Castle Mountains National Monument
Photo credit: National Park Service

CASTLE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT, CALIFORNIA

THE PLACE:

Located inside and managed by the Mojave National Preserve, Castle Mountains National Monument's nearly 21,000 acres connect remote watersheds and wildlife corridors along the California-Nevada border. Castle Mountains' rugged peaks can be seen from hundreds of miles in all directions. Designated in 2016 by President Barack Obama, the monument's remoteness provides solitude, dark skies, and the increasingly rare sounds of nature. It's also home to rich cultural and historic resources such as Native American archeological sites.

WHY IT'S SPECIAL:

Scientists have called the Castle Mountains one of the Mojave Desert's most important habitats. The monument's spectacular native grassland is a hotspot for botanical diversity that includes 28 species of grasses, about half of which are rare. It's also home to some of the finest eastern Joshua tree forests remaining in the Mojave.

Charismatic desert bighorn sheep and other wildlife still use ancient trails that traverse the monument. Numerous bat species live in rock crevices and abandoned mines. Rare animals include Townsend's big-eared bats, California leaf-nosed bats, Swainson's hawks, golden eagles, desert tortoises, Bendire's thrashers and gray vireos.

In addition to the iconic Castle Mountains, the monument protects part of the 226-square mile Lanfair Valley watershed and helps to maintain a large groundwater aquifer that feeds Piute Spring, the only perennial stream and riparian corridor located inside the Mojave National Preserve. This area is critical for both migratory and resident wildlife and unique plants.

Prehistoric rock art and archeological sites are found throughout the area. The rock art indicates sites of significant cultural importance to the Fort Mojave and Chemehuevi Tribes; it marks routes through the Castle Mountains likely traveled by both Tribes.

THE STAKES:

Castle Mountains National Monument is mineral rich with large gold deposits that make it a target for the mining industry. The Center for Biological Diversity has successfully fought mining-related projects and opposes a current proposal to expand gold mining on BLM-managed public land and private inholdings within the monument. Mining would use precious desert groundwater and poisonous cyanide to extract gold, a process that risks polluting groundwater for decades to come with heavy metals and other toxic materials. Reduced availability of groundwater, along with risk of toxic discharges, could also devastate oases like Piute Springs that are critical for bighorn sheep and migratory birds. Stripping protections to allow mining would irreparably harm the area.

Contact:
Lisa Belenky, Center for Biological Diversity, (415) 385-5694 lbelenky@biologicaldiversity.org