



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 19, 2014

Contact: Sarah Nolan, CAFé Executive Director, 575-520-1624

**Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks  
Protected for all time as a National Monument  
New Mexico's Faith leaders celebrate President Obama's action**

LAS CRUCES, N.M. – Spiritual leaders in Las Cruces and nearby communities today are celebrating news that the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region has officially been designated a national monument. President Barack Obama used executive authority to make the designation this Wednesday, May 21.

Sarah Nolan, Executive Director of faith-based non-profit New Mexico Communities in Action and Faith (CAFé), applauded the President's executive action, saying that the new national monument will ensure the protection of sites that have deep spiritual significance for local people across many faiths.

"The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region is filled with spiritually significant sites that were previously at risk of being vandalized, destroyed or developed," Nolan said. "But thanks to President Obama's efforts – and the work of Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and Senators Heinrich and Udall – these sacred lands will receive needed protection forever, allowing Americans to enjoy them for generations to come."

Many sites within the newly designated monument that have been at the center of religious ceremonies and gatherings for generations. These include places of importance to Native Americans and Catholics. Members of the Ysleta del Sur and the Piro-Manso-Tiwa Pueblo tribes still collect sotol and yucca along the Organ Mountain slopes for use in religious ceremonies.

Local Pastor Father Vince Petersen of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church said the national monument designation was needed for the spiritual well-being of the people.

"We believe that God has made us stewards of the environment for a reason, and that reason is so we will protect his sacred creation," said Father Vince. "Diverse leaders and members from Doña Ana County's diverse faith community have been advocating for an Organ Mountains-

Desert Peaks National Monument for quite some time now, and it feels wonderful knowing that President Obama listened to us and acted to protect our public lands.”

U.S. Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich co-sponsored a bill in December that called for the establishment of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. Their work paved the way for this designation by President Obama, who used his powers under the Antiquities Act of 1906 to create the monument.

####