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DEPUTY WHIP
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CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS
NEW DEMOCRAT COALITION

April 7, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your strong commitment to the conservation of America's public lands and waters and for supporting the underserved communities you represent throughout the country. As one of your first actions in office, you committed your administration to the goal of conserving 30% of this nation's lands and waters by 2030 and your administration's *America the Beautiful* initiative has made many strides in the past year to achieve that goal. As the representative of El Paso, Texas, I have also worked tirelessly to ensure that El Pasoans have access to the shared heritage of this country through our amazing public lands. To that end, I write to bring your attention to a proposal to protect Castner Range in the heart of El Paso as a national monument. I have introduced legislation (H.R. 2752) at the request of my community to permanently protect Castner Range, but I am also asking you to consider its designation as a national monument through the Antiquities Act. I have engaged closely with the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Army on the protection and preservation of Castner Range. Last month, I was honored to host Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland, in her visit to El Paso where she met with and heard directly from El Pasoans advocating for the protection of Castner Range.

Castner Range consists of over 7,000 acres of land that was formerly used by Fort Bliss Army Base as an artillery and munitions range. The Army ceased operations on Castner Range in 1966 and declared the land excess in 1971, at which community support for conserving the range as open space began to build. For the past fifty years, El Pasoans have come together to support the protection of Castner Range. At the same time, the Army's ownership and stewardship of the land has protected the area from development and degradation. In a similar model to a number of other military installations that have become premier places of outdoor recreation, we hope that Castner Range can be protected as a national monument for the enjoyment of all.

The breathtaking landscape has a cultural history that is evident in the numerous archaeological and historical sites throughout Castner Range, including rock shelters, petroglyphs, pottery shards and bedrock mortars. It is home to some of the highest peaks in the Franklin Mountains and it serves as a protection of the Hueco Bolson aquifer, where El Paso draws its drinking water. Due to the presence of natural springs, Mexican golden poppies bloom annually in the arid desert, creating a dramatic landscape that is the pride of El Paso. It will connect to the Franklin Mountains State Park, making a contiguous piece of habitat for a diverse array of wildlife.

The community which I represent in El Paso is a minority community that has often been overlooked in environmental matters. Communities like mine have often borne the brunt of irresponsible environmental

policies while being excluded from enjoying the benefits of open spaces and public lands. According to the [United Nations](#), in 2014 (the latest data compiled by the survey), El Paso had 3.01 square meters of green space per capita compared to 3,856.79 square meters per capita in the more affluent city of Houston, Texas. The protection of public access to Castner Range will help create vital outdoor recreation opportunities for a community that has for too long been overlooked.

Your Administration's *America the Beautiful* initiative is intended to address the three interlocking crises of nature loss, climate change, and inequitable access to the outdoors. Protecting Castner Range is a unique opportunity to make progress in addressing all three of these crises through protecting critical habitat for imperiled species, preserving clean water upon which our city relies particularly on in the face of climate change, and expanding access to the outdoors for an underserved and too often overlooked community. We cannot afford to lose another opportunity to protect this place for El Paso and the nation. As you move to implement your visionary goals of conservation, I urge you to consider using the powers granted to your office under the Antiquities Act to designate Castner Range as a national monument. I would welcome any opportunity to meet with you to discuss the proposal and invite you to Castner Range, the crown jewel of El Paso.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your commitment to our public lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Veronica Escobar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress