SONORAN INSTITUTE

Shaping the Future of the West

SANTA ROSA & SAN JACINTO MOUNTAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT

The National Landscape Conservation System includes 27 million acres of our most spectacular public lands, gathered together to conserve the essential fabric of the American spirit.

LANDSCAPES OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

California

The 280,000 acres that make up the monument include publicly owned lands managed by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service, tribal lands controlled by the Cahuilla Indians, and state lands administered by several different California agencies.

NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PUBLIC LANDS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

www.blm.gov/nlcs

The Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument rises beyond a field of brittlebush in the Coachella Valley in southwestern California.

Monumental Beauty

On a spring morning the vista from the Frank Bogert Trail in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument can take your breath away. It starts with the bright-yellow brittlebush blooming on the side of the trail, opens up to the red tile roofs of Palm Springs in the valley below, then stretches to encompass stark desert hills that quickly become mountains, ending with towering, snow-capped peaks framed in blue.

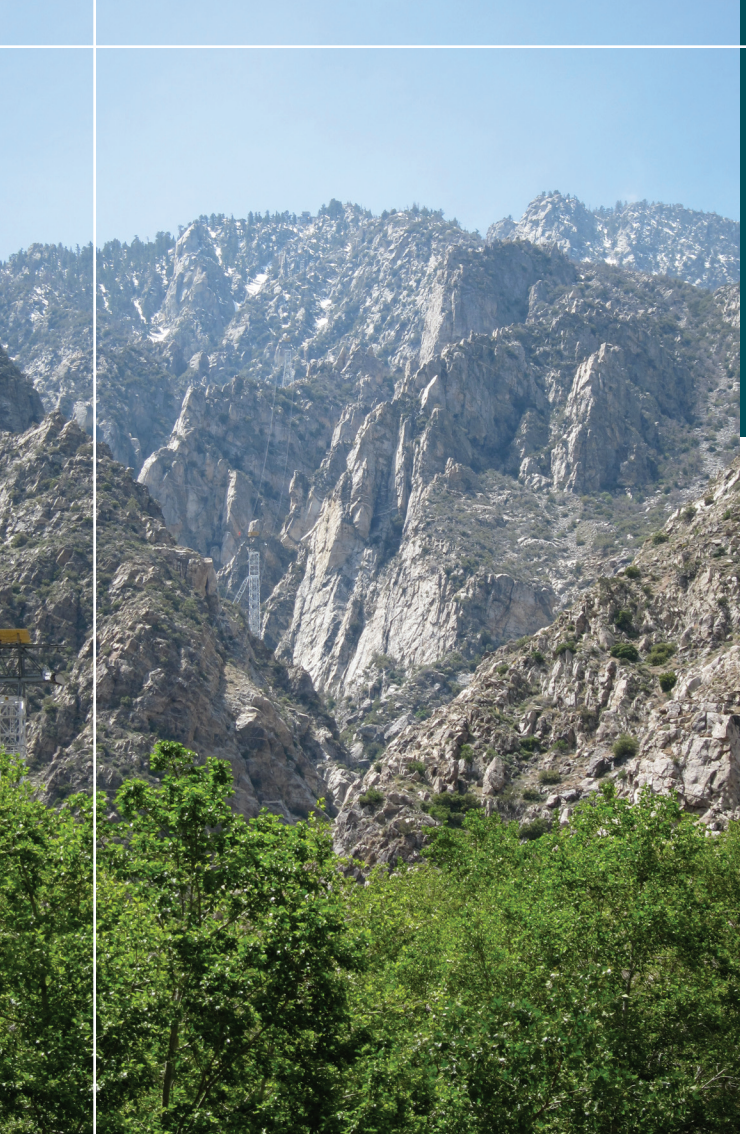
"Too bad there's no view, huh?" says Buford Crites, president of the Friends of the Desert Mountains, standing at the trailhead.

The Friends group, which provides support to the monument through a range of activities, is the main reason the trail opened this past May. The Bureau of Land Management's acquisition of this vast acreage in 1987 was due in large part to the Friends' efforts and commitment to establish the national monument. It's one of many land acquisitions for the monument that the Friends have facilitated since the group's inception.

Their work has made the Friends of the Desert Mountains an important partner in the operation of a national monument that depends on a set of relationships as complicated as the breathtaking landscapes within its boundaries. The 280,000 acres that make up the monument include publicly owned land managed by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service, tribal lands controlled by the Cahuilla Indians, and state lands administered by several different California agencies.

The monument also has privately held property within its borders, and in the Coachella Valley immediately below are many communities with vested interests in how it's managed. "Only about 60 percent of the land within the monument is actually federally owned," says Jim Foote, national monument manager, "which means it can require a fair amount of collaboration to get things done."

But the partnerships forged over the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument are also a source of strength, bringing the talents and resources of a range of public and private organizations together to support an area of tremendous beauty and significance.



"Only about 60 percent of the land within the monument is actually federally owned, which means it can require a fair amount of collaboration to get things done."

- Jim Foote, national monument manager

The winners are both visitors and local residents. The Frank Bogert Trail provides one example. Bogert was a longtime mayor of the city, a community booster and an avid horseman. When the land became available, the Friends of the Desert Mountains saw a way to help the monument while honoring Bogert. The trailhead is only a short walk from the edge of Palm Springs and is intended for both hiking and equestrian use, benefiting nearly everyone in the community. "This is going to get a lot of use," Crites says with satisfaction.

The monument is part of the National Landscape Conservation System, which was created to bring into one system a collection of specially designated areas to be managed with an emphasis on the conservation aspect of the BLM's multiple-use mission, and which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. Foote believes the monument's inclusion in the system has been important in building a sense of common identity among its many stakeholders.

But the heart of making it work, he says, is establishing relationships that build trust. "We talk a lot," Foote acknowledges. "What makes it easy is we all get along."

Astonishing Natural Wonders

The Coachella Valley is best known for its connection to old Hollywood, the world of Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope and other stars who frequented Palm Springs and neighboring communities. It first entered the national consciousness as a sun-streaked retreat for the rich and famous, a man-made Eden of manicured lawns, carefully pruned palm trees, golf courses and dry martinis served on the veranda at sunset.

But the '50s snapshot can obscure the area's astonishing natural wonders, which are an increasingly popular attraction. The valley is one of the driest places in the United States, averaging only 2½ inches of rain annually on its eastern end. While the valley floor sits below sea level, on its southwestern rim the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains rise to nearly 11,000 feet. On a clear day they hang over the palm-topped valley with a hypnotic clarity, snow-capped nearly all year, so steep they seem pushed straight up out of the earth.

Buford Crites, Friends of the Desert Mountains president, on Santa Rosa Mountain in the national monument

That's not far from true. The San Andreas Fault runs through the area and the mountains are the result of two of the earth's tectonic plates pushing hard against each other. Their vertiginous slopes change dramatically as you climb: sand dotted with agave and cactus, palm oases tucked in high canyons, pine forest and, finally, a windswept landscape of grass and granite above the timberline. About 30 rare or endangered species live within the monument, including Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep, the desert slender salamander and least Bell's vireo, a small gray songbird that nests in the Santa Rosa Mountains.

"It's a fascinating place to live," says Crites, who's called it home for more than 30 years, "so very different from anywhere else in the United States."

But the natural splendor of the area is under pressure. According to the Friends of the Desert Mountains, 19,000 new residents move into the Coachella Valley every year, and 3.5 million tourists and conventioneers visit. The Friends were born after a fight over a hotel built on a hillside above the city of Rancho Mirage. That battle was lost, but, Crites says, "it was a wake-up call."

The Friends have been involved in the purchase and conservation of more than 40,000 acres since, using private and public grants, money available through California green space bonds and corporate and individual contributions. The group works with federal and state agencies and the tribe to identify land that would benefit the monument. Crites points out that the Friends have been very successful over the years in identifying and facilitating the acquisition of land parcels to be added to the monument.

The Friends also work closely with the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, a state agency established in 1991 to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Coachella Valley. The conservancy is another example of the working partnerships that are a hallmark of the area. Its 21-member governing board includes representatives of all the agencies operating in the monument and every city in the valley.

Over the years the conservancy has preserved more than 48,000 acres. Bill Havert, executive director, says the success springs from a recognition that it's better "if we all get together and get it done, rather than worry about whose problem it is." The Friends of

SANTA ROSA & SAN JACINTO MOUNTAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT FACTS:

- Established by an act of Congress in 2000.
- Includes 280,000 acres of state, federal and tribal lands.
- Mount San Jacinto reaches an elevation of 10,834 feet.
- Indian Canyons include what is said to be world's largest fan palm oasis.
- About 30 rare or endangered species live within the monument borders.
- Has important cultural sites for the Agua Caliente Cahuilla Indians.

THE FRIENDS OF THE DESERT MOUNTAINS AT A GLANCE:

- Number about 200 members.
- Have preserved more than 30,000 acres since 1987.
- Work with federal, state and tribal agencies on land conservation.
- Helped secure land for the monument Visitor Center.
- Provide volunteers for the Visitor Center, hikes, festivals and other activities.
- Teach lessons that integrate nature studies and healthy living skills in local schools and lead field trips to the monument.

Friends site for the monument:
www.desertmountains.org/monument.html

BLM site for the monument:
www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings/santarosa.html

National Landscape Conservation System:
www.blm.gov/nlcs

the Desert Mountains is not a member of the conservancy, but Havert says the group has played a critical role in land conservation.

Another key partner is the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. "The tribe was one of the founding members of the national monument," says Margaret Park, tribal director of planning and natural resources. "We agreed to put our Indian Canyons into the monument. We still manage those lands independently, but in close cooperation with the BLM and Forest Service."

The tribe collaborates on a host of activities, from surveying cultural resources to providing mapping data for an interactive computer display at the Visitor Center. The tribe also works with the Friends of the Desert Mountains on land acquisition. The tribe's ancestral lands were fragmented in the 1860s when the U.S. government granted the Southern Pacific Railroad the odd-numbered sections of land along its right-of-way. When the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation was created, this meant part of it was a checkerboard. "The intent is to consolidate tribal lands by swapping them out over time," says Park. "The Friends have been very helpful in that process."

> "We agreed to put our Indian Canyons into the monument. We still manage those lands independently, but in close cooperation with the BLM and Forest Service."
>
> - Margaret Park, tribal director of planning and natural resources, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians

Partnerships in Action

The national monument contributes significantly to the economy of an area where tourism is key. The Indian Canyons alone draw about 120,000 visitors a year, while the aerial tramway to the top of Mount San Jacinto records 400,000 passengers annually. A survey by the city of Palm Desert found that people who enjoy the outdoors were the fastest-growing subset of visitors.

The Friends, as the nonprofit support group for the monument, provide volunteers and other assistance for a variety of activities. "Purchasing inholdings from a willing seller is huge," says Foote, the national monument manager. (Inholdings are the tracts of privately owned land that lie within the boundaries of publicly owned or protected areas.) "But they also help with our visitor programs, our education programs. These kinds of support roles are critical. We don't have the resources for the staff that would be necessary without the help of the Friends."

The Friends not only staff the monument's Visitor Center, the group worked with a local government to donate the land on which it was built. In fact, the Visitor Center embodies the approach that has allowed the monument to prosper. "The city of Palm Desert gave them the land. The water district gave them the right-of-way. A local architect donated his work. Another company that did the road paving donated their work. The landscape architect didn't charge. A number of organizations donated all the plants," says Crites. "It's a great example of partnerships in action." ■■■

SONORAN INSTITUTE
Shaping the Future of the West

www.sonoraninstitute.org
tel 520-290-0828

NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PUBLIC LANDS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

www.blm.gov/nlcs

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Writing, Reed Karaim, Tucson, AZ
Production, Ian Wilson, Tucson, AZ
Photography, Reed Karaim, Tucson, AZ
Design, Teri Bingham, Tucson, AZ
October 2010