



LEAGUE of UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS

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LULAC: Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument Designation a promise kept to New Mexico's Hispanic Community

Monument brimming with Latino History, Sites of Incredible Cultural Significance

LAS CRUCES, N.M. – The New Mexico chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and Las Cruces' Latino and Hispanic communities today are celebrating news that the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region will officially become a national monument.

It was announced today that President Barack Obama will use the executive authority of the Antiquities Act to give this nearly 500,000-acre region of public lands in southern New Mexico permanent protection as a national monument on Wednesday, May 21, 2014.

Ralph Arellanes, the New Mexico State Director for LULAC, said that creating the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument is vital to preserving the heritage of American Hispanics and Latinos because of the abundant historical and cultural resources found within the region.

"New Mexico LULAC and our community are very happy President Obama is protecting the rich Hispanic and Latino heritage and culture that define the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region," Arellanes said. "These public lands are a direct link to our history and traditions and keep us connected with our families today. Recognizing the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks as a national monument honors our state's Hispanic heritage and culture."

Included within the national monument are the northern boundary of the Gadsden Purchase which redefined the American-Mexico border 150 years ago; landmarks along the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, use of which dates back over 12,000 years; and many prominent geographic features with Spanish names, indicative of the role Hispanics have played in the area for centuries, such as the Sierra de Las Uvas and the Portrillo, Robledo, and Doña Ana Mountains.

Paul "Pablo" A. Martinez, President of LULAC Council 120 in Las Cruces, echoed Arellanes' statements and also expressed gratitude toward U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich for their working toward the designation of the new monument.

“The lands located within the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region make up a big part of the story of Latinos in America, which is why their protection is so important,” Martinez said. “I am glad that President Obama is using his executive authority to officially protect the region. I also appreciate Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich for urging Congress to act and Secretary Jewell for meeting with the community here in Las Cruces. These efforts informed the President’s decision to establish this national monument.”

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks is the third site significant to Latino heritage to receive a national monument designation by President Obama within the last two years. The President used the same executive authority under the Antiquities Act to create the César E. Chávez National Monument in California in September 2012 and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument near Taos, New Mexico, in March 2013.

“These three monuments combined are an important recognition that the Latino story is a critical piece of the American story,” Martinez said. “And that recognition is a promise kept by President Obama to both protect public lands and fully embrace the diversity of America.”

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