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# Turtle Mountains

*Endangered Desert Legacy*



**Location:** This area is located in the Mojave Desert, in San Bernardino County, south/southwest of the town of Havasu Lake. Located north of Hwy 62, south of the Stepladder Mountains Wilderness and Chemehuevi Valley, east of Ward Valley and west of Hwy 95. This area abuts the south end of the existing Turtle Mountains Wilderness.

**Management Agency:** Bureau of Land Management, Needles Field Office

**Description:** The area ranges from broad bajadas to highly-eroded volcanic peaks, spires, and cliffs. The colorful Turtle Mountains vary from deep reds, browns, tans and grays, to blacks. The area contains the two signature Mopah Peaks; the northern most peak is a landmark known as Mexican Hat. The area has several springs and seeps. Much of the Turtle Mountain range has been designated as a National Natural Landmark in recognition of its exceptional natural values. Elevations in the area range from about 2,650 feet to about 8,900 feet.

**Wildlife and Plants:** Species that make this area their home include the threatened desert tortoise, the protected desert bighorn sheep, the prairie falcon, golden eagle, roadrunner, Le Conte's thrasher, Cove's cassia (photo above), Arizona pholistoma, three-awned grama, burrowing owl, black-tailed jackrabbit, Bendire's thrasher, kangaroo rat, Mojave fringe-toed lizard (photo above), Abrams' spurge, Harwood's milk-vetch, and Harwood's eriastrum. A portion of this area lies within designated critical habitat for the desert tortoise. Additionally, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has recognized this area as a wildlife migration corridor. Vegetation includes creosote bush-bur sage, palo verde-cactus shrub ecosystems, Colorado/Sonoran microphylla woodlands, palo verde, smoke tree, honey mesquite, and catclaw.

**Cultural Importance:** This area is of utmost importance to local indigenous people. This area encompasses portions of Ward Valley, a sacred area for five local Native American tribes. Mopah Springs (in the Turtle Mountains Wilderness) contains petroglyphs and is widely thought to have been visited by early Chemehuevi Native Americans. Ethnographic accounts tell of trails that went along the Colorado, east through the Chemehuevi Valley and connected early Native Americans with water sources at Mopah Spring, and the salt mines at Danby Lake and then continued around the southern end of the Turtle Mountains.

**Activities:** Hikers, photographers, bird watchers, and hunters frequent the area. Rockhounds visit the Turtle Mountains area to collect chalcedony roses, agate, jasper and gypsum. Off-roaders enjoy traversing the Heritage Trail.

