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SR-116 (2017-2018)

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ENROLLED AUGUST 15, 2018

PASSED IN SENATE AUGUST 13, 2018

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2017–2018 REGULAR SESSION

SENATE RESOLUTION

NO. 116

Introduced by Senators Allen, Hertzberg, Hill, Leyva, and Stern

June 20, 2018

Relative to the California Desert

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SR 116, Allen.

WHEREAS, The California Desert is a land of hundreds of granite and limestone mountain ranges, tall sand dunes, mesas with cultural importance, and diverse volcanic features such as cinder cones, domes, and lava flows; and

WHEREAS, The California Desert includes the Mojave, Sonoran, and Great Basin deserts which are among the most unspoiled and unique lands in the world and the last areas in the world that are truly wild; and

WHEREAS, Americans have long been drawn to the stark beauty of the California Desert; and

WHEREAS, This fragile and unique ecosystem encompasses scenic, historical, archeological, environmental, ecological, wildlife, cultural, scientific, educational, and recreational values used and enjoyed by millions of Americans for hiking and camping, scientific study, and scenic appreciation; and

WHEREAS, Twenty-four years ago, in 1994, the California Desert Protection Act (CDPA) enlarged and redesignated Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Monuments as national parks, established Mojave National Preserve, and designated 69 new Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wilderness areas totaling 3.57 million acres; and

WHEREAS, The CDPA dramatically increased the level of protection for over 8.6 million acres of the California Desert and, for these reasons, the CDPA is widely regarded as one of our nation's most important conservation laws and an action that protected a vast wonderland of California's natural and cultural history; and

WHEREAS, In 2016 President Obama designated Castle Mountains, Sand to Snow, and Mojave Trails National Monuments to help fortify the desert against the impacts of climate change by connecting together millions of acres of protected and unprotected lands and waters, and by creating corridors through which at-risk species like bighorn sheep and desert tortoises are provided habitat, resiliency, and the ability to continue their movements; and

WHEREAS, Now covering 1.6 million acres, Mojave Trails National Monument connects Mojave National Preserve to Joshua Tree National Park and in doing so weaves together a stunning collection of public lands for the perseverance of wildlife and the enjoyment of current and future generations; and

WHEREAS, The California Desert is part of one of the largest undeveloped and intact ecosystems in North America, with more than 40 percent of California's native plant species on just 28 percent of the state's land mass; and

WHEREAS, The California Desert's plant diversity is likewise reflected in the biological diversity of animals, with many vulnerable species such as the desert tortoise, desert kit fox, bighorn sheep, golden eagles, and the endemic Mojave ground squirrel calling the landscape their home, and many species of migrating birds finding crucial rest stops in the desert as well; and

WHEREAS, The California Desert landscape, when undisturbed, provides crucial support for public health in California by reducing particulate matter pollution and offering untrammelled spaces for healthy recreation; and

WHEREAS, The California Desert provides a significant sink for atmospheric carbon, absorbing and storing large amounts of carbon into its soil, and absorbing even larger amounts of carbon as emissions increase, thus serving as a potentially important part of California's effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and

WHEREAS, The California Desert holds important water sources found in vast aquifers, seeps, springs, rivers, and intermittent streams and washes that come to life when it rains, and that are essential for the survival of people and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, Nonmotorized recreation on BLM lands, such as hunting and rock climbing, generated \$329 million in California in 2014 and supported 2,600 jobs; and

WHEREAS, The California Desert is home to California's largest state park, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, which spans three counties: San Diego, Riverside, and Imperial. At over 650,000 acres, it is the largest state park in the lower 48 states and contains stunning badlands, palm oases, slot canyons, and cactus-studded hills; and

WHEREAS, Our California Desert national parks support a growing tourism economy that in 2017 alone produced \$372 million in economic output in local communities, over 3,700 annual, sustainable jobs, and over \$136 million in labor income; and

WHEREAS, The Old Woman Mountains in the Mojave Trails National Monument contain sacred sites and cultural landscapes for the Chemehuevi, Mojave, Serrano, Cahuilla, Southern Paiute, and other Tribes that have lived in this desert region for millennia; and

WHEREAS, The region is a sacred landscape punctuated by landmarks esteemed by our tribal cultures, most notably, by the Salt Song Trail of the Chemehuevi and Southern Paiute Tribes; and

WHEREAS, The Mojave Trails National Monument also includes the historic remnants of World War II-era camps where thousands of soldiers trained for combat under General George Patton; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, That the California Desert is an ecological treasure and we should secure for the American people of this and future generations an enduring heritage of biodiversity, wilderness, national parks, and public land values in the California Desert; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.