; Stephen Stern, "Gold Mine Proposed on Site North of Barstow," *Desert Dispatch* (Barstow, CA), May 12, 1981; Gannett News Service, "Plan Approved for More Mining Activity in Desert," *San Bernardino County Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), April 17, 1981.
[108] Bureau of Land Management, "CDCA 10th Ann. Release," 11.
[109] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-73.
[110] Ibid.

sand rails, and dirt bikes, were reduced by 23%, from 628,000 acres to 485,000 acres.[111] All routes through Class C and ACEC designations were closed to motorized access.[112] Despite the reduction in available acreage for OHV travel, the Desert Plan stressed it would improve off-road recreational opportunities. Announcing that "daily life in the Los Angeles Basin is difficult and stressful," the plan assigned desert recreation an "often overlooked indirect impact" on the health of "individuals, family structure, and traditional freedoms valued in American society." Through increased information service stations, educational campaigns on "desert values," and the improved development and access to those areas still open for free play, the BLM would empowered motorized recreation, but where it would least impact sensitive resources. Operating under a greatly curtailed permit with a shortened width of approved travel corridors, the Hare and Hound motorcycle race returned to the East Mojave in 1984.[113] A change from earlier iterations of the race, 3- and 4-wheel all-terrain vehicles were allowed to participate along with motorcycles.[114] Rather than being "locked out," some events could pass through Class L under specific conditions. After public comment, the plan offered greater flexibility in the management of events while maintaining protective restrictions.

Other intensive-users of desert spaces found both restriction and support in the Desert Plan. Although the plan fixed the number of potential utility corridors at sixteen, their

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[111] Ibid., E-70.
[112] There were limited exceptions to the closure of Class C and ACEC designations for motorized travel. Dick MacPherson remembered one ranger-supervised event that included a trip over the Kelso Dunes in a jeep.
[113] Merrill McCarty, "Barstow-Las Vegas Race Upheld," *Desert Dispatch* (Barstow, CA), November 1, 1984; "Site Approved for Barstow-to-Las Vegas Race," *Desert Dispatch* (Barstow, CA), October 27, 1984; "BLM Issues Barstow-to-Las Vegas Race Permit," *Desert Dispatch* (Barstow, CA), September 25, 1984; Merrill McCarty, "BLV Race Termed Successful," *Desert Dispatch*, November 26, 1984.
[114] H. G. Wilshire, *The Barstow-Las Vegas Crosscountry Motorcycle Race, California and Nevada: Observations on Environmental Impacts of the 1988 Race, and Preferred 1989 Route, with an Addendum on the 1989 Race*, Open-File nos. 90–23 (U.S. Geological Survey, 1990), 1. Thousands conducted resistance rides along the course's route in defiance of the BLM rejecting permits between 1975 and 1983.

designation ensured transmission and pipeline rights-of-way across the desert. Oil and gas development was excluded from Class L lands, but geothermal, solar, and wind projects were permitted; oil and gas continued on Class M and I land.[115] Evaluations of wind-power projects reflected evolving visions for making the desert productive that increasingly considered the environmental effect of development on local wildlife.[116]

Environmental advocates had much to cheer in the final Desert Plan. Species-specific habitat zones, 73 ACECs, millions of acres of newly designated wilderness, and the creation of the East Mojave National Scenic Area signaled the success of environmental organizations in influencing the planning staff and the public popularity of increasing environmental protections in the desert. The plan reserved lands for the protection of endemic and iconic species of the desert country, including the Desert Tortoise and Mojave Fringe-toed Lizard. Taking a holistic view of local ecology, all land users agreed that feral burros had become a nuisance for ranchers, farmers, and local wildlife; a planned burro eradication program improved the desert landscapes for economic, environmental, and recreational activities.

Underlining the significance of micro-ecosystems within fragile but enduring spaces, the desert plan established ecological preserves to protect some of the region's most endangered inhabitants. An iconic species of the East Mojave and now the unofficial mascot for today's Mojave National Preserve, desert tortoise (*gopherus agassizii*) populations declined through the twentieth century.[117] To reverse that trend, the plan included the creation of a 15,000-acre Desert

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[115] CDCA Final EIS & Plan (1981), E-82.
[116] "Pass Winds To Be Tested For Power Generation," *Desert Sentinel* (Desert Hot Springs, CA), September 30, 1976.
[117] Roy C. Averill-Murray and Linda J. Allison, "Travel Management Planning for Wildlife with a Case Study on the Mojave Desert Tortoise," *Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management* 14, no. 1 (2023): 269–81; Linda J. Allison and Ann M. McLuckie, "Population Trends in Mojave Desert Tortoises," *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* 12, no. 2 (2018): 433–52; Roy C. Averill-Murray et al., "A New Approach to Conservation of the Mojave Desert

Tortoise Natural Area near California City, north of Barstow.[118] The Desert Tortoise Natural Area offered a respite for California's state reptile in response to its rapidly disappearing habitat.[119] Other observed tortoise habitats were designated as Class C or ACEC lands, limiting motorized vehicle access and economic development.

The plan offered similar protection for the Mojave Fringe-toed lizard (*uma scorparia*). Endemic to sand dunes, the fringes on *uma scorparia*'s hind legs allow it to move quickly in shifting sand.[120] As military and other activities infringed on its traditional habitats, fringe-toed lizard populations plummeted.[121] In the Coachella Valley, the BLM partnered with the Nature Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the University of California to establish a 13,000-acre preserve for the Mojave Fringe-Toed Lizard.

Tortoise," *BioScience* 62, no. 10 (2012): 893–99; Jeffrey J. Duda et al., "Effects of Drought on Desert Tortoise Movement and Activity," *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 63, no. 4 (1999): 1181–92; Kirsten E. Dutcher et al., "Move It or Lose It: Predicted Effects of Culverts and Population Density on Mojave Desert Tortoise (Gopherus Agassizii) Connectivity," *PLOS ONE* 18, no. 9 (2023); Patrick G. Emblidge et al., "Severe Mortality of a Population of Threatened Agassiz's Desert Tortoises: The American Badger as a Potential Predator," *Endangered Species Research* 28, no. 2 (2015): 109–16; Todd C. Esque et al., "Effects of Subsidized Predators, Resource Variability, and Human Population Density on Desert Tortoise Populations in the Mojave Desert, USA," *Endangered Species Research* 12, no. 2 (2010): 167–77; William B. Kristan III and William I. Boarman, "Spatial Pattern of Risk of Common Raven Predation on Desert Tortoises," *Ecology* 84, no. 9 (2003): 2432–43.

[118] California: Withdrawing Lands for Desert Tortoise Habitat, Pub. L. No. 5694, 45 FR 7815 (1980).

[119] Kristin H. Berry et al., "The Catastrophic Decline of Tortoises at a Fenced Natural Area," *Wildlife Monographs* 205 (2020): 1–53. The Desert Tortoise Natural Area has been unsuccessful, with *gopherus agassizii* populations outside of the fenced-in preserve demonstrating both greater healthiness and higher population densities.

[120] B. C. Jayne and R. V. Ellis, "How Inclines Affect the Escape Behaviour of a Dune-Dwelling Lizard, Uma Scoparia," *Animal Behaviour* 55, no. 4 (1998): 1115–30.

[121] David Mouat, *Analysis and Assessment of Military and Non-Military Impacts on Biodiversity: A Framework for Environmental Management on DoD Lands Using the Mojave Desert as a Regional Case Study*, no. ADA414355 (University of Nevada, Reno, Desert Research Institute, 2002); Andrew D. Gottscho et al., "Speciation, Population Structure, and Demographic History of the Mojave Fringe-Toed Lizard (Uma Scoparia), a Species of Conservation Concern," *Ecology and Evolution* 4, no. 12 (2014): 2546–62; Jeffrey M. Jarvis, "The Natural History of the Mojave Fringe-Toed Lizard, Uma Scopario: The Northern Lineage, Amargosa River, California" (M.S. thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2009); R. W. Murphy et al., "Conservation Genetics, Evolution and Distinct Population Segments of the Mojave Fringe-Toed Lizard, Uma Scoparia," *Journal of Arid Environments* 67 (January 2006): 226–47.

By providing acreage for both the Fringe-Toed Lizard and the Desert Tortoise, the Desert Plan sought to protect some of the species under the most direct threat from extant land use.

Perhaps the most visible ecological change initiated by planning process, the eradication of thousands of feral burros from public land in the California Desert addressed concerns from disparate land users. Introduced to the area by miners in the late-nineteenth century, burros offered essential labor to early operations. As ranches sprung up to support the local mining populations, burros competed with cattle for water and grazing ranges and threatened local populations of cattle and bighorn sheep with cross-species disease such as brucellosis.[122] The eradication of feral burros found support from ranchers to ecologists.

The burro eradication program reflected a growing understanding of how humans had reshaped the desert.[123] Protecting desert ecology demanded a removal of the previous century's human imprint. With thousands of burros moved out of the Mojave and to the Wild Horse and Burro Facility in Ridgecrest, CA, the removal of these animals represented a physical shift from when the desert's highest utility was profit to a new vision for protecting and enjoying arid landscapes and those animals that live within them.[124] Instead, the BLM increasingly saw the desert as many places, often hyperlocal and needing their own regulations. These new classifications only mattered if they could be enforced, driving the BLM toward increased surveillance, regulation, and physical presence.

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[122] Up to 15% of burros act as reservoirs for Brucella abortus, the bacterium that serves as the causative agent of brucellosis. James Mutiiria Kithuka et al., "The Burden of Brucellosis in Donkeys and Its Implications for Public Health and Animal Welfare: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.," *Veterinary World* 18, no. 2 (2025): 367–78.
[123] "Wild Burros Need Homes," *Hi-Desert Star* (Yucca Valley, CA), January 23, 1981.
[124] Between 1977 and 1988, the BLM removed 979 burros from the boundaries of the East Mojave National Scenic Area, the area that would largely encompass today's Mojave National Preserve. Immediately after EMNSA transitioned to NPS management as MNP, there was an intensive program to further remove feral horses and burros.; EMNSA, 124, Table 3-3.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Recreation management required enforcement capacity. To that end, the approved 1981 California Desert Plan contained 73 Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns, each requiring its own management prescription.[125] Lending "special emphasis for patrol, surveillance and monitoring," ACEC designation offered to protect "the greatest range of resource values and specific site locations."[126] ACEC designation significantly limited motorized vehicle access, and thus, damage to archaeological sites, desert tortoise and other endangered species' habitats, and outstanding natural features.[127]



Figure 18: Prehistoric petroglyphs at Rock Springs. Author's image.

A historical military post in the eastern Mojave, Camp Rock Springs exemplified the closeness of study and surveillance conducted on ACECs. Between December 30, 1866 and

[125] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-4, E-67.
[126] Ibid., E-67.
[127] For complete list of proposed and approved ACECs, see CDCA Final EIS & Plan, Volume C, Appendix IV.

January 2, 1868, Camp Rock Spring was a short-lived official United States Army camp on the Old Government Road, an adopted travel corridor used by the local Chemehuevi. The only water source for more than a dozen miles in any direction, Camp Rock Spring had been a popular layover and headquarter for activity for hundreds of years, evidenced by centuries of petroglyphs, pictographs, and modern markings on the granite walls that surround the shallow spring. A resource analysis study of the East Mojave Unit conducted by the BLM in 1976 rated Camp Rock Spring as having "the highest interpretive and sightseeing potential of cultural sites in the East Mojave."[128]



Figure 19: Inscription left by Charles Stuart of Company "B" 4th Infantry, California Volunteers, left on May 16, 1863. Author's image.

Simple ingress made Camp Rock Spring an increasingly popular destination for desert visitors during the 1970s. Located 1/8 mile south of Cedar Canyon Road, the main east-west running byway cutting across the new East Mojave National Scenic Area and a considerable

[128] "Camp Rock Spring ACEC Management Plan," 4.

portion of the historic and popular “Mojave Road” four-wheel-drive trail, Camp Rock Spring was sited off well-graded dirt roads. Numerous articles and books popularized the spring, making it “the most vulnerable site along the Mojave Road.”[129]

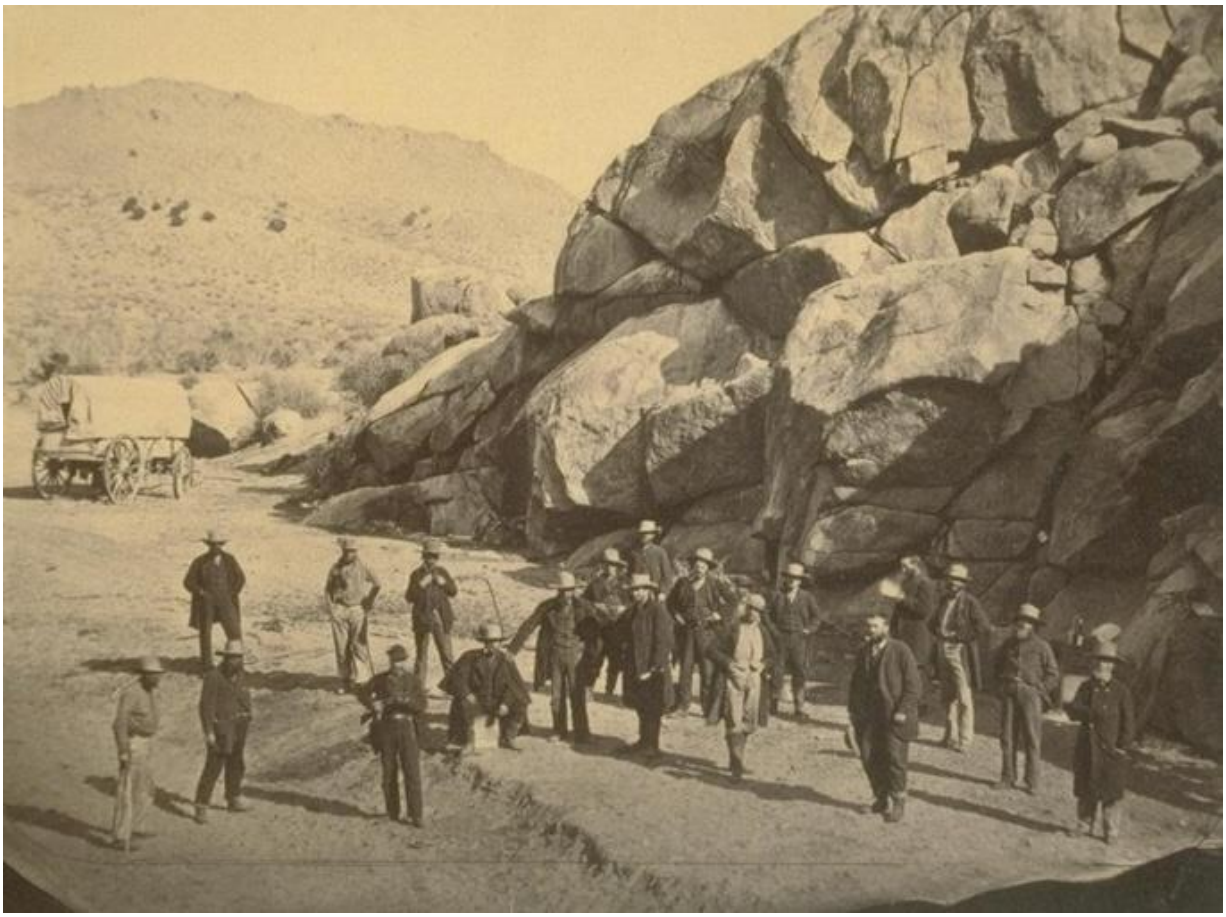


Figure 20: The Philadelphia Company at Camp Rock Spring, 1863. Image by Rudolf D’Heureuse, Photographic Views of the Mojave Route, El Dorado Canyon, and Fort Mojave, 1863, BANC PIC 1905.16894:35-A.

Increased visitation to Camp Rock Spring imperiled its distinctive resources. Through the 1970s, “loss to the resources caused by vandalism and theft,” increased “markedly.” Modern

[129] “Camp Rock Spring ACEC Management Plan,” 2.

graffiti pecked into and painted over prehistoric petroglyphs became "a regularity."[130] Although not a new phenomenon, the use of petroglyphs as shooting targets left many images damaged. Campers pushed boulders pocked with prehistoric art from their original locations to make fire pits. Generally, looters (or "treasure hunters") had removed substantial historic and prehistoric artifacts without permit. Some had chiseled petroglyphs off the rocks.

Land users who did not directly damage the cultural resources at Camp Rock Spring still affected the local wildlife. An increase in the number and intensity of camping visitors frightened wildlife and cattle dependent upon the spring, creating conflict with the OX Ranch, who leased the area for grazing and planned a transfer of 10 private acres to the BLM, including the rock cabin at which visitors sometimes parked. Visitors also accelerated natural erosion processes by climbing cut banks off trail.[131]

In a 1981 report, federal archaeologists suggested management plans to mitigate damage to fragile resources within 663 acres surrounding Camp Rock Springs. They approached the project with three management objectives: to stabilize and protect the remaining cultural and related natural resources; to develop interpretive materials to educate visitors to the region's resources so that they minimize their footprint; and, to "systematically monitor" the preservation of significant resources and the compatibility of other allowed uses within the ACEC.

Officials planned 16 actionable measures for increasing protection of Camp Rock Spring. Recently given law enforcement authority under FLPMA, the BLM's first suggestion was an increased ranger patrol. To justify the increased presence at Camp Rock Spring, the BLM also

[130] "Camp Rock Spring ACEC Management Plan," 2.
[131] "Camp Rock Spring ACEC Management Plan," 2.

suggested nominating the site to the National Register of Historic Places.[132] BLM rangers superintended the resources by taking a resource inventory (with photographs, sketches, and maps), monitoring vandalism, theft, and damage to resources, tracking the rate of erosion near petroglyph panels, and observing the availability and usage of water to determine if grazing remained compatible with the ACEC management goals. Camp Rock Spring operated under close watch, illustrating how ACECs functioned not only as map designations, but as laboratories of surveillance and control within the broader desert planning effort. Often, they became the only low-visitor-use areas rangers patrolled.

As with other ACECs, management of Camp Rock Spring represented what the BLM saw as the site's specific and exclusive value. The ACEC report moved to complete a "protective mineral withdrawal" that terminated any existing claims within the ACEC and prevented any future claims from being filed. Likewise, despite the popularity of quail hunting in the surrounding hillsides, the BLM designated the Camp Rock Spring ACEC as a "safety zone," closing the spring area to both hunting and indiscriminate target practice.

Despite the restrictions that increased patrols might place on public engagement, other management suggestions aimed to improve visitors' experience. To protect Camp Rock Springs, new posts, cable, and barbed wire enclosed a parking area on the hillside above the spring. Two new trash receptacles serviced that parking area, where a large informational sign board and a box with interpretive brochures educated visitors on the site's past and their role in protecting it for the future. Armed with freshly printed brochures, visitors followed newly placed numbered

[132] For more on how developments in the 1970s clarified eligibility for inclusion on the NRHP, see John H. Sprinkle Jr., *Crafting Preservation Criteria: The National Register of Historic Places and American Historic Preservation* (Routledge, 2014), 199.

placards through the ACEC, learning as they hiked. At relatively low cost, the BLM encouraged the public to personally invest in the ongoing protection of this valuable resource.[133]

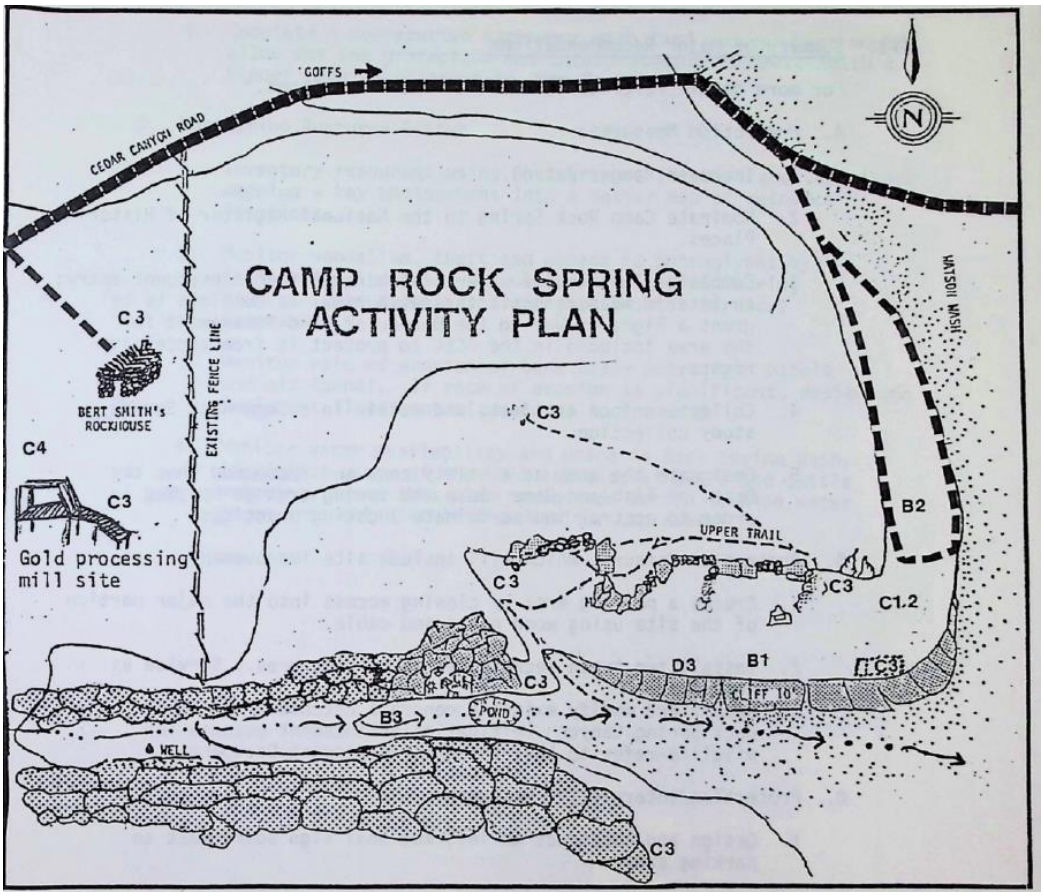


Figure 21: Camp Rock Spring ACEC Management Plan. "Camp Rock Spring Area ACEC Management Plan" 6, Camp Rock Spring ACEC subject file, MDHCA.

The Camp Rock Spring ACEC management plan typified how the BLM treated sites with specific cultural, natural, or aesthetic values. Strict stipulations on activities, the closure or limiting of motorized access, and the development of interpretive or other education signage shaped how the public engaged ACECs. Ranger presence greatly increased at the 73 ACECs,

[133] The BLM predicted the following costs for Fiscal Years 1981, 1982, and 1983 and beyond, respectively: $475.00, $4,030.00, $5,000.00; the BLM budgeted $10,405.50 for the improvements and control measures at Camp Rock Spring ACEC. "Camp Rock Spring ACEC Management Plan," 52.

representing more than 574,000 acres of public land, as the designation lent "special emphasis for patrol, surveillance, and monitoring."[134] Each ACEC encompassed resources requiring increased protection and regulation, and user access to these areas became increasingly limited, albeit less so than in newly designated Wilderness Study Areas.

Although Americans continue to debate the meaning of wilderness, the Wilderness Act of 1964 legislated what "wilderness" meant in the context of public lands, how it could be applied, and what type of lands might be designated as wilderness.[135] Recognizing wilderness "as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain," the newly created National Wilderness Preservation System obligated the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the BLM, and the U.S. Forest Service to study and designate areas suitable for wilderness and to devote them "to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use," and thus restriction to economic development and motorized vehicle access.[136]

The BLM excluded millions of acres found suitable for wilderness from being designated as such, as many of the intensive land-use activities in the desert required vehicular access. Mines relied on heavy equipment delivered by tractor trailers; oil and gas developments required boom-trucks and other pipeline repair material; ranchers used ATVs and other motorized vehicles

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[134] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-67.

[135] Wilderness Act of 1964, vols. 1131–1136. For academic debates over wilderness, see the first issue of *Environmental History*. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28; Samuel P. Hays, "Comment: The Trouble with Bill Cronon's Wilderness," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 29–32. For more on the importance of Wilderness designations within the American Environmental Movement, see James Morton Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics since 1964* (University of Washington Press, 2012). For the formation of early wilderness organizations and how they worked to limit motorized vehicle access, see Sutter, "Driven Wild: The Problem of Wilderness."

[136] Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest*, 5. Wilderness Act of 1964, S.2(c), S.4(b).

to drive their cattle between seasonal forage; dirt bikes and other OHV-carried travelers relied on their vehicles to access the quiet and beautiful spaces far in the desert. Widespread wilderness designation threatened to close the desert to most activities.

The final plan reflected competing feedback on the validity and scale of desert Wilderness Areas. For those supportive of preservation, the desert planning staff needed to consider more areas for inclusion and to tighten regulations on adjacent grazing, motorized recreation, and mining activities. Wilderness offered the solution to the perceived overcrowding in National Parks and supporters accused those against Wilderness as exploiting extractable resources for quixotic economic gains.

Those wanting a less-restrictive system in the California Desert felt that "elitist," often coastal "eco-freaks" had too widely embraced Wilderness.[137] Some saw new Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) as too heavily slanted to provide "access only for young, able-bodied people without families."[138] Others commented that the desert's potential for subsurface wealth and the social benefits of recreation "far outweigh[ed] the value of preserving habitat for species whose survival may have trivial value for humans." Economic interests in the proposed areas felt dispossessed; others felt that the arbitrarily drawn boundaries did not reflected local terrain and climate, belying the perceived ignorance of the desert by the desert staff.[139]

Instead, the plan selectively applied Wilderness to maximize its protective value. Evaluating 136 Wilderness Study Areas, the BLM elevated the proposed WSAs most supported

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[137] Phil M. Hrock, "Letter to the Editor," *Ventura County Star* (Ventura, CA), January 30, 1980; "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-91; MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.
[138] CDCA Final EIS & Plan
[139] Cal4Wheeler Dick MacPherson remembers with incredulity how the BLM staff would "pick an elevation line and just mark everything under that elevation as wilderness" for some areas in the East Mojave. MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.

by public comment for designation and through the following criteria: areas having the highest wilderness values; representative land forms; proximity to urban areas; relationship to existing wilderness; and, most significantly, to minimize conflicts with other resource activities.[140] Most public comments on wilderness did not reject its value, but instead disagreed as to the desirable extent of a wilderness system in the desert. Although 5,700,000 acres met the criteria for wilderness designation set by the Wilderness Act, the final desert plan recommended 2,074,000 acres as Wilderness areas; amendments in the early 1980s further reduced Wilderness designations to around 1,900,000 acres. Those reductions would later motivate a wholesale rejection of the Desert Plan by the environmental community.[141] Meant as a laboratory for democratic land management of public lands, the California Desert Conservation Area balanced competing needs while acknowledging the mutual exclusivity of some land uses.

The separating of land segments for intensive use, wilderness, or for mixed commercial, scientific, and recreational activity empowered the BLM to reorient management practice and public engagement with California's desert country. Land-class designations sequestered high-activity development to the areas that would least affect competing resource values or would at least secure substantial enough protective areas to offset the damage of such development. ACECs allowed for specialized regulations responding to hyperlocal conditions surrounding outstanding or greatly imperiled cultural, recreational, or natural resources. Other areas continued to service industry; the Glamis gold mine, wind-energy projects on Tehachapi and San Gorgonio Pass, and thousands of miles of new oil and gas pipelines confirmed that desert land

[140] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," E-67.CDCA Final EIS & Plan (1981), E-67.
[141] Ibid., E-66.

managers still valued and could support production.[142] Although not fully designated as Wilderness, the new East Mojave National Scenic Area best demonstrated the BLM's willingness to restrict economic activity in service of aesthetic, recreational, and scientific values.

East Mojave National Scenic Area

Situated in the "lonely triangle" between Interstate-15, Interstate-40, and U.S. Highway-95, millions of motorists drove past the East Mojave National Scenic Area every week. Accessible by only four paved entry points, the 1.2-million-acre Scenic Area represented a crown jewel of the California Desert. A topographical, faunal, and floral transitional zone between the Great Basin, Mojave, and Sonoran deserts, the East Mojave's distinctive geology, wildlife, vegetation, and human history distinguished it from other subregions of California.

Despite its apparent rocky barrenness, the East Mojave National Scenic Area was surprisingly alive. The eastern Mojave hosted at least 35 wildlife habitats. Banded Gila monster, desert tortoise, the fringe-toed lizard, regal ring-necked snake, desert striped whipsnake, and the infamously venomous Mojave green rattlesnake were a few of the 36 reptile species tucked into the lonely triangle. Falcons, red-tailed hawks, Lucy's Warbler, Mourning Dove, and the introduced Chukar comprised some of the 200 birds found in the East Mojave. It also housed "one of the finer bat faunas of the California Desert."[143] 47 mammal species called the Scenic Area home, including desert mainstays such as mountain lion, bobcat, and coyote, but also mule deer, kangaroo rats, and rock squirrels. A small fish, the endemic Mohave tui chub, lived only in

[142] Bureau of Land Management, "CDCA 10th Ann. Release," 11.
[143] "East Mojave National Scenic Area: Final Management Plan," Bureau of Land Management, California Desert District, Needles Field Office, May 1988, 122.

Soda Springs and the surrounding man-made pools, on the Scenic Area's western edge. In the 1980s, 550 to 600 individual desert bighorn sheep existed in the Scenic Area; a recovery in population led the BLM to allow a "very limited" hunting season for desert bighorn in 1987.[144] Adapted to the high temperatures, limited water, and light vegetative cover, the East Mojave's nonhuman residents found ways to manage the region's extreme climate.[145]

As a transitional zone, the Scenic Area contained habitat for wide-ranging plant species. From the low Kelso Dunes (3,074 feet above sea level), where perennial grasses and adapted flowers such as dune evening primrose clung to sandy soil, to the high peaks of the New York Mountains (7,533'), where the westernmost occurrence of Rocky Mountain white fir hung to mountainsides, vegetative microecosystems abounded in the East Mojave.[146] Vibrant wildflower displays might occur twice yearly, in the spring after wet, mild winters, and again in late summer following monsoonal rains, as ranchers moved their cattle from low- to high-elevation forage.[147]

The rocky roads, wandering cattle, and rusting windmills of the East Mojave gave the region a distinctive historical character. As the BLM finalized its management plan for the new unit, it confronted the more than 2,500 miles of dirt two-tracks, legacies of past "mining, agricultural, ranching, and homesteading activities."[148] Dotted with water tanks, corrals, and

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[144] Ibid. The BLM issues nine desert bighorn hunting permits for the 1987 season, despite the specie's fully protection under California state law.
[145] For more on the interconnectedness between geologies and ecologies in the East Mojave, see Robert H. Webb, ed., *The Mojave Desert: Ecosystem Processes and Sustainability* (University of Nevada Press, 2009).
[146] The East Mojave hosts more than a dozen "unusual plant assemblages," ranging from the enriched pinyon-juniper/oak woodland, or "chaparral," of the Lanfair-Pinto-Round Valley region, to the riparian cottonwoods, willows, and streambank vegetation along Piute Creek, the region's only perennial stream. EMNSA Final EIS & Plan, 120.
[147] Mary Beal, "Wild Flowers on Parade," *DM* 2, no. 6 (1939): 29.
[148] "EMNSA Final EIS & Management Plan," 110.

thousands of miles of barbed fence line, visitors to the Scenic Area connected with a mythical frontier.[149] Visiting a historical homestead or fort offered a rare chance for exploration.

That visitors could travel relatively freely across the Scenic Area reflected the BLM's attempt to preserve a "sense of freedom in unfettered open space." Whereas visitors felt "controlled" in NPS units, the low usage of the East Mojave empowered the BLM to encourage visitors to disperse and develop their own sense of exploration, whether from a hike into the lava tubes, a roped descent into Hole-in-the-Wall, or parking on an approved four-wheel-drive trail to examine an abandoned homestead cabin.[150]

Balancing the want from visitors to feel unrestrained with a Congressional mandate to protect the natural, recreational, and cultural values within the California Desert, the BLM again selectively applied wilderness and land-class designations in the East Mojave National Scenic Area. Scrutinizing 23 proposed WSAs totaling approximately 705,000 acres, the BLM recommended 16 of the WSAs as "nonsuitable" for wilderness, because their designation would have been incompatible with "other uses or opportunities which outweigh their value as wilderness."[151] Still, the BLM applied "limited use designations" to many of these non-WSAs, such as ACECs (including Camp Rock Spring), offering them some increased level of surveillance and protection. Within the 1.2 million-acre Scenic Area, WSAs totaling 271,000 acres closed motorized access and limited economic development in the Cinder Cones, Kelso Dune, Granite Mountains, Providence Mountains, Castle Peaks, and historic Fort Piute.[152]

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[149] Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000*, 82–84.
[150] Visitor participation rates in activity as of 1988, in descending order: OHV exploring/sightseeing (90%, trending up), camping (70%, trending up); hunting (50%, stable trend); Shooting/plinking (40%, trending down); nature study/research (30%, trending up); hiking/backpacking (20%, trending up); and rock collecting (15%, stable trend). EMNSA Final EIS & Plan, 133, Table 3-2.
[151] Ibid., 115, Table 3-3.
[152] Ibid., 83–84.

Although closed to motorized access, maps of approved WSA's "cherry-stemmed" along existing rights-of-way to so that visitors could drive to wilderness' edge and then hike in.[153]

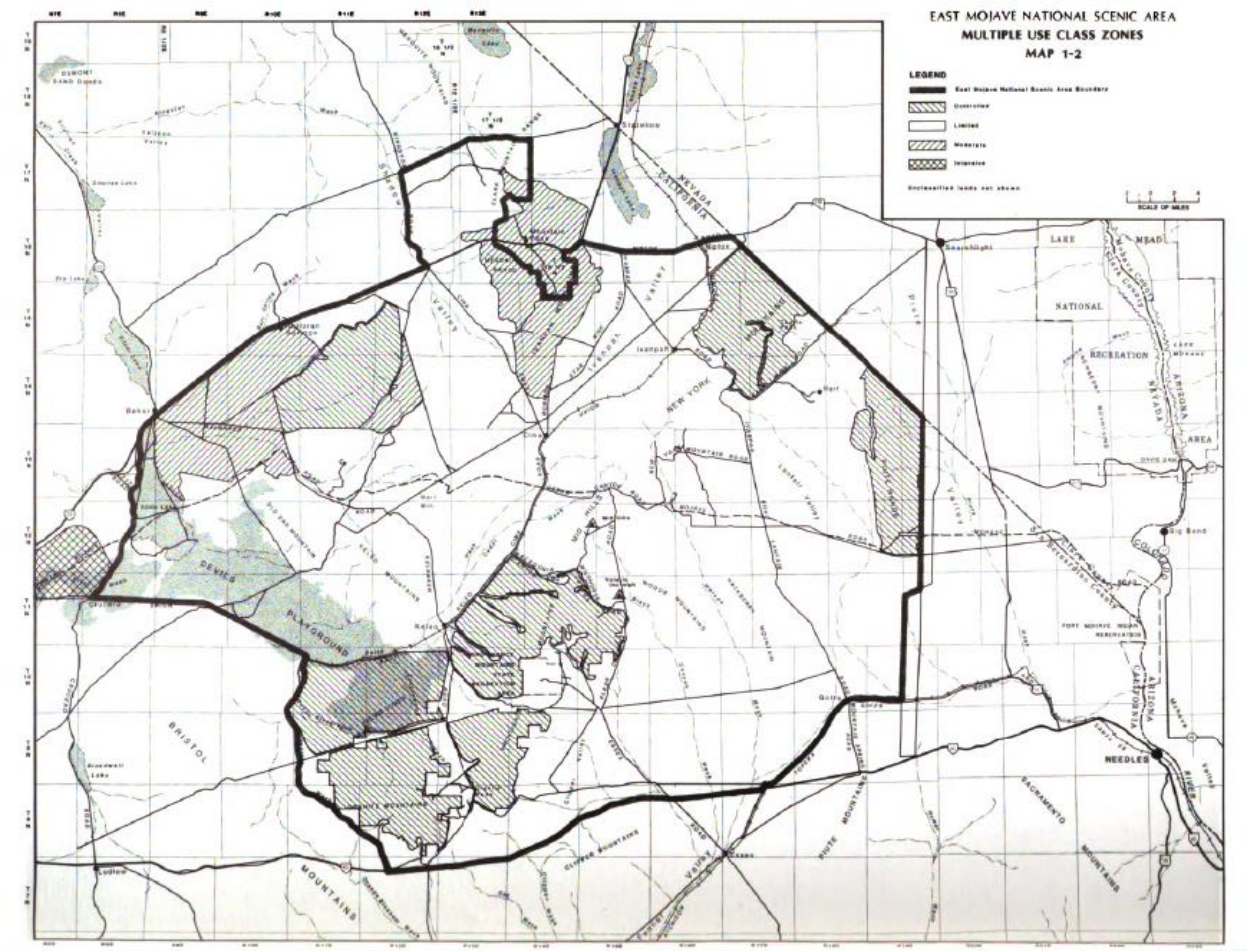


Figure 22: Final Map of EMNSA Multiple Use Class Zones. EMNSA Final EIS & Plan (1988), 28.

Although not fully wilderness, the Scenic Area operated under restrictive land designations. Created to "ensure continuation of the uses and occupations which [gave] the

[153] Dick MacPherson, active in California 4-Wheelers through the 1980s, was "in the room when the BLM drew the maps." He and his wife Kathy still maintain "they didn't know the land. They just drew the line at the 2800' elevation mark and disregarded anything else." MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.

region its character, and yet give special emphasis to retaining the area's natural scenic qualities in evaluating and permitting changes and new uses," limited ranching and mining continued in the Scenic Area, but the Desert Plan designated ninety percent of the new land unit as Class C or L lands to limit use and access, with none designated for intensive use. BLM management closed more than 1,100 miles of previously accessible rights-of-way in the new Scenic Area.[154] That so much of the unit was closed to development foreshadowed the proposed Mojave National Park and the eventual Mojave National Preserve. But the Park battle sat on the horizon, and the Desert Plan seemingly reflected acceptable compromise.

Specific outcomes of the plan accommodated industrial developers, recreationists, and preservationists' priorities. The designation of corridors for transmission and pipeline rights-of-way ensured developers' access across the desert. Consideration of wind-power projects reflected evolving visions for a producing desert, while freshly permitted gold mines promised new prosperity from traditional resources. Specific use areas allowed for off-road fun while presumably limiting the destruction caused by unrestrained use. Wildlife programs, with some enacted across the entire region and others in targeted areas, improved the perceived naturalness of arid spaces. New visitor centers, signage, campgrounds, and collaboration with volunteer groups increased Americans' awareness of the desert's historical, cultural, ecological, commercial, and recreational value. Through its investment in understanding not just the ecology and geology of the desert but of the varied opinions projected across it, the plan was to be a model for public lands across the country.[155]

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[154] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.
[155] "The California Desert Conservation Area Plan Summary," Bureau of Land Management, 1980, Biodiversity Heritage Library.

Despite winning a compromise tilted toward environmental protection, which included two million acres of Wilderness and created the East Mojave National Scenic Area, the California Desert Plan left environmentalists unsatisfied.[156] To some, the misalignment of places found to be worthy of Wilderness status and those designated as such was an existential threat to not just the perceived pristineness of areas in question but the legitimacy of the larger environmental movement. Within months of the President Reagan signing the final California Desert Plan in 1981, Sen. Alan Cranston introduced a new bill, S.21, "The California Desert Protection Act." Seeking to correct a wrong instigated by his own 1976 legislation, Cranston and his backers moved to discard the millions of dollars of studies, tens of thousands written public responses, and years of cooperation and compromise that had been lauded as a potential model for the nation. In the face of perceived defeat, well-funded, national environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society fought for their vision of desert protection.

Environmental groups warned that only a National Park could secure the Wilderness designations that areas within the East Mojave deserved. They argued that the roadrunners, bobcats, and juniper-piñon forests of the Midhills, Table Mountain, and New Yorks had been found worthy of Wilderness status, but political maneuvering had prevented their designation. The creation of the East Mojave National Scenic Area moved land management of the eastern Mojave toward resource protection and damage mitigation, but only National Park status would bring an end to threats posed by local ranching, mining, and OHV travel.

For those living in and around the East Mojave, calls for a National Park in their backyard proved that the "eco-freaks" lacked integrity and were unwilling to compromise.

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[156] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," vii.

Feeling they had made significant concessions just for their opponents to demand more, commodity producers, land-users, and residents came to doubt that land managers, congressional representatives, and environmentalists would operate and negotiate in good faith.

As the proposed Mojave National Park took shape, critics raised alarm about the potential repercussions for local populations and industry. Among their most significant concerns, locals worried about a disconnect between landowners and new federal law enforcement rangers, feared closure of trusted rights-of-way and economic lifeways, and expressed anxiety around possible restrictions to, or even seizure of, private parcels. To varying extents, the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 justified their fears.

CHAPTER FIVE

"ECO-FREAKS": ENVIRONMENTALISTS, PLACE, AND THE CALIFORNIA DESERT PROTECTION ACT

The California Desert Plan did not settle management or use of the East Mojave. Concerns over the Reagan administration's attitude toward environmental measures and the adoption of pro-development amendments in 1982 motivated environmental groups to reject the Desert Plan and prompted Senator Alan Cranston to introduce legislation for a Mojave National Park. Environmental groups under the banner of the California Desert Protection League rallied behind a preservation-driven vision for the East Mojave and employed a national network of lobbyists, lawyers, and volunteers to promote the proposed Park. Although the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), ranchers, and four-wheel recreationists mobilized to retain the East Mojave National Scenic Area, successfully defeating congressional measures throughout the 1980s, by the 1990s, the BLM's perceived failure to manage for preservation as a component of multiple use led to an outpouring of national support for desert protection. With the election of Dianne Feinstein in 1992, a new National Park seemed certain.

However, a National Park would not be created. The threat of preservationists' visions for the East Mojave mobilized local ranchers, large mining corporations, and national hunting groups to maintain a productive desert. Hunters maintained permitted take seasons for various animals and some ranchers successfully received special exemptions to retain their grazing rights in the compromise California Desert Protection Act of 1994. Mining companies benefitted from cut-outs from the Preserve maps, allowing rare earth element and gold extraction to continue at Mountain Pass and Castle Mountain, respectively. As ranchers leaned into their cultural identity

and mining and hunting advocates employed well-resourced lobbying networks to retain some of their traditional access, private landowners found themselves without the resources to successfully advocate against the incoming National Park Service (NPS) unit. Rather than resolving conflicting visions of the East Mojave, the California Desert Protection Act institutionalized a hierarchy that privileged those backed by national networks and political capital over local and producer perspectives rooted in experience and use.

Citizens for a Mojave National Park

Coming to Barstow, California, in the heart of the Mojave Desert, in 1972, Peter and Joyce Burk needed something to do. Through his employment as a social worker covering the territory from Newberry Springs to Needles, Peter traveled extensively throughout the East Mojave. Worn down by "dealing with all kinds of problems people have," Burk sought a distraction. In trips to help a cook retain employment at a local ranch or to visit a family holding a cattle lease, Burk found himself in what he quickly came to consider the jewel of the Mojave Desert. The mixed chaparral and Joshua trees of Lanfair Valley and the high granite peaks of the Providence Mountains gave Burk a cause worth throwing himself behind.

In 1974, the Burks joined the Mojave Group of the Sierra Club, a collection of environmentalist-recreationists in Barstow, and took part in outings with the club's San Gorgonio chapter.[1] Before long, Peter joined the Southern California Regional Conservation Committee and its desert subcommittee while Joyce remained active on the mountain subcommittee.

[1] Burk remembered, "There's two kinds of people in the Sierra Club. One is the outings people, and the other is the environmentalists. And I like both of them, but I ended up on the environmentalist side." Burk, interview.

Although the Burks enjoyed the outings, they "ended up on the environmental side" of the Sierra Club, embracing that there were "some beautiful places in the desert that need[ed] protecting."[2]

On July 4, 1976, as they celebrated two-hundred years of nationhood with an evening walk around their neighborhood, Peter and Joyce wished to "do something nice for [the] bicentennial," and resolved to "form a National Park and…save the best part of the Mojave Desert."[3] Calling themselves Citizens for a Mojave National Park, the Burks and a few friends made a slideshow covering the need for protection in the East Mojave: the Kelso Dunes and the threat from off-road vehicle use, mining at the Cinder Cones, ranching across Round Valley, and the threat of speculative development in Lanfair Valley.[4]

Presenting to local chambers of commerce, Rotary Clubs, off-road groups, and environmental organizations, the Burks traveled widely to promote their proposed desert park. By 1977, the Burks approached Congressman Jerry Lewis, who represented California's 41st Congressional District that included the lands of the proposed Mojave National Park and who owned a parcel in Lanfair Valley. A staunch conservative, Lewis rejected their request to introduce Park legislation. The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) California Desert Planning Staff was still drafting a comprehensive desert plan and Lewis was disinclined to close more desert to access and development.

Undeterred, Burk and his group first found support from outside of the desert. Approaching Congressman George Brown, who represented the Inland Empire in the House, Burk's group quickly garnered his support. In 1978, Representative Brown introduced the first

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] "CDCA Final EIS & Plan," P-44; Burk, interview.

bill for a Mojave National Park, H.R. 13282.[5] Although Brown's bill quietly died in committee, the Sierra Club and other environmental organizers learned that support for an East Mojave Park would need to come from outside of the desert. Shortly after the 95th Congress ended, shuttering H.R. 13282, in 1978, Burk earned the first of what would become a flood of endorsements from a board of county supervisors.[6] As Lewis' rejection taught Burk, the politics of an East Mojave Park required him to not "bother about what district things are in," but rather to "just get people to support [us]," a tactic that he and fellow environmentalists used to great effect over the next fifteen years as they attacked the California Desert Plan as insufficiently protective.[7]

Finalized in 1980 and approved in 1981, the Desert Plan left many environmentalists disillusioned with the ostensibly democratic land planning process. Wilderness Society executive director William A. Turnage wrote to Senator Alan Cranston describing disappointment with the final Plan because of "off-road vehicle management, the wilderness recommendations, and the wildlife protection element."[8] Senior biologist Kristin Berry disavowed her work on the project.[9] Writing to chairman for the Council of Environmental Quality Gus Speth to "call [his] attention to some very serious problems with the Final Environmental Impact Statement" for the BLM-managed California Desert Conservation Area, Berry accused the Bureau of modifying the impact statement to "lessen or remove adverse impacts on wildlife."[10] Berry inventoried

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[5] H.R.13282 - A Bill to Establish the Mojave National Park in the State of California, and for Other Purposes., 95th Congress (1978).
[6] Burk, interview, 18.
[7] Ibid.
[8] William A. Turnage to Alan Cranston, October 1, 1980, Folder 1, Desert Bill 1986-1992, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[9] In a letter to Senator Cranston's legislative aide, one Sierra Club member summarizes Berry's complaints: "Her complaint is very simple: she thinks the EIS for the California Desert Plan is a lie; she disavows her connection with it and says, flatly, that it is a scientific hoax." Lu Haas to Kathy Files, November 18, 1980, Folder 1, Desert Bill 1986-1992, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[10] Kristin Berry to Gus Speth, October 30, 1980, Folder 1, Desert Bill 1986-1992, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.

omissions, deletions, major errors, and misleading statements in the Plan's appendix covering wildlife impacts, including that "findings of tortoise experts and the wildlife staff differ markedly from the statements in the impact analysis," adding that "staff finding was consistently ignored."[11] Further, planning staff-assigned BLM geologist and Geographic Information Services analyst Larry Vredenburg thought that BLM rangers would not change their daily activity to account for their new preservation mandate and preferred a status quo that gave primacy to ranchers, miners, and hunters.[12] Protective elements of the Plan were flawed, and their enforcement was toothless. Its first amendment process further weakened the framework's protective measures, seemingly justifying environmentalists' wholesale rejection of BLM management in the East Mojave.

Amendments adopted in 1983 reflected the Reagan administration's posture toward wilderness and environmental issues. Despite the California Desert Plan's charge to give environmental protection equal consideration under a multiple-use framework, the 1982-1983 amendment process demonstrated a nationwide rollback of environmentalist initiatives under the Reagan administration.[13] Led by inflammatory Secretary of the Interior James Watt, the federal government displayed their support for productive industry and other intensive land users across the American West.[14]

The fight for a Mojave National Park played out in a period of regional self-reflection and backlash against the environmental movement. Angry and scared, westerners in the late

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Larry Vredenburgh, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, April 18, 2025, OHC, MDHCA.
[13] The amendment process took place in 1982 but was confirmed in 1983.
[14] Frank Wheat, *California Desert Miracle: The Fight for Desert Parks and Wilderness* (San Diego, CA: Sunbelt Publications, 1999), 99; Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 169–70.

1970s and 1980s confronted how their region had changed and was changing, what had prompted their perceived economic and cultural downturn, and how the West as they knew it might yet survive.[15] The second half of the twentieth century curtailed rural peoples' voices and votes, as a metropolitan West increasingly dominated state, regional, and national politics.[16] The physical symbol of the fading West's socioeconomic past, cattle ranching became less profitable. Despite their economic marginalization, cowboys remained symbols of *the* traditional western lifestyle as interconnected global markets and threats of new environmental regulation made it an increasingly risky business.

The election of folksy peanut farmer Jimmy Carter to the presidency in 1976 pushed western lands and their management to the forefront of national politics. As Carter developed his "hit list" of proposed water projects across the West, anti-environmentalist westerners increasingly saw both federal officials and civil society members butting against traditional land uses and cultural identities.[17] Clumsily promoting environmental policies that westerners felt belied his ignorance of their culture and land, Carter's "distant landlordism" calcified anti-government sentiments among westerners, as the administration increasingly challenged land

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[15] Historian of race and the American West Jason Pierce argues race should be filtered through a distinctively white, male, and heteronormative perspective that had developed over more than a century of racialized physical and social arrangements. In *Making the White Man's West*, historian Jason Pierce argues that the West had developed within and to support Anglo-American and Northern European dominance, "supposedly free of the allegedly unpleasant characteristics of an emerging, less ethnically homogenous nation." As the East became increasingly "ethnically and racially irredeemable," the West was left as a place of "refuge" for White Americans, a refuge that White westerners would upkeep with violence. Jason Eric Pierce, *Making the White Man's West: Whiteness and the Creation of the American West* (University Press of Colorado, 2016), 9–10, 209–41.

[16] White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 575.

[17] For more on Carter's "Hit List," its political, policy, and environmental implications, see Adam R. Eastman, "Hit List: President Carter's Review of Reclamation Water Projects and His Impact on Federal Water Policy" (Ph.D., The University of Oklahoma, 2013), 80–149; Richard D. Lamm and Michael McCarthy, *The Angry West: A Vulnerable Land and Its Future* (Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 239. Lamm writes, "with regard to public lands, and issues related to public lands, the Carter administration was a western nightmare."

agencies' privileging of local and regional interests.[18] The Sagebrush Rebels, a loose group of western land users and private interests, drew a line in the sand.

Historians of the American West have written extensively on the Sagebrush Rebellion, a movement during the 1970s and early-1980s that advocated for the federal government to transfer control of public lands to the states.[19] Having reclaimed what was meant as a dismissive title, the Sagebrush Rebels fundamentally argued for local control over western federal lands. Accusing the federal government, environmental groups, and urban recreationists of encroaching on the lands they had developed and to which they lived in proximity, the Rebels seized cattle ranchers' ties to frontier western identities to gain support from a rural western populace under pressure from the federal Leviathan. Legal historian John D. Leshy demonstrated how Ronald Reagan "shrewdly flirted" with the Sagebrush Rebellion, politicizing public lands during his successful campaign for the presidency in 1980.[20]

Influenced by the political headwinds against the environmental movement, and with encouragement from the Reagan administration, the BLM used the 1982 amendment process to scale back protective measures in the Desert Plan. Most significantly, the amendments confirmed in May 1983 included the reopening of the Barstow-to-Las Vegas off-road motorcycle race and

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[18] James R. Skillen, *The Nation's Largest Landlord: The Bureau of Land Management in the American West* (University Press of Kansas, 2009), 114.
[19] Cawley, *Federal Land, Western Anger*; William L. Graf, *Wilderness Preservation and the Sagebrush Rebellions* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1990); Quammen, *American Zion*, 140–50; Dunn, "A Tangled Path to Extremism: Desperation, Resentment, and Rebellion in Rural Montana," 41–49; Skillen, *This Land Is My Land*; Wald and Temkin, "The Sagebrush Rebellion: The West Against Itself-Again"; Lamm and McCarthy, *The Angry West*; Howard E. McCurdy, "Public Ownership of Land and the 'Sagebrush Rebellion,'" *Policy Studies Journal* (Oxford, UK) 12, no. 3 (1984): 483–90; Sally K. Fairfax, "Riding into a Different Sunset: The Sagebrush Rebellion," *Journal of Forestry* (Bethesda) 79, no. 8 (1981): 516–82; Frank J. Popper, "The Timely End of the Sagebrush Rebellion," *The Public Interest* (New York) 76, no. 76 (1984): 61–61.
[20] John D. Leshy, "Making the Modern Bureau of Land Management," in *Our Common Ground* (Yale University Press, 2022), 579.

the elimination of 47,000 acres from the East Mojave National Scenic Area to allow for rare earth mining exploration near Clark Mountain and leach-mining for gold on Castle Mountain, exemplifying what reporter Philip Shabecoff described as the early Reagan years' counterrevolution against the environmental movement.[21]

In the face of a perceived disregard for the protective mandate within the Desert Plan, a perception confirmed by the 1982 amendment process, the Burks (leading the California Desert Alliance) called for increased Wilderness designation and protection for places such as the Mojave Cinder Cones and Kelso Dunes.[22] If ranching, mining, and off-roading could continue, Burk and his fellow desert environmentalists would not compromise on the need for National Park designation for the East Mojave.

Nationalizing the Fight for Mojave National Park

Vicky Hoover first heard the call to protect the California Desert at the Visalia, California, Conference Center. Building on the previous year's legislative success, including President Reagan's signing of the California Wilderness Act of 1984, Hoover and fellow members of the Sierra Club, Wilderness Society, and other environmental groups gathered at the California Wilderness Conference in late October 1985 to mobilize against what they viewed as the administration's degradation of public lands.[23] Having traveled from San Francisco as a

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[21] Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (Island Press, 2003), 203.
[22] "Mojave Cindercones Wilderness Area," California Desert Alliance, 1981, Folder 1, California Desert Alliance, MDHCA; "Kelso Dunes Wilderness Area," California Desert Alliance, 1980, Folder 1, CDA, MDHCA; "MidHills Wilderness Area," California Desert Alliance, 1980, Folder 1, CDA, MDHCA; "New York Mountains Wilderness Area," California Desert Alliance, 1980, Folder 1, CDA, MDHCA.
[23] The California Wilderness Act of 1984 created 25 new national forest wilderness areas, 14 additions to existing wilderness areas, two new wilderness areas within national parks, the wild and scenic Tuolomne River, and the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area. H.R.1437, An Act Entitled the "California Wilderness Act of 1984"., Pub. L. Nos. 98–425 (1984).

representative for her local chapter's Wilderness Committee, Hoover and hundreds of fellow activists heard from a who's-who of 1980s environmental leaders. Speakers included EarthFirst! founder Dave Foreman, National Audubon Society vice president Brock Evans, and lifelong Sierra Club leader David Brower.[24]

Just before noon on the second day of the proceedings, keynote speaker Senator Alan Cranston stepped to the podium. Supportive of a desert National Park since at least 1978 and working hand-in-glove with national and local environmental groups to draft its text, Cranston announced his intention to introduce a bill to designate three new National Parks in the California Desert.[25] A self-described "newbie," Hoover wondered "why do we need a bill for the California Desert?"[26]

By the next spring, Hoover was not only well-versed in the political battles for the California Desert, but actively engaged in a lobbying campaign on behalf of a place she quickly came to love. Hoover and the Northern California Desert Task Force she led throughout the late 1980s wrote to county boards of supervisors across California and national media outlets to advocate for a permanent solution to perceived ecological problems created by land management agencies responsive to political vicissitudes. Management by the National Park Service seemed like the obvious answer to Hoover, Judy Anderson, and others standing for a Mojave Park.

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[24] The EarthFirst! group advocated for direct action against development and advocated for industrial sabotage or "monkeywrenching," a term borrowed from Edward Abbey's anti-capitalist western classic, *The Monkeywrench Gang* and its sequel, *Hayduke Lives!*. Writing in its first page, "this book is only for entertainment purposes," Foreman authored the definitive how-to guidebook for field sabotage. In the late 1980s, EarthFirst! activists sabotaged sections of the Barstow-to-Vegas motorcycle race. Dave Foreman, *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, 2nd edition, ed. Bill Haywood (EarthFirst! Books, 1987); Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (Harper, 2006); Edward Abbey, *Hayduke Lives!* (Back Bay Books, 1991).

[25] Alan Cranston to Cecil Andrus, March 27, 1978, Folder 1, Desert Bill 1986-1992, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB. Cranston wrote to Secretary of Interior Cecil Andrus, "I believe the proposal to establish a national park in the California desert should be one of the options considered as part of the desert planning."

[26] Vicky Hoover, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, May 5, 2025, OHC, MDHCA.

Judy Anderson first came to investigate the desert after a trip to hot springs in Saline Valley, a large, remote reach in the northern Mojave Desert where 13,000 feet can separate the valley floor from the peaks that enclose it. Anderson piled into an old Ford Bronco equipped with a secondary gas tank and took to the dirt roads of the Mojave to find more hot springs and investigate an experimental energy station near Daggett, CA, for the Sierra Club.[27] She noticed how extensively the rural two-track network allowed her to penetrate remote places. Anderson unknowingly paraphrased A. Starker Leopold and wondered, "does every valley have to have a road down the middle of it?...Are there a few that we can just leave as they are?"[28]

A force within the desert Park movement, Anderson worked with Cranston's legislative aide, Kathy Lacy (later, Kathy Files), to work out the specific language of the first bill, introduced in the 99th Congress as S.2061, "The California Desert Protection Act of 1986."[29] With direction from Debbie Sease, a senior lobbyist and later director of the Sierra Club's Washington office, beginning in 1982, Anderson traced the map lines of the California Desert Plan and worked to refine them for a proposed Mojave National Park. Eventually drafting hundreds of maps for the various iterations of the desert bill, Anderson and other Sierra Club cartographers amended and adjusted the borders to gain support for the legislation.[30] Detailed and professionally prepared maps helped convince the public of threats to spaces it had not known existed: "[maps] gave credence to an area that nobody had ever heard of and didn't know

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[27] Judith Anderson, interview.
[28] Ibid.; A. Starker Leopold, "Adios, Gavilan," *Pacific Discovery* 2 (February 1949): 13.
[29] S.2061, "California Desert Protection Act of 1986," Senate 99th Congress (1986); Judith Anderson, interview, 33.
[30] S.21 - California Desert Protection Act of 1994, Pub. L. Nos. 103–433, 108 Stat. 4471 (1994); Text of S.21 as Introduced to Senate, S.21, 103rd Congress 1st Session (1993), https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/senate-bill/21/text/is; S.21 - "A Bill to Provide for the Protection of the Public Lands in the California Desert," Senate 102th Congress (1991); S.11, "California Desert Protection Act of 1989," Senate 101th Congress (1989); S.7 - "A Bill to Provide for the Protection of the Public Lands in the California Desert," Senate 100th Congress (1987); S.2061, "California Desert Protection Act of 1986"; Judith Anderson, interview, 39.

about and probably didn't care about."[31] Maps and other images connected often-urban supporters of conservation to corners of the desert that they might never visit.

The Sierra Club wanted a Mojave National Park for, and with the support of, urban people. As the BLM demonstrated half-hearted adherence to the protective goals of the Desert Plan through the early 1980s, the Sierra Club moved to expand the Park fight beyond its own brand. Dozens of environmental organizations including the Audubon Society, Wilderness Society, California Wilderness Coalition, and the National Parks and Conservation Association joined the Sierra Club to form the California Desert Protection League.[32]

The Protection League epitomized changes in the environmental movement during the late-twentieth century. As procedural law developed around the Wilderness Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Air Act, and Federal Land Management and Policy Act, environmentalists litigated agencies and lobbied for legislation to institute their desired policy changes.[33] National news coverage supplemented and soon overtook door-to-door canvassing.[34] The Protection League presented a united front representing hundreds of environmental

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[31] Judith Anderson, interview, 38.
[32] "Press Release by California Desert Protection League," February 7, 1986, Folder 2, CDPA of 1986 (S.2061), Alan Cranston Collection, Bancroft Library.
[33] David R. Boyd, *The Rights of Nature: A Legal Revolution That Could Save the World* (ECW Press, 2017), 103–34; Noga Morag-Levine, "Partners No More: Relational Transformation and the Turn to Litigation in Two Conservationist Organizations," *Law & Society Review* 37, no. 2 (2003): 457–510; Dale A. Hudson, "Sierra Club v. Department of Interior: The Fight to Preserve the Redwood National Park," *Ecology Law Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1979): 781–859; Marc Bramer Mihaly, "The Clean Air Act and the Concept of Non-Degradation: Sierra Club v. Department of the Interior," *Ecology Law Quarterly* (Berkeley) 2, no. 4 (1972): 801–36; Paul Sabin, "Environmental Law and the End of the New Deal Order," *Law and History Review* 33, no. 4 (2015): 965–1003.
[34] Tom Kenworthy, "In California Desert, Prospects for Preservation Are Blossoming," *Washington Post*, April 27, 1993, folder 9, box 1, Frank Wheat Collection (henceforth, FWC), A-3, Huntington Library (henceforth, HL); "The Playground Becomes the Battleground," *LA Times Magazine*, April 22, 1990, folder 9, box 1, FWC, HL; "California's Desert Storm," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 21, 1993, Special Edition, folder 9, box 1, FWC, HL.

organizations and scientists from across the country, each signing their concern for the damage caused by ranching and off-road vehicles and the threat of further development.[35]

Environmentalists sought an end to all cattle ranching and most off-road travel in the East Mojave. Burk and his fellow Citizens for Mojave National Park saw little utility in traditional lifeways they considered both anachronistic and antithetical to proper environmental protection. Compared to the seemingly vast good that setting aside lands under the NPS banner could accomplish, Burk felt the expected benefits of a Park would far outweigh the social cost of losing a few ranchers.[36] The perceived abuses of off-highway vehicles similarly motivated environmentalists' fight for a Park in the East Mojave. Burk expressed disgust at the Barstow-to-Vegas motorcycle race: "It just ate at me that these people would, you know, 3,000 [people] just tearing the place up." Vicky Hoover defended that the Sierra Club did not "block people out of the desert," but conceded that "we may want to lock vehicles out of there, as vehicles do morbid damage."[37] The threat seemed increasingly imminent and every year, more bikes, jeeps, and trails seemed to appear in the East Mojave.

The popularizing of off-road motorcycle and four-wheeled vehicular travel and efforts to constrain their use corresponded to the rapid growth of western cities such as Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Both the environmental movement and those who opposed it reflected a postwar embrace and feeding of consumptive culture and the legacy of liberal New Deal structuralism in the West. Defining "political liberalism" as "support for federal intervention to improve the conditions of daily life," Richard White argued that between the 1930s and 1960, "the West had

[35] "Member Organizations of the California Desert Protection League," c 1989, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[36] Burk, interview.
[37] Hoover, interview.

been the most 'liberal' section of the country."[38] Indeed, despite the region's projected image as ready-made only for the hardy, individual frontiersman, the increasingly conservative West's "very existence was the result of federal programs and policies."[39] The last half-century had physically cemented the power of the post-New Deal state: dams provided a previously impossible physical security through access to water, roads and railroads wove western economies into the nation, and quickly developing cities such as Los Angeles and Phoenix confirmed that the West's future rested in urban spaces, even if rural spaces continued to provide for their power, sustenance, recreational escapes, and regional identities.[40]

As urban western populations continued to boom through the second half of the twentieth century, the uptick in rural land-use cemented popular support for preservationist ideals but also the enlarged threat of public misuse. Setting away the East Mojave as a National Park could prevent it from the "Los Angelesization" feared by environmentalists. Burk "didn't want to see the Mojave Desert, especially the nice parts of the Mojave Desert, [become] Los Angeles."[41] Similarly concerned with private land throughout the East Mojave, Judy Anderson worried "that

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[38] White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 576.

[39] Kurt Schuparra, "Freedom vs. Tyranny: The 1958 California Election and the Origins of the State's Conservative Movement," *Pacific Historical Review* 63, no. 4 (1994): 537–60. Historian Kurt Schuparra argues that Republicans in California developed a distinctive distrust of New Deal liberalism and used the language of freedom in their arguments against perceived steps toward socialism, threats that included the "tyranny" of "Big Labor" (right-to-work in 1958), "forced housing" (Fair Housing Act of 1964), or the eventual "locking away" of desert spaces where Americans could freely act out their ideas of what it meant to be American. For how thew New Deal and postwar "victory culture" lost popular legitimacy through midcentury military engagements, see Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 62, 87.

[40] Walter Nugent, *Into the West: The Story of Its People* (Vintage Books, 1999), 287; Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*; Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*, 108, 111, 114, 117–19; Quammen, *American Zion*, 219, 223–24; Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2011); Needham, *Power Lines*; Betsy Gaines Quammen, *True West* (Torrey House Press, 2023); Katz, "Miracle Miles: Road Building to American Highway Engineering, 1898-1933"; Mont H. Saunderson, *Western Land and Water Use*, 1st edition (University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 11–12; Wallace Stegner, *The American West as Living Space* (University of Michigan Press, 1987), 50–60.

[41] Burk, interview.

we could end up with housing over thousands and thousands of acres…basically inviting in the Lanfair Valley a new community."[42] Despite the lack of reliable roads, water, power, or telecommunications, environmentalists feared that the relatively empty Lanfair Valley might sprout a new commercial center, ruining the East Mojave's primitive feeling. As the smog and traffic of Los Angeles drove people to recreate in the National Parks and National Forests of Southern California, keeping the desert free of disquiet motivated Park advocates.

Leading Los Angelenos agreed the desert could serve their rapidly growing population. Mayor of Los Angeles Tom Bradley wrote to Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, chairman of the Senate Public Lands Subcommittee, endorsing an early version of the Protection Act (S.7 of 1987). As his city felt increasingly overcrowded, Bradley looked to the East Mojave as "a tonic for the commotion of urban life."[43] Even Los Angeles needed a break from Los Angeles.

Burk, Anderson, and Mayor Bradley each fell into an American tradition of seeing presumably open space as a release valve for overcrowding urban populations. When Frederick Jackson Turner first suggested the significance of the frontier in American History, he and his contemporaries saw the frontier as a place for Americans to become hardy and inculcate democratic principles by providing space for a burgeoning nation.[44] The need for a frontier on which urban populations could reconnect with both nature and their better selves persisted through the late-twentieth century. Sierra Club members and Southern California politicians

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[42] Judith Anderson, interview.
[43] Tom Bradley to Dale Bumpers, July 14, 1987, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[44] Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, 79; Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In his study of frontier narratives in the European conquest of what North America, historian Kerwin Klein writes, "The interaction of free land and settlement, of wilderness and European colonist, produced the higher synthesis of American democracy, a complex spirit holding the traces of all its previous moments together in an evolving matrix."

advocated for a Mojave National Park to salve urban growing pains and misuse of seemingly natural spaces. That the desert remained a scientific frontier further amplified calls for a Park.

Members of the scientific community advocated for Mojave Park legislation as a solution to their community's ignorance of the region. Writing to Senator Cranston late in 1987, Director of the Granite Mountains Natural Reserve Philippe S. Cohen offered his support to the legislation. Cohen advised, that the East Mojave "is one of the least studied deserts in the world," and that he took "as axiomatic that our understanding of the various habitats found in the East Mojave is woefully inadequate for making informed, reliable long-term resource management decisions."[45] The scientific community's call for Park designation to address research deficiencies intersected with, and reinforced, environmentalists' conviction that the BLM could not be trusted to safeguard the East Mojave under a multiple-use regime.

Environmentalists expressed alarm at the BLM's apparent indifference toward managing for protection and non-motorized uses within the existing Desert Plan.[46] Although cultural anthropologist and human geographer Julia Sizek writes that BLM managers flexibly applied grazing management strategies to constrain off-road motorcycles in the late-1960s and early-1970s, by the 1980s, environmentalists rejected their multiple-use practices.[47] After reintroducing his desert bill in 1987 (as S.7), Cranston accused the amendment process of having

[45] Philippe S. Cohen to Alan Cranston, December 29, 1987, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[46] "Bureau of Land Management Response to General Accounting Office Report on California Desert Wildlife," Bureau of Land Management, 1989, Folder 14, GAO Report, California Desert Wildlife Protection not achieved 1989, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; Bureau of Land Management, "CDCA 10th Ann. Release."
[47] Julia Sizek, "The Bureau of Livestock and Motorcycles: Measuring Leisure in the Bureau of Land Management's Off-Road Era," *Environmental History* 30, no. 5 (2025): 494–517; Burk, interview; Alan Cranston "Letters to the Editor," to Bakersfield Californian, November 6, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB. In a letter to the editor of the *Bakersfield Californian*, Cranston referred to the BLM's "multiple abuses."

subverted the intentions of the Desert Plan and cast it as "a breach a faith."[48] Instead of endorsing an unending watering down of the Plan through repeated amendment processes, Cranston accused the BLM of falling "short of this task," and insisted that "only statutory designation [could] provide lasting protection" to the Mojave and elsewhere in the California Desert.[49]

Senator Cranston requested the General Accounting Office (GAO) to review "the management of wildlife" in the California Desert Conservation Area to prove the BLM's inability to manage for preservation.[50] Completed in 1989, the GAO report summarized that "the wildlife protection objectives envisioned in the overall land use plan have not been achieved. More than 8 years after the plan was issued, nearly one-half of the required wildlife management implementation plans have not been developed."[51] The report offered damning evidence of the Reagan administration gutting the BLM's ability to attend to the wildlife requirements of the Desert Plan, with "wildlife funding" between fiscal years 1982 and 1988 at "less than half the levels the plan stated were required."[52] Describing how commodity and motorized recreation interests took precedence over wildlife protection, with desert tortoise, bighorn sheep, and other sensitive species experiencing population declines, the GAO recommended a substantial increase in both funding and staffing for a BLM that "makes the institutional commitment to focus more

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[48] *Statement by Sen. Alan Cranston before Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks, and Forests: Hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks, and Forests*, Senate 100th Congress (1987). Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[49] Kathy Files "Senator Cranston's Answers to Questions Posed by the American Motorcycle Association," to Robert Rasor, December 15, 1987, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[50] Alan Cranston to Charles A. Bowsher, October 20, 1987, Folder 14, GAO Report, California Desert Wildlife Protection not achieved 1989, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[51] *California Desert: Planned Wildlife Protection and Enhancement Objectives Not Achieved*, B-235669 (General Accounting Office, 1989), Folder 14, GAO Report, California Desert Wildlife Protection not achieved 1989, carton 227, ACC, p. 3, BL-UCB..
[52] *Ibid., 4.*

on the long-term health of the land than on the immediate needs of special interest groups."[53] Press immediately echoed the report's findings.[54] Despite agreement that it served at the direction of the executive branch, the BLM found limited sympathy when they blamed their failings on funding and legal constraints.[55] The California Desert Protection League and Senator Cranston blamed the BLM for not changing "with the times," accusing it of wasting a recreational and aesthetic gem for those willing to earn it.[56]

Importantly, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment shaped many environmental activists' support for a Mojave National Park. Senator Cranston and the Protection League justified a Park on multiple grounds, including that the desert under the BLM-managed Plan was being undemocratically reserved for special interests to the detriment of the East Mojave's wildlife, but two core beliefs motivated environmentalists: preserving an environment quickly being altered by intensive land use and enjoying a stunning and distinctive landscape. Peter Burk found peace while climbing the New York, Providence, and Piute ranges.[57] Judy Anderson first chased hot springs.[58] Vicky Hoover led many Sierra Club outings to popular locations in the proposed Park.[59] The desert could and should be enjoyed.

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[53] *Ibid., 29.*
[54] Mark A. Stein, "BLM Failed to Protect Desert Life, Report Says," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1989, Folder 14, GAO Report, California Desert Wildlife Protection not achieved 1989, carton 227, ACC, p. 3, BL-UCB; Martin Salditch, "Desert Wildlife Suffering," *Press-Enterprise* (Riverside, CA), July 31, 1989, Folder 14, GAO Report, California Desert Wildlife Protection not achieved 1989, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[55] "Bureau of Land Management Response to General Accounting Office Report on California Desert Wildlife"; Mark A. Stein, "BLM Blames Problems on Laws, Funding," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1989, Folder 14, GAO Report, California Desert Wildlife Protection not achieved 1989, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[56] Burk, interview; Judith Anderson, interview. In an oral history, Judy Anderson stated "I think we king of lost faith in BLM ability to, to have enough teeth or understand what was expected to protect" desert resources.
[57] Burk, interview.
[58] Judith Anderson, interview. Although a trip with a women's group of the Sierra Club first drew Anderson to the desert, she also spent significant time investigating proposed nuclear storage facilities in the Mojave.
[59] Hoover, interview.

"The Interest of a Few Individuals": Opposition to Mojave Park

The Bureau of Land Management, off-roaders, miners, and ranchers opposed the proposed Park. Mining companies thought that to close the desert would unnecessarily deprive their shareholders and the nation of untapped wealth. As the nation's largest landlord, the BLM feared losing control over the East Mojave, which it considered the "crown jewel" of its desert holdings.[60] Off-roaders felt misunderstood, as if their appreciation for, and want to, visit desert spaces was reduced to the caricature of a dirt-bike climbing a sand dune. Fervently clinging to their traditional lifeways, ranchers argued that their operations in the Mojave were both economically and culturally significant to the nation. Intensive land users united around orienting the East Mojave toward production and fundamentally saw a different place than the quiet and pristine wilderness experienced by a backcountry hiker.

The space that is today Mojave National Preserve has been many different places for many different people. Humanistic geographers have stressed the different between space, an open-ended abstraction which refers to a location or spatial arrangement without inherent meaning, and place, a concrete and meaningful space that has been experienced, named, remembered, and valued. Scholars such as Yi-fu Tuan, Edward Casey, and J.B. Jackson refined the relationships between space, experience, and place to describe how various peoples came to create divergent values for the desert through repeated experience. Tuan described space as having "no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning," and place as spaces that acquire definition and meaning; places matter because humans give

[60] Bureau of Land Management, "CDCA 10th Ann. Release"; Skillen, *The Nation's Largest Landlord*, 1.

them meaning.[61] Reversing Tuan's order, Casey argued that humans are always in place and space is an abstraction derived from experience; places matter because they are the basis of being, memory, and experience.[62] Jackson took Casey's ontological intervention and demonstrated how place is practically produced by emphasizing work, routine, and adaptation in the creation of vernacular landscapes; place is what people make, use, and keep going.[63] Collectively, Tuan, Casey, and Jackson explained that land-use debates will persist because land is never just land, but rather something that is simultaneously experienced, inhabited, and practiced.[64]

Having developed distinctive if overlapping places within the East Mojave, stakeholders argued for how the physical space would be adapted for the future. Leave-no-trace backpackers hiking through the New York Mountains experienced and developed a sense of place around a seemingly more static and perhaps more pristine desert than four-wheel-drive recreationists traversing hundreds of miles of two-track.

Intensive land users and the BLM came to the desert with different values than those held by environmentalists and non-motorized recreationists. Discussing evolving management plans for another desert, in southern Utah, social scientist Julia Brugger described how people brought their own ideals of the desert's inherent, economic, and social value. Brugger employed the language of democratic imaginaries (a framework adopted from philosopher Charles Taylor's

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[61] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 54, 136.
[62] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (University of California Press, 1997), 27. Casey describes the creation of place from the first moments of primordial existence as a moment of emplacement: "To progress from this initial state of no-thing-cum-no-place to a state of created existence–to *ens creatum*–calls not only for cosmically creative acts but also for sequential temporality within which the transition from void to plenum can occur."
[63] John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (Yale University Press, 1986).
[64] For historic preservationists'' understanding and application of place, see Richard W. Longstreth, ed., *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

concept of "social imaginaries") to describe how ranchers, environmentalists, recreationists, miners, and Latter day Saints imbued the seemingly inhospitable Great Basin with substantial, overlapping, and often conflicting ideas of how the land held mutually exclusive values to an increasingly contested user base.[65] In similar ways, local ranchers, four-wheel enthusiasts, miners, and the BLM attacked the legislation for subverting a democratic land process.

The BLM rejected the Protection Act of 1986 and subsequent iterations of the bill for disregarding "years of planning and a great amount of participation."[66] Arguing that multiple-use had been the standard management of the California Desert "traditionally over the centuries," BLM state director Ed Hastey wrote to Cranston shortly after S.2061's introduction. Hastey accused the legislation of substituting "the interests of a few individuals or organizations for the critically important desert planning public involvement process."[67] Sharing the belief that the East Mojave could service the rapidly burgeoning populations of Los Angeles and Las Vegas, Hastey asserted the California Desert under the BLM had "appropriately, been providing space for that recreational need."[68] Hastey followed up with an editorial in the Riverside, California, *Press-Enterprise*, describing that "the BLM offer[ed] all Californians a balanced public land use system for full enjoyment of all the desert resources."[69]

The BLM rejected that it was unable to properly protect the desert, generally, and the East Mojave, specifically. Writing to Senator Cranston's legislative aide Kathy Files, Hastey

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[65] Julie Brugger, *Public Land and Democracy in America: Understanding Conflict over Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument*, Anthropology of Contemporary North America (University of Nebraska Press, 2025), 55–80, 290–91; Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2003). Taylor's work investigates the assumptions and beliefs that silently undergird societies and those societies' self-reflections.
[66] Ed Hastey to Alan Cranston, February 14, 1986, Folder 2, CDPA of 1986 (S.2061), ACC, BL-UCB.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ed Hastey, "A Desert Plan Already in Place," *The Press-Enterprise* (Riverside, CA), March 20, 1986, File 9, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, H-11, MDHCA.

defended his agency's work and included the BLM's management plan for the East Mojave National Scenic Area. Hastey added a star next to management goal four: "Limit the region's 'development.'"[70] Appealing to environmentalists' concerns for commercial or speculative development in the East Mojave, Hastey emphasized his agency's commitment to upholding all protective measures of the Desert Plan.

As the Protection Act (S.7) advanced through the Senate in 1987, the Department of the Interior endorsed the BLM's management practices. Assistant Secretary of the Interior J. Steven Griles wrote to J. Bennett Johnston, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Energy and Natural Resources, staking the Department of the Interior's "strong" opposition to the legislation. Echoing the BLM's concerns that "S.7 ignores the provisions of [the] carefully balanced, congressionally mandated Desert Plan," Griles described the economic loss of shuttered mines, the recreational loss from proposed trail closures, and the perceived abandonment of a process shaped by public input.

Governmental pushback against the desert bill extended beyond the Department of the Interior. The Army cited the proposed legislation's effect on "combat readiness."[71] The Navy attacked the bill for its potential weakening of the nation's ability to quickly deploy intercontinental ballistic missiles.[72] Soon, conservative-leaning newspapers in California

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[70] Ed Hastey to Kathy Files, January 3, 1986, Folder 1, Desert Bill 1986-1992, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[71] John W. Shannon, July 20, 1987, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[72] Rocky Lane "Memorandum: California Desert Protection Act," to Flight Test Office, China Lake Naval Weapons Center, Department of the Navy, February 18, 1986, File 8, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA; Thomas J. McGill, "Comments on Cranston Bill (S.2061)," Department of the Navy, February 25, 1986, File 8, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA; M. K. Burford to Rocky Lane, March 10, 1986, File 8, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA; Rocky Lane, "Area of Interest: Basing of Small ICBM on NWC T&E Ranges," April 1986, File 9, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA; S. D. Langdon "Proposed Legislation for California Desert Protection," to Navy Representative, Western Pacific Region, Department of the Navy, May 12, 1986, File 8, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA.

highlighted military and broader opposition to S.7 and other iterations of the California Desert Protection Act.[73]

The California Desert Protection League moved quickly to placate the military, industry, and utility providers. Although some resistance remained from the military, mapmakers addressed many of its concerns by allowing low-altitude flights in the Preserve and enlarging the naval air weapons base at China Lake. Approaching major utility providers such as Southern California Edison and the Metropolitan Water District, cartographers carefully amended the Park border to placate potentially powerful opposition. Expecting a battle over millions of acres of potential Park land, instead, Anderson and other Protection League leaders found that major utility companies "were quite, quite happy to help us."[74] To attract the support of major mining companies, the League cut-out segments of the proposed Mojave National Park to allow operations to continue on its peripheries. Recognizing that economic arguments could sink its bill, the Protection League quickly appeased companies to prevent them from "writing to their stockholders about this."[75] Having minimized opposition from the Department of Defense and garnered the support of large corporations and utility providers, the Sierra Club-led California Desert Protection League moved to overcome vocal opposition from public land users, including miners, local landowners, and off-road-recreationists. Four-wheelers worried that the desert bill would close off access to millions of Americans.

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[73] Damon Arthur, "Cranston's Plan to Save the Desert," *Daily-Independent* (Riverside, CA), April 12, 1986, File 9, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA; "Opposition Growing Against Desert Bill," *Trona Argonaut* (Trona, CA), June 10, 1987, File 9, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA; Linda Katzenstein, "Cranston Bill May Hinder Military Desert Operations," *Inyo Register* (Bishop, CA), June 14, 1987, File 9, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA; M. S. Enkoji, "Groups Far Apart on Issue of Desert Protection," *San Bernardino Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), June 14, 1987, File 9, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, MDHCA.

[74] Judith Anderson, interview, 46.

[75] Judith Anderson, interview.

Off-road Travel in the East Mojave and Environmental History

A grandmother and former parts department manager for an auto shop, Kathy MacPherson had ridden nearly every mile of trail in the East Mojave. With her husband Dick, a three-time vice-president in Cal4Wheel, Kathy had enjoyed the desert backcountry since the late-1970s. As they aged into their seventies, with bad knees and owning a full section of Round Valley in Mojave National Preserve, by the 2020s, the MacPhersons lacked the mobility to scale the canyons of Hole-in-the-Wall or climb the Kelso Dunes. However, with their trusty Jeep pickup, lifted to accommodate thick-walled, oversized tires, they still led the curious on trips to historical locations across the desert, traversing washes and descending sharp embankments.

Experts on local history and stalwarts of the East Mojave community, the MacPhersons missed the days before the Park Service. Dick remembered driving his Jeep over the Kelso Dunes and through the Devil's Playground in the 1980s. Kathy recounted days with up to 50 "rigs" at Hole-in-the-Wall, where group camping and evening fires mattered as much as the joy that came with successfully navigating a technical trail to visit an abandoned mine high in the mountains. The MacPhersons bemoaned the many places closed for Wilderness Areas and how closures limited the public's ability to engage the desert they held so dearly. Reflecting on the Desert Park fight three decades after the bill's passage in 1994, Kathy MacPherson argued the bill narrowed, rather than eliminated, those who could access public lands: "We want to be able to explore, to have access…we've got the asthmatics, you've got the disabled, you're eliminating

total access to anybody that can't walk."[76] Other four-wheelers voiced concern for the potential loss of access for "the elderly and handicapped."[77]

Off-roaders' lamentations for the closing of Wilderness only to those with the physical capacities to reach it fit within a growing discussion of disability within land management, and the National Park Service in particular. In her thesis on disability within Yellowstone National Park, Rose Ashley investigated how park planning considered social models of disability, a model in which disability is "*produced* by interaction between the body and the environment."[78] As Ashley showed, by the 1990s, the National Park Service worked to integrate disability access into natural tourist spaces.[79] However, as Yellowstone's leadership team moved to allow for greater access for disabled people in the first National Park's backcountry, the Mojave Park legislation threatened to cut off backcountry access for those who relied on four-wheel-drive vehicles.[80]

Some Californians seized on the Mojave Park's threat to undue access for the millions of Americans unable to ambulate themselves through the backcountry. California's junior Senator, Republican Pete Wilson, confronted Senator Cranston on the exclusivity built into designated Wilderness, asking, "are the elderly, the disabled, and very young children to be denied…access and…enjoyment? Are the pleasures of the desert only to be reserved for the able-bodied?"[81] Wilson's argument for keeping proposed Wilderness open to vehicle travel rejected the previous century's environmentalist ethic that access to the backcountry should be hard-won and

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[76] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.
[77] Dennis Casebier to Carl Volkmar, September 26, 1995, folder 18, DGCC, MDHCA.
[78] Guadalupe Rose Ashley, "Bodies, Public Land, and Belonging: The Story of Disability in Yellowstone National Park" (M.A. thesis, Montana State University, 2022), 7. Original emphasis.
[79] Ibid., 16.
[80] Ibid., 78–102.
[81] Pete Wilson to Alan Cranston, July 7, 1988, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.

represented a national transition toward disability awareness.[82] Warning that Cranston's Protection Act would "result in permanently denying millions of Southern Californians access to legitimate desert recreation," Wilson voiced fears that more Wilderness or a Mojave National Park would only serve the young and able-bodied.[83] Many echoed Wilson's warning that the closure of roads due to Wilderness designation threatened to eliminate the nation's best chance to learn about and enjoy the East Mojave.

Despite having proposed parts of the East Mojave as California State Parks in 1967, like many rural westerners, by the late 1980s, Dennis Casebier resented the perceived overburden of federal government and do-gooding environmentalists, or "eco-freaks."[84] Beginning in the 1960s, Casebier invested years into researching the history of the Mojave Road (or Old Government Road), first hiking the roughly 140-mile section of drivable trail that connected Camp Cady to Fort Mojave during the 1860s before deciding it would be more easily and widely appreciated as a four-wheel-drive trail. Casebier believed that understanding and appreciating the region's history demanded seeing it up close.[85] In 1986, and after consultation with the BLM, Casebier published *The Mojave Road Guide*, offering drivers historical and environmental

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[82] Edward Abbey, "Polemic: Industrial Tourism and National Parks," in *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (McGraw-Hill, 1968). A sparkplug in the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Ed Abbey wrote "Let the people walk. Or ride horses, bicycles, mules, wild pigs–anything–but keep the automobiles and the motorcycles and all their motorized relatives out."

[83] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview; William Claypool to Marr Middlebrook, June 26, 1995, folder 24, box 26, Jerry Lewis Collection (henceforth, JLC), Young Research Library, Univesity of California, Los Angeles (henceforth, YRLUCLA). Local landowner William Claypool wrote to Senator Feinstein, "the desert is a harsh area, and the act took away many of the access areas needed for safe use by all but a few young and healthy youth."

[84] Marcus Rudnick, interview by Dennis Casebier, April 2, 1994, Oral History Collection, MDHCA; MacPherson and MacPherson, interview. MacPherson and other anti-park activists use eco-freak as a catch-all for environmentalists and environmental organizations. One inflammatory anti-environmentalist group, the Sahara Club, published a newsletter "dedicated to fighting eco-freaks and keeping public lands free." *Sahara Club Newsletter #28*, c 1996, folder 6, CDPA of 1994, DGCC, p. 1, MDHCA.

[85] Casebier had a number of International and Jeep 4x4s, including one that he custom-fitted with a playpen so that his young daughter, Darelyn, could accompany him on weekend excursions into the desert backcountry. Dennis Casebier, "Rig of the Month," *The Camper Coachman and Motorhome Sportsman*, June 1966; Casebier, interview.

context as they crawled westward from the Colorado River, climbed the Piute Range, clambered through the high-elevation Joshua Tree forests of Lanfair, Pinto, and Round Valleys, wormed between the Mojave Cinder Cones, and eventually sped across the Soda Lake and Rasor sand dunes before fording the Mojave River and rejoining civilization near Barstow.[86] Having successfully negotiated a trail stewardship program with the BLM, the Casebier-led Friends of the Mojave Road maintained the trail, reported malfeasance, and led hundreds of groups on historical tours of the road, positing that four-wheelers could have a positive effect on the region's interpretive and recreational value.



Figure 23: The Friends of the Mojave Road engaged a trail stewardship program for their namesake trail, 1999. Binder 3, Lanfair Photography, DGCC, MDHCA.

[86] Dennis G. Casebier, *The Mojave Road*, Tales of the Mojave Road 5 (Tales of the Mojave Road Pub. Co, 1975); Dennis G. Casebier, *Mojave Road Guide: An Adventure Through Time*, 2nd edition (Tales of the Mojave Road Pub. Co, 1999).

The Friends received multiple commendations for their volunteerism. The BLM awarded both Casebier and his group "Volunteers for the Public Lands" awards in 1989 for "exemplary volunteer services."[87] The California Desert Conservation Area presented a certificate of appreciation to the Friends of the Mojave Road for their "efforts to educate the public in desert etiquette through" their guidebooks.[88] Congressman Lewis often cited the Friends "to show how responsible recreation" would "be prohibited" under the Protection Act, and entered a tribute to the organization into the Congressional Record.[89]

Finding success and acclaim with the *Mojave Road Guide*, Casebier set his sights on a larger project and worked to establish the 660-mile East Mojave Heritage Trail throughout the 1980s. Casebier again collaborated with the BLM. Together, the Friends and BLM agreed to a viable route that would meander around newly instituted Wilderness Study Areas.[90] After Senator Cranston failed to advance S.2061 during the 99th Congress in 1986, the Friends of the Mojave Road published the four-book *Guide to the East Mojave Heritage Trail*, beginning in 1987 with the last segment published in 1989. However, as the California Desert Protection League successfully garnered endorsements and negotiated boundary adjustments with utility providers for the proposed Mojave National Park, Casebier confronted that widespread Wilderness designation would render his mileage-specific guidebooks useless. Judy Anderson remembered that "he absolutely would not give up even…5 or 10 acres…there was no compromise" in

[87] "1989 'Volunteers for the Public Lands' Awards," BLM, March 23, 1989, folder 17, DGCC, MDHCA.
[88] California Desert Conservation Area, DoI, "Certificate of Appreciation," June 15, 1988, folder 17, DGCC, MDHCA.
[89] Jerry Lewis, "Statement to the Friends of the Mojave Road," October 8, 1988, folder 17, DGCC, p. 2, MDHCA; Jerry Lewis, "A Tribute to Friends of the Mojave Road," *Congressional Record* 133, no. 150 (1987), folder 17, DGCC, MDHCA.
[90] William Creech, interview by Austin Schoenkopf, July 17, 2025, Oral History Collection, MDHCA.

possible negotiations on the Park boundary.[91] Because of the location-specific material he produced, Casebier loathed to relinquish his trail.

To counter the momentum for a desert Park, Casebier tried to educate government and environmental representatives on why the East Mojave should be kept open to motorized travel. He published dozens of books based on archival research – even Sierra Club lead counsel Frank Wheat read his works.[92] In a position paper outlining his group's objection to the Protection Act, Casebier described that "the East Mojave is a beautiful place, but it has been heavily used by man for over a hundred years. The marks of man are everywhere. You cannot escape them."[93] Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, Casebier led dozens of Park advocates on trips across the desert in hopes that they would come to sympathize with his view that one must be able to access the Mojave to appreciate and want to protect it.[94] Park organizer Peter Burk rode with Casebier along the Mojave Road. Senator Cranston similarly enjoyed the scenery from one of Casebier's jeeps.

Despite frequently citing off-road travel as a dominant threat to the East Mojave and its resources, environmentalists struggled to understand those who opposed the California Desert

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[91] Judith Anderson, interview; William Claypool to Los Angeles Times, Letter to the Editor, July 10, 1995, folder 24, box 26, JLC, YRLUCLA. Opponents described the "wiping out of the East Mojave Heritage Trail" and "one example of the evil" committed by the CDPA.

[92] Casebier, *The Mojave Road*; Casebier; Dennis G. Casebier, *Camp Rock Spring California*, Tales of the Mojave Road 3 (Norco, CA: Tales of the Mojave Road Pub. Co, 1973); Dennis G. Casebier, *Tales of the Mojave Road: The Military*, Tales of the Mojave Road (Essex, CA: Tales of the Mojave Road Publishing Company, 2006); Chester King and Dennis Casebier, "Background to the Historic and Prehistoric Resources of the East Mojave Desert Region," Prepared for the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, California Desert Planning Program (Riverside, CA: Archaeological Research Unit, University of California Riverside, 1976); Maud Morrow Sharp, *Maruba: Homesteading in Lanfair Valley*, Tales of the Mojave Road 10 (Goffs, CA: Tales of the Mojave Road Pub. Co, 1984); Bob Ausmus, *East Mojave Diary* (Norco, CA: Tales of the Mojave Road Publishing Company, 1989); Frank Wheat to Stan Sloss, May 3, 1990, folder 1, research notes, box 1, FWC, HL. Wheat wrote to fellow Sierra Club counsel, "have arranged to borrow Kayspear (sp?) books."

[93] Dennis Casebier, "Position Paper of the Friends of the Mojave Road on the California Desert Protection Act," June 23, 1991, folder 7, Position Paper on CDPA, DGCC, MDHCA.

[94] Barbara LaGrange, "OHV Clubs Escort League in Mojave," *Lucerne Valley Leader*, February 13, 1991.

Protection Act's curtailing of motorized access. Despite directing the mapmaking for the desert bill, Sierra Club cartographer Judy Anderson felt "it was very difficult to interpret exactly what [four-wheelers'] goal was. Do they want to get from point A to point B or were they most interested in whether or not the slope was gonna be a challenge?...What – what was their interest?" Having expected a chance to negotiate Park boundary proposals, Anderson recalled that Cal4Wheel and other off-road groups "weren't willing to give an inch," despite major utility companies' quickness to negotiate with the Protection League.[95]

Dick and Kathy MacPherson resented that the Protection Act effectively cast the four-wheel-drive community as uncontrollable and purposefully destructive. Rather, the MacPhersons posited local history and exploration across unridden trails as their favorite off-road activity. Advocating for more trails to disperse four-wheeled damage, the MacPhersons believed that "shoving [them] down into a little area just makes it worse, not better."[96] Although hill climb competitions occurred at semiyearly meetings, the four-wheel-drive community saw itself as good-faith stewards of public lands who recreated differently than environmentalists who preferred hiking, rock climbing, or mountain biking.

Recreational histories have focused on how people hike, ski, climb, and otherwise move themselves in the outdoors.[97] Examinations of the reasons Americans slept outdoors, histories of National Parks, and critiques of recreational tourism in rural spaces increasingly demonstrate the complex interplay between Americans and the environment that occurs when they have fun

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[95] Judith Anderson, interview, 46.
[96] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.
[97] Joseph E. Taylor, *Pilgrims of the Vertical: Yosemite Rock Climbers and Nature at Risk* (Harvard University Press, 2010); Michael W. Childers, *Colorado Powder Keg: Ski Resorts and the Environmental Movement*, 1st ed. (University Press of Kansas, 2012).

outside.[98] Environmental historians have interwoven stories of race, recreation, and the outdoors to add subaltern perspectives to understanding the significance of fun.[99] Both peak-bagging environmentalists and pedal-mashing off-roaders came to the desert for recreation. By taking seriously four-wheel-drive motoring as a recreational activity, historians may further enrich our view of how interaction with the land drove American relationships with the environment.

Although Burk, Cranston, and others appreciated tours with the Friends of the Mojave Road, the backcountry excursions did little to temper momentum behind Park legislation. It seemed that work in Washington trumped anything accomplished while crawling over the rocky Piute Range. Still, environmentalists' joining of Casebier-led tours represented a legitimizing of off-road vehicles as necessary tools for backcountry access and enjoyment.

Competing Messages on Mojave National Park

As the California Desert Protection Act moved through successive Congresses between 1986 and 1992, garnering support from national news outlets along the way, intensive land users came together under the banner of the California Desert Coalition to counter the Protection League's influence. Messaging around the proposed Mojave National Park operated on a national scale, with local landowners and small-scale ranchers unable to effectively shift the political dialogue, frustrated that they were unable to leverage their physical proximity into a

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[98] Young, *Camping Grounds*; Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*; Ashley, "Bodies, Public Land, and Belonging: The Story of Disability in Yellowstone National Park"; Adrian Howkins et al., eds., *National Parks beyond the Nation: Global Perspectives on "America's Best Idea,"* Public Lands History Series, volume 1 (University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Philpott, *Vacationland*; Mette Flynt, "Becoming America's Ski City: Place and Identity on the Wasatch Front" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2028).

[99] Connie Y. Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 147–74; McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago*, 20–54, 100, 133–39, 177–83.

political strength. As the Protection League leaned heavily into an environmental playbook centered on litigation and lobbying, and special interest groups negotiated for privileged positions within the new Park unit, locals lacked comparable resources to advocate for themselves and fell through the cracks of the negotiating table.

Sensing the need to enlarge the umbrella of opposition to Park legislation, the four-wheel-drive community came together with miners and ranchers to form the California Desert Coalition. A meeting between Senator Cranston's legislative aide Kathy Lacey (formerly, Kathy Files) and the Desert Coalition allowed opponents to detail their grievances. Attendants included Tom Getzfrid, president of the South California district of the American Motorcycle Association, Donnetta Carnagey of the California Off Road Vehicle Association, Dr. David Hess of Cal4Wheel, Don Fife representing numerous mining associations, and Dennis Casebier of the Friends of the Mojave Road.[100] When the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests hosted a hearing on the Protection Act, Fife and Hess both testified to counter pro-Park testimony made by Judy Anderson, Peter Burk, and the film actress Morgan Fairchild.[101]

The California Desert Coalition sought to undercut the growing public support for desert Park legislation. As the Protection League increasingly garnered endorsements from county boards of supervisors, labor leaders, politicians, and celebrities, the Desert Coalition circulated flyers and newsletters warning of a "close-out" bill.[102] The Coalition coordinated with other

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[100] "Attendance Memorandum," February 12, 1987, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[101] "Witness List for Hearing on S.7 before Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests," July 23, 1987, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[102] California Desert Coalition, February 1991, Folder 1, California Desert Coalition, DGCC, MDHCA; "Committee for California Desert National Parks," July 21, 1987, Folder 15, Desert Committee (Kim Cranston), Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; John F. Henning, "California Labor Federation Endorses California Desert Protection Act," California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, February 10, 1988, Folder 3, S.7 CDPA of 1987, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; Bradley to Bumpers, July 14, 1987. While the Committee for California Desert National Parks included members such as film stars Fairchild and Jeff Bridges, the Coalition appealed to the numbers against the Mojave

desert opponents to present cohesive criticism of the proposed Protection Act and warned of "lies, hysteria, and press releases" from environmentalists. Each newsletter ended with a perforated fundraising pledge titled "it's everybody's desert!"[103] Through their publications, the Desert Coalition posited reasons to distrust both environmentalists and the politicians who championed their causes.

Although also engaged in the Coalition's political alliance with other land users, some ranchers appealed directly to Senator Cranston for relief from his legislation. Running their cattle across roughly 950,000 acres of the East Mojave, Gary and Linda Overson described their dismay in a letter to Cranston. With most of their forage lands within the proposed Park, the Oversons predicted that "when our present grazing leases with BLM expire, we would be out of business."[104] Describing the history of cattle ranching in the East Mojave "with no degradation to the environment," the Oversons underlined that they produced beef "for the people of the United States," highlighting the importance of production for the nation.[105] Inviting the Senator out "for a day at our ranch" to "see for [himself] what it's all about," the Oversons hoped some time on the land would convince Cranston of the need to keep the East Mojave open to cattle ranching.[106] Although they were hopeful, the Oversons were not optimistic and lamented that Senator Cranston "advocate[d] the demise of our industry and the personal means of our family to make

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Park: "Over a million people in California can't be wrong in wanting S-21 defeated! Dissatisfaction with this bill arose with the way it was formulated (without public involvement) and presented (as an "environmentalist" approach)."

[103] Greg Ouellette to Dennis Casebier, May 20, 1991, Folder 1, California Desert Coalition, DGCC, MDHCA; "Desert Closure Bill Takes a Giant Step Toward Enactment," *Desert News Letter* 6, no. 1 (1992), Folder 1, California Desert Coalition, DGCC, MDHCA.

[104] Overson and Overson to Cranston, January 30, 1987.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

a living in a time-honored and highly respected way." They ended their letter by encouraging Cranston to "come out here and verify the facts for" himself.[107]

The Oversons rooted their argument for privileged use of the land on their proximity and traditional lifeways that relied on the desert space they occupied.[108] Further, ranchers rejected that cattle were inherently oppositional to environmental protection and repeatedly positioned their locally sourced knowledge as superior to scientific studies. Environmental historians and historians of the American West have demonstrated how production-based communities can conflict with environmental protection measures. Importantly, the static (if movable) nature of usable natural resources – coal for the Navajo Nation or grassland for ranchers in the Great Basin – demands labor within proximity of those resources.[109] As communities developed around them, those communities become attached to the landscape through their labor.[110] Relying on Lockean definitions of property, ranchers acknowledged that they operated on public property but created an emotional form of ownership across the East Mojave.[111] Ranches transcended juniper-post fence lines and reached into the hills and valleys that cattlemen ranged. The labor of repairing windmills or branding calves penetrated ranchers' bodies and imprinted the desert onto their identities and souls.

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Findlay, *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000*, 260–62; Quammen, *American Zion*; John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), § 22-51, 123-26. FIND = SAME WITH ZION
[109] Carr-Childers, *The Size of the Risk: Histories of Multiple Use in the Great Basin*; Needham, *Power Lines*.
[110] Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (W.W. Norton & Company, 1996). White writes, "Our tools, the products of our work, become extensions of ourselves." Histories of labor in nature offer lessons for how Americans have come to know and feel about the outdoors. For more on labor, see Maher, *Natrue's New Deal*; Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Harvard University Press, 2008); Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (University of Washington Press, 2003); Warren, *The Hunter's Game*.
[111] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, §22-51, 123-26.

Ranchers of the East Mojave shaped and were shaped by an evolving relationship with the constantly shifting network of things and ideas in which they operated. Whether riding on horseback to check fence lines, digging trenches for water pipelines, or sitting out a hot August day in the shade of a juniper, ranchers engaged a multitude of technologies, ideologies, and environmental conditions that affected how they operated, what beliefs they endorsed, and what the desert meant. Windmill repairs operated within geologic and hydrologic conditions, engaged centrifugal pumps and hyperlocal water tables, and occurred during a social, political, and legal milieu in which cattlemen needed to maintain existing developments to justify their continued use. Not passive riders on a wave of metal and rock, ranchers also lowered water tables, impressed ideas about rationally surveyed and fenced landscapes, and opposed social and political outsiders. Families like the Oversons were both part of the interwoven material and semiotic networks that were the East Mojave and asserted themselves as part of the landscape.

Within their East Mojave, the Oversons cast themselves as the true conservationists and those most grounded in the land. Hoping that their future would be in the East Mojave "pursuing this honored business in the old way," the Oversons claimed being "attune with the land like no other group of users," and that "no conservationist has stronger feelings about the need to protect the land."[112] A decade after the Oversons sent their letter to Senator Cranston, historian Richard White castigated seemingly "self-righteous, privileged, and arrogant" environmentalists, "because they so readily consent to identifying nature with play…a place where leisured humans come only to visit and not to work, stay, or live."[113] Demonstrating the durability of the belief that labor ties one to the land, decades after the Oversons' letter, their nephew Jacob remarked,

[112] Overson and Overson to Cranston, January 30, 1987.
[113] White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," 173.

"no one is more of an environmentalist than a rancher, because a rancher needs the land for their livelihood."[114] The direct economic motive to keep public lands viable for use and their intragenerational maintenance of cultural touchstones gave local people in the East Mojave and across the American West confidence in their understanding of the land.[115] Despite landowners' hope that their proximity would lend weight in negotiations on managing the desert, environmental groups used their national reach to overwhelm opposition to the proposed Park.

Gaining support from outside of the desert proved crucial to the California Desert Protection League's campaign for a National Park unit in the East Mojave. Throughout the late 1980s, the Protection League solicited articles from outlets across California supporting the desert bills.[116] Vicky Hoover, Judy Anderson, and Peter Burk collaborated to garner endorsements from city and county boards of supervisors across the state – but not from San Bernardino, the county that would host the East Mojave Park.[117] The Protection League reached

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[114] Overson, interview.
[115] Aaron M. Lien et al., "The Land Ethic of Ranchers: A Core Value Despite Divergent Views of Government," *Rangeland Ecology & Management* (Lawrence) 70, no. 6 (2017): 787–93.
[116] "Protect and Preserve," *San Diego Union* (San Diego, CA), April 8, 1988; "Protection for the Desert," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1988; "Scenic Desert Land Requires Protection," *San Bernardino Sun*, January 21, 1988; "Desert Gets Odd BLM Protection," *San Bernardino Sun*, October 22, 1987; "Desert Needs Some Protection," *Inyo Register* (Bishop, CA), July 31, 1987; "Babbling in the Wilderness," *Sacramento Bee*, June 3, 1987; "A Worthy Desert," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 19, 1987, Folder 4, Editorials in Support of S.7, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Our Heritage in the Parks," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1987, folder 4, editorials in support of S.7, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; *San Bernardino Sun*, "Scenic Desert Land Requires Protection"; "A Desert in Danger," *The Tribune* (Oakland, CA), December 14, 1986, Folder 4, Editorials in Support of S.7, Carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.
[117] "Resolution 4553: Support for S.11," City of Redlands, July 11, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution No. 13996," Salinas City Council, January 8, 1991, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution R-89-311," Board of Supervisors of Alameda County, April 11, 1989, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution 89-29," City Council of Palm Desert, April 13, 1989, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution No. R-89-311," Board of Supervisors of Santa Clara County, February 25, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution 89-310," Board of Supervisors of Santa Barbara County, May 23, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution 17107," Riverside City Council, April 25, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution No. 89-375," Board of Supervisors of Contra Costa County, CA, June 13, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution 89-112," 29 Palms City Council, February 29, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution 7825," Santa Monica City Council, June 21, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution 89-241," City of Escondido, June 30, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution 89-

farther for support by the turn of the decade, mustering editorials across California, but also in cities such as New Orleans and Louisville.[118]Although the Desert Coalition asked its newsletter subscribers to write to relevant congresspeople, it did not have the national reach of the Protection League which continued to draft legislation through successive Congresses and gain support from across the country.

The Creation of Mojave National Preserve

Worn down by backlash to his involvement in the Keating Five scandal, prostate cancer, and uncooperative colleagues, Senator Cranston retired in 1992.[119] Elected with Barbara Boxer in 1992, his replacement, Dianne Feinstein, sought an early legislative achievement. However, upon reintroducing the California Desert Protection Act (S.21), Feinstein confronted the same rigid opposition Cranston faced.

Despite her want to move quickly on the desert bill, specific provisions weighed down Feinstein's early efforts. As the Protection Act once again advanced through Congress, in 1993, opponents accused Senator Feinstein of fraud and corruption. Journalists for the *Los Angeles*

241," City of Rancho Mirage, June 22, 1989, folder 5, S.11, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Resolution 4553: Support for S.11"; "Resolution 88-285," Board of Supervisors of Marin County, October 25, 1988, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB.

[118] "Preserving the Desert," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), August 7, 1990, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Johnston Can Help Save Desert," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), July 30, 1990, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC; "Protect Desert," *Daily Breeze* (Torrance, CA), May 7, 1989, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Mirage of Desert Protection," *Fresno Bee*, August 10, 1989, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB; "Save the Desert," *San Diego Union*, August 6, 1989, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, C–2, BL-UCB; "Protecting the Desert...from off-Roaders Too," *San Diego Union*, March 2, 1989, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, B-8, BL-UCB; "Council Quits Opposing Desert Bill," *Desert Dispatch* (Barstow, CA), May 16, 1989, folder 6, editorials/press on S.11 1989-1990, carton 227, ACC, BL-UCB. Barstow Mayor Bill Pope described that "it's a national issue, not a Barstow City Council Issue."

[119] Helen Dewar, "Cranston Accepts Reprimand; 'Keating 5' Senator Angers Colleagues by Denying Misconduct," *Washington Post*, November 21, 1991; Frank Wheat to Richard Jencks, May 11, 1990, folder 1, research notes, box 1, FWC, HL. Frank Wheat accused Senator Pete Wilson of having "pussyfooted about coming to the negotiating table to work out a piece of legislation he'd be willing to support."

Times claimed Feinstein repeatedly voted to benefit her husband's business interests. [120] Glenn Bunting and Dwight Morris tied two unnamed "friends" of Feinstein's husband, Richard Blum, to the Catellus Corporation and suggested that Feinstein's support for the desert bill was directly tied to Blum's implied involvement in the Catellus conspiracy.

A relic of the checkerboarded land grants for construction of the transcontinental railroads, the Catellus Corporation (formally Santa Fe Pacific Realty, now ProLogis) owned 366,000 acres of land in the East Mojave. A holding company for the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific railroad's unsold land, Catellus and individuals associated with it contributed at least $119,000 dollars to Senator Feinstein's campaigns between 1990 and 1994.[121] Opponents of the bill suggested that Feinstein had been bought.

When the original text of S.21 called for Catellus to receive preferential exchange of its lands within the proposed Park, opponents called foul.[122] An independent journalist writing for *Media ByPass Magazine*, Karen Lee Bixman accused Senator Feinstein of being "the modern Jesse James." Local landowner and four-wheel-drive advocate Dick MacPherson suggested that his microphone was cut at public meetings with Feinstein after his mention of the Catellus operation.[123] MacPherson contended "Catellus land company, with [Blum] at the top of the list, made 'buku' money because the Park Service bought the lands that Catellus had."[124]

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[120] Glenn F. Bunting and Dwight Morris, "Husband's Business Ties Pose Dilemma for Feinstein," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), October 28, 1994.
[121] Ibid.
[122] S.21 as introduced in 1993 included language that would require the Secretary of the Interior to present Catellus with a list of Catellus lands or interests within the boundaries of "wilderness areas or park units designated by this Act," and a list of lands "wherever located to be offered for exchange," including any federal land with "potential for commercial development but not currently under lease or producing Federal revenues." Text of S.21 as Introduced to Senate, Sec. 610.
[123] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.
[124] Ibid.

Catellus-related allegations almost doomed Feinstein's fight for a Mojave Park unit. Utahn Senator Bob Bennett attempted to turn the agency's takeover of Catellus lands on its head by introducing an amendment where Mojave National Park would only take effect upon the successful purchase or accepted donation of 90% of private land within the proposed boundary.[125] Democrats countered that such an amendment would effectively give Catellus veto power over the Park.[126] Although the Catellus exception was removed from S.21, it signaled to Park opponents that corporations, the Sierra Club, and other special interests dictated Feinstein's votes, a feeling of disenfranchisement that spoiled residents' hopes of a trustworthy landlord if the NPS were to take control of the East Mojave.

By 1994, Senator Feinstein appeared willing to bend her legislation for political expedience.[127] Her successful compromise created Mojave National Preserve as the Park Service's unit in the East Mojave, rather than the originally proposed Mojave National Park, and stemmed from two considerations. First, Senator Feinstein wielded her position on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to advocate for agriculture interests, especially in California. Feinstein promised some ranching families, such as the Blairs, that she would extend their leases in perpetuity.

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[125] Sen. Bennett, speaking on S.21, on April 11, 1993, 103rd Congr., 1st sess., *Congression Record* (April 12, 1993): S 7092.

[126] Sen. Johnston, speaking on S.21, on April 11, 1993, 103rd Congr., 1st sess., *Congression Record* (April 12, 1993): S 7092; Since 1999, The Wildlands Conservancy has purchased more than 587,000 acres of Catellus property "throughout the desert" and donated it "to the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management…the largest nonprofit land acquisition donated to the American people in U.S. history." "California Desert Land Acquisition," The Wildlands Conservancy, accessed June 29, 2025, https://wildlandsconservancy.org/conservation/cadesertlandacquisition.

[127] In the previous Congress, Senator Cranston had tried a similar tact. Testifying before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on General Oversight and California Desert Lands, Cranston suggested a Mojave National Monument by which S.21 (CDPA of 1991) that would moonlight grazing within 10 years. *Hearing on H.R. 2929, the California Desert Protection Act: Hearing before the House Subcommittee on General Oversight and California Desert Lands*, House 102nd Congress (1991).

Feinstein's sentimental attachment to the Blair family reproduced urban-rural divisions that had separated city and pastoral systems and skewed the relationship between labor and place. Leftist critic Raymond Williams described how national perceptions of the countryside relied on the invisibility of agricultural labor and, when it was visible, the naturalizing and sentimentalizing of labor as part of the landscape. Williams assigned part of pastoralism's value as "characteristically part of an elegy for a lost way of life."[128] Some federal officials thought Feinstein unknowingly replicated this elegy and "was romanticized by [the ranchers], being a city girl from San Francisco."[129] Environmentalists could not understand why "Feinstein…had a soft spot for the ranchers," as she advocated for the East Mojave's cowboy families, seemingly relics of a bygone age and testaments to a past West.[130]

Although emotional attachment to ranchers and their way of life led Feinstein to support the desert's ranching families, the compromise Protection Act also resulted from the sportsman lobby successfully mobilizing its substantial political power. Groups such as the National Rifle Association expressed dismay at the proposed closure of one of California's most open hunting ranges. The California Department of Fish & Game (CDFG) had manipulated the East Mojave for sports hunting since at least the 1940s.[131] In 1941, CDFG planted wild Mexican olive and wooly senna seedlings near waterholes around the New York Mountains to encourage cover growth for partridge and other small game.[132] Introduced mule deer competed with local cattle

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[128] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford University Press, 1975), 124.
[129] Buono, interview.
[130] Burk, interview; Dianne Feinstein to Bruce Babbitt, May 25, 1995, Folder 1, Box 27, JLC, YRLUCLA. Feinstein continued to advocate for the Blairs and Oversons throughout the first years of MOJA's existence, writing to Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt, "it is essential that we keep our commitments to those who live and work in the Mojave National Preserve."
[131] Nystrom, "From Neglected Waste to Protected Space," 45–47.
[132] "Here and There...On the Desert," *DM* 4, no. 10 (1941): 44.

operations and sportsmen eagerly assisted ranchers by harvesting game. Numbers were soon so stressed, that in 1948, CDFG closed 10,000 square miles from Daggett east toward the Nevada-Arizona border to encourage recently stocked deer and pheasant communities to take root.[133] National sportsman groups in the early-1990s posited hunting as an important historical and cultural use of the desert.

The political battle to maintain hunting access in the East Mojave fell into an American tradition of upper-class sportsmen influencing land policy. However, unlike in Louis Warren and Karl Jacoby's respective histories of early conservation, in which they demonstrated how conservation efforts restricted subsistence practices by rural landowners, in the East Mojave, organizations representing game hunters united to preserve public hunting access rather than close it to a select few.[134] With CDFG having only reopened bighorn sheep permits in fall of 1987 and driven by demand for the few permits available each year, groups such as the National Rifle Association, International Safari Club, and Ducks Unlimited lobbied to prevent Mojave National Park.[135] Relenting to pressures from hunters and shaped by her "soft spot" for ranchers, Feinstein revised the Protection Act so that hunting and ranching could continue despite new Park Service designation.

The separation between National Preserve and National Park proved immaterial to environmentalists.[136] At first, Peter Burk resented the extension of ranching in the East Mojave,

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[133] "No Hunting in Mojave Area," *DM* 11, no. 12 (1948): 30; Nystrom, "From Neglected Waste to Protected Space," 46.
[134] Warren, *The Hunter's Game*; Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*. The cost of hunting permits within arguments for public access stretch credulity.
[135] In 1987, the BLM had released nine bighorn sheep permits. "EMNSA Final EIS & Management Plan," 122; California Desert Protection Act of 1994, 103–433, 103rd Congress 1st Session, 108 4471 (1994), at Sec. 506.(b); Nystrom, "From Neglected Waste to Protected Space," 46.
[136] Hoover, interview; Judith Anderson, interview; Burk, interview.

but as the NPS successfully negotiated buy-outs with most of the ranching landowners over the next decade, including with the Oversons, he came to appreciate the pragmatic change. After holding out for decades, the Blairs sold their ranch and moved out of the Preserve in January 2026. Although off-road enthusiast Dick MacPherson maintained "it is not a Park," Burk and other environmentalists considered Mojave National Preserve "as good as a Park."[137] For Vicky Hoover, her time in (and for) the desert ended in 1994; she has not visited the National Preserve since its inception. Hoover reflected that "we don't have to go there anymore. Let other people…enjoy it."[138] The cleverly designed National Preserve grants National Park designation within a framework that allows for multiple uses if not traditional "multiple use." By allowing for continued ranching and hunting while also expanding Wilderness Areas, the California Desert Protection Act yielded to special interests across the political spectrum, but in doing so, left out smaller, if more locally connected, parties.

At its core, the political cohesion between national environmental groups overwhelmed the issue-focused interests of local producers, residents, and motorized recreationists, resulting in a National Park unit in the East Mojave. Urban planner Elisabeth Infield has described how national environmental groups "fell into line" around specific amendments that might weaken the political coalition behind the bill's eventual passage.[139] After the election of Senators Boxer and Feinstein in 1992, the thin tissue connecting park opponents snapped, leaving miners, hunters, off-roaders, and locals on their own. Sportsmen groups remained a powerful lobbying

[137] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview; Burk, interview.
[138] Hoover, interview.
[139] Elisabeth M. Infield, "Stories of the Land: Rhetoric and Reconciliation in Mojave National Preserve" (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 1997), 167.

force but for their own ends.[140] Mining corporations took the best deals they could for themselves. Ranchers either sold their operations or stayed under a changing land management system that seemed to rely on Senator Feinstein's personal goodwill. Smaller interests lacking national legal departments and armies of volunteers could not muster the same political force and found themselves minimized. When President Bill Clinton signed the California Desert Protection Act on October 31, 1994, some residents of the hot desert were left out in the cold as incoming rangers struggled with the complexity of the new Preserve.

National Park Service transition team officials grappled with the enormity of their new holding. Mining claims, ranching permits, and private property presented a web of administrative considerations that complicated the Park Service's ability to manage for seeming contradictory goals that shifted and were shifted by environmental conditions. At the same time, a lack of social and political awareness undercut leaders' early interactions with landowners. Confronted by an assertive new landlord that held an incomplete grasp on its domain, the desert that in-holders knew quickly changed in fiery ways.

[140] Ibid., 168.

CHAPTER SIX

"MOONSCAPE": WILDERNESS, POLICING, AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF A RETURN TO NATURE

Sandy and Sheldon McIntosh hated what the National Park Service (NPS) did to their desert. In 1988, the McIntoshes retired to a 40-acre parcel in Fourth of July Canyon, nestled between Pinto and the New York Mountains in what was then the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) East Mojave National Scenic Area. They built a house and large barn on their boulder-rich property and installed a residential solar system in their quiet but tight-knit corner of the world. Surrounded by a dense piñon pine and juniper forest that kept their high-altitude hamlet cool even in the heart of summer, the McIntoshes relied on their neighbors as they slowly built up their parcel and came to know the rangers who patrolled the dirt roads. Over the next decade, as environmentalists, land users, and federal land agencies jostled over legislation to create a Mojave National Park, the McIntoshes and other landowners in the East Mojave found themselves left out of the bargaining process. The compromise National Preserve gave in-holders little hope for a light hand.

The National Park Service struggled to gain the trust of its new neighbors as it instituted substantial land management changes after the California Desert Protection Act's passage in October 1994. The NPS offered uneven enforcement and a revolving door of officials who failed to cogently develop and apply management plans, a self-acknowledged failure punctuated by long-term staffing problems and conflicting personalities and management preferences among early administrators. Set within the context of recent government responses to Waco and Ruby Ridge, landowners worried about eminent domain seizures, feared the highly militarized police

force that accompanied Park Service control, resented the destruction of historical and seemingly natural resources, and felt betrayal by both environmentalists and federal land managers. Landowners and off-roaders had found agreement in the California Desert Plan, only for environmentalists to slowly grind down opposition to a Park Service unit in the East Mojave. As in-holders and administrators navigated a contentious relationship, contradictory directives to enforce both Wilderness and allow activities at odds with Wilderness handcuffed the Park Service as it created a new East Mojave that highlighted its supposed primitiveness. Changes in public access, diminished water availability, fewer cattle, and an increasingly volatile fire regime characterized this new desert, revealing the costs of applying idealized wilderness policies to lived-in places. The balance of administration, relationships, and a changing environment shaped during Mojave National Preserve's first decade faltered when crisis ignited in the dry summer of 2005.

"I Was Like Edward Abbey": Early Preserve Administrators

New Yorker Frank Buono went on a road trip shortly after his discharge from the Army in 1971. Heading west on an "extravaganza trip of 12,000 miles," Buono and his friends visited "park after park after park." At Timpanogos Cave National Monument in Utah, Buono asked a ranger how to get a job. The next summer, he landed as a seasonal backcountry ranger at the confluence of the Green and Yampa Rivers in Dinosaur National Monument. The mid-1950s' saving of Echo Park from a proposed dam rooted Buono within the wild West he had imagined: "I felt like an Edward Abbey. I felt like an Edward Abbey in *Desert Solitaire*."[1] The radical

[1] Buono, interview. For more on the Echo Park Dam controversy and how it galvanized the postwar environmental movement, see Mark W. T. Harvey, "Echo Park, Glen Canyon, and the Postwar Wilderness Movement," *Pacific*

environmentalist writer inspired Buono to stand for what he stood on.[2] Within a decade, Buono counted Everglades, Bandelier, Mount Rainer, Gateway, and Chaco Canyon among the Park Service units on his resume. His last seasonal job tasked him with patrolling the northern rim of the Grand Canyon during the closed snow season.

By 1982, Buono developed an interest in and special aptitude for understanding the complex entanglements of federal law and natural resource issues. He joined the natural resource management team in the Santa Fe office, which offered him opportunities to deepen his knowledge of the mining laws and their applicability to the Park Service. Two years later, he transferred to the Mining and Minerals office in Washington, D.C. By 1988, Buono's extensive training prepared him to instruct at the Park Service training academy at the Grand Canyon, where he developed and delivered courses on legal and resource management issues.

Buono approached natural resource management through the lens of the Leopold Report. Although since critiqued for its idealization of pre-European contact land conditions and limited attention to indigenous land management and cultural practices, the landmark 1963 report called for "a potent infusion of science into national park management" and marked an inflection point in the Service.[3] The Leopold Report encouraged the Park Service to embrace biologically informed management decisions made by trained staff and to shift away from its historical directive to accommodate tourism, unknowingly planting the roots of what Richard White called

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Historical Review 60, no. 2 (1991): 43–67; Susan Rhoades Neel, "Newton Drury and the Echo Park Dam Controversy," *Forest & Conservation History* 38, no. 2 (1994): 56–66; Mark W. T. Harvey, "Battle for Dinosaur: Echo Park Dam and the Birth of the Modern Wilderness Movement," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 45, no. 1 (1995): 32–45.

[2] Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*; Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*; Abbey, *Hayduke Lives!*

[3] Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (Yale University Press, 1997), 201, 214; Douglas W. Smith and Rolf O. Peterson, "Intended and Unintended Consequences of Wolf Restoration to Yellowstone and Isle Royale National Parks," *Conservation Science and Practice* 3, no. 4 (2021): 2.

a "problem with purity" based on misunderstanding idealized baselines and misjudged relationships between cultural and natural spheres.[4] Buono seized the report's call to develop long-term plans for landscapes and was eager for a challenge.

The seeming imminence of legislation creating a Mojave National Park motivated the Park Service to create a transition team early in 1994. Working out of Lake Mead National Recreation Area, this small group prepared for management responsibility and flagged early potential issues. Across the summer of 1994, the incoming management team of superintendent Marvin Jensen, deputy superintendent Mary Martin, and assistant superintendent Frank Buono "were just trying to get a feel for what was out there. It was enormous. It's 1.5 million acres of land." Buono and his superiors "had no idea what was there."[5]

Buono and the transition team found over a million acres grazed by cattle, abrasive private landowners, and heavy trucks cutting through the Preserve to connect Interstate-40 and Interstate-15. With experience "perfectly suited for the complexities of going to Mojave," Buono confidently began organizing resource management plans. However, personal conflict between administrators limited the Park Service's ability to institute consistent management plans during this early period. Buono felt targeted by Mary Martin, the deputy superintendent whose experience he considered "nil" and perceived her being "deeply threatened by my experience there." When Buono had a contentious transfer to Joshua Tree National Park, Superintendent Marv Jensen cited an over-allocation of resources to administration when the fledgling Preserve

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A. Starker Leopold, *Wildlife Management in the Future* (University of California, Berkeley, 1963), 12; Richard White, "The Problem with Purity," The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, May 10, 1999.[4] Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 214–15. For more on the Leopold's practical impact on management in National Parks, see Ryan M. Yonk et al., "Human Influences on the Northern Yellowstone Range," *Rangelands* 40, no. 5 (2018): 185–86.

[5] Buono, interview.

required field work for the new posting but opined that Buono felt "entitled" to the superintendent job.[6] As the transition team navigated personal conflict, they struggled to smoothly implement new policies when the Preserve became official.

"They First Came in with SWAT Trucks": Policing in the Preserve

Affixed to paper on October 31, 1994, President Clinton's signature on the California Desert Protection Act culminated more than fifteen years of desert Park activism and marked a new era for the East Mojave.[7] Although settling for a National Preserve, environmentalists celebrated the vast expansion of Wilderness and the new Park Service unit. Four-wheeled recreationists bemoaned the loss of more than a thousand miles of trails within the newly created Preserve, but hunters retained their access and mining corporations enjoyed cut-outs to continue extracting.[8] Despite environmentalists' optimism for the "park," landowners within the newly instituted Mojave National Preserve boundaries feared management changes.

Equipped with the fewest resources to resist legislation, non-ranching local landowners (in-holders) experienced the most jarring effects of the California Desert Protection Act. Incoming administrators focused on the vocal opposition to the Preserve that they considered

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[6] Marvin Jensen, interview by Eric Charles Nystrom, November 2002.

[7] Nystrom, "From Neglected Waste to Protected Space"; Wheat, *California Desert Miracle*. A protracted funding battle forced early Mojave administrators to limp the Preserve into existence. Likewise, the Protection Act did not only create Mojave National Preserve, but also upgraded both Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Monuments into Death Valley National Park and Joshua Tree National Park. Interviews with Sierra club leaders reveal that the Park status for Death Valley and Joshua Tree was not contested compared to the fight for Mojave Park. For more fully coverage of the legislative and administrative history of Mojave National Preserve, see Nystrom and Wheat, respectively.

[8] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview; McIntosh, interview. Dick MacPherson cites that the OHV community "lost that 1100 miles, most of it in Wilderness."

regional and from outside of the new unit's boundaries.[9] In fact, property owners within the new Mojave National Preserve experienced changes most sharply. In-holders resented road closures, feared the highly militarized police force that accompanied Park Service management, worried about eminent domain seizures, became dismayed by the destruction of historical and natural resources, and grew angry over a perceived betrayal by both environmentalists and federal land managers.[10] Landowners resented their perceived disenfranchisement from what had been a democratically shaped, multiple-use land management plan.[11] Through early missteps, Mojave National Preserve officials confirmed many in-holders' suspicions.

Echoing the complaints of off-road-advocacy groups to which they sometimes belonged, local landowners found trusted routes through their community unexpectedly closed. Round Valley landowners Dick and Kathy MacPherson discovered that the reliable underground cable AT&T road was closed shortly after the park's implementation. The direct route from Cima to Baker had quickened trips to the nearest grocery store, hardware center, and post office for decades. After discussing their desire to keep the road open with park administrators, the MacPhersons learned of its closure when they encountered "No Motorized Vehicles" signage at the mouth of the two-track.[12]

Park Service management grated locals with rigorous enforcement of unclear new regulations on road use. Hoping to constrain the popular shortcut through the Preserve that connects Interstate-40 and Interstate-15, rangers installed "commercial vehicles prohibited."

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[9] Buono, interview. "Most, most of the local people didn't live in a Preserve. First of all, they lived outside the Preserve. Some in Barstow, some in, I think, Newberry Springs. They lived in places kind of far removed from the preserve. These people had deep resentment for the creation of the preserve. And they were implacable."
[10] Chris Brown to San Francisco Chronicle, Letters to the Editor, n.d., folder 24, box 26, JLC, YRLUCLA.
[11] B. Kal Munis and Zoe Nemerever, "Rural Residency, Rural Resentment, and Attitudes toward Public Land Management in the United States," *Environmental Politics* 34, no. 5 (2025): 903–24.
[12] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.

Importantly, early law enforcement rangers did not distinguish between bypass traffic and commercial vehicles (such as tow trucks) operating on private property within the Preserve. Fourth-generation landowner Patricia A. Smith wrote to Congressman Lewis complaining that a family member had been cited while driving an un-trailered semi-truck to her property in the East Mojave. Feeling that "to post falsely, allowing passage or denying passage at the discretion of government employees, is outrageous," Smith and other in-holders did not agree with the Park Service's adherence to its preservation mandate.[13]

Relying on the rhetoric of freedom and liberty, landowners cast governmental closures of previously open rights-of-way as an affront to their constitutional rights. A leader within the East Mojave Property Owners Association, Robert R. Brown wrote to Preserve superintendent Marvin Jensen four months after the Park Service's arrival, that "the signs result in an improper constraint on the freedom and liberties of private interest within the park preserve…'fooling' the public out of freedom and liberty by incorrect actions can be held repugnant, unlawful, or even criminal."[14] Brown and other in-holders felt the Park Service illegally restrained their traditional access to service political goals, with one writing that the surprising closure of roads in the East Mojave represented a "crazy taking of public lands for political purposes."[15]

Administrators operating under legislative mandate held little compunction over the signs and physically marked legal authority over the new unit. Some, including Frank Buono before his transfer to Joshua Tree, felt that in-holders exaggerated their response to the "no commercial

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[13] Patricia A. Smith to Jerry Lewis, March 3, 1995, folder 1, box 27, Collection 2124, JLC, YRLUCLA; John C. Brown to Jerry Lewis, June 25, 1995, Folder 1, Box 27, JLC, YRLUCLA. "The Park Service has turned out to be a very poor neighbor," wrote East Mojave Landowners Association president John C. Brown wrote to Congressman Lewis.[13]

[14] Robert R. Brown Jr. to Marvin Jensen, February 20, 1995, Folder 1, Box 27, JLC, YRLUCLA.

[15] Dan Painter to Jerry Lewis, June 4, 1995, Folder 1, Box 27, JLC, YRLUCLA.

vehicles" signs, and likened displays of anger by people against perceived federal authority to anti-Civil Rights activism in the 1960s Deep South.[16] Despite protests by San Bernardino County and landowners, the Park Service asserted its privilege. Buono summarized the move as "a thing called federal supremacy. I'm sorry, that's the way our constitutional order, democracy works."[17] Road signs and two-tracks became the first battlegrounds in putting the Preserve into practice.



Figure 24: The Friends and the East Mojave Landowners Association hosted "Jerry Lewis Day" in 1996. Folder 1, Ann Price Collection, MDHCA.

[16] Buono, interview. "And this show of authority really, really angered local people, even those who were not driving the trucks. But it was just the display of federal authority, like in the Deep south in the civil rights era of the 1960s that raised enormous resentment."
[17] Ibid.

The Friends of the Mojave Road felt that environmentalists had purposely arranged new Wilderness Areas to disallow trails important to the group, especially the East Mojave Heritage Trail. Friend of the Mojave Road William Claypool bemoaned that "the success of this large group of hard-working volunteers has irritated some" environmentalists who "purposely ruined [the trail] by placing a few miles in each of the four [trail] sections in Wilderness Areas." Frustrated that Friends of the Mojave Road had lost "over $100,000" through its publication of non-unusable guides, Claypool estimated that a 30-foot passage for the Trail would result in "taking back only 263.7 acres of the 7,5000,000 of Wilderness (.003516% of the total)," but that the mapping of new Wilderness was meant to intentionally undercut the success of his local volunteer group.[18] Following both legally defined Wilderness boundaries and NPS regulations, rangers installed closure signs once the bill passed.

Park Service administrators felt that Casebier was stubborn and unwilling to compromise but justified closures of parts of the East Mojave Heritage Trail on the Protection Act's legal designation of Wilderness Areas. Describing the Friends of the Mojave Road as Casebier's "following of disciples that thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread," Jensen remembered the group "trying to put some different twists on [the law] that would give them the right of access to…the route [Casebier] fathered."[19] Jensen thought Casebier's ideas of continued motorized access through Wilderness "were different than the realities" of the desert bill and the Wilderness Act.[20]

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[18] Writing to Bureau of Land Management Desert District ranger Henri Bisson, William Claypool remarked that "not to take this 263.7 acres back out of wilderness is not only ridiculous, but will rob common citizens of an exciting and educational experience in the years ahead." William Claypool to Henri Bisson, April 26, 1995, folder 24, box 26, JLC, YRLUCLA.
[19] Jensen, interview.
[20] Ibid.

Regardless of the influence of potentially retributive politics, the lack of motorized access to newly designated Wilderness Areas greatly affected local landowners and land-users. Some ranchers were surprised to find their access decreased. Despite having developed a close relationship with Senator Feinstein, the Blair family was required to check their wells by horseback.[21] Because of new constraints on vehicular access to private parcels, landowner John Baker bemoaned his inability to profit from his property: "I am now effectively 'locked out.' Wilderness Areas will prevent me from ever using or selling the land. This land was purchased with hard-earned, after-tax dollars. Money I worked for!"[22] Many landowners argued that Wilderness Areas devalued their properties.

Many resented the apparent arbitrariness of new boundaries. Having bought a 40-acre property nestled west of the New York Mountains, Sandy McIntosh voiced frustration at road closures and the lack of transparency from the Preserve administrators, especially "NO JEEPS IN WASHES" signs.[23] McIntosh felt the Park Service "closed off just about everything…you could hardly go anywhere," and often found in the Preserve's early days that "you would go down a road and then right in the middle of the road they'd have a sign. This is Wilderness. You can't go in there."[24] McIntosh remembered rangers placing Wilderness signs on roads through private property, removing them when prompted, and replacing the signs soon after.[25] Other local landowners found Wilderness markers on their driveway, demanding that landowners apply for a

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[21] Bob L. Vice to Dianne Feinstein, April 27, 1995, Folder 1, Box 27, JLC, YRLUCLA. President of the California Farm Bureau Federations Bob L. Vice wrote to Senator Feinstein on behalf of ranchers in the East Mojave, describing ranchers' "problems getting Park Service authorization for motorized access to their cattle and water supplies."
[22] John W. Baker to Jerry Lewis and Joe Skeen, June 26, 1995, Folder 1, Box 27, JLC, YRLUCLA.
[23] Mary Martin, interview by Eric Charles Nystrom, March 29, 2002, accessed with generous permission from Eric Nystrom.
[24] McIntosh, interview.
[25] Ibid.

permit to bring motorized vehicles to their Wilderness-enclosed private parcels.[26] Closing roads to accommodate new Wilderness, as well as to manage expected visitors, early management practices created friction with local landowners, who watched the Park Service institute new boundaries and weaken landowners' autonomy.

Fearful of eminent domain under the new regime, in-holders moved to secure their private properties. Owning 40 acres in the juniper and piñon pine forest of Round Valley, the MacPhersons feared the government would use the Protection Act to squeeze them out. Hearing that it would be harder to use eminent domain to remove landowners who had structures, the MacPhersons dropped a two-bedroom pre-fabricated home on their parcel in hopes that it would help them keep their property. Despite language in the California Desert Protection Act that only offered to purchase from "willing" sellers, a decade of perceived backsliding on commitments led some to invest heavily in keeping their homes. Dick MacPherson remarked, "there's verbiage in the bill about…all the private property that tells the Park Service they're not supposed to be screwing with us, but nobody trusts that. *Nobody*."[27] MacPherson felt little reason to trust an agency he considered stocked with the same sort of environmentalists who had disenfranchised him from the Desert Plan he had helped shape. As larger ranchers increasingly sold their holdings, in-holders feared standing alone if the government moved to evict them. The arrival of armored police trucks within days of the desert bill's passage validated in-holders' concerns, and the Park Service cast itself as a heavy-handed imposition through its early policing methods.

Right-wing extremism and governmental responses to it cast a shadow over relationships between rural people and federal officials in the early 1990s. In August 1992, a U.S. Marshals

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[26] Casebier, interview.
[27] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview. Emphasis added.

surveillance mission near the cabin of white supremacist Randy Weaver in northern Idaho devolved into a bloody firefight. After an 11-day siege, Weaver, his wife Vicki, son Sammy, and Deputy U.S. Marshall William Degan lay dead, the result of what a investigatory task force called "numerous problems with the conduct" of law enforcement, including that the applied Rules for Engagement likely "contravened the Constitution of the United States."[28] In the spring of 1993, a fifty-one day siege against Branch Davidians, a "paramilitary cult," by federal agents similarly ended in bloodshed, when agents' botched seizure of a Mount Carmel, Texas, compound result in a fire that killed seventy-six compound members, including twenty-one children.[29] Historians Robert Churchill and Kathleen Belew have noted both Waco and Ruby Ridge as flashpoints in late-twentieth century white power and paramilitary politics by offering vivid illustrations of seemingly illegitimate federal force that justified armed resistance.[30]

As right-wing extremism and governmental responses to it had recently resulted in deaths at Ruby Ridge and Waco, the deployment of a heavily armed Special Event Team (SET) in November 1994 seemingly justified locals' fears of an overreaching and potentially violent government.[31] Sandy McIntosh remembered, "they came in, they pulled SWAT team members

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[28] *Report of the Ruby Ridge Task Force to the Office of Professional Responsibility of Investigation of Allegations of Improper Governmental Conduct in the Investigation, Apprehension, and Prosecution of Randall C. Weaver and Kevin L. Harris* (U.S. Department of Justice, 1994), 4.
[29] Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 205–6.
[30] Robert H. Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face* (University of Michigan Press, 2011), 4; Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 183–84.
[31] Martin, interview; McIntosh, interview; Stuart A. Wright, "Anatomy of a Government Massacre: Abuses of Hostage-Barricade Protocols during the Waco Standoff," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 2 (1999): 39–68; Jean E. Rosenfeld, "The Use of the Military at Waco: The Danforth Report in Context," *Nova Religio* 5, no. 1 (2001): 171–85; Mark Pitcavage, "Camouflage and Conspiracy: The Militia Movement From Ruby Ridge to Y2K," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 44, no. 6 (2001): 957–81; Betty A. Dobratz et al., "What Happened on Ruby Ridge: Terrorism or Tyranny?," *Symbolic Interaction* 26, no. 2 (2003): 315–42; Dunn, "A Tangled Path to Extremism: Desperation, Resentment, and Rebellion in Rural Montana," 57–64; Jennifer Dawes, *Dark Tourism in the American West* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 41–65. Dr. Nystrom generously granted access to oral histories he recorded in 2002.

from a whole bunch of places, and they harassed us."[32] The Park Service rangers used equipment likely procured through the "1033 Program," a product of Cold War demobilization and the presumed end of the Gulf Wars. During the 1990s, the 1033 Program transferred excess equipment from the Department of Defense to federal and state agencies, militarizing police forces across the country.[33] The Park Service's hiring preference for veterans reinforced an importation of tactics and technologies from the military, including the use of paramilitary units.[34] Belew noted that the use of "military units, weapons, strategies, and technologies to unleash violence on American civilians," exacerbated events at Ruby Ridge and Waco, and Churchill described the tragedies as "the most visible product of [a] broader tend toward paramilitary policing."[35]

The more recent implementation of military equipment and tactics at the end of the Cold War was just the latest iterations of a militarized Park Service. Soldiers were the first rangers.[36] Historian Mark David Spence described how management of early Parks such as Yellowstone "resembled…small western military installation[s]," with soldiers tasked with keeping native peoples out of parks and on their reservations under the presumption that "only the army could effectively manage the national park."[37] Like at Yellowstone, the Army oversaw the early

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[32] McIntosh, interview.
[33] Daniel J. Bell, "Police Uniforms, Attitudes, and Citizens," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 10, no. 1 (1982): 45–55. Vincenzo Bove and Evelina Gavrilova, "Police Officer on the Frontline or a Soldier? The Effect of Police Militarization on Crime," *American Economic Journal. Economic Policy* 9, no. 3 (2017): 3; Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 190.
[34] Peter B. Kraska and Victor E. Kappeler, "Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units," *Social Problems* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1–18.
[35] Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 189; Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face*, 187.
[36] Thomas C. Rust, *Watching over Yellowstone: The US Army's Experience in America's First National Park, 1886-1918* (University Press of Kansas, 2020).
[37] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 57, 62–63.

administration at Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks and contended with illegal poaching.[38] As the newly formed National Park Service found its footing, as historian Richard Sellers demonstrated, it "continued that management practices of its military" predecessors.[39] The SET team at Mojave National Preserve was a highly visible escalation of the Park Service's tradition of militarized policing.

Clad in bullet-resistance vests, armed with shotguns and assault-style rifles, driving heavily armored vehicles, and expecting pot-shots from the hills, SET rangers created an atmosphere of intimidation in the new Preserve. Writing to Riverside County Republican Central Committee member Trudy Thomas, local landowner Fred Norris described the speed and disrespect with which the SET team asserted itself:

> In November of 1994, the day after President Clinton signed the Act into law, National Park police were trespassing on my property…Robert Blair, a pioneer descendant rancher who lives a short distance from our property, encountered a National Park Service police S.W.A.T. team. He inquired as to why they were there. Their response was that any time the National Park Service acquires land, their standard procedure was to send [out] their S.W.A.T. teams to survey the area.[40]

For locals, the presence of highly militarized police units confirmed that the NPS would enact sweeping and powerful changes to the place they called home.

A lack of communication between Park Service staff undermined its deployment of the SET team. Lake Mead's leadership did not notify the transition team of superintendent Jensen, deputy superintendent Martin, and assistant superintendent Buono of the SET team's activity.

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[38] A. Berle Clemensen, *Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks: History of the Parks, Maps, Evaluation of Historic Resources, Determination of Effect, DCP* (Denver Service Center, Historic Preservation Team, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1975), 6; Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*, 121–30; Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 25.
[39] Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 48.
[40] Fred Norris to Members of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, April 10, 1995, Folder 1, Box 27, JLC, YRLUCLA.

When the armed rangers began patrols "with their shotguns and rifles…very present," the transition team had little control over locals' first impression of the Park Service.[41] Still, the Park Service considered the SET team an unexceptional step for securing such a vast and unknown holding. Buono considered that the rangers "were out there to try and enforce the normal…regulations on things like hunting and littering…dumping of illegal substances, [and] hazardous wastes."[42] Early incidents also included "recreational bulldozing…and modern-day train bandits."[43] Despite "a big learning curve," the Park Service did not consider their imprint overbearing. Rather, accepting that "little misunderstandings or wrinkles" would happen "inevitably when new people are assigned into a very complicated situation," rangers policed what seemed like the backcountry.[44] However, for landowners, that backcountry was their backyard.

The short deployment of the SET team confirmed in-holders' fears of authoritarian over-policing.[45] Failing to understand how the Park Service encountered by locals differed so greatly from stereotypes of the Stetson-crowned rangers beloved by the nation, Norris voiced disquiet from his community: "as property owners and ranchers in the East Mojave, we are deeply concerned with these reportings of National Park Ranger Police dressed in military clothing (like ninjas), armed with assault weapons and carrying military equipment. Whatever happened to Smokey the Bear?" Petitioning to "restore Park Rangers to what they are supposed to be:

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[41] Martin, interview.
[42] Buono, interview.
[43] Ancieto L. Olais, *94-648 - Special Operations* (Mojave National Preserve, National Park Service, 1994).
[44] Buono, interview.
[45] Martin, interview. Deputy superintendent Mary Martin estimated in a 2002 oral history that the SET team was in place for "at least a month, maybe two."

conservationists, not *paramilitary commandos*," Norris and other landowners wanted the police force disarmed.[46] The potential for violence worried those who would bear its brunt.

Even if not having to engage highly armed rangers, landowners felt under surveillance from their new neighbor. One landowner remarked that "citizens of America are protected by the Fourth Amendment from unwarranted search and seizures. Yet Park Rangers armed with access to the latest aerial photography and maps 'mistakenly' inspect private property."[47] Once approaching an elderly couple's parcel in Round Valley in full tactical equipment, retreating, and repeating their illegal encroachment only to then drive away without engaging the landowners, demonstrations of force by the SET team brought tension to the Preserve's first months.[48]

Administrators ill-prepared for the complex issues involved in implementing the new Preserve engaged locals in a "ham-handed and unguided" way.[49] Despite his departure for Joshua Tree by the end of 1994, Frank Buono remembered how limited understanding of public land conflict resulted from Martin and her staff trying "to wing it. And you can't wing it."[50] Without discussion with the landowners they hoped to cow into submission, the short-term SET deployment reflected a misunderstanding of local feelings at a time of heightened tension between federal administrators and rural people.[51]

Although recent historiography has highlighted the rise of rural, white extremism in the American West, the in-holders of the East Mojave represent a counterexample of rural westerners

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[46] Norris to Members of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, April 10, 1995. Original emphasis.
[47] Robert R. Brown Jr. to San Francisco Chronicle, Letters to the Editor, January 29, 1995, folder 24, box 26, JLC, YRLUCLA.
[48] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.
[49] Buono, interview; MacPherson and MacPherson, interview.
[50] Buono, interview.
[51] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview; Martin, interview; McIntosh, interview..

bearing highly militarized policing.[52] Landowners in Mojave National Preserve embodied what historian Catherin McNichols Stock described as a righteous rage that historically emerged when rural Americans perceived threats to their local autonomy, but did not resort to violence.[53] Operating in a milieu shaped by rural extremism, in-holders surrounded by the newly created Mojave National Preserve rejected the perception that they wanted to harm federal officers.

Residents in Fourth of July Canyon developed a noted reputation for being armed and ready for conflict, one that left locals confused. Having decorated the garden of her parcel with granite and silicified wood found on her property at the canyon's mouth, McIntosh rejected the SET team's expectation for violence: "I would say to them, my husband and I are not going to go to prison because you drive up the road. We're not that kind of people. It was scary because…it was right after Ruby Ridge…and I thought, if anything happens…it'll be our fault."[54] Locals felt under siege.

The Preserve transition team recognized their mistake. Martin remarked the SET team "expected to find drug labs and people that didn't like them," but that their deployment was a public relations nightmare.[55] By patrolling with visually militarized equipment, the rangers gave

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[52] Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 187–208; Kathleen Belew and Ramon A. Gutierrez, eds., *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* (University of California Press, 2021); Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (Metropolitan Books, 2020), 254–62; James Pogue, *Chosen Country: A Rebellion in the West* (Henry Holt and Company, 2018); Kyle Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right: Anticommunist Internationalism and Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 212–17.
[53] Catherine McNicol Stock, *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain* (Cornell University Press, 2017), 4–5, 10, 22, 59, 98.
[54] McIntosh, interview.
[55] Martin, interview. Drug labs were a constant through early years of the Preserve as the nation navigated the peak years of the War on Drugs. Bill Blake, "95-112 Raid on Methamphetamine Lab," Mojave National Preserve, National Park Service, March 22, 1995; "95-748 - Drug Lab," Mojave National Preserve, National Park Service, November 22, 1995; Tim Duncan, "98-91 - Drug Lab Arrests," Mojave National Preserve, National Park Service, March 6, 1998; Christopher Jefferson, "01-079 - Drug Lab," Mojave National Preserve, National Park Service, March 7, 2001; Kirk Gebicke, "Methamphetamine Lab Conviction," Mojave National Preserve, National Park Service, November 4, 2003.

locals reason to think "aha, just what we expected from the Park Service."[56] The Park Service unwittingly confirmed that they would be the imposition feared by locals. However, rather than responding with force, local people tried to find less confrontational ways to seek redress. Specifically, they turned to the California Desert Protection Act to for avenues to influence the evolving management of their community.

Locals perceived an inadequate adherence to the Protection Act's mechanisms for public input. Among other things, S.21 called for an Advisory Commission to guide the transition to Mojave National Preserve. However, by June 6, 1995, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors wrote to Senator Feinstein describing their concern that no Advisory Commission had yet been appointed. Describing fading belief in "assurances that 'it is coming,'" Board Chairwoman Marsha Turoci expressed concern that "irreversible actions will take place without citizens and local government input and oversight."[57] When the Advisory Commission did meet, it included well-known names such as Peter Burk and Dennis Casebier among other members representing various desert land uses.[58]

Multiple landowners and local groups objected to what they perceived as a weak Advisory Commission that left many without a means of advocating for their interests.[59] Wanting "something with real teeth in it" to "protect the thousands of land owners in the [the Preserve]," Casebier accused the Advisory Commission of being extensions of "what is perceived to be a

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[56] Martin, interview.
[57] Marsha Turoci to Dianne Feinstein, June 6, 1995, Folder 1, Box 27, JLC, YRLUCLA.
[58] "Mojave National Preserve Advisory Commission; Notice of Meeting," *Federal Register* 62, no. 184 (1997): 49702; "Charter: Mojave National Preserve Advisory Commission," April 22, 1996, folder 18, DGCC, MDHCA; Mary G. Martin to Dennis Casebier, March 14, 1996, folder 18, DGCC, MDHCA; Bruce Babbitt to Dennis Casebier, April 22, 1996, folder 18, DGCC, MDHCA.
[59] Smith to Lewis, March 3, 1995.

corrupt political process."[60] Interestingly, Peter Burk similarly remarked that the Advisory Commission had been stocked with pro-development "wise-users."[61] Mutual distrust exacerbated tension as management of the East Mojave shifted to the National Park Service.

As the Park Service's preservation mandate manifested with closed roads, Wilderness regulations, and militarized rangers, in-holders perceived betrayal by environmentalists and federal land managers. Although landowners most pointedly recollect the effect of a militarized police force in their backyard, perhaps a foot-tall round of cement best encapsulated how Park Service management affected the East Mojave. Markers of once-pumping wells, the destruction of water resources and strict adherence to Wilderness Area regulations in the East Mojave resulted in a die-off of local wildlife in 1995 and limited the agency's ability to combat its first crisis when lightning ignited dry brush in late June 2005.

Turning Off the Taps: Creating a New East Mojave

Cattle rancher and current Mojave National Preserve water operator Jacob Overson grew up on the land. Raised at the Valley View Ranch, the northern reach of the Rock Spring Land & Cattle Company's historical range, Overson's days of driving cattle and digging trenches for water pipes added ever-crustier salt rims to his black hat. He became a staple of Mojave National Preserve's backcountry, driving his green-and-white Park Service maintenance vehicle, inspecting wells, fixing pipe, and testing water samples on government time, while using his well-dented personal Dodge truck to check fifty-odd head of cattle he grazed on 2,000 acres of

[60] Dennis Casebier, *Non-Political Citizen Advisory Process*, September 26, 1995, folder 18, DGCC, MDHCA.
[61] Elizabeth Manning, "The Mojave National Preserve: 1.4 Million Acres of Contradictions," *High Country News*, April 14, 1997. In an article with *HCN*, Burk remarked, "The Park Service is giving the cowboys everything they want."

private land in Fourth of July Canyon. An advocate of ranchers as the ultimate environmentalists because of their reliance on the land to sustain their herds, Overson lived the transition to the Park Service's management of the East Mojave.

Overson watched with dismay as Wilderness designations changed the desert that was a part of him.[62] As the Oversons sold their cattle and tore down their ranch buildings, he saw carcasses of mule deer, birds, and jackrabbits after the family turned off their hundreds of miles of pipeline and dozens of watering troughs. Overson watched as tall invasive grasses, which had always been present but chewed back by cattle, overran the desert. Over his life, Overson witnessed how, in their misguided quest to return the East Mojave to a more "natural" state, the National Park Service invited megafires to the desert.

Growing up in the early 1990s, when his family still ran cattle over more than 1.3 million acres of public land, Overson spent his time between his relative's ranches, working when not in class or on the more than hour-long bus ride to and from school.[63] Although he was young when the family began selling allotments to the government in the late 1990s, Overson recalled his father, Tim, and other family members' concern about eminent domain and the government's slow squeezing of ranching through increased and shifting range regulations:

> Their whole main goal was to get rid of all the ranchers. So they would play hell with us and try to tell us how to run our cattle. Because they would use the Desert Tortoise as their angle of trying to make us move our cattle to certain areas, cut off grazing in some areas…we'd go back and forth and they would take us to court and you can't fight the government in a court of law because…the ranchers don't carry enough money to fight the federal government…So my family just finally got to

[62] Overson, interview.

[63] Typical of many ranchers, the Overson's security rested in their ability to renew grazing leases for vast swaths of the American West. Despite running cattle over 1,300,000 acres across three distinct ranches (Valley View, OX, and Kessler Springs), the Oversons as a family owned fewer than 5,000 acres of private land. Overson interview.

> the point…well, either we lose everything fighting or we might as well just sell out to them and move to Arizona.[64]

Led by Jacob's father and uncle, Gary, the Oversons negotiated a "fair" buyout that also guaranteed the family the contract for deconstructing their former ranches, work that likely paid more than what they received for their lands and permits.[65] In Arizona, BLM-managed land offered traditional grazing arrangements. In Southern California, the Park Service instituted more restrictive grazing permits before, more recently, not renewing grazing permits and instead instituting single-year, non-transferable special-use permits.[66] The hemming in of cattlemen's ability to use and sell grazing permits effectively destroyed ranchers' equity by eliminating their most valuable transferable resource.[67]

Beyond their holdings' decreased salability, cattle ranchers in the East Mojave and elsewhere in the American West contended with globalizing markets that decreased their industry's economic viability. Western ranchers increasingly found themselves positioned at the low-margin end of an internationalized beef supply chain and in competition with highly concentrated domestic supply that moved away from open range grazing and toward feedlots.[68]

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[64] Overson, interview.

[65] The ranch buy-out process is complicated. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the NPS had funding to buy from willing sellers, the Park Service and a variety of conservancy organizations would negotiate prices with local ranchers with the government and conservancy sharing the purchasing cost. Possession would transfer to the conservancy, who would hold the land for the legally required year before officially retiring it from grazing and then donating it to the Park Service. See Overson, oral history.

[66] Overson, interview.

[67] Ibid. Although the Oversons utilized more than 1.3 millions acres for their cattle, the family only owned approximately 2,000 acres.

[68] James M. MacDonald, "Concentration in U.S. Meatpacking Industry and How It Affects Competition and Cattle Prices," USDA Economic Research Service, January 25, 2024, https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2024/january/concentration-in-u-s-meatpacking-industry-and-how-it-affects-competition-and-cattle-prices; James S. Drouillard, "Current Situation and Future Trends for Beef Production in the United States of America — A Review," *Asian-Australasian Journal of Animal Sciences* 31, no. 7 (2018): 1008; Stephen R. Koontz, "Market Power in the United States Red Meatpacking Industry," *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Food Animal Practice* 19, no. 2 (2003): 519–44; Jimmy M. Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meatpacking in the United States 1607-1983* (Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 171–72.

Desert ranching had always operated on environmental and economic margins, so the Oversons took what they thought would be the best offer while they still could. Buying out the East Mojave ranchers fundamentally ended one period of the East Mojave and began a new one.

Although selling to the government gave his family long-term security, Jacob Overson recognized that the reduction of ranching in the East Mojave extolled substantial cultural cost. The emotionally and physically exhausting labor of removing their family's imprint on the desert wore on Overson's father and uncle, but the threat of government seizure proved overwhelming.[69] Holding an identity grounded in their labor more than in the land, the Oversons accepted buyouts to allow them to continue ranching elsewhere.[70]

The desert bill's directive for Preserve managers to prioritize the buying of cattlemen's lands and grazing permits led to conservationists' eventual victory over ranching in the East Mojave.[71] Ranchers felt that the government could enact a cohesive anti-ranching land-acquisition strategy for decades. Overson remarked, "the government plays a long game. They know eventually they're going to get everything…they know the people won't sell their land now, and maybe not their kids, but they know the grandkids or somewhere along the family tree" will sell.[72] The perceived inevitability of the government forcing out ranchers directly motivated some families to sell while the agency still had funding to purchase their properties. As each ranch sold, officials removed the associated buildings and water developments.

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[69] Overson, interview. Regarding the cultural cost of losing historical artifacts of his family and industry's time on the desert, Overson remarked, "Once you tear it out, you can't get it back."
[70] Ibid. "I think they were sad because they thought they would live out here till they die. So it hurt [my uncle] pretty, pretty bad. But then again, it is business, you know? So, if you fight the government and you lose everything you have, what'd you gain? So at least here they can still, they sold out and went and bought at the ranches. They can still stay in the ranching business."
[71] S.21 - California Desert Protection Act of 1994.
[72] Overson, interview.

At its core, a legislative mandate to restore the East Mojave to more primitive conditions drove the Park Service's reduction of grazing and removal of ranching-affiliated infrastructure. Implementing Wilderness, or areas where "man himself is a visitor who does not remain," necessitated the removal of physical evidence of more than a century of American occupation, a politically contentious process.[73] Although environmental historians have often debated the significance of Wilderness, in the East Mojave, ideas of pristine environments shaped land use management to great effect.[74] When the Park Service left some structures standing due to National Historic Preservation Act standards, East Mojave locals felt that government historians and archaeologists applied the 50-year historical standard unevenly, allowing older, and more historically significant structures to be razed in the name of wilderness.[75] Buildings left standing slowly deteriorated in the heat and wind, creating safety hazards and exacerbating the pain felt by locals who watched their history slowly rot away.

Wilderness expunged recent human history from the landscape. Relics from more than a century of ranching, metal-roofed barns and gnarled juniper fenceposts disappeared seemingly

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[73] Wilderness Act of 1964, vols. 1131–1136.

[74] Samuel P. Hays, "Comment: The Trouble with Bill Cronon's Wilderness," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 29–32, https://doi.org/10.2307/3985060; Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"; Sutter, *Driven Wild*; Turner, "From Woodcraft to 'Leave No Trace': Wilderness, Consumerism, and Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America"; Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest*. Specifically considering the significance of wilderness to both the environmental movement and environmental historians it influenced in the inaugural issue of *Environmental History*, Bill Cronon critiqued wilderness as a human construction, one that ignores the long indigenous occupation of North America prior to European arrival and separates humans from a world that they helped shaped. Significantly, this detachment between human and non-human natures allows humans to disregard the ethical implications of reserving some spaces as natural (and thus, worth protecting) while simultaneously polluting, developing, and otherwise impacting human-created (thus "unnatural") spaces. Critiquing some of Cronon's framing of the American environmental movement, and significant to NPS actions in the East Mojave, Samuel P. Hays contended that "wilderness proposals are usually thought of not in terms of perpetuating some 'original' or 'pristine' condition but as efforts to 'save' wilderness areas from development. Other environmental historians have examined the relationship between technology and wilderness, how wilderness interaction informs our understanding of the natural work, and how wilderness designation developed institutionally.

[75] McIntosh, interview; Overson, interview.

overnight, a curation of a seemingly natural environment that concealed extensive historical activity. As with historian William Cronon's riddle of the Apostle Islands in Wisconsin, a legislative mandate for a primitive *feeling* justified the removal of actors, processes, and relics that had actively engaged, shaped, and been shaped by those landscapes.[76] The resultant desert was a strange hybrid that manifested the forces of historical human use but without any of its makers, a landscape-scale ghost town that needed to display timelessness without past. Europeans in RVs and dads on motorcycle tours experienced a desert that had surely always been as it was, but ranchers, landowners, and off-road enthusiasts who had used the East Mojave for generations sharply felt their erasure from a place that had shaped them.

State wildlife officials found that Wilderness designations also limited existing programs and diminished their ability to upkeep backcountry projects, casting the larger goal of rewilding the desert as at odds with ongoing conservation efforts.[77] A die-off of bighorn sheep in the summer of 1995 demonstrated how Park Service management of Wilderness Areas created an inconsistent bureaucratic landscape that prevented timely action by wildlife experts. On April 14, 1995, a volunteer for the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep hiked up the Old Dad Peak area within Mojave National Preserve along a two-track they had driven when the land was under BLM management. Inspecting a guzzler, a manufactured water system consisting of three 1,500-gallon tanks to provide water for local bighorn sheep, all seemed ready for summer. When

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[76] William Cronon, "The Riddle of the Apostle Islands," *Orion*, June 2003, 36–42.

[77] Ev Hayes to Dennis Casebier, November 19, 1995, folder 4, BHSDO, DGCC, MDHCA. The bighorn sheep program came through partnership with the BLM, California Fish & Game, groups such as Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep, and motivated individuals. One BLM manager marked his dismay, writing to FOTMR founder Dennis Casebier "I was very sorry to hear of the Big Horn die-off in the Old Dads. Many people (like the late Jim Bicket) labored for years to get the herd going again," referencing BLM biologist Jim Bicket, who died on October 6, 1986 in a helicopter crash on Clark Mountain in the Preserve while performing fieldwork with the state. See Earl Gustkey, "Helicopter Pilot, Devoted to Wildlife, Dies Pursuing His Passion," California, *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1986.

California Department of Fish & Game wildlife biologists conducted aerial overflights to locate radio-collared sheep on May 11th and July 11th, respectively, the Old Dad bighorn herd roamed in good condition.

The guzzler represented a hybrid in the East Mojave. A water tank fed by a large plastic catchment apron placed on a slope, guzzlers intersected technologies and competing ideas of preservation and production to increase water's availability to local wildlife. Historian Mark Fiege described irrigators in the Snake River Valley of southern Idaho similarly using a blend of technology and topography to find some measure of predictable water.[78] A hybrid, mixed-faunal, mixed-use environment, the guzzler drew animals and converted the landscape into something both wild and domestic, 1,500 gallons of space at a time. The guzzler also represented divergent opinions within the preservation community. Park Service opponents of guzzlers such as Frank Buono considered them unnatural water meant to artificially increase bighorn sheep available for trophy hunting.[79] Volunteers with the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep believed that American activity had greatly reduced bighorn numbers, and that introduced water sources only helped restore the iconic ungulate. With California Department of Fish and Game, the bighorn group helped to maintain the guzzlers throughout the year.

As the summer heat rose, state officials attempted to clarify their right to conduct collaring of bighorn sheep in the newly instituted Old Dad Wilderness, a product of the desert bill.[80] Since the collaring would require landing a helicopter in a designated Wilderness Area,

[78] Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*, 47–49.
[79] Buono, interview.
[80] Terry M. Mansfield "Approval of Capture and Survey Plan for Bighorn Sheep, June 5-16, 1995," to Al Petrovich Jr., May 16, 1995, folder 3, BHSDO, DGCC, MDHCA.

California Department of Fish & Game first applied for permission from the Park Service.[81] During a May 10, 1995, meeting, Preserve officials considered the application to conduct collaring in June 1995. Two weeks later, they denied the application because of time constraints on performing an environmental assessment as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, a decision later affirmed by a letter from a Department of Interior field solicitor and an Inspector General investigation.[82] Superintendent Marv Jensen wrote to state officials, "I know my decision may dishearten you but be assured that both the NPS and [Fish & Game] share a mutual objective with regard to bighorn research in the Mojave National Preserve."[83] Rather than possibly inflaming interagency tensions, state officials did not pursue their planned June 1995 collaring.[84] In mid-August, heavy thunderstorms came to the Preserve.

Conducting another telemetry flight on August 25th, biologists identified two sheep mortalities near the Old Dad Peak guzzler. Visiting the area on foot later that week, state biologist Andrew Pauli discovered more than three dozen dead bighorn sheep. An investigation revealed that a caved-in guzzler roof had allowed a tank to become overfilled during recent monsoonal rains. Thirteen bighorn lambs had fallen through the dislodged roof of the guzzler and drowned sometime after mid-July 1995. As the lambs' bodies decayed, botulinum toxin developed in the guzzler's water. After drinking the contaminated water, an additional 32 bighorn

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[81] The California Desert Protection Act converted many preexisting Wilderness Study Areas into Wilderness Areas. Germane to the bighorn die-off, although the Wilderness Areas under BLM management had provisions accounting for specific allowances for motorized access (including helicopter surveys under 500 feet elevation), "there were no provisions that pertained to the NPS that allowed NPS to easily grant use of motorized vehicles on WAs within the boundaries of NPS lands." *Report of Investigation, Case No. 96VI223* (Office of Inspector General, DoI, 1996), folder 1, BHSDO, DGCC, p. 8, MDHCA. Frank Buono remarked, "Congress did not give it to them because Congress did not want to give it to them." Buono, interview.

[82] *Report of Investigation, Case No. 96VI223*, 4.

[83] Marvin O. Jensen and Steven Torres, May 23, 1995, folder 3, BHSDO, DGCC, MDHCA.

[84] *Report of Investigation, Case No. 96VI223*, 2, 56, 61–62.

sheep died from Botulism Type C, although some state officials and volunteers from the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep concluded that veterinary doctors misassigned their expected time of death.[85]

Both the California Department of Fish & Game and Society accused the Park Service of inconsistently applying Wilderness regulations in Mojave National Preserve, with the bureaucratic delay of disallowing helicopters for the collaring program resulting in biologists' late discovery of the mortalities. State officials and the bighorn conservation group suggested that the proposed collaring flight would have discovered the defective guzzler in time to mitigate the die-off, but that Preserve administrators rigorously applied Wilderness guidelines to the detriment of wildlife programs. The Inspector General's 1996 report into the Old Dad Peak bighorn sheep die-off concluded that the Park Service "did not impact the die off of the sheep" but acknowledged "there were some very strong opinions that there was a clear nexus between the non-collaring of the bighorn sheep in June 1995 and the die-off of the bighorn sheep."[86]

Strong opinions and personal relationships shaped the aftermath of the bighorn sheep die-off. Recriminations flew between agencies over proper authority and conduct. State wildlife biologist Vern Bleich accused Mojave deputy superintendent Buono of "[coming] across as arrogant and reflected a lack of respect" for the sheep program, with Buono having apparently stated in a June 1994 meeting that the "NPS will let CDFG know what CDFG could do." Although Death Valley allowed for Fish & Game to traverse Wilderness for their sheep

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[85] P. K. Swift et al., "Desert Bighorn Sheep Mortality Due to Presumptive Type C Botulism," *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 36, no. 1 (2000): 184–89; *Report of Investigation, Case No. 96VI223*, 40, 92. Swift estimated that the death of the sheep occurred between August 12 and 19, 1995. Glenn Sudmeirer, longtime member of the bighorn Society opined that "the decomposition of the sheet reflected that the death of the sheep occurred in June 1995."
[86] *Report of Investigation, Case No. 96VI223*, 4.

monitoring, Bleich felt that the incoming Preserve administrators unnecessarily denied his agency access to the desert backcountry. Buono maintained that the Park Service had a larger preservation mandate that included "wildlife as well as the terrain within the park" unit. Although Buono and Jensen discussed granting a categorical exemption for the sheep collaring program, Buono feared establishing "a precedent for exempting the use of all future helicopter landing no matter the circumstances," especially given that "in virtually all cases, the NPS has accommodated the needs and desires of [Fish & Game]."[87] Decades later, Buono asserted that Fish & Game had attempted to blame the Park Service for their mismanagement and argued "that [the bighorn sheep deaths were] an invented crisis and a manufactured story…they had failed to do adequate maintenance of those guzzlers."[88] Although not found responsible for the Old Dad die-off, the Park Service struggled to square its preservation and wildlife missions.[89]

As the 1995 mortalities of bighorn sheep demonstrated, animals in the desert had come to trust human-developed water sources. Despite legislation dictating Wilderness as places without the artifices or feeling of human activity, neither land managers, scientists, nor historians understand what constitutes the "natural" conditions of the East Mojave.[90] Although the Park Service positioned mule deer, bighorn sheep, and jackrabbits as natural and water troughs, pipelines, and windmills as unnatural, the implementation of Wilderness in Mojave National

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[87] Frank Buono to Marvin Jensen, November 1, 1995, folder 2, BHSDO, DGCC, MDHCA.
[88] Buono, interview. Buono also expressed that guzzlers artificially inflated game numbers for hunters.
[89] Ralph Regula et al. to Bruce Babbitt, November 8, 1995, folder 4, BHSDO, DGCC, MDHCA. In a letter to Secretary of Interior Babbitt requesting the investigation, Republican Congressmen Regula, Young, and Lewis wrote that the die-off "raised a number of critical questions relating to present and future management of the Mojave Desert…a number of noted experts have questioned [NPS] management practices."
[90] Lawrence R. Walker and Frederick H. Landau, *A Natural History of the Mojave Desert* (The University of Arizona Press, 2018); Buono, interview. This is not to say that scientists have not developed substantial understanding of the Mojave Desert, but rather than the Park Service's ideal of a "natural" state is both always in flux and continually shaped by human use, even after evidence of that use has been removed.

Preserve demonstrated how generations of adaptation to developed water sources left animals high and dry when the Park Service turned off the taps.

Since the 1860s, ranchers in the desert had extensively developed water sources. By the 1990s, infrastructure spun out from ranch-fed headwaters like a spider's web across the East Mojave, providing precious water to cattle and local wildlife. The Oversons pumped water from dozens of wells through more than 200 miles of pipeline across the desert to service more two dozen water tanks and troughs.[91] As the Oversons removed their pipeline and emptied their properties, maintenance staff cemented or capped wells from the historic operation. As troughs went dry, local wildlife died.

The loss of developed water sources resulted in widespread wildlife mortality in the desert. In its quest to restore the East Mojave to its natural state, the Park Service removed wells and other developed water resources on which generations of animals had been conditioned to rely. Rangers discouraged locals from leaving water for animals. When told by a recently arrived ranger that "it's not good for the animals to have artificial water," Sandy McIntosh responded incredulously, "do you know that these animals out here have been living on artificial water for a hundred years?"[92] Those permanently living in the East Mojave knew deer and similar animals would make daily trips to developed water sources and watched animals struggle as those sources disappeared.

Many of the region's animals could not adapt to their new, dried home. Overson saw many carcasses when his family turned off their ranch's water.

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[91] Per Overson interview, ranchers in the East Mojave would space their water sources within 4 to 6 miles of each other.
[92] McIntosh, interview.

> There was areas where there was…quail, rabbit, deer along these pipelines. It's been there their whole life. They grew up on these pipelines. So now you just shut the water off overnight. A lot of these animals, even though they're known to travel 30 miles to a water source, but these animals don't know that when there's another water source at 30 miles away, they'll sit there and die of thirst.[93]

Overson and other locals saw nothing unnatural in their developed water. Rather, the removal of water sources constituted an unnatural change for more animals in the desert. Overson understood the argument against "unnatural" water sources, that

> a person put that in, obviously [it is unnatural]," but argued that "it's been like that for 100 years. So, in a way, it becomes natural because that animal which is natural out there, that deer [or] bighorn sheep, depend on that water source *now*…So yes…it is unnatural…but the animals depend on it now.[94]

Although animals adapt, in the scarcely watered East Mojave, the intragenerational learning curve proved too steep and many animals died in the months after the capping of wells.[95] The imposition of Wilderness onto a peopled landscape again resulted in wildlife mortality.

Park administrators interested in long-term landscape conservation accepted mortalities as short-term corrections needed to restore balance. Frank Buono and other proponents of the Leopold Report's call to be "guardians, not gardeners" of the National Parks were unhappy with the strain on local populations but likened it to "when Park Service shut down the garbage dumps at Yellowstone and the grizzly bears… all of a sudden lost a huge food source…it's called cold turkey."[96] Many of the developed water sources served as unsanctioned guzzlers for wildlife.

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[93] Overson, interview.
[94] Ibid.
[95] McIntosh, interview; Overson, interview. No comprehensive study exists on the correlation between removing artificial water sources and animal mortality in Mojave National Preserve. However, oral histories reveal residents and landowners still struck by the scale of death in the years immediately following the NPS takeover.
[96] Rust, *Watching over Yellowstone*, 48, 122; Buono, interview; Elizabeth Newbern, "A Less Trashy Diet.(Grizzly Bear's Eating Habits)," *Science World* 71, no. 5 (2014): 5; Richard R. Knight and L. L. Eberhardt, "Population Dynamics of Yellowstone Grizzly Bears," *Ecology* 66, no. 2 (1985): 323–34; Stephen F. Stringham, "Effects of Climate, Dump Closure, and Other Factors on Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Litter Size," *Bears, Their Biology and Management* 6 (1986): 33–39; William J. Ripple et al., "Trophic Cascades from Wolves to Grizzly Bears in Y

Buono felt that allowing the desert to rewild by removing historical cattle and water developments offered the cleanest path through a complex web, as "the park managers [and] biologists have neither the insight, intelligence, wisdom, or resources to monkey with ecological systems."[97] As Nancy Langston and others have demonstrated, federal managers' simplifying of complex environmental systems resulted in unintended ecological consequences.[98] Fulfilling their mandate to prioritize ranch purchases, the Park Service removed cattle without mitigation plans for the invasive grasses the industry had emplaced.

"The Desert Doesn't Burn Like This": A Changing Fire Regime

By the turn of the twentieth century, cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum L.*) had invaded the American West. An early-season germinator, cheatgrass absorbed shallow soil moisture and nutrients to replace more deeply rooted native grasses.[99] Cheatgrass and its close relative red brome (*Bromus rubens L.*) spread as cattle practices imported from wetter, more biotically rich regions disturbed soils and became the dominant plant species in western rangelands by 1915.[100] Better adapted to hotter, drier environments, red brome covered the Mojave and Sonoran

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Ellowstone," *The Journal of Animal Ecology* 83, no. 1 (2014): 223–33. Buono stated in oral history, "restoring the balance is not always easy."

[97] Buono, interview.

[98] Nancy Langston, *Where Land & Water Meet: A Western Landscape Transformed*, 1st ed. (University of Washington Press, 2003), 115. Describing the unforeseen impacts of their attempt to manipulate the Malheur Basin in southeastern Oregon, Langston wrote, "People were responsible for these monsters, but they had little luck controlling them."

[99] James O. Klemmedson and Justin G. Smith, "Cheatgrass (Bromus Tectorum L.)," *Botanical Review* 30, no. 2 (1964): 233–34.

[100] Ibid., 238; Richard N. Mack, "Invasion of Bromus Tectorum L. into Western North America: An Ecological Chronicle," *Agro-Ecosystems* 7, no. 2 (1981): 146, 152, 155; L. F. Salo, "Red Brome (Bromus Rubens Subsp. Madritensis) in North America: Possible Modes for Early Introductions, Subsequent Spread," *Biological Invasions* (Dordrecht) 7, no. 2 (2005): 165–80. For more on the introduction of ecologically mismatched cattle practices that degraded conditions in the American West, specifically the low-carrying capacity "cold deserts" of the Great Basin, Snake River Plain, and Intermountain West, see James A. Young, *Cattle in the Cold Desert, Expanded Edition*, 2nd ed., with B. Abbott Sparks (University of Nevada Press, 2002).

Deserts. Because of its ability to germinate and produce seeds with minimal rainfall, it spread while native grasses like Big Galleta and Grama stayed dormant to preserve their moisture during dry years.[101] Study plots in the East Mojave demonstrated 70% ground cover by red brome and cheatgrass, carpeting the desert floor.[102]

Red brome and cheatgrass changed how fires move in the East Mojave. Germinating within days of winter rains, both grasses grow strong stems and tissue with large surface-to-volume ratios compared to native forbs, allowing them to both dry quickly and support their structures after drying.[103] As native grasses wither back during dry and hot summer days, both cheatgrass and red brome remain stubbornly upright, keeping them within reach of other potential fuels. These fine-fuel loads increase the chance that ignitions spread across the desiccated grasses, resulting in grassland conditions "that favor fire," with flame lengths sufficient to consumer "large amounts of plant biomass."[104] In some parts of the West, cheatgrass-dominated landscapes have been shown to be up to "500 times more likely to burn than those under other cover."[105] Invading and dominating post-burn areas by seeding early, cheatgrass enforced an cyclic process that gradually encouraged future fires.[106] By quickly

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[101] Benjamin S. Jurand and Scott R. Abella, "Soil Seed Banks of the Exotic Annual Grass Bromus Rubens on a Burned Desert Landscape," *Rangeland Ecology & Management* (Lawrence) 66, no. 2 (2013): 157–63.
[102] Janet L. Howard, "Research Project Summary: Nonnative Annual Grass Fuels and Fire in California's Mojave Desert," Fire Sciences Laboratory, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2006.
[103] Carla M. D'Antonio and Peter M. Vitousek, "Biological Invasions by Exotic Grasses, the Grass/Fire Cycle, and Global Change," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 23 (1992): 73; Matthew L. Brooks, "Alien Annual Grasses and Fire in the Mojvae Desert.," *Madroño* 46, no. 1 (1999): 13.
[104] D'Antonio and Vitousek, "Biological Invasions by Exotic Grasses, the Grass/Fire Cycle, and Global Change," 73; Emily J. Fusco et al., "Invasive Grasses Increase Fire Occurrence and Frequency across US Ecoregions," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 47 (2019): 23594–99; Howard, "Research Project Summary: Nonnative Annual Grass Fuels and Fire in California's Mojave Desert."
[105] D'Antonio and Vitousek, "Biological Invasions by Exotic Grasses, the Grass/Fire Cycle, and Global Change," 74–75.
[106] Frederick B. Pierson et al., "Fire, Plant Invasions, and Erosion Events on Western Rangelands," *Rangeland Ecology & Management* 64, no. 5 (2011): 441–42; Young, *Cattle in the Cold Desert, Expanded Edition*, 28.

amplifying and accelerating fire, especially in recently burned areas, cheatgrass and red brome reshaped the East Mojave's fire regime and affected those who lived in an increasingly fire-tolerant landscape.[107]

As a region, the American West became increasingly fire-tolerant through the twentieth century. Historian of fire Stephen Pyne has written extensively on fire as a biocultural phenomenon shaped by vegetation, climate, human ignition practices, and management institutions. Pyne described how the postwar suburbanization of southern California did not stop fires but "too often stoked them," and that the region's distinctive chaparral "could not be easily managed by prescribed fire."[108] Emphasizing fire regimes, or patterns of frequency, intensity, and spatial extent, Pyne argued that fire must be placed within a historical and cultural context, as part of the interconnected web of material and semiotic relationships.[109] Importantly, by having tried to suppress "bad" fire through most of the twentieth century, the United States shifted from a fire regime generally shaped by routine, small-scale fire to one dominated by less-frequent but more extreme wildfire.[110] With its overwhelming invasion by red brome and cheatgrass through more than a century of intensive ranching, the East Mojave became a fire-tolerant landscape through an interaction of human and environmental factors. However, the large-scale cattle grazing on cheatgrass and red brome grasslands obscured this growing fire tolerance.

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[107] M. L. Brooks and J. R. Matchett, "Spatial and Temporal Patterns of Wildfires in the Mojave Desert, 1980–2004," *Journal of Arid Environments* 67 (2006): 149–50.

[108] Stephen J. Pyne, *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (University of Washington Press, 1997), 404, 407.

[109] Ibid., xx; Stephen J. Pyne, *Fire: A Brief History*, second edition (University of Washington Press, 2019), 19. In his preface to *Fire in America*, Pyne wrote, "A fire environment consists of the fuels, topography, and weather within which a fire burns. When a fire environment combines with a consistent pattern of ignition, then a fire regime results, characterized by a particular vegetative ensemble and regular patterns of fire behavior."

[110] Pyne, *Between Two Fires: A Fire History of Contemporary America*. Describing the increased and extensive role the federal government played in fighting early-twentieth century fires, Pyne wrote "

With drought-declined wildlife populations and thousands fewer cattle to consumer fast-growing invasive grasses, ranchers feared how the desert would fare without its naturalized fuel-reducer. In Spring 2005, as the Oversons cleaned out their last holding in the Preserve, Jacob's childhood home at the Valley View Ranch, Tim Overson warned Preserve employees, "when these ranches sell and everybody's leaving, fires are going to come in and burn up everything you guys wish to preserve."[111] Months later, the elder Overson's words proved prescient.

Around 5:00 in the late afternoon on Wednesday, June 22, 2005, a series of lightning strikes ignited dry, tall brush near Hole-in-the-Wall in Mojave National Preserve, becoming the Narrow and Wildhorse fires.[112] By that evening, two new fires, the Brant and Ranch fires, combined with the earlier blazes and burned northward through Gold Valley, sped by strong winds and a landscape covered in cheatgrass and red brome. Climbing over the side of Tabletop, an appropriately named mesa-mountain in the Preserve's center, the fire quickly burned across Round Valley, torching homes, barns, trucks, and trees. Park Service archaeologist and local landowner David Nichols remembered "it was a shock to all of us. We were like, wait, the desert doesn't burn like this."[113] By the weekend, the renamed Hackberry Complex Fire developed into a firestorm that burned through more than 70,000 acres of high-country chaparral and piñon-juniper woodland overrun by invasive grasses, with more than 68,000 acres burning within the

[111] Overson, interview.
[112] Mary Martin, "Burned Area Emergency Stabilization Plan: Hackberry Complex," National Park Service, Mojave National Preserve, July 5, 2005, iii. Thanks to Ella LaFleur at Montana State University's inter-library loan office for tracking down this hard-to-find document.
[113] Nichols, interview.

first 24 hours.[114] Among other buildings, the fire consumed the cabin in which Nichols' had written his master's thesis by lantern light just three years earlier.[115]

The Park Service struggled to combat the blaze. Like many fires that ignite during the summer monsoon, the Hackberry Complex Fires sparked when a strike of electricity carrying up to 300 million volts connected with dry desert. It ignited during a "dry" lightning storm, or "thunderheads from which little precipitation reaches the ground and which commonly occur after droughts or dry seasons." Despite promising clouds, no rain fell on June 22nd.[116]

Without rain, the Preserve relied on a National Interagency Burned Area Emergency Response Team to fight the fire. At its peak, operations included 1,133 personnel, 24 crews, 5 helicopters, 4 air tankers, and 15 engine crews. Crews constructed 2.3 miles of hand line (fire break) and used almost 50 miles of road as preconstructed fire breaks. Interagency aircraft delivered 19,129 gallons of retardant, 30,000 gallons of foam, and 96,010 gallons of "wet water."[117] However, because of a high fuel load created by substantial precipitation the previous winter, the fire spread too quickly for landowners to prepare their properties, limited as their defenses may have been.

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[114] Martin, "HCF BAER Report," iv; Susana Enriquez, "2 Inland Wildfires Nearly Encircled; Containment Is Expected Today for the Paradise and Soboba Blazes. Four Mojave Fires Burn On.," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2005.
[115] Nichols, interview.
[116] Pyne, *Fire in America*, 11.
[117] Martin, "HCF BAER Report," iv.



Figure 25: Burned remains of early-twentieth century windmill and water tank in Round Valley immediately after the 2005 Hackberry Complex Fire. Martin, HFC BAER, 2005, Appendix 3.

Although the follow-up investigation found no adverse effect to populations of federally listed endangered species, in-holders in Round Valley experienced great loss from the blaze.[118] Having repeatedly called the Preserve headquarters for updates on the fires from their home in Redlands, CA, Dick and Kathy MacPherson heard on Thursday, the morning after the fire rolled through, that they had lost their entire property to the flames. Kathy tearfully remembered:

> [We] could see the smoke still…When you made the corner onto Black Canyon [Road], you knew it was bad…[because] it was all black. Moonscape…that's what

[118] Ibid., vii.

> we called it. We got up over the hill and all of everything was just so black and so ashy…it looked like the moon…it was just awful."[119]

With money from Dick's family for the land and with help from Kathy's family installing water and electrical, the first MacPherson Fleetwood-brand manufactured home had been a product of generations of work. The insurance check after the fire only covered the cost of a replacement tractor.[120] With decades of memories dashed like the substantial burn-scar through the valley, the MacPhersons resented that the Park Service did not do more to save their property.

Already feeling burned by their combative relationship with the Park Service as both landowners and four-wheeled-community leaders, the MacPhersons contended that the agency could and should have done more to protect properties and inform local landowners of evolving fire conditions. As they arrived in Round Valley on Thursday morning, the MacPhersons heard a roar while they climbed Black Canyon Road toward their property. As the fire consumed their home, the water heater had fallen on its side, with a propane valve erupting into flames. Dick pulled through his gate and hurried to turn off the propane. He noticed vehicle tracks but no footprints:

> The asshole from the Park Service had come in, drove a vehicle in, parked right over here, faced the house, what was left of the house. Never got out because there were no footsteps…could see the vehicle tracks, rode down this whatever and left…They didn't turn the propane off. They didn't do anything.[121]

Feeling that the Park Service could have mitigated property loss but did not, the MacPhersons and other landowners fingered Wilderness Areas for limiting the government's response. Talking

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[119] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview. As her emotions swelled in preparing to describe the fire in an oral history, Kathy said "I'm gonna cry, and I'm gonna get upset, and I'm gonna get mad."
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid. It is important to note that the Protection Act created a jurisdictional nightmare for residents in the East Mojave. Although surrounded by federal law enforcement, any emergency on private land would receive response from San Bernardino County, often with several hours delay.

with firefighters coming from outside of the desert, the MacPhersons heard that crews "had to go through a half-hour minimum training…on desert tortoises before they could step on the properties" despite private properties technically existing in San Bernardino County and the fire burning primarily in high-elevation, thus lower tortoise population density, areas.[122] For their part, Preserve officials felt there was little they could do, as "that stuff was out of control in that Hackberry fire."[123] Despite nearly 20,000 gallons of air-dropped fire retardant, many still accused superintendent Mary Martin of prioritizing Wilderness characteristics as the justification for not dropping more of the sticky, red chemical that slows or prevents fire from spreading.[124] Although the MacPhersons' sentiments misaligned with documented actions by the fire response team, their strongly held belief in officials' wanton disregard for landowners reflected three decades of a poor relationship with the Park Service. Importantly, it *seemed* to locals that bureaucratically created blockades prevented a timely fire response.

Shaded by a smattering of the few twisted junipers that survived the 2005 fire season and tall piñons they replanted in the years after the burn, the MacPhersons sat on the porch of their replacement manufactured home in 2025 and considered the Wilderness upon which they gazed. "This side of the hill," Dick gestured out his back window, "you go out, and it's now Wilderness out there." Wilderness designations limited the four-wheeled community in the East Mojave and motivated the MacPhersons to purchase and place a building on their property for fear of losing

[122] Ibid.
[123] Nichols, interview.
[124] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview; McIntosh, interview.

it through eminent domain. A decade after Mojave National Preserve's creation, the MacPhersons' hard-earned homestead went up in smoke.[125]

The Hackberry Complex Fire of 2005 dramatically illustrated the California Desert Protection Act's effect on the East Mojave. The creation and implementation of Mojave National Preserve left in-holders exasperated after feeling voiceless in the political contest for the National Park Service unit. As red brome and cheatgrass carried the fire across thousands of acres, landowners accused the Park Service of prioritizing Wilderness over people and their property.

During its first decade, administrators at Mojave National Preserve struggled to balance its mandate for preservation within a complex ecosystem substantially shaped by human activity. Although departing ranchers anticipated the desert's adaptation into a fire-tolerant landscape, the Park Service failed to offer a solution that supported both Wilderness and local plant, wildlife, and human populations. As the land managers made the East Mojave more natural, local fauna died of thirst, nonnative grasses grew, and fires sparked.

For in-holders, the Park Service's inability and perceived unwillingness to contain the Hackberry Complex Fire climaxed a decade of perceived disregard for the desert they had known. Feeling mistreated by early policing methods, landowners struggled to trust that Park Service's intentions and competence. Locals watched ranchers carry away historical relics representing their culture to restore the East Mojave to a supposedly more natural state. Those who lived in the Preserve found closed roads, dead wildlife, and destroyed or dilapidated buildings. As the Park Service rigorously regulated new Wilderness Areas, disallowing even

[125] MacPherson and MacPherson, interview. Kathy recounted why she came to love their desert acreage. During personal struggles, "it was a getaway and it was comfortable."

scientists from exemption to non-motorized travel restrictions, mule deer collapsed at once-filled troughs and bighorn sheep were allowed to drink toxic water after defective wildlife guzzlers went unnoticed. Although some hikers enjoy the spring and fall seasons with their feet, Wilderness excluded many land users reliant on off-pavement travel. Counted as a victory by environmentalists, the Mojave National Preserve swept the East Mojave with social and environmental change that continues to reveal itself.[126]

[126] Judith Anderson, interview; Burk, interview; Hoover, interview.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EPILOGUE

Sweating out the heat of late July, I left my workshop in Round Valley and gazed east toward the New York Mountains. After a wet winter, spring and summer of 2023 brought little rain and temperatures consistently over 105˚ Fahrenheit. Waiting for monsoons that seemed to arrive later and with less moisture each year, I was surprised to see large, dark clouds low on the horizon. I ran inside, opening the windows and doors. The house would be wet but cool.

A few hours later, I received a call from Jacob Overson, who informed me that rather than rain clouds, the plumes came from a fire that had broken out in the foothills of the New Yorks. It was spreading quickly, and the winds seemed uncertain. Needing to leave for a week of fieldwork the following day, I spent the morning packing up important papers, my gear, and a few irreplaceable items of sentimental value. I hoped insurance would cover anything I might lose. The fire to our east glowed an ominous red as the dog and I took our evening walk.

The next morning, I drove down my dirt driveway and looked back once more. Winds that shifted to the northeast in the night buoyed my hopes to see the house again. I was lucky. The fire burned northeast over the New Yorks and through the Castle Peak hiking corridor, eventually reaching into Clark County in southern Nevada. Within days, it consumed more than 93,000 acres, the second largest fire in the United States in 2023.[1] Although my home was safe, the fire left places like Carruthers Canyon darkened with soot, as wilderness restrictions and

[1] *Wildland Fire Summary and Statistics Annual Report 2023* (National Interagency Coordination Center, 2024), 8.

other ecological considerations slowed firefighters' work.[2] Only one property was lost, but the fire reshaped the northeast quarter of the Preserve and underscored changes under Park Service management. The Hackberry Complex, Dome, and York fires have combined to burn more than 200,000 acres of Mojave National Preserve since 1994.

The National Park Service is at a loss for how to prevent future megafires. Invasives have become emplaced in a landscape increasingly shaped by climate change. Park Service archaeologist David Nichols acknowledged that red brome and cheatgrass "can't be controlled…the fire carriers, those low grasses, they're hard to control. I mean it burned down my property [in 2005]."[3] Despite efforts to pull Sahara mustard and to treat tamarisk, the Park Service "understands there's no controlling" red brome and cheatgrass.[4] Small-scale mitigation efforts across a park covered in invasives felt like Sisyphean tasks of "weeding the desert."[5]

Mojave National Preserve may be returning to historical fire patterns. While Casebier and other desert access advocates suggested that reintroducing cattle could stop the fires, Nichols dismissed their argument as "bullshit" and ignorant of fire's cyclic role in the region.[6] Although the East Mojave experienced substantial and cyclical fire patterns through the mid-nineteenth century, the desert that people came to use, enjoy, and defend in the twentieth century was decidedly shaped by the introduction of cattle and that industry's disruption of the earlier fire regime.[7] Biologists consider more recent events like the York Fire as demonstrations of "a return

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[2] Ty O'Neil et al., "Preserving World Famous Joshua Trees Complicates Fight to Contain York Fire," KTNV Las Vegas, August 2, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20230802025516/https://www.ktnv.com/news/preserving-world-famous-joshua-trees-complicates-fight-to-contain-80-000-acre-york-fire.
[3] Nichols, interview.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Joseph R. McAuliffe, *Investigating the History of Pre-Eurosettlement Wildfires in Mojave National Preserve*, No. P21AC12169-00 (Mojave National Preserve, National Park Service, 2025), 95–97.

to a naturally occurring regime of wildfire."[8] In large-scale burn areas, some perennial grasses have shown noted recovery compared to invasives, suggesting a return to an old normal.[9] As the Park Service implements a return to prehistoric conditions in the desert, it struggles to navigate a landscape still filled with private holdings surrounded by Wilderness Areas. Earlier cyclical fire regimes did not burn across a landscape dotted with unregistered mobile homes and propane tanks, nor did it contend with surveyed boundaries of private property. Things just burned.

The California Desert Protection Act's strict legal mandate for the Park Service hamstrung the agency's ability to plan for this new but also returning fire regime. Nichols suggested that proponents of the desert bill achieved the removal of cattle by including specific language to prioritize their reduction, but unknowingly invited fires by not anticipating how the larger ecological system connected: "our enabling legislation tells us we're getting rid of cows. Period. Doesn't say anything about, oh, then you have to do something about the invasives that are here…we're totally handcuffed by it."[10] When lightning ignited the Hackberry Complex in 2005, the NPS instructed fire crews to protect private property while limiting tactics that might otherwise interrupt what was understood as a natural desert process.[11] Residents felt that the uneven and unclear enforcement of Wilderness regulations resulted in the loss of their homes.

As fires have intensified, Park Service administrators have reconsidered humanity's role in seemingly natural fires. Acknowledging that human-accelerated climate change encourages conditions for extreme fires, administrators now treat both lightning-ignited and human-sparked

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[8] Ibid., 2.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Nichols, interview.
[11] Mary A. Bomar, "Director's Order # 18: Wildland Fire Management," National Park Service, January 16, 2008. The order outlined that "Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance natural and cultural resources and, as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role."

fires as anthropogenic.[12] The Park Service recognized during the Biden administration that "climate change is exacerbating conditions conducive to large wildfires, with implications for…Mojave National Preserve," with changes to "wildfire probability, frequency, and seasonal duration."[13] Although the second Trump administration has cast climate change and renewable energy projects as "scams," going as far as to bar NPS staff from using terms such as "anthropogenic climate change," geographers expect that anthropogenically inflated fuel loads will "impose an increasingly dominant and detectable effect on western" wildfires.[14] Changing climate patterns will accelerate "precipitation frequency declines," extending the fire season and making fuels more susceptible to ignition.[15]

The Park Service's framing of natural ignitions as human-exacerbated has given it a freer hand to suppress fire across Wilderness boundaries, returning to the early-twentieth century practice of mass suppression that historian Stephen Pyne described as "not just a doctrine," but "a way of life."[16] The redefinition of all fires as anthropogenic lets the Park Service suppress "natural" lightning-ignited blazes as though they had been started by humans. Nichols described how the interagency team based in Mojave National Preserve now "fight [any fire] immediately. As soon as something happens, we're on it, fighting it." Park administrators embrace retardant

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[12] John T. Abatzoglou and A. Park Williams, "Impact of Anthropogenic Climate Change on Wildfire across Western US Forests," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 42 (2016): 11773.
[13] "NPS Fire Key Messages," National Park Service, 2003, 2, https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/pio/NPS/NPS-Wildland-Fire-Key-Messages.pdf?
[14] "Ending the Green New Scam," The White House, 2026, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Ending-the-Green-New-Scam-Fact-Sheet.pdf; Abatzoglou and Williams, "Impact of Anthropogenic Climate Change on Wildfire across Western US Forests," 11773. In oral history, Nichols described being an NPS employee under the Trump administration.
[15] A. Park Williams et al., "Observed Impacts of Anthropogenic Climate Change on Wildfire in California," *Earth's Future* 7, no. 8 (2019): 893–94.
[16] Pyne, *Between Two Fires: A Fire History of Contemporary America*, 26, 30, 50–51; Stephen Pyne, *The Pyrocene: How We Created an Age of Fire, and What Happens Next* (University of California Press, 2021), 88, 102, 140; Stephen J. Pyne, *World Fire: The Culture of Fire on Earth* (University of Washington Press, 2014), 190–92; Stephen J. Pyne, *California: A Fire Survey* (University of Arizona Press, 2016), 13–14, 39, 43–51.

drops, once rejected for their use of polyfluoroalkyls (PFAS), and now approach small blazes "like, drop that…let's stop the fire right now."[17] Without intervention, more private landowners would lose their buildings and the Preserve would "lose more natural resources."[18] Tasked with managing a dynamic and sometimes violent landscape, Mojave National Preserve cannot keep the staff needed to implement long-term management goals.

The vastness and underdevelopment that make the Preserve desirable for visitors prevent employees from making careers in the desert. "I love it," Nichols says of his manufactured home set on 40 acres at the base of Pinto Mountain. However, without a school, restaurant, grocery store, or even a post office within an hour of his home, Nichols knows that the Preserve "can't keep people here because you can't raise a family out of here."[19] Needing social interaction, at least one recent ranger was "driving into Vegas," two hours away, "to a cowboy bar every night to try to meet women. Every night…and he finally gave up and left. He couldn't take it."[20] When the Trump administration called for a culling of NPS rosters in early 2025, the interim superintendent of the Preserve accomplished a 30% cut without losing a single active staff member by eliminating the positions that had historically remained unfilled.[21] Mojave National Preserve gets by on a skeleton crew of a few dozen; rarely are ten staff members within the Preserve itself, with most at headquarters in Barstow. A pass-through Park unit on the public lands career path, most superintendents and high-level administrators stay at Mojave National

[17] Nichols, interview.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Overson, interview.

Preserve only until the next, larger, and more well-known Park offers a permanent position outside of the hot, dry, and socially isolating desert.

Few members of the Preserve staff hold permanent positions. Many are seasonal or have "acting" as the first word in their title. In a milieu of deprioritized funding for public lands, the Preserve has money to hire, but "can't keep anybody on staff," undercutting its ability to perform resource assessments, grade roads, and staff visitor centers.[22] As the West increasingly lives in cities and suburbs, traveling to rural spaces for leisure instead of livelihoods, few want to live in the backcountry.

Without permanently staffed administrative and research positions, the Preserve will continue to unevenly manage the desert. The revolving door of high-level administrators has resulted in constantly shifting targets for the Preserve's biologists, archaeologists, and maintenance staff. This precarious governance structure has undermined Park Service responses to existential threats. The recently proposed Cadiz Water Project threatens to usurp the region's aquifer as another tap for the West's unquenchable thirst, potentially drying the Preserve's springs and harming species such as the desert tortoise, bighorn sheep, and fringe-toed lizard.[23] Similarly, a series of acting superintendents have failed to effectively counter the BLM's reassertion of its right to reactivate 1980s mining leases at the Coliseum Mine within the

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[22] Nichols, interview.

[23] "Science Confirms Cadiz Water Project Would Harm the Largest Spring in Mojave Trails National Monument," National Parks Conservation Association, accessed January 23, 2026, https://www.npca.org/articles/1810-science-confirms-cadiz-water-project-would-harm-the-largest-spring-in; "Mojave Groundwater Bank," Cadiz, Inc., accessed January 23, 2026, https://cadizinc.com/mojave-groundwater-bank/; Angela Shah, "Stantec to Lead Engineering of $800M Mojave Groundwater Bank Project," Engineering News-Record, Mountain States & Southwest, March 19, 2025, https://www.enr.com/articles/60471-stantec-to-lead-engineering-of-800m-mojave-groundwater-bank-project; John Bredehoeft and Newsha Ajami, "Cadiz Groundwater Plan," *Pacific Insititute*, n.d., accessed January 23, 2026, https://pacinst.org/cadiz-groundwater-plan/.

Preserve's boundaries.[24] It seems that the Park Service is losing ground in a landscape it never fully controlled.

As the last ranchers leave, it is unclear how, and under whose watch, the desert will change next. The Blairs will pack up the 7IL Ranch in the spring of 2026 and end a century and a half of intensive land use in the East Mojave. Many expect bigger and more frequent fires as the climate continues to change and fuel loads are no longer reduced by cattle. The next lightning strike might be an ironic end to the desert's cattle industry, as fires spread by the grasses it introduced will likely burn the few remaining cabins and corrals left standing by the Park Service. The next fire is often on locals' minds. In-holders have purchased additional water tanks, sprinklers, and hoses to prepare for a firestorm-version of the inevitable "Big One."

Those who lose property to fires will feel the changing desert most sharply, but shifting climatic conditions will exert pressure on the varied relationships Americans have with the lands that comprise Mojave National Preserve. Its ongoing susceptibility to extreme weather and fires signals that Mojave National Preserve is neither a restored wilderness nor managed under the guise of multiple use. It is a hybrid landscape in which past decisions constrain present options, and where climate change magnifies every unresolved tension embedded in the Preserve's creation.

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[24] Kurt Repanshek, "Bureau Of Land Management Approves Continued Mining Inside Mojave National Preserve," National Parks Traveler, April 10, 2025, https://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2025/04/update-bureau-land-management-approves-continued-mining-inside-mojave-national-preserve; "Colosseum Mine in California given Go Ahead to Continue Mining Operation," Bureau of Land Management, April 8, 2025, https://www.blm.gov/announcement/colosseum-mine-california-given-go-ahead-continue-mining-operation; "Trump Administration Promotes Unauthorized Mining in Mojave National Preserve," National Parks Conservation Association, April 9, 2025, https://www.npca.org/articles/7967-trump-administration-promotes-unauthorized-mining-in-mojave-national.

Americans have repeatedly sought to fix the desert's meaning – first as a site of extraction, then one of recreation, and most recently as an object of preservation. Each effort produced new relationships between people, technology, non-human life, and climate, and those relationships continue to evolve. Mojave National Preserve does not offer a correct or incorrect vision of the desert. Rather, it offers the opportunity to reckon with the fact that there has never been only one desert here at all.

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