Protecting our Nation's Storytellers: National Monuments

The Latino Conservation Alliance (LCA) is a partnership of five Latino organizations who work to educate, activate, and support Latino communities in the protection of public lands in the United States. We believe that our national public lands system is an important part of our democracy and should continue to be made available and owned by to all Americans.

America’s national monuments, forests, battlefields and other public lands protect and represent diverse natural resources and cultural heritages and protecting them is critical to telling a more complete story of our nation.

Several opponents of our public lands system in Congress and within the Trump Administration have suggested efforts to rescind and/or reduce the protections of National Monuments, as well as efforts to eliminate or reduce the executive power under the Antiquities Act.

The Latino Conservation Alliance opposes any actions by Congress and the Trump Administration to rescind the protections of any established national monuments or public lands. As well as, any actions to eliminate or limit the executive authority of President under the Antiquities Act to protect important natural and cultural areas in the future.

Historically, the histories and cultural heritages of communities of color and tribal nations have been underrepresented in our national monuments and public lands system. The LCA supports and defends national monuments which protect cultural heritages and natural resources that represent the historic, cultural, and spiritual heritages of communities of color and tribal nations.

As the largest minority group in America — one that is expected to grow to nearly 30 percent of the population by 2050 — the Latino community’s engagement is critical to ensuring the future success and preservation of our nation’s public lands. As America’s storytellers National Parks and Monuments must also reflect the diversity of our growing population. It is essential that young people see their culture and history reflected in our public lands.

About Latino Conservation Alliance:
The Latino Conservation Alliance (LCA) is a strategic partnership of five Latino organizations aligned to protect public lands, including: HECHO, GreenLatinos, Hispanic Federation, Hispanic Access Foundation, and Latino Outdoors. For more information or questions regarding this document please contact: Jessica@hispanicaccess.org

Pictures: Bears Ears National Monument, Cesar Chavez National Monument, Organ Mountains - Desert Peaks National Monument
Defending the Antiquities Act

Congress’ refusal to work across party lines on conservation and public lands has made this once bipartisan issue, controversial. The anti-public lands rhetoric and threats to sell or transfer public lands to private or state entities is a demonstration of their lack of commitment to protecting natural resources and cultural heritages of diverse communities.

The executive authority of the Antiquities Act has allowed Presidents from both parties to protect the places that represent the diverse cultural heritages of Americans that Congress has been unwilling to do. The Center for American Progress found that Presidents have a stronger record creating inclusive parks and monuments than Congress (Figure 1 - June 2015).

Efforts to limit the authority of the Antiquities Act, such as those proposed in S.33 - Improved National Monument Designation Process Act, will further enhance the inequitable representation of tribal nations and diverse communities among our national monuments.

Representation of Diverse Communities in National Parks and Monuments

The lack of representation of diverse peoples, history, and cultures in the among our National Parks and Monuments is unfitting to the prolific contributions that have been made and continue to be made by diverse communities to this nation.

A 2016 report by the Center for American Progress found that about one in every four national parks and monuments had a focus on diverse groups (Figure 2). A number that is not at all reflective of the demographics of this nation and an issue that must be addressed in our public lands.

Since the report’s release, the designations of Bears Ears National Monument, Gold Butte National Monument, Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument and other national monuments were steps towards increasing the diversity and inclusion of diverse communities in the places and stories protected.

Efforts to rescind or sell/transfer our national monuments are attacks on one of America’s most democratic institutions. The important history, heritage, and national resources they protect would be lost.

It is important that we protect these places now and for future generations.