

Cooperation is key to success in Mojave Trails National Monument's future

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by Frazier Haney

VISITING the **Gems, Minerals and Jewelry Department** at the **2017 San Diego County Fair** and taking a guided field trip to the Marble Mountains fossil beds has given me a clear picture of the amazing resources the **Mojave Trails National Monument** provides for rockhounds. While the national monument is approaching its second birthday, there will be a unique opportunity to craft how this public land will be managed through interested stakeholders giving input on a management plan for the area, the beginning of which will be officially noticed in the Federal Register.[1] However, the entire process is on hold pending an unprecedented administrative review that may eliminate protection for portions of the national monument, with the aim of making the land available for industrial development.

While public outcry on the administrative review has been overwhelmingly in favor of keeping the national monument intact (2.9 million comments, 99% in support of national monuments), the notable exception is the area's congressional representative **Paul Cook** (R-Apple Valley), who sent a detailed private letter to **DOI Secretary Zinke** asking for the Cadiz Valley to be eliminated from **Mojave Trails**. [2] The outcome of the review is up in the air – the **Department of the Interior** has yet to publicly release any final recommendations, leaving the future of the monument subject to a great deal of uncertainty. **Mojave Trails** could lose a large area in the southern portion of the monument, but there is virtually no chance it will be rescinded entirely. If the

boundary is changed in some way, the entire matter is likely to end up in court, causing further delays in preparing the management plan.

Any land that might end up being removed from the national monument would revert to its previous designation, which is determined by **BLM's** land use plan for the area. No additional public input would be gathered on the matter. Additionally, the **Desert Advisory Council (DAC)**, a formal group

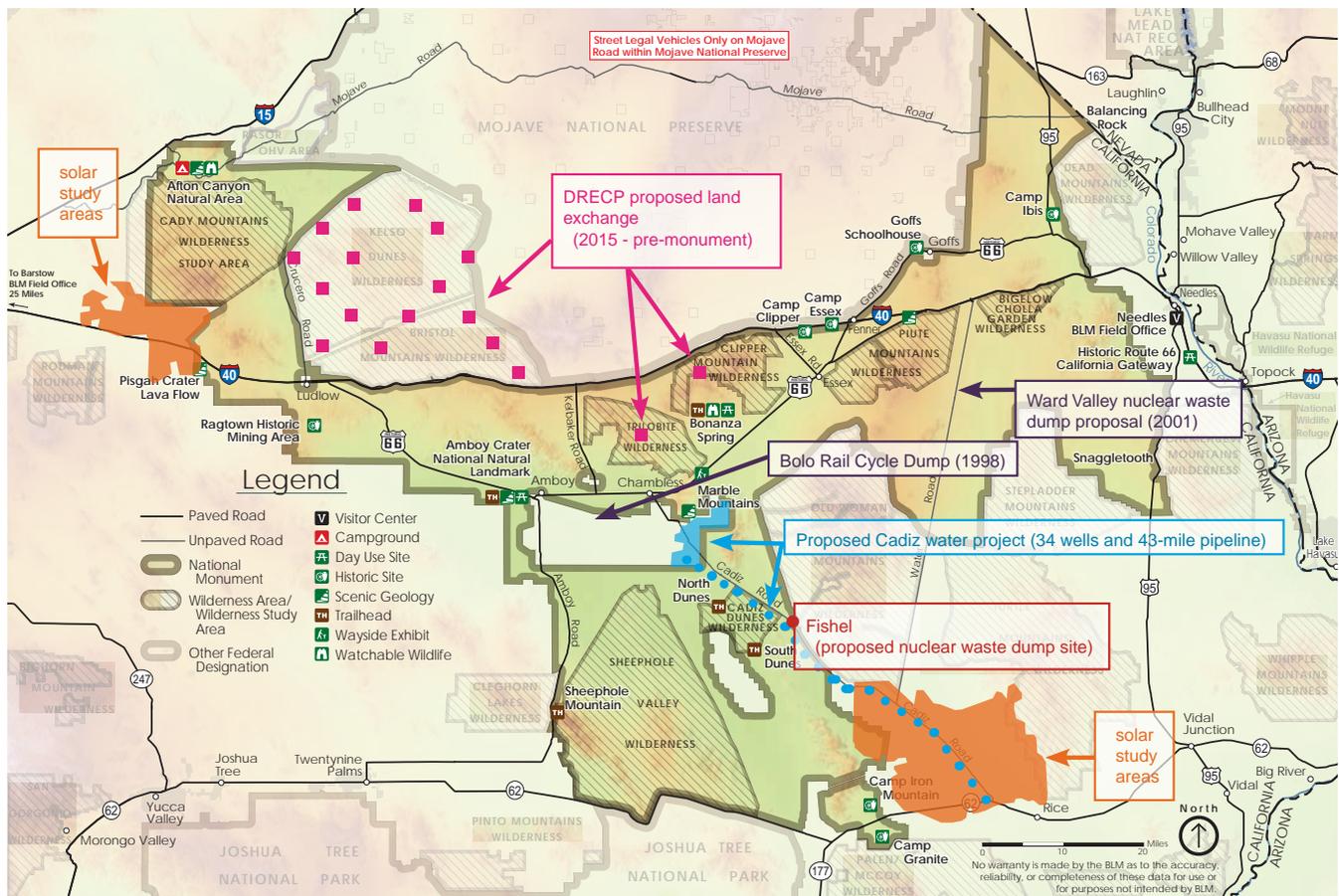


These small dunes were formed by north winds pushing sands off the Cadiz Dry Lake. The pristine nature of the dunes and the beautiful spring display of unique dune plants have made Cadiz Valley a favorite for photographers. Photographed on February 14, 2014. Photo: Bob Wick, BLM.

of appointed citizens representing a variety of desert land use issues, has been waiting to get back to work on incorporating a subgroup to advise on the management plan, also pending an administrative review process. While these reviews and delays have frustrated stakeholders and caused a great deal of confusion, I want to take this moment to reach out from my position as the Conservation Director

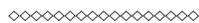
1.) <https://www.federalregister.gov/agencies/land-management-bureau> or short URL: <https://goo.gl/qQDzTi>.

2.) <https://www.scribd.com/document/357283116/Cook-Correspondence-With-Zinke-FOIA> or short URL: <https://goo.gl/f8SsPn> (the relevant letter in the series is dated June 8, 2017).



Mojave Trails National Monument is surrounded by wilderness areas, with the Mojave National Preserve to the north, the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps base and Joshua Tree National Park to the south (west and east, respectively). The monument provides a buffer in the region, protecting surrounding wildlands and unique geological and culturally significant landscapes within its boundaries. Together, they provide contiguous natural viewsapes and habitat for threatened and endangered species. The area that is now a monument was (and still is) targeted for a variety of projects that would irrevocably change this unique, largely unspoiled region. Some of the proposed uses are overlaid on the monument map above. Source: BLM; annotations: L. Thoresen.

at the **Mojave Desert Land Trust** to encourage cooperation and dialogue regarding the future of **Mojave Trails National Monument**.



Creation of the **Mojave Trails National Monument** east of Barstow, California was the work of many years. In 2009, it was clearer than ever that public land in the California desert was continuously under threat from private development interests. The Bolo Rail-Cycle dump, the Ward Valley nuclear waste dump, and a long list of industrial energy projects are good examples of previous proposals in **Mojave**

Trails which would develop large areas of public lands in a way that would eliminate public use. Impacts would be felt equally by all users – off-road vehicle enthusiasts, hikers, rockhounds, campers, and other explorers. In the face of this kind of industrial development, it is in the common interest of all users of public lands to work to keep them intact and open. The national monument designation does just that, while shrinking the boundary would leave excluded lands back on the chopping block. The real promise for protecting public access and balancing uses is through developing a management plan for the existing protected area.

Two uses that will need particular attention once a management plan is formally in development are Rockhounding and vehicle routes. There was great consternation at the time **Mojave Trails** was created that it would eliminate the ability to collect the variety of gem minerals found in the national monument, or would close roads used to access these collecting areas.[3] While both uses are controlled by numerous policies already in place before the national monument was created (e.g., **WEMO**), members of the conservation community involved in the creation of **Mojave Trails**, as well as elected officials and agencies, are deeply committed to making sure these recreational uses are not lost because of the national monument designation, consistent with the intent behind the original legislation, not least among them **Senator Dianne Feinstein**, who has publicly defended rockhounding since the national monument's designation.[4] Interim guidance has been provided which leaves the uses in place status quo until the management plan can be completed.[5]

Despite the uncertainty and pending threat to **Mojave Trails** from the administrative review, attention should continue to focus on the future management of the area. It is expected **DAC**

meetings will resume next year and progress can be made incorporating a specific advisory subgroup. **Kyle Sullivan** has been hired as the national monument manager and is in the process of collecting information for the plan and guiding many of the day to day operations of the area. Everything is prepared for a thorough public process to unfold, but success will depend on the willingness of all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue and compromise. Changing the boundaries of the national monument will only lead to more delay and more division.

Please stay tuned for news on **Mojave Trails National Monument** and its future, and email me with inquiries – Frazier@mdlt.org

Frazier Haney joined the Desert Advisory Council in 2017 in the Environmental Protection position with the intent of serving while the Mojave Trails National Monument management plan is being developed. He works as the Conservation Director at the Joshua Tree based Mojave Desert Land Trust, and is an avid desert explorer and camper. He grew up in the California desert, and has a healthy collection of gems and stones at his home in Joshua Tree.

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- 3.) <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-0507-rockhounds-20160507-story.html> or short URL: <https://goo.gl/B6MEJ6>.
 - 4.) See Senator Feinstein's letter in support of rockhounds to then-Secretary Sally Jewell, available online at: http://www.sdmg.org/calnatmonuments/Feinstein_to_Jewell_support_rockhounding_CalNatMonuments_20160512.pdf or short URL: <https://goo.gl/bnEn5j>.
 - 5.) <http://www.hi-desertrockhounds.org/news/mojavetrailsnationalmonumentisopen> or short URL: <https://goo.gl/vvtPdi>.

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