



**DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL**

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June 20, 2024

The Honorable Dave Min, Chair  
1021 O Street, Suite 6710  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Senate Joint Resolution (Padilla): Chuckwalla National Monument: Support**

Dear Chair Min,

On behalf of the Desert Tortoise Council (Council), I am pleased to offer our strong support of SJR 16, which urges the President to use the federal Antiquities Act of 1906 to establish the Chuckwalla National Monument and to establish a National Park Service-managed Joshua Tree National Monument adjacent to Joshua Tree National Park.

The Council is a non-profit organization comprised of hundreds of professionals and laypersons who share a common concern for wild desert tortoises and a commitment to advancing the public's understanding of desert tortoise species. Established in 1975 to promote conservation of tortoises in the deserts of the southwestern United States and Mexico, the Council routinely provides information and other forms of assistance to individuals, organizations, and regulatory agencies on matters potentially affecting desert tortoises within their geographic ranges.

Local efforts have been underway to establish the Chuckwalla National Monument, which would protect approximately 660,000 acres of federal public lands that reach from the Coachella Valley region in the west to the Colorado River in the east. Designating the Chuckwalla National Monument would help ensure equitable access to nature, honor a cultural landscape, and protect the desert's unique biodiversity, desert tortoises, wildlife habitat and landscape connectivity, and history.

These efforts also propose to protect approximately 17,000 acres of public lands that are adjacent to the east side of Joshua Tree National Park. The National Park Service (NPS) has studied this proposed expansion and has indicated that it would be feasible to incorporate the area into the park. According to the NPS, these lands are a "key building block" for landscape conservation in the desert, and, in particular, the area is important for the migration of desert bighorn sheep populations.

The lands proposed for protection include the homelands of the Iviatim, Nüwü, Pipa Aha Macav, Kwatsáan and Maara'yam peoples (Cahuilla, Chemehuevi, Mojave, Quechan, and Serrano nations). This is a living landscape with interconnected cultural, natural, and spiritual significance, which sustains the well-being and survival of Indigenous peoples today.

SJR 16 (Padilla) would also significantly advance state and federal “30×30” goals to protect 30% of lands and coastal waters by 2030 due to the size of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument.

For these reasons, SJR 16 (Padilla) would further the Council’s goal of protecting desert tortoises in the Chuckwalla Critical Habitat Unit. In April 2024, the Council joined the Defenders of Wildlife and Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee to uplist the Mojave desert tortoise from Threatened to Endangered in California. We sincerely believe that supporting SJR 16 (Padilla) would benefit conservation of this imperiled species, and encourage your “aye” vote when it is heard in your committee.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ed LaRue", is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Edward L. LaRue, Jr.  
Ecosystems Advisory Committee, Chair  
Desert Tortoise Council

cc. Senator Alex Padilla, [senator\\_padilla@padilla.senate.gov](mailto:senator_padilla@padilla.senate.gov)