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Efforts to shrink, eliminate national monuments will hurt economy: Guest commentary

By Pat Flanagan

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President Trump aimed to dismantle part of our nation's heritage when he called recently for a 120-day review of national monument designations since 1996. This egregious order is an affront to our country's history and an attack on the protected lands in our backyard, including Mojave Trails and Sand to Snow National Monuments.

His actions should profoundly concern California desert residents who treasure these special places, and the businesses that depend on their many visitors. Through my work as the naturalist at the 29 Palms Inn on the Oasis of Mara, I have introduced thousands of guests — Americans and travelers from all over the world — to the natural and cultural history of our desert. These public lands are a gift, passed down from generation to generation, that contribute to our economy and our way of life. President Trump's threats against our monuments should outrage anyone who cares to preserve that.

Efforts to eliminate or shrink national monuments will hurt economies like ours by effectively stripping us of an important economic engine. Local businesses are baffled by the President's move, particularly because he touts such strong economic interests. People come from all over the world to visit protected public lands — for example, a recent National Park Service report found that more than 2 million visitors to Joshua Tree in 2015 spent \$96.8 million in communities near the park. That spending supported 1,341 jobs in our community.

The amount of revenue, jobs and quality-of-life associated with these non-diminishing resources fuel local economies in ways that the extractive industries cannot and do not.

Just-released data from the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) shows that outdoor recreation alone generates \$887 billion and 7.6 million jobs in the United States every year. In 2016, national parks saw a record 331 million visits. It comes as no surprise to me that this growth is so robust — people tell me every day they've been coming back again and again since they first stepped foot on, and fell in love with, the desert's public lands.

Recently I went to Washington, D.C. with business owners and members of Western Chambers of Commerce to talk to Congress about preserving the value of our national monuments. We listened to Interior Secretary [Ryan Zinke](#) and his intention to review the size and scope of our national monuments. And though Zinke noted he and the President are "lifetime supporters and admirers of Teddy Roosevelt's policies," the underlying intention to fray the edges of our monument lands is in direct opposition to President Roosevelt's Antiquities Act legacy.

Signed by Roosevelt, the 110-year-old Antiquities Act is also threatened under Trump's executive order. It's been used by presidents of both parties to protect national monuments. The law safeguarded Joshua Tree in 1936 (it later became a national park) and Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow and Castle Mountains National Monuments in 2016.

Our desert is a place of big, complicated spaces, and as residents we have a responsibility to voice opposition to this executive order. Any honest, transparent review of our national monuments will reveal them for what they are: a boon to our local economies and emblems of our local heritage.

With so much on the line, we'll need our leaders in D.C. to advocate for these places now more than ever. Sen. [Dianne Feinstein](#) was instrumental to the designation of our desert monuments. I encourage her to continue this work and urge newly elected Sen. Kamala Harris and Rep. [Paul Cook](#) to be our champions as well. We need to fight against these unprecedented efforts to diminish our national monuments, and preserve a natural, cultural and economic legacy from which our children deserve to benefit.

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