

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 4222, A BILL TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF THE MOJAVE NATIONAL PRESERVE IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA TO INCLUDE THE LAND WITHIN THE CASTLE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT.**

**MAY 15, 2024**

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Chairman King and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 4222, a bill to adjust the boundary of the Mojave National Preserve in the State of California to include the land within the Castle Mountains National Monument.

The Department supports S. 4222 with amendments.

S. 4222 would modify the boundary of Mojave National Preserve to include the existing Castle Mountains National Monument and direct the Secretary of the Interior to manage the addition as part of the Preserve.

Mojave National Preserve was established by the California Desert Protection Act in 1994. At 1.6 million acres, it is the third-largest unit of the national park system in the contiguous United States. The preserve is an expanse of desert lands that represents a mosaic of three of the four major North American deserts: the Great Basin, Sonoran, and Mojave. Mojave National Preserve protects these desert ecological communities and evidence of a 10,000-year history of human connection with the desert.

Castle Mountains National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation in 2016. The Castle Mountains represent some of the most unique elements of the eastern Mojave Desert and contain Joshua tree forests, unbroken natural landscapes, rare desert grasslands, and rich human history. Castle Mountains National Monument provides a critical linkage for plants, animals, and water between two mountain ranges within the Preserve, the New York Mountains to the northwest and the Piute Mountains to the southeast.

Mojave National Preserve and Castle Mountains National Monument share a boundary and are both under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. The two areas are currently administered as one unit with shared leadership, staff, and budget. S. 4222 would further improve administrative efficiencies and reduce confusion for visitors.

The Department recommends amending S. 4222 to specify that the Castle Mountains National Monument would be abolished upon the land becoming part of Mojave National Preserve. This would eliminate any duplicative or conflicting regulations or guidelines. We also recommend transferring certain important provisions from the Proclamation to the legislation, such as the provision for certain Bureau of Land Management lands to be transferred to the National Park

Service when all mining activity has terminated and reclamation has been completed. The Department would be happy to work with the sponsor and the Committee on amendments to reflect these recommendations.

Chairman King, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.