

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 21, 2014

**President Obama Designates Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument**

WASHINGTON, DC — As part of his commitment to make 2014 a year of action using his pen and phone, President Obama will sign a proclamation today to establish the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in south-central New Mexico, an action that, according to independent analysis, could generate \$7.4 million in new economic activity each year. Using his authorities under the Antiquities Act, the President's action will permanently preserve approximately 496,000 acres to ensure that the prehistoric, historic, and scientific values of this area remain for the benefit of all Americans while preserving access for sportsmen, ranchers, and recreational users. The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument joins the ten other national monuments President Obama has designated across the country to permanently protect sites that are significant to our nation's rich history and natural heritage.

"Whether they're hiking or camping or fishing, visitors to our parks and public lands are not only enjoying the bounty of our natural resources, but also promoting jobs and growth. And continuing to set aside federal land for outdoor recreation will drive critical revenue for those local communities, and preserve our pristine land for generations to come," said **President Obama**.

"Today is the culmination of a community-led effort to preserve, protect and promote these public lands, but it's the beginning of a new chapter for the businesses that will benefit from the tourism and recreation, and the wildlife that rely on this unique habitat," said **Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell**. "The Organ Mountains and surrounding Desert Peaks are steeped in culture, history, wildlife and opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors - from hunting to hiking to gazing at ancient petroglyphs and fossils - and the President's action ensures that these cherished landscapes are celebrated and passed on to the generations of New Mexicans and Americans to come."

The President's proclamation honors years of work by the local community and businesses seeking increased protection and recognition for the area. Senators

Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall have championed legislation to protect and preserve the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region. Conservation groups and sportsmen's organizations, local tribal governments, veterans and ranchers, faith leaders and Latino leaders, historic preservationists, the nearby cities of Las Cruces and El Paso, and over two hundred local businesses have also expressed support for permanent protection.

The area is home to a high diversity of animal life, including deer, pronghorn antelope, mountain lions, peregrine falcons and other raptors as well as rare plants, some found nowhere else in the world, such as the Organ Mountains pincushion cactus. Hundreds of archeologically and culturally significant sites are found within the new monument, including some limited Paleo-Indian artifacts, extensive rock art sites and the ruins of a ten room pueblo, among other ancient dwellings. More recent history is memorialized with Geronimo's Cave, Billy the Kid's Outlaw Rock, and sites related to early Spanish explorers. The Organ and Doña Ana Mountains are popular recreation areas, with multiple hiking trails, a popular campground, and opportunities for hunting, mountain biking, rock climbing, and other recreation.

Today's action builds on steps the Administration has taken over the past five years as part of the America's Great Outdoors initiative, which fosters a 21st century approach to conservation that responds to the priorities of the American people. When he signed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, President Obama marked the most extensive expansion of land and water conservation in more than a generation, designating more than 2 million acres of federal wilderness, thousands of miles of trails, and protecting more than 1,000 miles of rivers.

Wilderness, parks, forests, monuments, and other public lands help support local economies through tourism. Recent estimates also show that over \$50 billion were added to the economy from visits to public lands in 2012 alone. In fact, a recent study says that this national monument could double the number of visitors to the region and help grow the local economy by more than 70%. Protected public lands also attract businesses interested in relocating to areas with beautiful scenery, outdoor opportunities, and a high quality of life. These businesses can bring high paying jobs, which helps explain why, on average, western non-metro counties' per capita income increases when there is more protected public land in the area. The outdoor recreation industry supports 6.1 million jobs nationwide.

First exercised by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 to designate Devils Tower National Monument in Wyoming, the authority of the Antiquities Act has been used by 16 presidents since 1906 to protect unique natural and historic

features in America, such as the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, and Colorado's Canyons of the Ancients.

The monument will continue to be managed by the Bureau of Land Management as part of the system of National Conservation Lands. The Bureau of Land Management currently manages the federal land within the national monument for multiple uses, including conservation of natural and archeological resources and outdoor recreation, such as hiking, biking, camping and hunting. Recreation on BLM-managed lands and waters in New Mexico supported more than 1,900 jobs and contributed more than \$170 million to the state's economy in fiscal year 2012.