



The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20240

The Honorable Brenda Mallory
Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden, Secretary Austin, Secretary Haaland, and Chair Mallory:

Thank you for your commitment to our nation's public lands. Through your America the Beautiful initiative, the restoration of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, and your efforts to reform our broken oil and gas leasing system - it is clear that protecting our nation's public lands and waterways is as important to you as it is to those of us who have donned a uniform.

Your efforts are appreciated. But to achieve our collective goals, more is required – from all of us.

As retired senior military leaders, we are well-aware of the special relationship veterans and military families have with these iconic places. From the heights of Mount Katahdin to the deserts of Joshua Tree, our nation's public lands have long been turned to by veterans as places of reflection, reunion, and healing. We view protecting and expanding our nation's public lands as an extension of our service to this country and the duty of anyone who thinks themselves a patriot.

Presently, one such undertaking is the campaign to have the Castner Range, which is part of the U.S. Army's Fort Bliss in West Texas, designated as a National Monument through the Antiquities Act. This move would ensure military and cultural heritage sites, endangered species, scientific and environmental wonders, and an awe-inspiring landscape, are permanently protected. Moreover, a National Monument designation of Castner Range by President Biden would benefit marginalized communities, specifically indigenous and Latino peoples. These communities have been paramount to our military's success, but disproportionately bear the brunt of climate impacts and traditionally have less access to nature. Additionally, designating Castner Range as a National Monument would stimulate the local economy through expanded outdoor recreational opportunities.

Veterans and military families have long been central figures in efforts to create, expand, and safeguard our nation's greatest treasures – our public lands and waters. For example, fellow veteran President Teddy Roosevelt used the Antiquities Act to protect millions of acres during his presidency. World War II veteran Earl Shaffer became the first person to thru-hike the Appalachian Trail following his service. And the veterans of today who mobilized and organized in communities across the nation for years to ensure that the Land and Water Conservation Fund was permanently and fully funded, an effort that was finally achieved with passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. Wherever one finds an effort to protect our wild spaces, one will find a veteran lending their voice to those efforts.

The designation of Castner Range as a National Monument is widely supported among El Paso elected officials, community leaders, conservation groups, and military veterans like us. We are ready to work with you to do whatever we can to see the Castner Range National Monument made a reality – for ourselves and for future generations.

Sincerely,

BG Steven Anderson, USA (Ret)
Brig.Gen. Ricardo Aponte, USAF (Ret)
BGen Stephen Cheney, USMC (Ret)
MG Paul Eaton, USA (Ret)
BGen Leif Hendrickson, USMC (Ret)
RADM Mike Mathis, USN (Ret)
MG Gale Pollock, USA (Ret)
RADM Mike Smith, USN (Ret)

Cc: Congresswoman Veronica Escobar