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NEW DEMOCRAT COALITION

October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

I write to commend you on the historic Camp Hale designation and express my ardent support for the designation of Castner Range as a national monument similarly through the executive powers delivered by the 1906 Antiquities Act.

Castner Range is cherished by the El Pasoan community and merits long-term federal protection as a national monument. Also known as *La Sierra de los Mansos* (an older Spanish language moniker), Indigenous peoples of the Southwest have inhabited the mountains of Castner Range in northeast El Paso, Texas since [6,000 B.C.](#) This place has ancestral significance and holds a key to El Paso's, and our nation's, future, as well as our cultural and historical identity. A Castner Range national monument designation will also advance the goals set by the *America The Beautiful Initiative*—conservation is climate strategy and resilience. The U.S. military previously tested weaponry on the 7,081 acres that make up Castner Range; since ceasing operations, the larger El Paso community has worked for half a century to ensure that this treasured Chihuahuan Desert landscape honors the people and wildlife that call El Paso home. It's time to designate Castner Range as a national monument, not only for El Paso, but for the benefit of all Americans and future generations.

I offer my sincerest gratitude to Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland for graciously taking the time to visit Castner Range this past March in order to understand the critical importance of this landscape. Her visit was followed up with more than 137,000 signatures and letters of support from community members addressed to the Department of the Interior in support of the Castner Range National Monument proposal. I also thank the Under Secretary of the Army, Hon. Gabe Camarillo, who joined community leaders in August in

supporting Castner Range; he voiced the U.S. Army's commitment to clean up unexploded ordnance in the area, so that it can successfully transition to becoming safe and accessible public land. This concerted community effort to protect Castner Range is precisely the kind of collaboration and vision we need to advance the *America the Beautiful Initiative*.

While this designation will benefit our nation as a whole, protecting the Castner Range is also a matter of equity, specifically for Indigenous, Hispanic, and Latino peoples. El Paso is the 23rd largest city in the nation and is majority Latino ([83%](#)). The designation of Castner Range will serve to increase this borderland Latino-community's access to healthy public lands. In the west, [87% of Latino/a/x voters](#) support the national goal of protecting 30 percent of America's lands and waters by 2030 and [84% of Latino/x voters](#) support creating new national monuments, demonstrating the overwhelming support for such a designation. The Tigua tribe people from the nearby Ysleta del Sur Pueblo community in El Paso continue their annual festivals in celebration of the Castner Range golden poppy bloom, and revere this mountain range as sacred. Protecting Castner Range as a national monument is a way to bridge what public land policy experts have termed the "[Nature Gap](#)" and ensure that communities of color in El Paso have access to America's great outdoors.

On the heels of Indigenous Peoples Day, and as National Hispanic Heritage Month comes to an end, I urge you to honor Indigenous, Hispanic, and Latino peoples' relationship to this west-Texas landscape by officially designating Castner Range as national monument.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Veronica Escobar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Veronica Escobar (TX-16)  
Member of Congress