

Holding our breath: DAC meetings and National Monuments Review

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Desert District Advisory Council (DAC)

A DECISION WAS EXPECTED in September regarding reinstatement of **BLM's** advisory council meetings, which were suspended in May. **BLM** had tentatively scheduled a **DAC** meeting for November 3–4, in Ridgecrest, but it now appears that the meeting may not be scheduled earlier than March 2018 – the date and venue are subject to **DOI** formally confirming that **DAC** can resume its work.

National Monuments review

WITH FEDERAL LANDS under new management at the **Department of Interior**, vast swaths of public lands – possibly millions of acres – are under threat of being wrested away from recreational users, conservationists, ranchers, hunters, and other Stakeholders. The administration is contemplating the most sweeping and consequential repurposing of public lands safeguarded by protective designations in US history (Executive Order 13792). Under consideration is the elimination or downsizing of twenty-two land-based national monuments that were designated by executive proclamation under **presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama**. All but one are located in western states, with seven located in California (**Cascade-Siskiyou** straddles the California-Oregon border).

The public comment period closed on July 10th, and **Interior Secretary Zinke's** report was submitted to **President Trump** on August 24th. It was not made public. However, on September 17th, **Zinke's** 19-page memorandum was leaked to the press.[1] He advised making changes to 10 monuments (including marine monuments), and shrinking four land-based monuments, including **Bears Ears** and **Grand Staircase-Escalante** (both in UT), **Gold Butte** (NM), and **Cascade-Siskiyou** (CA-OR).



All but one of the national monuments under review are located between the Pacific coast and Colorado. Source: DOI.

During the summer, **Zinke** preliminarily recommended sparing several monuments from any changes, including **Sand to Snow** in California. Although, the fate of California's other national monuments under review may seem less precarious in the light of **Zinke's** leaked memorandum, it is anyone's guess what actions the president will take. If he felt emboldened to slash away when he ordered the monument review in April, he may have second thoughts after the public response to it – 99% of the comment letters favored maintaining the size of the monuments or growing them or designating more new monuments.

Public sentiment notwithstanding, at least one California monument – **Mojave Trails** – is a ripe target for significant downsizing.

Mojave Trails in the crosshairs

Mojave Trails, which is California's largest national monument, at 1.6 million acres, is vulnerable to scaling back by as much as one-third. Prior to the monument designation, permits were approved for renewable energy projects on 600,000 acres now within the

1.) Available online at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4052225-Interior-Secretary-Ryan-Zinke-s-Report-to-the.html> or short URL: <https://goo.gl/QKuca7>; reported by Juliet Eilperin in the *Washington Post*, available online at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/shrink-at-least-4-national-monuments-and-modify-a-half-dozen-others-zinke-tells-trump/2017/09/17/a0df45cc-9b48-11e7-82e4-f1076f6d6152_story.html or short URL: <https://goo.gl/u6TA3N>.

monument's footprint. Cadiz Inc., which is the largest private landowner in the valley, aspires to pump 16.3 billion gallons of water annually over 50 years from the desert aquifer and pipe it to Orange County for its residential water customers.[2] To achieve its goal, Cadiz has contributed to many California politicians' campaigns and bankrolled lobbying efforts – for decades. Because Cadiz is now literally boxed in by the monument, for its plans to proceed the company is seeking a right-of-way waiver from **BLM** to build the pipeline, but a drastic reduction in the size of the monument would be a desirable outcome for Cadiz.

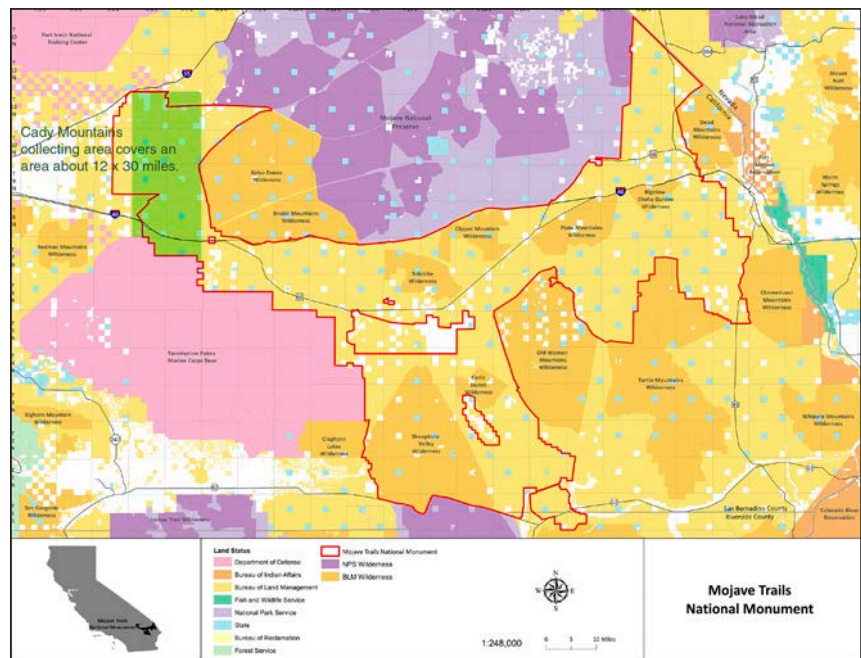
Among commercial Stakeholders, Cadiz Inc. is a leading protagonist in the battle over **Mojave Trails**, which is shaping up to become the object of a legal and legislative slugfest over whether or how much water may be pumped from an aquifer that sustains the wider region, including the monument itself, **Mojave Desert National Preserve** to the north, **Joshua Tree National Park** to the south, numerous landmarks, sacred tribal lands, and at least 10 previously designated wilderness areas, not to mention the local desert communities.

Cited less often, but no less a possibility is the US Marine Corps annexing parts of **Mojave Trails** if they fall out of protected status – the Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms flanks the monument's southwestern boundary. The firing test range at the dry lake at the foot of the Bullion Mountains is adjacent to Lavic Siding, a favorite collecting area with Rockhounds.

Seventeen Republican legislators, including **Calif. Representative Paul Cook** (R-Apple Valley), wrote a letter to **DOI** supporting the monument's downsizing.[3] (**Cook** is on record advocating a 500,000-acre reduction to accommodate commercial projects.) Private companies have lobbied hard

for shrinking the monument, none more aggressively than Cadiz Inc., which has the support of **Rep. Cook**, as well as **California President Pro Tem of the Senate Kevin de León** (D-Los Angeles) and **Senator Ricardo Lara** (D-Bell Gardens). **Deputy Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt** was formerly on Cadiz's payroll as a lobbyist, so he is not perceived as being dispassionate about **Mojave Trails**.

Among the projects proposed before the monument designation, overdrafting the aquifer has been decried as an existential threat to the desert's fragile ecosystem and unsustainable for local communities. Keeping **Mojave Trails** intact and defending against Cadiz, specifically, now has the backing of many conservation groups and political heavyweights, including **Senator Dianne Feinstein**, **Governor Jerry Brown**, and **Lt. Governor Gavin Newsom**. **Assembly Bill 1000**, sponsored by **Laura Friedman** (D-Los Angeles, Glendale, and Burbank), sought to finally quash Cadiz's aspirations. The bill died in committee on September 1st, but its proponents have vowed to fight on.



Many favorite hobby collecting areas are within Mojave Trails NM. Many sites are scattered throughout the Cady Mountains (see green highlighted area), part of Afton Canyon, part of Lavic Siding, and Cadiz, among others. Source: BLM.

- 2.) The proposed Cadiz Water Project was discussed in the May 2017 issue of *The Pegmatite*, available online at: <http://www.sdmg.org/articles/201705/the-rime-of-the-mojave-mariner-sdmg-pegmatite-201705.pdf> or short URL: <https://goo.gl/Nvq6if>.
- 3.) Available online at: <https://westerncaucus.house.gov/sites/westerncaucus.house.gov/files/documents/6.30.17%20Final%20letter%20to%20Zinke%20Antiquities%20Review.pdf> or short URL: <https://goo.gl/u5xYBr>