

# America's Newest Fossil Beds National Monument



Tule Springs / Upper Las Vegas Wash

**FACTS SHEET:  
WHY THE UPPER LAS VEGAS WASH (TULE SPRINGS) SHOULD BE  
MANAGED AS A FOSSIL BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT,  
BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**FOSSIL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Upper Las Vegas Wash has been confirmed by scientists to have significant paleontological fossils demonstrative of the Pleistocene Ice Age.

Fossil findings at the site appear to contain the longest continuous section of Pleistocene strata, spanning multiple important global climate cooling and warming episodes in the desert Southwest.

The area contains the single largest assemblage of Ice Age fossils in the Southwest, spanning geologic history from 7,000 to 200,000 years before present.

Fossil findings of plant spores along with vertebrate and invertebrate animal remains within the Upper Las Vegas Wash provide study opportunities uncommon in most fossil localities, and are expected to attract international scientific interest and onsite research.

**CONFIRMATION OF THE AREA'S SIGNIFICANCE**

A four-month intensive study of the area in 1962, chronicled by *National Geographic*, catalogued thousands of Ice Age mammal fossils including Columbian mammoth, ground sloth, American lion, Camelops, bison and ancient species of horse.

The significance of the Upper Las Vegas Wash area was re-confirmed in the past few years with the scientifically documented removal of thousands of fossils. The San Bernardino County Museum currently holds thousands of fossils from this site in its repository facility.

Recent paleontology studies and inventory contracted by the Bureau of Land Management and a 2009 site-survey of the area commissioned by the National Park Service for the Department of Interior confirm the area's significance and draw attention to the area's increasing degradation.



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## **ENDANGERED PLANTS AND AREA WILDLIFE**

The Upper Las Vegas Wash supports four unique and imperiled plants. The Las Vegas buckwheat in the area is a species that has been petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The Nevada Natural Heritage Program has also identified three additional plant species in the area - Merriam's bear poppy, the Las Vegas bearpoppy, and the halfring milkvetch - as imperiled. The area also supports Joshua trees and several species of cacti.

The Upper Las Vegas Wash provides important habitat for the threatened desert tortoise, burrowing owls, kit foxes and several other wildlife species that are recognized for protection under the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan.

Four species of raptors utilize the Wash for meeting their habitat needs - kestrels, barn owls, burrowing owls, and great horned owls.

The red-tailed blazing star bee, a little known or described species, is found in the Wash ecosystem and is considered as imperiled due to its rarity.

Proposed boundaries for the new fossil beds national monument about the Desert Wildlife Refuge, home to more than fifty-two species of mammals, including desert bighorn sheep, and thirty-one species of reptiles and amphibians

The springs at the Corn Creek headquarters of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, immediately adjacent to proposed boundaries for the fossil beds national monument, have refugia for the Pahrump poolfish, a species protected as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act, as well as the Corn Creek springsnail, a species recognized as critically imperiled due to extreme rarity and immediate threats to its existence.

## **WILDLIFE CORRIDORS AND OPEN SPACE**

Proposed boundaries of the new fossil beds national monument would connect four federal designations - moving from east to west, the Desert Wildlife Refuge (US Fish and Wildlife Service), the new fossil beds national monument (managed by the National Park Service), Red Rock National Conservation Area (Bureau of Land Management), and Spring Mountain National Recreation Area (US Forest Service).



Important wildlife and recreation corridors would be maintained and preserved. Wildlife movement between the Spring and Desert Ranges would be protected from impeding urbanization.

The proposed monument will become an integral component of the regional trail and open space system of local governments, facilitating the connection of the urban core with the natural federal lands surrounding the Las Vegas Valley.

Plans for the regional trail system would extend from Lake Mead National Recreation Area, through the County's Wetlands Park, continuing along developed components of the Wash's flood control system to the monument and then on to more primitive trails leading to and within Red Rock, the Spring Mountains, and the Desert Wildlife Refuge.

## **ACTIVE WATERSHED**

The Las Vegas Wash is the only drainage system in the Las Vegas Hydrologic Basin. All waters in the Basin eventually flow to the Wash and then on into Lake Mead and the Colorado River. Ninety percent of the drinking water for the Las Vegas Valley comes from Lake Mead, thus the protection and preservation of the Upper Las Vegas Wash, as an active watershed, is critically important.

Preservation of the Upper Wash would help satisfy water quality and water resource goals outlined through several commissioned studies and defined by Southern Nevada Water Authority, the Las Vegas Valley Watershed Advisory Committee, and the recently approved Clark County Las Vegas Valley Water Quality Management Plan.

The Upper Las Vegas Wash carries water only intermittently, which is not unusual for a desert wash. As a body of water in a desert ecosystem, the biodiversity of the region is sustained and concentrated within the Wash. This makes the Wash and its functioning as a healthy hydrological feature critical to protect and preserve all the native plants and animals that it supports.





## THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE IS THE APPROPRIATE MANAGING AGENCY

While the area is currently under the responsibility of the Bureau of Land Management, differences in the enabling legislation, expertise and mission suggests that the National Park Service is best suited to be the managing agency for the proposed national monument.

The National Park Organic Act of 1916, which created the National Park system, states:

*“...the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”*

The American people have entrusted the National Park Service for nearly a century with the care of our most special places and treasures, and have recognized that creating national parks preserves special places for generations to come.

While the Bureau of Land Management currently manages fifteen national monuments as part of the National Landscape Conservation System, the majority - if not all - are located in wildland, not urban settings. The National Park Service, on the other hand, has a long and distinguished history of managing and interpreting American's natural, cultural and historic landscapes in urban settings.

The Upper Las Vegas Wash satisfies rigorous criteria and is deemed worthy of national park status. It is a privilege for Nevada to add a new park designation to 392 units within the National Park Service.

Nevada's fossil site deserves inclusion in the National Park System. Other fossil sites in the national park system include Dinosaur National Monument in Utah, John Day Fossil Beds National Monument in Oregon, Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in Colorado, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument in Nebraska, Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument in Idaho, and Fossil Butte National Monument in Wyoming.



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## **COMMUNITY BUILDING AND OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

As a new national monument located solely within the State of Nevada for the first time since 1922, the Upper Las Vegas Wash is expected to engender community pride and assist in developing a greater sense of community.

The area is part of an open space plan of coordinated trails that will eventually ring the Las Vegas Valley, providing opportunities for local families to spend time together in a natural, outdoor setting.

The Upper Las Vegas Wash can provide educational opportunities, especially first-hand experience of several sciences, for our school children. The area also is supported by state higher education institutions and is expected to be a significant educational resource for the northern campus of University of Nevada Las Vegas.

## **URGENCY**

The area and its ecosystem are facing threats posed by urban encroachment, ongoing or increased recreation demand and the illegal dumping of residential and industrial waste. Vandalism and looting of the irreplaceable paleontological resources is occurring now.

