Castner Range National Monument
Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas:

A Report for Federal Officials on a CRNM’s Value to the Community and the Nation

March 15, 2016

By:
# Castner Range National Monument
## Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas

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Overview of Castner Range

Whether we live in the city or the countryside, we rely on the natural systems that support us, that affect our health and happiness and that give us a sense of place, pride and identity. Having clean water and air and plenty of natural open space attracts business and improves our standard of living. A healthy natural environment is a cost-effective tool to support economic growth, improve public health and enhance our quality of life.

Castner Range is one of the last undeveloped zones in the greater El Paso area of far-west Texas. What’s more, Castner Range is critical to the natural functioning of El Paso’s Franklin Mountains, a 16-mile north-south range that runs from just northeast of downtown El Paso to the New Mexico state line and whose highest peak lies 7,192 feet above sea level. Castner Range occupies 11 square miles (7,081 acres) on the eastern slopes of the Franklin Mountains and includes a third of all high land. A closed artillery range since 1966, Castner is in nearly pristine condition today thanks to the stewardship of the US Army that owns the range and to its potential for unexploded ordnance which has prompted the Range’s closure to all but authorized access. Since 1966, construction on Castner’s flatter areas has been a threat to this natural treasure and remains so to this day.

In the spring, the range’s lower slopes explode with color when wild Mexican Gold Poppies carpet the rugged desert terrain. Castner Range provides the greatest concentration of natural springs and contains the most visually striking and complex geology in the Franklin Mountains. Floods from summer storms are naturally channeled by Castner’s canyons, arroyos (‘dry stream beds’) and alluvial fans. Unique plant and animal habitats characterize Castner Range along with spectacular scenery and rich cultural features dating back 14,000 years.

Investing in the conservation of Castner Range is an investment in clean water, air and energy, all natural resources we rely on for our quality of life. Conserving Castner Range as a national monument will preserve the fragile lands at the urban fringe around the Franklin Mountains State Park. A national monument will address many needs such as additional park land and possible future recreation opportunities as El Paso grows, will provide benefits to public health, education, natural resource management and the El Paso area’s economy, and will preserve the breathtaking view-sheds of and from the Franklin Mountains. Dedicating these lands as a National Monument will safeguard cultural resources and a network of natural areas that enhance our community’s unique character, culture and sense of place. Conserving Castner Range as a National Monument will save hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure costs and maintenance, now and for scores of years to come.
A Long-Term Grass-Roots Effort in El Paso, Texas

The Frontera Land Alliance (Frontera), the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition (FMWC) and the Franklin Mountains State Park (FMSP)* of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) have been working since the late 1970’s to conserve Castner Range. Early in 1978 a broad-based campaign was launched to create an FMSP, which the Texas Legislature did by June 1979. At that time, plans to conserve Castner Range were also made, and from 1979 to the present day the FMWC has succeeded in preventing construction and development on all but the extreme southeastern part of the Range. The FMWC’s efforts were especially effective in 2006 when it successfully galvanized opposition to an ambitious plan to develop the entire eastern twenty-five percent of the Range.

In 2010, El Paso’s then-Congressman Silvestre Reyes (TX-16) obtained $300,000 in National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) funds through the DOD’s Office of Economic Adjustment that were earmarked for the study of ways in which Castner Range could be conserved. A Castner Conservation Conveyance Committee (4C’s) quickly arose. From March 2010 to the end of the funding (Sept. 2015) the 4C’s produced two book-length works (Conservation Conveyance Report for Castner Range, Fort Bliss, Texas [2011] and Castner Range Land Use Plan November 21, 2013) along with a Surveyor’s Report: Franklin Mountains State Park and Castner Range Corners (2015), two 9:47-minute videos—one in English (“Conserving Castner Range”) and one in Spanish (“Conservando Castner Range”)—several brochures, a “packet” of Castner Range materials, and various position papers. All these efforts examined the means by which the Range could be conserved, and set forth the reasons why conservation was imperative.

In 2013, language supporting Castner conservation appeared in the NDAA to the following effect: “The Secretary of the Army may convey, without consideration, to the Parks and Wildlife Department of the State of Texas … all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to a parcel of real property,
including any improvements thereon, consisting of approximately 7,081 acres at Fort Bliss, Texas for the purpose of permitting the Department to establish and operate a park as an element of the Franklin Mountains State Park.” It should be noted that this language does not preclude other dispositions of Castner Range such as to a division of the Department of the Interior.

A great step forward was taken on December 16, 2015 when Congressman Beto O’Rourke (TX-16) introduced legislation (HR 4268) to make Castner Range a National Monument. Rep. O’Rourke’s work is strongly supported in El Paso by the Castner Range National Monument Initiative, an outgrowth of the 4C’s being led by the Frontera Land Alliance (El Paso’s only 501(c)3 land trust organization; see www.Fronteralandalliance.org/) in partnership with the FMWC (www.franklinmountains.org/) and the El Paso Community Foundation, founded in 1977 (http://epcf.org/). The Initiative (whose website is http://castnerrangenationalmonument.org/) is also asking President Obama to dedicate Castner Range as a national monument through the 1906 Antiquities Act. Considerable local support for the Initiative continues to be garnered from individuals, civic groups, neighborhood associations, businesses, veterans’ organizations, etc. The El Paso County Commissioners’ Court, the El Paso City Council, El Paso’s six-member State Legislative delegation and the Public Service Board of the El Paso Water Utilities have separately and unanimously approved formal declarations of support for the CRNM Initiative.

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*The support of the FMSP (which shares a long boundary with Castner Range) appears in the Franklin Mountains State Park Management Plan (1994/2010, Holliday, Ron et al.). The FMSP will “conserve outstanding ecological, geological, scenic, and cultural features and … provide recreational, educational, interpretive, and scientific opportunities for the visiting public that do not disturb the … character of the park.” (p. 9) Castner will only enhance the FMSP and as a National Monument could provide outdoor recreation for El Paso’s growing population. Descriptions of the FMSP were included in the land use plan since any recreational opportunities that Castner Range might provide must take into account what the FMSP already offers and plans to expand.

Volunteers showing support, March 12, 2016, at City of El Paso Archeology Museum with Castner Range as a back drop
U.S. Army Post Fort Bliss and History of Castner Range

Castner Range is a 7,081-acre parcel of closed-artillery-range land that is situated on the eastern slopes of the Franklin Mountains on the Northeast Side of El Paso, Texas. Castner Range is currently owned by the United States Department of Defense under the administration of the United States Army and forming part of its Fort Bliss Army Post.

From 1926 until 1966 this land—named after Brigadier General Joseph Compton Castner—was used by the Fort for live firing of field and air-defense artillery. Unexploded ordnance (UXO) and munitions and explosives of concern (MECs) may have accumulated on the surface of the ground or may be buried in the soil, which is why Castner Range is closed to public entry. The Army is conducting the Military Munitions Response Program (MMRP) to determine the highest and best use for Castner Range.

When the General Services Administration (GSA) returned the land to the Army it was no longer classified “excess” (as before) but classified instead as a closed range. The Department of Defense is presently conducting a CERCLA (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980) at Castner Range. The DoD is also conducting a remedial investigation at Castner Range that is scheduled to be completed in 2017. Because of the possible presence of MECs and UXOs, public access is not permitted. This is confirmed in the “Castner Range, A Vital Addition to Franklin Mountains State Park”, (n.a.) where the “Army has identified Castner Range as surplus to its needs and, as funds permit, has been searching the surface for old artillery rounds since 1995.” (p. 1) It has been noted that the Army had undertaken previous if limited clearance prior to 1995.
The City of El Paso

Castner Range represents one of the most significant opportunities in the city for permanent open space acquisition. The conservation of Castner Range as a national monument will complement and strengthen the Northwest Master Plan, the El Paso Sustainability Plan, the El Paso Open Space Plan and other regional efforts that identify preserving large, connected natural areas. And the conservation of Castner Range will only strengthen the efforts toward regional conservation that have gathered such strength with the dedication (in May 2014) of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument near Las Cruces in Doña Ana County, just across the New Mexico state line from El Paso County.

In the years since the creation of the Franklin Mountains State Park in 1979, the City of El Paso has made it clear on various occasions that it supports the conservation of Castner Range-like lands, as demonstrated below in these sites:

Plan El Paso: Volume 2 page 10.10 – Habitat and Biodiversity: The City should produce or commission a plan for biological corridors and habitat that identifies existing habitats and corridors and candidate sites and routes for restoration.

Plan El Paso: Volume 2 page 10.27: Habitat and Biodiversity Goals 10.8: Protect and enhance ecologically sensitive areas such as aquifer recharge zones, hillsides, bosques [‘wooded areas’], arroyos, wetlands, and plants and wildlife resources.

Wildlife, page 11.15: Protect native wildlife through the preservation of the Chihuahuan Desert habitat.

Goal 10.8: Protect and enhance ecologically sensitive areas such as aquifer recharge zones, hillsides, bosques, arroyos, wetlands, and plant and wildlife resources.

El Paso City Open Space Master Plan: The desert lands have vibrant communities of animals and plants. From the mountain foothills to the Rio Grande’s banks, are found a variety of open spaces. The interconnection is critical in providing both connectivity for ecological functions and for passage and dispersal of wildlife. Each bionetwork has its own particular part to play in benefiting our community.

El Paso Sustainability Plan: Achieve international recognition for successful preservation of our Chihuahuan desert heritage for all time.

### Geographic Profile for El Paso County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>827,398</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change from 2010</td>
<td>+ 3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (sq.mi.)</td>
<td>1,015.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land area (sq.mi.)</td>
<td>1,012.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altitude (ft.)</td>
<td>3,520-7,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall (in.)</td>
<td>9.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. mean. min.</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July mean max.</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian Labor</td>
<td>321,753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate (December 2012)</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages (2012)</td>
<td>$2,402,688,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita Income (2012)</td>
<td>$30,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Value (2012)</td>
<td>$40,616,969,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Sales (2012)</td>
<td>$12,294,197,708</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Arid lands typically have sparse vegetation and are associated with intense rainstorms that generate substantive rainfall impacts and locally high rates of overland flow runoff which leads to flooding, hillslope and channel erosion and high sediment concentration. Methods to slow down, intercept and stabilize the flow of water are varied; however, using a combination of bioengineering and natural materials often produces the most effective results. (*Storm water, Arroyos, and Slope Stabilization Recommendations for Arid Lands*. Austin, TX: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2015. 4 pp. pamphlet. No author cited.)

Castner Range is key to ensuring that land alongside the FMSP remains open to allow for natural runoff during periods of heavy or “monsoon” rainfall, which in El Paso typically occur from July through September. The greater the time and space for the floodwater to be absorbed and spread out, the more the flow of water will be slowed down, thereby reducing the likelihood that existing residential and commercial areas to the east of Castner’s eastern boundary (the US 54 freeway) will flood.

According to *Towards a Bright Future, Mountains to River – A Green Infrastructure Plan for El Paso* (n.a.), it is believed that “30% of the remaining arroyos connect to the edge of the Franklin Mountains State Park. These provide excellent potential corridors for trail access to the lower mountain areas, and also provide excellent corridors for natural drainage though El Paso. Many of these corridors are also longer than one mile in length...” (3:3) With the preservation of the land, the vegetation would remain undisturbed and would assist in reducing erosion and flooding. Flora and fauna will have a source of food and water along with places in which to live undisturbed. Once preserved, the view-sheds will remain a wonderful asset to the residents of the City of El Paso and surrounding areas, as well as a great attraction to out-of-town visitors. The quality of life of the community and surrounding areas will be enhanced directly. (See the City of El Paso’s arroyo map to left, arroyos in red and Castner Range outlined in white).

Arroyos are ephemeral, unstable, and dynamic, and therefore particularly unsuitable to development. Attempts at controlling arroyos have unpredictable effects downstream on the surrounding arroyos, on flatter desert lands and on all the human structures they contain. Confining a dynamic system disrupts the natural ecological balance and creates erosion, incision, loss of habitat, habitat degradation and altered habitats. Increasing impervious areas by paving and curbing will invariably contribute to increased peak flows and will impair the storm water treatment functions that vegetated areas perform naturally. Traditional arroyo management using concrete walls, channels, and culverts, and building on floodplains creates unhealthy stream systems. Traditional methods are expensive to build and maintain and mostly lead to more problems.
In 1961, construction was completed on Fusselman Dam, located just south of the soon-to-be-undertaken Transmountain Road (TX Loop 375), which opened to traffic in 1969 and now bisects the FMSP and Castner Range.

Fusselman Canyon is the largest canyon in the Franklin Mountains and is named in honor of Texas Ranger and Deputy U.S. Marshall Charles H. Fusselman, killed in the canyon by cattle thieves in the late XIXth century. The Franklins are in the northern part of the Chihuahua Desert and form a barrier between the Rio Grande and the desert basin to the east. Fusselman Canyon separates North and South Franklin peaks. Both canyon and range are located in El Paso’s Franklin Mountains State Park.

In 1973 the Northgate Dam was completed (and expanded in 1986). It is located at the southern end of Castner Range and serves to prevent floodwaters from inundating the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) maintenance yard in the far southeastern corner of Castner Range (and also, subsequently, the adjacent U.S. Border Patrol Station). If any further development were to take place on the flatter or “more developable” eastern twenty-five percent of Castner, four more dams of the Fusselman/Northgate sort would have to be constructed and of course paid for. Given the fact that the Department of the Army/Department of Defense is responsible in perpetuity for any MEC/UXO-generated mishaps on Castner or any other formerly-used artillery range, the dam-site lands would have to be cleared of all MECs and UXOs before the dams’ construction could begin, and the same is equally true of the development sites themselves. That too would cost tens of millions.

In 2013 a 15-acre property to the east of the US 54 Freeway was being prepped for a Sam’s Club on land that was part of Castner Range until 1971. The prepping process involved stripping the land of all vegetation and then digging foot-deep holes at foot-wide intervals to check for MECs and UXOs. Similar “moon-scaping” operations would have to occur on Castner Range to clear the MECs and UXOs leaving the Range open to massive monsoon-season erosion followed by colossal dust storms. Vegetation would be slow in returning, and to land that was permanently scarred by wind and rain damage. It has been estimated that clearing even the flatter parts of Castner Range would cost at least $75 million. Therefore, conserving Castner as a national monument in its current natural state is a highly cost-effective move.
**Impact on Health and Education**

Castner Range as a National Monument would provide significant benefits to a traditionally underserved population. “As the region’s population dynamics are shifting, leaders must plan for the future, taking into consideration the evolving needs from the continuing rural to urban migration, changing demographics, and intensified pressure on our land, water, and wildlife resources”. *Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2012, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*

The City of El Paso Department of Health identified obesity, diabetes, fitness and nutrition as the number one health priorities for our community in 2013. In addition, a key finding in a review of more than 200 research studies by the American Heart Association in 2011 was that for every dollar spent on building biking trails and walking paths an estimated $3 in medical expenses is saved (*Trust for America’s Health, 2012*). A Castner Range National Monument, within the urban area of El Paso and adjacent to the Franklin Mountains State Park, will provide much needed opportunities for improved community health. It will be an easily accessible and very attractive location for people to get outside to exercise in a natural environment and learn about the natural world.

Nature deficit disorder must also be considered. “Research indicates that one of the best antidotes to a stressful lifestyle is to spend time in natural settings outdoors. Children who spend time outdoors are likely to be: happier, healthier, smarter, more cooperative, better problem solvers, and more creative. Children need leisurely, unscripted, and exploratory hours to find the wonders in their own backyards and neighborhoods, from discovering the beauty of the stars in the night sky to watching lizards on a warm summer’s day.” (Cheryl Charles, *Nature Deficit Disorder Special Edition*, March 18, 2013) Of considerable importance as well is the sort of outdoor education which “provides students with an opportunity to connect with nature, learn hands-on science, achieve personal growth, and develop a commitment to environmental stewardship and community service. Open space has a very positive impact on one’s mental and physical health even if they do not step on the land. Researchers hypothesize that exposure to the natural outdoors causes significant, measurable changes to the brain. These changes lead to clearer thinking, greater ability to focus and maximum cognitive ability. In short: enjoying nature makes you smarter. Recent studies have already linked spending time in nature with stress reduction and overall happiness.” (*Backpacker Magazine*)
Soldiers: Active and Veteran
Currently there are several programs for the military and their families specific to outdoor recreation and natural areas, including the U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Program to the Warrior Adventure Quest. Here in El Paso there are also several local programs at Fort Bliss. They include organizations such as Outdoor Recreation, Southwest Adventure, Family Programs for Active Military and Wounded Warriors, Armed Service YMCA, and Military Warriors Support Foundation.

With Castner Range as a National Monument we have a great opportunity to honor and empower active military personnel, wounded warriors and veterans. In addition, when soldiers face challenges, their families experience challenges too. Open space provides a great opportunity for a family unit to enjoy an adventure in an urban area where they could all go, regardless of any one individual’s physical or mental concerns. A Castner Range National Monument would aid in improving and maintaining military personnel’s mental and physical health as well as that of their families as explained in the article below, published in the American Forces Press Service.

A Castner Range National Monument would be a perfect complement to the aforementioned military programs, providing nearby, ready access for activities to participants, their families, and their leaders. With Castner Range as a National Monument we would have a great opportunity to honor and empower active military personnel, wounded warriors and veterans and provide rejuvenating outdoor time. In addition, when soldiers face challenges, their families experience challenges too. Open space provides a great opportunity for a family unit to enjoy an adventure in an urban area where they can all go, regardless of any one individual’s physical or mental concerns. A Castner Range National Monument would aid in improving and maintaining military personnel’s mental and physical health as well as that of their families as explained in the American Forces press Service article excerpted below:

American Forces Press Service, August 21, 2103. Committed to preserving quality-of-life offerings despite ever-tighter budgets, military morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) officials are scaling back in some areas as they introduce innovative approaches to delivering services and programs. Ed Miles, DOD’s MWR policy director, and his counterparts across the military services see a close connection to military readiness and MWR. “We have a direct impact on the readiness and retention and resilience of the troops and their families,” Miles told American Forces Press Service. “When you have a healthy and fit force, it has absolute national security implications in terms of stress reduction, physical and emotional health and esprit de corps.” Congress has long agreed, authorizing funds since 1989 to cover 85 percent of programs with the most direct link to readiness: fitness centers, community centers and library programs among others, Miles explained. With increased privatization, almost three-quarters of military families now live off installations and tap services and programs in their communities.
Economic Impact
El Paso represents a bi-national metro area of more than 2.5 million people, encompassing three states and two nations and offering a globally competitive business environment. El Paso is the largest metro area on the Texas-Mexico border. As a best-in-class location, El Paso offers one of North America’s most efficient business environments while affording a great living experience. El Paso is located next to southern New Mexico whose unique blend of Southwestern culture and vision offers space-age technology and a strong military presence. Just across the border is Ciudad Juárez, El Paso’s sister city which in the 1960s pioneered the twin-plant maquila industry by launching more than 40 industrial parks. Maquilas allow fiscal advantages for manufacturing facilities with non-Mexican ownership. This environment provides a cost-efficient, bilingual business climate with a strong infrastructure supported by a world-class labor force. El Paso is diligently working to attract new businesses to the region and part of that appeal is the wealth of outdoor activities. A Castner Range National Monument within the City limits would be a major attraction to businesses thinking of setting up shop in the Sun City.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Rentable Area SF</th>
<th>Vacancy Rate %</th>
<th>Availability Rate %</th>
<th>Net Absorption SF</th>
<th>Under Construction SF</th>
<th>NNN Average Asking Rate $/PSF/YR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>7,365,204</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>46,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$3.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>9,002,447</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>(30,689)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>13,768,564</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>18,155,160</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>(100,307)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$3.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower Valley</td>
<td>6,252,169</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>(29,129)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>54,543,544</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>(114,125)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$3.50</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: BoarderplexAlliance.org

Research on the economic contribution of national monuments in the West created in the last generation found that adjacent economies grew, adding new jobs, and per capita income increased, in real terms, in every case after the creation of these national monuments. Headwaterseconomics.org, Winter 2012

We can create opportunities for our local economies to grow by investing in land for outdoor recreation, for wildlife, and water. Such investments have a ripple effect. Seniors relocating in the western US are three times more likely to settle in a county with more protected public lands than one with fewer protected lands. This has led more than 500,000 seniors relocating to the Western United States between 2000 and 2010 (The Gold Rush). In addition, investment in a nature-based park, such as Castner Range National Monument, can create more jobs and lead to more visitor spending. With their growing international reputation as tourist destinations for nature and adventure, our mountains which include Castner Range) can bring more outside dollars to the area. Locally, in 2006, the Hueco Tanks State Park brought in $582,207 in county sales and $331,774 in county residents’ personal income. In 2007 our two state parks (Hueco Tanks and Franklin Mountains) brought 72,644 visitors to El Paso County (Texas State Parks, Natural Economic Assets).
Eco-Tourism
El Paso is the largest metro area along the Texas-Mexico border which boasts a best-in-class, business-friendly operating environment while also offering a great living experience. El Paso is ranked number 11 of the 2015 National Tourism Quality Performance Rankings list (City of El Paso Resilience Report, 2016) This is largely due to El Paso’s unique quality of possessing the largest bilingual and bi-cultural workforce in the Western Hemisphere.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, recreation benefits include “increasing local employment, wage levels and income, reducing poverty, and improving education and health.” The Economic Research Service also found that jobs earnings in recreation counties are $2,000 higher than for non-recreation counties (Headwaterseconomics, Winter 2012).

The environment in El Paso has been identified as a major factor in expanding the tourism industry in our region. The warm and predominantly stable climate in conjunction with a unique and wide array of natural desert assets provide the foundation upon which to build a robust tourist population. Moves toward branding El Paso as an eco-tourist destination have already begun and continue to expand (City of El Paso Resilience Report, 2016).

The El Paso community and visitors to the Franklin Mountains State Park will benefit greatly from the creation of Castner Range National Monument. Currently there are over 40,000 registered visitors to the park annually; approximately 10,000 military personnel use the park for training purposes every year, and between 5,000 to 10,000 non-registered individuals visit the park each year. The Franklin Mountains State Park is the largest urban state park in the continental United States. It is estimated that there will be a 10 to 20 percent increase in users if Castner Range becomes a national monument and is opened to the public, even with limited access on cleared and demarcated trails.
Social Justice
Exemplary of a strong border culture, the majority of residents identify as Hispanic (83%) and are Spanish speakers (65%), whether alongside English or exclusively. A large portion of El Paso families earn less than their counterparts across Texas. Median household income at the City level is approximately $39,000, lower than the State level. A substantial proportion of residents are also very low-income, with the City’s poverty rate greater than 20%—higher than the State rate. Low income, however, is offset by a lower cost of living as compared to other cities in the United States—1.8% lower than the national average according to Forbes. *(City of El Paso Resilience Report, 2016)*

Volunteers helping to collect letters of support for Castner Range National Monument

Over a quarter of El Pasoans live below the federal poverty line with certain neighborhoods exceeding 40%. Median Household Income, at 71% of the US average, is approximately $39K annually. It is no coincidence that this statistic relates to both economic and social vulnerability. Wages, educational opportunity, access to healthy lifestyle choices and social and physical mobility all reflect the barriers facing this population. *(City of El Paso Resilience Report, 2016)*

The lack of parks and open space exacerbates an already unjust system for El Pasoans. In a city of 831,000 people there are just 1.6 acres of active park land for every 1,000 people in the northeast area where Castner Range is located. Over 110,000 people reside in the Northeast. But there are only .52 acres of accessible open natural lands for those residents. Designating Castner Range as a national monument would help mitigate these inadequacies and would provide this underserved population with a greater equality of services when compared to the rest of the state and the nation.
**Flora and Fauna:**
A land of surpassing beauty and biological richness, Castner Range possesses a combination of diverse plant and animal habitats, complex geology, spectacular scenery and rich cultural features unequaled anywhere else in the Franklins. Two significant springs (of the five known) in the Franklin Mountains are located on Castner Range and three within the FMSP. The Range’s two are named Whispering Springs and Indian Springs. One third of the Castner land is a series of alluvial fans, as pointed out in the *Conservation Conveyance Report for Castner Range, Fort Bliss, Texas* (2011).

A key characteristic of Castner Range is its seasonal flora, in particular the Mexican Gold Poppy. This species is found in its greatest abundance in far west Texas on the lower slopes of Castner Range. The Mexican Gold Poppy is an iconic flower that provides color and beauty to the region. Castner Range is a favorable environment for the Southwestern Barrel Cactus which is an uncommon plant species in the Northern Chihuahuan Desert. The conservation of Castner Range as a National Monument will preserve this ecosystem’s diversity. According to *The Conservation Conveyance Report for Castner Range, Fort Bliss, Texas* (p. 28): “Riparian vegetation communities on the watershed are mainly herbaceous with a less than 20 percent cover of trees and shrubs, containing grasses, sedges and forbs. Other riparian vegetation communities that can be found in the project floodplains are woodlands, shrub lands, and wetland. [The quote is continued below.]

“Although there is no documentation of any threatened or endangered plants on the Closed Castner Range MRS [Munitions Response Site], a high outcropping rock formation on the southwest corner of the range exemplifies preferred habitat and substrate for the Sneed pincushion cactus (*Escobaria sneedii var. sneedii*), a federal and state endangered species; however, no specimens of the cactus have been found here … and no project activities are planned in this area.”

The faunal component of the area is detailed in the *Franklin Mountains State Park Biodiversity List* (n.a.). There are only two species of amphibians recorded and about 33 species of reptiles confirmed. There are over 100 species of birds recorded from sightings within the park boundaries. The most common avian species are: Mourning Dove, White-winged Dove, Gambel’s Quail, Scaled Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Golden Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Barn Owl and Great Horned Owl. Finally, some 30 species of mammals are known to be present within the Franklin Mountains State Park.
Cultural Landscape
Castner Range includes numerous prehistoric and historic resources, including pictographs and petroglyphs, mining sites and military training sites. Over one-third of the range has been surveyed for cultural materials and over 30 sites have been recorded. Civilian Fort Bliss staff has conducted periodic monitoring of Native American archeological sacred sites on Castner Range.

The Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan Fort Bliss 2008-2012 (n.a., p. 5) reports: “The historic period began with the arrival of the Spaniards in A.D. 1581. The Spaniards governed the region from 1581 to 1821, when Mexico won its independence. Texas subsequently became a separate nation in 1836. Following its annexation of Texas in 1845, the United States claimed the rest of the region from Mexico after the Mexican-American War (which ended in 1848). The U.S. subsequently acquired a small part of the region from Mexico by means of the 1853 Gadsden Purchase. Although El Paso del Norte had already become a commercial hub and halfway point along the Camino Real Road between Mexico City and Santa Fe, it was not until after the Gadsden Purchase that settlement expanded northward into the Tularosa Basin. The Army established its first post in the region in 1849 and moved to its present location in 1893. The arrival of the railroads in 1881 brought about an increase in El Paso’s population.”

According to the Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan 2008-2012 (n.a., p. 5): Prehistoric habitation of the Fort Bliss /Castner Range area began about 10,000 years ago and ended just under 340 years ago. While there is speculation about the Pre-Clovis (50,000 - 10,000 B.C.) period, prehistoric occupations in the area are known to include the Paleo-Indian (10,000 – 6,000 B.C.), the Archaic (6,000 B.C. – A.D. 200), the Formative (A.D. 200 – 1450), the Pre-contact (A.D. 1450 - 1580) and the Protohistoric (A.D. 1580 – 1659) periods.

A few ranchers had moved into the region in the late 1860s/early 1870s, but the main ranches were formed shortly after the arrival of the railroads.

Mining has a long history in the region with the first mines recorded in the 1840s, although there are tales of earlier lost Spanish mines. It was not until the settlement of the Mescalero Apache on their present reservation in the 1880s and the Wheeler Survey that mining increased, continuing into the 1930s. Properties reflecting these historic activities and periods have been recorded on lands managed by Fort Bliss. The present Fort Bliss landscape reflects influences of its initial establishment, of the Punitive Expedition (1916-1917, intended to capture Pancho Villa), of the establishment of the Fort as a Calvary post following the Punitive Expedition, of World War II as an air defense training facility, of activities throughout the Cold War, and of its transformation into yet another new landscape following recent changes in mission which take full advantage of Fort Bliss’s and the adjacent White Sands Missile Range’s desert terrain.
Castner Range Historical Timeline

1926-1966  Castner Range extensively used for weapons firing. (All firing ceased in 1966.)

1967  Construction begins through the Franklin Mountains on what is now Transmountain Road, a part of TX Loop 375 which when complete will encircle the city. (As of May 2015 it encircles ca. 85% of it.)

1969  Transmountain Road completed and open for traffic.

1971  Fort Bliss reports Castner Range as “excess” to its needs. Castner Range placed with the GSA [the federal ‘General Services Administration’] for disposal.

1971  El Paso Congressman Richard White (TX-16) forms an ad hoc committee to study the disposition of Castner Range.

June 1971  The City of El Paso’s Castner Range Master Plan is published.

April 1972  Ad hoc committee’s Castner Range Development Plan published.

1974  1,247 acres of Castner Range east of the US 54 Freeway conveyed to City; most of this acreage is now developed as private residences, commercial zones, government buildings, City parks, etc.

May 1975  The 17-acre museum lands aka Wilderness Park (now home to the City of El Paso’s Museum of Archaeology and the private Border Patrol Museum, and future home—construction to start Sept. 2016—of the Franklin Mountains State Park Visitor Center/new Headquarters) conveyed from the U.S. Department of the Interior to the City of El Paso under the Lands-to-Parks program. (Earlier—perhaps 1971 [information is unavailable]—these 17 acres had been transferred from the Department of Defense to the Department of the Interior.)

July 1978  Gerald Fitzgerald and others espy Dick Knapp (the owner—with brother Bob—of most of the Franklin Mountains) bulldozing the top of North Franklin Mountain to prep the land for another communications tower. Mass meeting quickly organized. Over ten thousand people sign petition asking City Council to obtain state-park status for the Franklins.

June 1979  State of Texas HB 867 signed, creating the Franklin Mountains State Park (FMSP).

June 1981  State of Texas SB 1273 signed into law adjusting FMSP boundaries.

April 1983  LeBron Hardie et al. submit to El Paso Congressman Ron Coleman (TX-16) their recommendation on Castner Range disposition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 1983</td>
<td>GSA returns Castner Range to Fort Bliss as “not disposable” due to UXO, voiding the declaration of excess (q.v. supra).</td>
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<td>March 1985</td>
<td>The Wilderness Park Coalition (WPC) adopts position on the disposition of Castner Range (“convey all land north and west of proposed Magnetic-Diana connector to the FMSP”).</td>
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<td>Nov. 1985</td>
<td>WPC changes its name to “Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition” (FMWC).</td>
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<td>Feb. 1986</td>
<td>FMWC learns that TxDOT proposes a 10-acre maintenance yard be located in the middle of Castner Range (Sec. 36).</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1986</td>
<td>TxDOT agrees to relocate the proposed maintenance yard to Sec. 3 in the far southeast corner of Castner facing Hondo Pass Drive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Cohen Stadium proposed for the middle of Castner (Sec. 31, west of the US 54 Freeway).</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>Cohen Stadium site relegated to the eastern side of the US 54 Freeway, its present lieu.</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>The start of the clean-up studies and the initial clean-up of Munitions and Explosives of Concern (MECs) and of unexploded ordnance (UXO) on Castner.</td>
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<td>April 1996</td>
<td>El Paso Mayor Larry Francis proposes that a sports-concert arena be located in the middle of Castner (Secs. 31, 36). This proposal is opposed by the FMWC and is abandoned.</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>Conveyance of [Texas] General Land Office mineral rights in the FMSP to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, ensuring no future mining in the FMSP.</td>
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<td>2000:</td>
<td>Production of the first Castner Range video.</td>
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<td>Nov. 2005</td>
<td>REDCO (‘Regional Economic Development Corporation’, a joint City-private venture) proposes to build a “high-tech” office center on all possible parts of Castner Range—roughly the eastern or “flattest” 25% of the Range’s 7,081 acres.</td>
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</table>
Jan.-Feb. 2006 FMWC holds a series of public meetings to discuss REDCO’s plans for Castner.

March 2006: Unanimous City Council Resolution to preserve all 7,081 acres of Castner Range from development.

2007 The FMWC presented a petition with over 6,000 signatures to El Paso Congressman Silvestre Reyes seeking his support to preserve Castner Range.

Jan. 2007 Military Munitions Response Program (MMRP) Site Inspection for Fort Bliss, Texas was submitted to the US Army Corps of Engineers.

2009-2013 The U.S. Army conducted a demonstration of a Wide Area Assessment (WAA) to investigate methods to characterize the presence of munitions on Castner Range. Frequent WAA meetings open to stakeholders were held.

2007-present Military Munitions Response Program (MMRP) undertaken. Various Technical Project Planning (TPP) activities and meetings held over the same time period. “Pursuant to the Military Munitions Response Program (MMRP), Castner Range underwent a preliminary assessment in 2003 and a site inspection in 2007, which recommended further characterization of the site through a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study.” (Oct. 7, 2009 letter signed by Keith Landreth, Chief, Environmental Division, Directorate of Public Works, Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas)

2014-present As part of the MMRP, the U.S. Army and contractors have been conducting a Remedial Investigation (RI) of Castner Range that leads to the undertaking of a Feasibility Study (FS) of the Range and of ways to deal with its munitions.*

Early 2010 Congressman Reyes secured—in the Department of Defense Appropriations Act—a $300,000 Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) grant to study ways of implementing a conservation conveyance on Castner Range. (See the next item.)

Early 2010 The “4C’s” (‘Castner Conservation Conveyance Committee’) was formed to undertake the tasks mandated by the $300,000 grant (q.v. supra).

March 2010 El Paso County Commissioners Court unanimously passed a resolution in favor of permanently preserving Castner Range.

May 2011 A Sense of the (Texas) Senate Resolution supporting preservation of Castner Range passed unanimously.

May 2011 A Sense of the (Texas) House Resolution supporting preservation of Castner Range passed unanimously.
Oct. 5, 2011  The final version of the 4C’s Conservation Conveyance Report for Castner Range, Fort Bliss, Texas (iv, 91 pp.) was published.


Nov. 21, 2013  Final version, 4C’s Castner Range Land Use Plan (v, 94 pp.) published.

March 2014  FMWC produced two 9:47 minute videos: “Conserving Castner Range” and “Conservando Castner Range.”

Jan. 28, 2015  An event was hosted by the FMWC and the 4C’s. It featured the 9:47-minute video “Conserving Castner Range” that the 4C’s had sponsored and helped produce.

May 2015  Texas State Legislature approved appropriation of $3.5 million for a new Franklin Mountains State Park Headquarters and Visitor Center to be built on the City-owned “museum lands” surrounded by Castner Range. Construction will begin on September 1, 2016.

November 2015: The El Paso County Commissioners’ Court unanimously approves a Resolution urging that Castner Range be dedicated as a National Monument.

December 2015: All six members of El Paso’s State of Texas legislative delegation sign a Resolution urging that Castner Range be dedicated as a National Monument.


January 2016: The Public Service [governing] Board of the El Paso Water Utilities entity unanimously approves a Resolution urging that Castner Range be dedicated as a National Monument.

January 2016: El Paso’s City Council unanimously approves a Resolution urging that Castner Range be dedicated as a National Monument.

*“The Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) represents the methodology that the Superfund [CERCLA] program has been established for characterizing the nature and extent of risks posed by uncontrolled hazardous waste sites and for evaluating potential remedial options. The RI serves as the mechanism for collecting data … [T]he FS is the mechanism for the development, screening and detailed evaluation of alternative remedial actions.” (From website http://www.epa.gov/superfund/policy/remedy/sfremediy/rifs.htm

Castner Range Conservation Report, Fort Bliss, Texas, October 5, 2011

Castner Range Land Use Plan, November 21, 2013


Dona Ana Count’s Public Lands and Economic Prosperity, Headwaterseconomics.org, Winter 2012


City of El Paso Resilience Report, Nicole Ferrini, Chief Resilience Officer, City of El Paso January 2016


The Gold Rush, The Introduction and Summary

The Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan Fort Bliss 2008-2012 (n.a., p. 5)


Towards a Bright Future, Mountains to River – A Green Infrastructure Plan for El Paso (n.a.)