

be authorized to meet in executive session during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, November 3, 1999, at 9:30 a.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND DRINKING WATER

Mr. ROTH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Drinking Water be authorized to conduct a hearing Wednesday, November 3, 10 a.m., hearing room (SD-406), to examine solutions to the policy concerns with respect to habitat conservation plans.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

CALIFORNIA DESERT PROTECTION ACT ANNIVERSARY

• Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, this week marks the fifth anniversary of the California Desert Protection Act, a bill I authored that was signed into law on October 31, 1994. This Act marked a watershed event for California and for the 2.8 million people who visit this pristine national treasure each year. This was the most extensive land-protection bill in U.S. history and protected the largest parcel of land in the continental U.S.

The bill was unique in many ways. It designated national park and Bureau of Land Management wilderness areas comprising more than 7.7 million acres, the highest category of federal protection. It also designated the Death Valley National Park and Joshua Tree National Park in areas that formerly fell under less protected "national monument" status and created the 1.6 million acre Mojave National Preserve.

At the time of its passage, the Desert Protection Act was the centerpiece of a long and contentious battle among a variety of different stakeholders. It faced enormous opposition from groups and individuals concerned about private property rights, grazing permits, mining claims, and access for off-road vehicle use. The bill took nearly eight years to pass over objections from miners, property owners, hunters, ranchers and off-road enthusiasts, who thought the legislation would restrict too much land and hurt business. I worked hard to craft a bill that protected private property rights and safeguarded the region's job base while preserving a treasured resource—the California Desert.

I am proud to say that after 5 years there has not been a single instance of a land transaction that did not involve a willing seller and willing buyer. Grazing has not been impeded and valid mining rights have been upheld. The 25 million acres of California desert remain a place of extraordinary beauty and diverse resources. There are soaring sand dunes, ninety mountain ranges, extinct volcanoes, streams, lakes, wildflowers, the world's largest Joshua Tree forest, waterfalls and cactus gardens.

The land also includes over 100,000 archeological sites, including the only-known dinosaur tracks in California, believed to be more than 100 million years old. More than 760 different wildlife species call the rugged California desert home. The protected land has aided in the recovery of the desert tortoise and has provided thousands of acres of needed habitat for big horn sheep.

The Death Valley National Park consists of more than 3.3 million acres of spectacular desert scenery, interesting and rare desert wildlife, complex geology, undisturbed wilderness and dozens of historical and cultural interest sites. It contains the lowest point in the Western hemisphere, the Death Valley badwater, which rests 282 feet below sea level. The Joshua Tree National Park comprises two deserts and vividly illustrates the contrast between high and low desert. Below 3000 feet, the eastern half of the park is the land of the creosote bush, smoke trees and ocotillo. The higher, cooler and slightly wetter Western part is dominated by Joshua Trees.

But the crown jewel of the California Desert is the Mojave National Preserve whose geographical and wildlife diversity are practically unrivaled. The area contains eleven mountain ranges, four dry lakes, cinder cones, badlands, innumerable washes, mesas, buttes, lava tube caves, alluvial fans and one of California's most complex sand dune systems.

I would like to especially thank Mary Martin, the Mojave National Preserve Superintendent for her diligence and the commendable job she has done balancing the diverse needs of the Preserve with those of all the stakeholders who work and/or use the land.

The desert parks have attracted record numbers of tourists in recent years from across the globe. Tourism has increased the visibility of California's natural resources, created jobs for desert residents and brought additional income. In 1997, the three parks created more than 6,000 jobs and over \$22 million in tax revenue from tourist expenditures.

The passage of the California Desert Protection Act has been one of my proudest accomplishments in the Senate. But there is still more work to be done.

To encourage out nation's westward expansion, in 1864 Congress gave the railroad industry every other section of land in a 50 mile swath in what is now the Mojave National Preserve and Joshua Tree National Park. Most of this remaining checkerboard arrangement of land is owned by the Catellus Development Corporation.

Earlier this year David Myers, the Executive Director of the Wildlands Conservancy, brokered a deal with Catellus to sell these lands at well below market value. Through David's hard work, The Wildlands Conservancy raised \$25.5 million in private funding and donated land. The Catellus Corporation agreed to donate an additional \$16.4 million in land.

Through the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund the U.S. would acquire 487,000 acres of protected land. This includes 150,000 acres of Congressionally designated Wilderness areas, 87,000 acres in the Mojave National Preserve, 18,700 acres in Joshua Tree, land in Big Morongo, San Gorgonio wilderness, and the Kelso Dunes.

This acquisition would formalize rights-of-way over 165 jeep trails and dirt access roads leading to 3.7 million acres of land used for hunting, hiking, sightseeing, camping and recreational vehicle use.

The land includes the biggest cactus gardens in the world at the Bigelow Cholla Gardens.

The acquisition also includes one hundred miles of scenic lands and historic water stops along historic route 66 and would help to conserve one of the single most intact portions of America's "Mother Road" which provided many Americans their first look at the Golden State and became the source of much of America's western migration folklore.

The purchase is supported by an overwhelming majority of constituents in the 40th Congressional District including Republicans and Democrats alike and a broad coalition of interest groups from the Sierra Club to the National Rifle Association. This transaction would be one of the biggest land acquisitions in California history and one of the most substantial gifts ever to the American people.

It is my hope that we can take advantage of this rare opportunity to purchase these valuable lands and remove any remaining impediments for the millions of hikers, campers, and other recreationists who will continue to visit and enjoy this pristine area in the heart of California.

ASTEROID RESEARCH

• Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I want to commend a group of New Mexicans who are achieving some phenomenal results. In fact, they're currently battling .500 and more. If they were baseball players they would be acclaimed on every sports page.

But instead of baseball, this group has discovered half of the comets that are currently visible through telescopes. One of their latest comet discoveries may be bright enough to see with binoculars next year. And it's probably safe to guess that the brightest of comets attracts an audience well in excess of those watching major league baseball.

Instead of baseball bats, they are using a telescope at the north end of White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. This Lincoln Near-Earth Asteroid Research project is run by Lincoln Laboratory of the Massachusetts Institute of technology. A second telescope at the site started operations in the last week—that may boost their discoveries still further.