

RE: Oppose Senate Amendment 3023 and 3126 to the Energy Policy Modernization Act (S. 2012), amendments to block new national parks and monuments

January 29, 2016

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the over 100 undersigned organizations and our millions of members across the country, we are writing to strongly urge you to OPPOSE Amendments 3023 and 3126 (authored by Sen. Mike Lee) – the “blocking new parks” amendments – to the Energy Policy Modernization Act (S. 2012).

These amendments would essentially gut the law that first protected nearly half of our national parks – the Antiquities Act. It is particularly alarming to see an attack on one of our most vital conservation tools that is so essential to our system of national parks and monuments being launched during the National Park Service Centennial year. Since it was signed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, the Antiquities Act has been used on a bipartisan basis by 16 Presidents (8 Republicans and 8 Democrats) to protect America’s most iconic natural, cultural, and historic places: the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, Fort Monroe, the Pacific Remote Islands, and Acadia, Zion and Olympic National Parks.

Since its inception over a hundred years ago, the Antiquities Act has been one of our nation’s most critical conservation tools for preserving our nation’s most important public lands and waters. The sheer diversity of historic, cultural, and natural treasures that have been protected by the Antiquities Act is the reason why groups representing sportsmen, cultural heritage organizations, evangelicals, conservation, recreation businesses, historic preservation, and many others all oppose efforts to undermine this vital law.

Not only do national monuments protect our irreplaceable natural, historic, and cultural resources for future generations, they benefit local economies today. Following the March 2013 protection of Rio Grande del Norte, visitation to the area increased by 40% and Taos, New Mexico saw an increase in lodgers’ tax and the hospitality sector’s gross receipts tax. Visitation to Ford Ord in California has increased tenfold since the monument designation.

Senate Amendment 3023 and 3126 are an attempt to block the designation of new national monuments, something that is wildly out of step with the American public’s interest in protecting our special places – especially apparent given the groundswell of positive support for our national parks shown during the celebration of the centennial year. According to Colorado College’s Conservation in the West Poll released this month, 80% of western voters support “future presidents continuing to protect existing public lands as national monuments.” This poll reinforces other surveys that document widespread public opposition to congressional attacks on new parks. In a December 2014 Hart Research Poll, 90% of Americans support the permanent protection of some public lands, monuments, wildlife refuges and wilderness. Americans want more protected public lands, not less! We believe that the Senate should listen to the American public and celebrate our national parks system and work towards making it even more inclusive of our nation’s diverse history and cultures, not attack the ability to add to it!

The changes proposed in amendment 3023 and 3126 are entirely contrary to the intent and purpose of this celebrated and effective conservation tool. The Antiquities Act was created by Congress specifically to allow the President to act to protect irreplaceable national treasures at times when Congress is unwilling or unable to act swiftly enough to do so. For over 100 years this tool has allowed forward thinking Presidents to act swiftly in the common interest to protect places like the Grand Canyon, Acadia, and Muir Woods which may have been lost forever without this tool. It is impossible to imagine the United States without being able to visit and celebrate these uniquely American places, but if the proposed amendments had been included in the act originally it is entirely possible these treasures would have been irreparably damaged.

Furthermore, national monuments designated under the Antiquities Act protect public lands owned jointly by all Americans. Granting a state legislature the ability to essentially veto a designation is entirely different than encouraging local input. Our federal lands are shared equally by all Americans and managed for the public good.

These amendments are a clear effort to block new parks and not an effort to protect local input. Recently successful community-led efforts to protect treasured public lands like Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument show that local collaboration and community input remain at the forefront throughout the monument-designation process, with robust public meetings prior to designations, thousands of public comments, and close contact with stakeholders to help guide management plans for newly protected sites and make recommendations for recreation and other uses.

For these reasons and many others, we urge you to OPPOSE Senator Lee's blocking new parks amendments (#3023 and 3126) to S. 2012.

Sincerely,

The Wilderness Society
Conservation Lands Foundation
National Parks Conservation Association
League of Conservation Voters
Alaska Wilderness League
Californians for Western Wilderness,
Green Latinos
Earthjustice
Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument
Friends of the Kalmiopsis
National Trust for Historic Preservation
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Islanders for the San Juan Islands National
Monument
Grand Canyon Wildlands Council
Friends of Arizona Rivers
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council
Tuleyome
Scenic America
Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship

HECHO (Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting,
and the Outdoors)
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Klamath Forest Alliance
Epic-Environmental Protection Information
Center
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
Marine Conservation Institute
Association of Zoos and Aquariums
Wilderness Workshop
Oceana
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Greenpeace USA
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Hispanic Federation
Los Padres ForestWatch
Wildlands Network
Partnership for Responsible Business
Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce
Santa Fe Green Chamber of Commerce

New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
Mojave Desert Land Trust
Amargosa Conservancy
The Wildlands Conservancy
Center for Biological Diversity
WILDCOAST
Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection
Conservation Law Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Association of Northwest Steelheaders
NW Guides and Anglers Association
Waitt Foundation
Waitt Institute
Natural Resources Defense Council
Evangelical Environmental Network
Conservation Alliance
Mendocino Land Trust
Friends of the Inyo
Friends of Browns Canyon
Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks
Fort Ord Recreation Trails
Utah Dine Bikeyah
Friends of Sloan Canyon
Western Slope Conservation Center
Friends of Gold Butte
Sierra Club
New Mexico Wildlife Federation
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Surfrider Foundation
Citizens for Dixie's Future
American Rivers
American Society of Landscape Architects
The Trust for Public Land
Montana Wilderness Association
Hispanic Access Foundation
Southwest Colorado Canyons Alliance
Friends of the San Pedro River
Friends of Pompeys Pillar
Friends of the Cliffs
Outdoor Industry Association
Grand Canyon Trust
National Wildlife Federation
Lost Coast Interpretive Association
Carrizo Plain Conservancy
Trinidad Coastal Land Trust
Conservation Colorado
Arizona Conservation Partners
Friends of Ironwood Forest

Cotoni - Coast Dairies National Monument
Campaign
Sempervirens Fund
Piedras Blancas Monument Committee
Friends of the Desert Mountains
Friends of Red Rock Canyon
Basin and Range Artists Collective
Friends of Cascade-Siskiyou
Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Southern Environmental Law Center
Mattole Salmon Group
Sanctuary Forest Inc.
Friends of Headwaters
Crow Canyon Archeological Center
Loxahatchie River Historical Society
Friends of the Owyhee
Friends of Black Rock-High Rock
Friends of Cedar Mesa
Basin Rangers
Archeology Southwest
Dolores River Boating Advocates
Bodie Hills Conservation Partnership
Friends of the Oregon Badlands
Friends and Neighbors of Deschutes Canyon
Area
Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve
Birds of Prey Partnership
Friends of Agua Fria National Monument
Friends of Joshua Tree Forest
Friends of Sonoran Desert National Monument
Mattole Restoration Council