

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2025

Remarks on Establishing the Chuckwalla National Monument and the Sáttítla Highlands National Monument

January 14, 2025

The President. Thank you, Rhian. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Please. *[Applause]* I'm going home now. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Please—please sit down.

Rhian, thank you for that introduction. Your commitment to conservation gives me so much optimism for the future, and I mean that sincerely.

Before I go much further, I want to explain to you why we have these screens up here. I was hoping we were going to do this in place so the American people—this being covered by the media—would see what we're talking about—feel it, sort of taste it.

This is as close as we could get. I'm going to—as I speak, hopefully, they're going to bring up the areas I'm talking about so people get some sense of what we're talking about.

But I want to make a special thanks to Secretary Deb Haaland whose incredible leadership these past 4 years has scared the hell out of me. *[Laughter]* I've been doing this job a long time not as President but in public life. I'm afraid to tell her "no." *[Laughter]* She doesn't take no for an answer on anything. I promise you, she has a list—*[laughter]*—still.

You've done a hell of a job. I'm so proud to have nominated you for that. And thanks for the job you've done.

As you all know, I was in California last week where the event was supposed to be held, but we had to postpone it because of the fires in Los Angeles, among the worst wildfires in California history. It's devastating.

For Kamala and for so many of you, it's home. She and I and our entire administration have been working closely with Governor Newsom, Senator Padilla, Senator Schiff, the entire congressional delegation to make sure California has every possible resource to fight these fires and help the survivors and fight back against the misinformation that's going out.

You know, that includes our heroic firefighters and first responders. The hearts of the Nation are with the victims and families left behind and all the people who have lost their homes, livelihoods, and so much—so much of the—to these fires. It's been devastating. It's incredible. It's incredible, the thousands of homes lost.

Folks, yet another reminder a tragedy like this is not about blue States and red States, not about conservatives and liberals. It's about the United States of America—the United States of America.

And now, to turn to today's event, in addition to Secretary Haaland, we have elected officials of the community and from the Tribal community—the "Indian Nations." I learned that a long time ago from Danny Inouye. *[Laughter]* Just want you to know that, okay?

I once said "those Indian reservations"—he said: "No, no, no. Joe, come here." Anyway, I was only 30 years old, but I learned it really quickly. *[Laughter]*

Look, members of the California delegation and Senator Padilla, Representative Ruiz championed legislation to establish these national monuments; key members of my administration, Brenda, Chair of the Council of Economic and Quality *[Environmental Quality]*;

White House correction]; and you know, and the staff from the Bureau of Land Management and the Fire Service—the Forest Service.

Like many families, Jill and I made it a tradition to take our children and grandchildren to national parks and monuments every year. I wanted them to see—wanted them to see, feel, smell, taste, look at just what had been preserved.

And every time I looked at it, I thought about Teddy Roosevelt and these people, what they—all the preserve—all they preserved. Imagine had they not acted. Imagine—imagine—had they not acted.

And I wanted them to witness the majesty and beauty of America. It's absolutely majestic. Our natural wonders are the heart and soul of our Nation. And you all know it in this room. They unite us. They inspire us. It's a birthright we pass down from generation to generation.

And that's why, on day one of my administration and since then, we've been carrying out the most aggressive climate agenda ever in the history of the world. *[Applause]* I mean it. And make no mistake, I was able to do it because of you. *[Applause]* I—no, I mean it. But—I'm not kidding you. Because of you, including the historic steps to conserve our natural resources for the ages.

My second week as President, I signed—I signed an Executive order establishing the first-ever conservation goal to protect 30 percent of all our lands and waters everywhere in America by 2030—30 percent.

I call this national campaign "America the Beautiful." That's what it's called: "America the Beautiful." And over the last 4 years, we have delivered, with your help, putting America on track to meet that bold goal.

Restoring and creating new national monuments; conserving hundreds of millions of acres of lands and waters all across the—America, from New England to Minnesota, Texas to Colorado, Arizona to Alaska.

I've also created the first national marine sanctuary in U.S.—in the United States proposed by Indigenous communities. And I thank you for your push. I thank you for your push. It stretches 116 miles along the California coast—116 miles. It's going to protect the natural and cultural resources while also supporting our progress on offshore wind, I might add.

And today I'm proud to use my authority under the Antiquities Act to designate two more national monuments in California. First, Chuckwalla National Monument in the southern California desert. This monument will protect more than 624,000 acres of wildlife habitat and sacred ancestral lands.

Ladies and gentlemen, together [with; White House correction] prior designations, we're going to create a contiguous corridor along the Colorado River of nearly 18 million acres of protected land, the largest in the lower 48 States. And the area—*[applause]*.

And for those at home who may be listening, that's bigger than the entire State of West Virginia. *[Laughter]* And it's called the Moab-Mojave Conservation Corridor.

Look, today's action will also protect and preserve mountain ranges and rugged canyons, desert floors and deep valleys, sandy slopes, stunning peaks. Tucked away in the desert landscape are beautiful springs and over 50 rare plants and animals: palm trees, cacti, lavender flowers, lizards and mountain lions, bats, bighorn sheep, owls, desert tortoises—I mean, this is incredible what's there.

This action also preserves the mosaic of trails woven together by Tribal Nations that trace their origins back thousands of years—thousands of years. And left behind on these trails are ancient ceramics, tools, rock art, sacred ceremonial sites that will also be preserved.

We're also preserving ruins of old mines from the 1800s. Their construction drove out Indigenous people from their homes, a reminder of the harm that was done.

And there are remnants of a U.S. Army camp—trained units in desert combat shortly after World War—we entered World War II.

For generations, this place of wonder has attracted outdoor enthusiasts, from hikers, horseback riders exploring these vast lands, as well as scientists and geologists who are studying how the earth evolves.

Many veterans also returned here to heal their wounds, mental and physical, and invisible wounds as well, seeking solace and serenity in ways that only nature can provide. And you all know that. Only nature can provide some of this. Nothing else.

And next door to this monument, solar energy is being built, which proves what I've often said: We don't have to choose between the environment and the economy or between conservation and clean energy. We can do both at the same time. At the same time.

This monument offers a perfect road map for how to strike that balance. It's a key element of our climate agenda. It includes the most significant climate law ever in the history of the world. That's not hyperbole. That's a fact.

A law that's positioned us to cut carbon emissions in half by 2030; that's generated \$300 billion so far in new private sector clean energy investment—\$300 billion—and that's creating hundreds of thousands of jobs and unleashing a manufacturing boom all across America. You know, and this matters a great deal.

Second—the second national monument I'm designating today is this—these—this is important. I mispronounced it the first time—[*laughter*]*—Sáttitla Highlands in Northern California.*

Two hundred—240,000 acres of mountains that contain pristine waters and forests and stunning rock formations, lava fields, craters, and volcanic activity from—volcanic activity centuries ago. At the center of these highlands, a dormant volcano cradles a beautiful lake inside the summit.

The Highlands are home for countless plants, animals, including fox, frogs, bald eagles, bumblebees. The night skies there are darkest in America, and distant galaxies and stars are extra visible. It's incredible.

In the 1960s, these lava formations were used by NASA to train astronauts on Apollo missions how to observe and take samples from the Moon. And ever since, this landscape supports California's outdoor recreation economy, from biking, hunting, fishing, canoeing, and so much more.

This area is also sacred in many—sacred to many Tribal Nations so were violently—who were violently forced to leave their homes. You know, they held ancient ceremonies here. They found sources of reverence and healing here. And they're preserving lands fundamental to who they are and their way of life.

Folks, it's important.

Today's monument announcements build on another conservation action I took. Last week, I signed two directives to protect the entire East Coast, West Coast, and Florida Coast of the eastern Gulf and parts of the Alaskan Coast from offshore drilling for natural gas. And I might add: That is a big deal. [*Laughter*]

My State is only 3 feet above sea level. *[Laughter]* Oh, you're laughing, but it's important. Nearly 40 percent of Americans live in coastal communities.

And it's not only good for the environment, it's good for our economy. It will protect coastal fishing industry that generates \$320 billion of income a year, beach tourism that generates nearly \$220 billion annually, and 3 million American jobs.

It also saves us billions in potential damages by avoiding oils spills, like Deepwater Horizon.

You know, in the spirit of conserving not just the waters and lands, but our history, I did something else. I became the first American President to formally recognize a group of mostly Native Hawaiians. They lived for years on uninhabited Pacific Islands in the runup to World War II to claim them for the United States. As a nation, we honor their service, sacrifice as patriots to our country and stewards of the land. We owe them.

Let me close with this. As President, I've had the privilege of bestowing our Nation's highest honors on the world's preeminent environmental leaders.

Two weeks ago, I bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Jane Goodall. Well, guess what? She memorialized—she has memorialized a global movement to protect the planet. She's done an incredible job.

In October, I bestowed the National Medal of the Arts on Clyde Butcher, who grew up in California and became America's most acclaimed landscape photographer today. Clyde once said, quote, "Wilderness is a spiritual necessity." I'd add that our wilderness is a national necessity.

Over the past 4 years, I am proud to have kept my commitment to protect more land and water than any President in American history: more than 670 million acres, bigger than the size of Texas and Alaska combined. And without you standing up with me, we couldn't ever done it.

It's about our planet, our people. It's about America itself. Our outdoor treasures are the pride of our country, a bond between the physical and spiritual world, a bridge to our past and to our future. Conserving them not only protects the livelihoods of people who depend on them, it preserves a key piece of our history and full—a full American story.

It unites us through the ages. It connects us to something bigger than ourselves. And above all, it reminds of who we are—who we are.

I just had another baby grandchild born. Guess what? Actually, to be precise—I hate to say it—a great-granddaughter—*[laughter]*—or son—great-grandson. And guess what? Think what this means for your children, your grandchildren, and your great-grandchildren. I mean it sincerely. Think of what it means if we don't do this.

Above all, it reminds us of who we are. We're the United States of America. And there's nothing, nothing, nothing beyond our capacity when we do it together.

I want to thank you all again, because I'm not—this is not hyperbole. We could've never done any of this without the support of the people in this room. You stepped up. You made the case. People listened to you. Ordinary people listened to you about what—how important this is.

And by the way, if I had my way, I'd make sure everyone can see the natural wonders, because they'd have a more reverent view of what we are.

So, folks, God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

[At this point, the President moved to the signing table.]

The first bill I'm signing is the establishment of the California Chuckwalla National Monument.

Today is the 14th, right?

Participant. Yes.

[The President signed the proclamation titled "Establishment of the Chuckwalla National Monument."]

And the signing pen goes to the Secretary, because I'm afraid not to give it to her. *[Laughter]* No, you've done an incredible job, and I'll get each of you a signing pen.

All right.

Secretary of the Interior Debra A. Haaland. Thank you, sir.

The President. You're welcome.

The second I'm signing is the establishment of the Highlands National Monument. Here we go.

I've got to fill this in?

Audience member. Sáttitla.

The President. I know, Santino [Sáttitla; White House correction]. I'm trying—why—the day of—on this hand—you'll fill in the dates here, guys? *[Laughter]* All right.

Audience member. The 14th, sir.

The President. No, I know that, but I don't want to——

[The President signed the proclamation titled "Establishment of the Sáttitla Highlands National Monument."]

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Thank you very much.

[Inaudible] [Laughter] Thank you all. I really mean it, none of this would have happened without you guys. I really, really, genuinely mean it. This was a national movement you generated.

So thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 5:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rhian Reyes, a campaign organizer of Audubon California's Deserts and Salton Sea Program and alumna of the Chuckwalla Youth Advisory Panel; Vice President Kamala D. Harris; and Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality Brenda Mallory. He also referred to his great-grandson William Brannon Neal IV. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 15.

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