

Congressional Forum on National Monuments and the Antiquities Act

Thursday, June 8, 2017, at 3:00 p.m. in the Cannon

Carrie Hamblen, CEO/President. Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce

Thank you to the Committees on Natural Resources, Small Business and Veterans' Affairs for hosting this forum today and allowing me to spend time with you. I would also like to thank Ranking Members Grijalva, Veleazquez and Walz.

It is an honor to speak with you about our beloved Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in Southern New Mexico. From this point on, you may hear me refer to the Monument as OMDP....it is a long title and the shortened version will allow for my comments to highlight the incredible benefits our region has experienced in the time that is allotted.

The designation of OMDP was an over 10 year effort by 11 Native American Tribes, sportsman, conservation, environmental, and religious groups. It features more than 22 miles of the Butterfield Stage Trail, Kilbourne Hole National Historic Landmark, Billy the Kid's Outlaw Rock, Geronimo's Cave, 243 known archeological sites, Estimated 5000+ unknown archaeological sites, the Apollo Astronaut Training Sites, and more.

Prior to the designation, there were some reservations about the monument as ranchers were concerned about their grazing privileges and a very small group of people felt the monument was too large. At this time, there was a great deal of misinformation on what the monument would mean to the community. However, 3 years later, we have an overwhelming amount of support in the community and several of those voices who were in opposition of OMDP now have more information and understanding about the positive benefits of our Monument.

The Las Cruces Green Chamber's role in the success of OMDP has involved highlighting the economic impact this monument has for our local businesses. Following the designation, the Las Cruces Green Chamber created the OMDP Marketing toolkit, providing businesses with the resources, materials, and marketing ideas to cross brand the monument with their business. Some of the materials given to businesses include a Spanish and English version of our Visitors' guide, providing information and links to many of the popular hiking trails and areas within the Monument. Also, on the back of the guide, businesses can put their logo and information so they give these to customers and clients, compliments of their business.

As a result, there is the OMDP Coffee Blend, the OMDP Bread Pudding, the OMDP cupcakes, the OMDP Apparel, OMDP Chile sauce, and the OMDP cocktail.

From those businesses that use the toolkit, 65% of businesses surveyed field questions from customers about OMDP, 32% of them use OMDP in their promotional and marketing materials. And, 20% of them have introduced new products or services directly related to OMDP including: mountain bike tours, specialty drinks, running tours, wilderness first aid trainings, apparel, iconic monument photography and monument-inspired desserts.

In the past three years, events celebrating OMPD include: the 1 year anniversary celebration, a wild game BBQ, an interfaith service on the monument, a Fiesta in Historic Mesilla, an OMDP Art Show, and a Monumental Opening night for the Las Cruces Vaqueros baseball team. And, the unveiling of the first of its kind, OMDP Girl Scout Achievement Patch from our local Girl Scout Council. This patch is now the model for other Girl Scout councils across the country with National Monuments and National Parks in their region. There is the California Deserts Monuments Patch and the conversation is already started for the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument Patch.

We are also in the final planning stages of our second annual Monuments to Main Street celebration that features not only the amazing events happening already in our area (our Hatch Green Chile Festival, Salsa fest, and wine festivals, but also incorporates hikes into the monument, a plein air painting competition, yoga on the monument and this year, we will have a mariachi concert on the monument to finish the month. We also have horseback trips out into the monument, and some of the newest business endeavors include a bikepacking trip and an apparel business that donates a portion of every sale of their Organ Mountains shirts to assist in buying school lunches for our local school children.

Our area has received a great deal of media recognition as a result of OMDP. Lonely Planet listed Southern New Mexico as one of their top 10 “Best in the US” travel destinations for 2016. US News and World Report featured Las Cruces as one of three great retirement destinations. In March of 2015, the Center for Western Priorities featured Las Cruces in the Golden Rush Report. And just recently, Readers Digest just listed OMDP as one of the 10 Practically Secret National Parks you’ll want to Visit This Spring.

National Monuments created under former President Obama has created or expanded are generating more than \$156 million in local economic activity annually. Non-local visitor spending is equivalent to supporting 1,820 jobs. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation in the U.S. generates upwards of \$887 billion in consumer spending annually and 7.6 million jobs. That's up \$200 billion from just last year.

What has happened in Las Cruces serves as an example elsewhere. OMDP was made possible because of the Antiquities Act. We can look at a number of elements that show how a community can embrace protecting our public spaces: not only coming together in a coordinated effort, but also having businesses chime in and become stewards of the Monument. We talk a great deal about how this is "Our" monument. And, I think if every community does that, it creates investment beyond just using it as a tourist draw. But, then, our community and the partnerships that have been created can be replicated elsewhere, including the cross branding, Monument travel packages, the Girl Scout patch, Monument products. It's really endless. I think if there is a coordinated effort in other communities to create that investment, you cannot justify removing the use the Antiquities Act. If you are doing this, you are against sustainable economic development, job creation, and protecting our great land for generations to come.