

United States Senate

July 17, 2015

[REDACTED]

218 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0303
(202) 224-2235

2201 EAST CAMELBACK ROAD
SUITE 115
PHOENIX, AZ 85016
(602) 952-2410

122 NORTH CORTEZ STREET
SUITE 108
PRESCOTT, AZ 86301
(928) 445-0833

407 WEST CONGRESS STREET
SUITE 103
TUCSON, AZ 85701
(520) 670-6334

TELEPHONE FOR HEARING IMPAIRED
(602) 952-0170

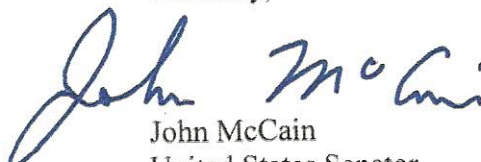
As you know, the Chiricahua National Monument was established by President Calvin Coolidge in 1924 to safeguard 12,000 acres of breathtaking geologic features. It is also known for its historical and cultural significance, and I agree with your points about the tourism draw to Sierra Vista. In 1976, Congress designated 87% of the monument as a Wilderness Area, thereby permanently banning development across most of the monument. Sometimes called the "Wonderland of Rocks," I've personally enjoyed the monument's gorgeous scenery and spectacular hiking trails.

Unfortunately, it's unlikely that Congress would pass legislation to convert the Chiricahua National Monument into a national park at this time. First, the current security situation along the U.S.-Mexico border likely remains not conducive to the public enjoyment and maintenance of this area as a national park. More than 80% of the land in the Arizona-Mexico border region is owned by the federal government, and the laws and regulations that govern national parks tend to conflict with the Border Patrols mission of interdicting drug smugglers and illegal border crossers. A study issued by the Government Accountability Office in 2010 (GAO-11-38) found several examples of Border Patrol agents in Arizona being ordered to wait several months to obtain permission from federal land managers just to patrol an area or setup a temporary surveillance towers. In some cases, federal land managers have fenced off access roads to deny entry of Border Patrol vehicles. While officially elevating the Chiricahua National Monument as a national park may be appealing, the visitor experience and ultimately the resource itself may suffer if the security situation there is further complicated.

Second, many members of Congress have objected to designating new national parks unless the National Park Service first addresses the ballooning \$11.5 billion deferred maintenance backlog that has plagued the agency for more than a decade. The National Park Service will celebrate its centennial in 2016, and we can expect a great deal of discussion on Capitol Hill concerning the budgetary costs of addressing the crumbling infrastructure at some of our most prominent national parks, including Grand Canyon National Park. At this time, I would advise against pursuing national park designation.

I truly appreciate you taking the time to contact me, and I hope that you will continue to share your priorities with me. Do not hesitate to write me again on this or any other issue.

Sincerely,


John McCain
United States Senator