

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
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## **Senator Feinstein Announces Intention to Introduce Measure to Protect Former Catellus Lands through a Monument Designation**

**Washington, DC** – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), the author of the 1994 California Desert Protection Act, today announced her intention to introduce new legislation to establish a national monument to preserve hundreds of thousands of acres in the Mojave Desert. The former Catellus lands were previously donated to or by purchased by the Department of the Interior for conservation.

**“The former Catellus lands between the Mojave National Preserve and Joshua Tree National Park were purchased by or donated to the federal government so they would be protected forever. I feel very strongly that the federal government must honor that commitment,”** Senator Feinstein said.

**“That’s why I am very concerned about wind and solar development proposals intended for these lands. I’m a strong supporter of renewable energy and clean technology -- but it is critical that these projects are built on suitable lands. The former Catellus lands shouldn’t be eligible for development.**

**So, I intend to introduce new legislation to protect hundreds of thousands of acres of these former railroad lands through a national monument designation. This would provide lasting protection for these lands and prevent development, while allowing existing uses to continue. I also intend to work with local stakeholders to determine whether other local desert lands may be suitable for federal protection at this time.**

**These former Catellus land acquisitions were financed by \$40 million in private donations from The Wildlands Conservancy, \$18 million in Land and Water Conservation Fund appropriations and approximately \$5 million in a price reduction from Catellus, a real estate subsidiary of the former Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Railroad. The private parties contributed this large sum of money in the belief that this land will be protected and conserved. Building huge solar facilities on these lands is untenable and unacceptable. Bottom line: the former Catellus lands must be protected from development.”**

Senator Feinstein recently expressed her concerns about development proposals intended for the former Catellus lands in a letter to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, which is available below.

### **Protecting the Former Catellus Lands**

The national monument designation would ensure that hundreds of thousands of acres between Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave National Preserve are protected in perpetuity. Large-scale development would be prohibited within the monument in order to protect the biological and aesthetic integrity of the region and guarantee public access for hunting, hiking, camping and exploring scenic back roads.

The 600,000 acre Catellus agreement was one the largest nonprofit land acquisition donations to the United States in history. Most of the Catellus lands were acquired and donated to the federal government between 1999 and 2004. It included nearly 100,000 acres of land to the National Park Service, over 210,000 acres in 20 wilderness areas to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and hundreds of thousands of acres of important habitat for threatened and endangered species.

The BLM is currently reviewing 130 applications for solar and wind energy development in the California desert, covering more than 1 million acres of public land. Several of these applications are located in the eastern Mojave Desert on or near property previously owned by Catellus. The California Energy Commission has estimated that approximately 100,000 to 160,000 acres of desert lands would be needed for the state to meet its 33 percent renewable energy goal by 2020.

Senator Feinstein was the lead sponsor of the 1994 Desert Protection Act, which provided lasting federal protection for nearly 9 million acres of pristine desert land in Southern California. It established Death Valley National Park, Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave National Preserve. It remains the largest parks and wilderness bill to impact the lower 48 states.

### **Letter from Senator Feinstein to Secretary Salazar**

***Pasted below is a letter written by Senator Feinstein to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, outlining her concerns about the development proposals for the former Catellus lands:***

March 3, 2009

Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

As the author of the California Desert Protection Act, I am writing to express my strong opposition to the leasing of former railroad lands in the eastern Mojave Desert by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). I also want to make you aware that I am currently preparing legislation to ensure the permanent protection of these lands, which were donated to the federal government for conservation.

As you may know, hundreds of lease applications have been submitted to the BLM for the development of renewable energy projects in the California desert. While I strongly support renewable energy, it is critical that these projects move forward on public and private lands well suited for that purpose. Unfortunately, many of the sites now being considered for leases are completely inappropriate and will lead to the wholesale destruction of some of the most pristine areas in the desert.

Following the passage of the Desert Protection Act, I worked closely with the Department of the Interior, the Wildlands Conservancy and Catellus (the real estate arm of the Union Pacific Railroad) to develop a plan to conserve hundreds of thousands acres of privately held land that checker-boarded much of the eastern Mojave. As part of that agreement, Catellus reduced the selling price of its land, the Wildlands Conservancy contributed \$40 million in private donations, and the federal government provided \$18 million in Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars to acquire and donate approximately 600,000 acres to the Department of the Interior. As you can see in the attached map, these lands generally cover the area between the Mojave Preserve and Joshua Tree National Park.

The significance of the Wildlands Conservancy-Catellus agreement cannot be overstated. It represents the largest nonprofit land acquisition donated to the American people in United States history. This included the donation of nearly 100,000 acres of land to the National Park Service, over 210,000 acres in 20 BLM wilderness areas, and hundreds of thousands of acres of important habitat for threatened and endangered species. Beyond protecting national parks and wilderness from development, the conservation of these lands has helped to ensure the sustainability of the entire desert ecosystem by preserving the vital wildlife corridors.

Though the Wildlands Conservancy-Catellus agreement and the use of federal conservation funds demonstrated the clear intent of all parties to preserve these lands in perpetuity, I have been informed that the BLM now considers these areas open for all types of use except mining. This is unacceptable! This policy has also led the State of California to include large swaths of former Catellus lands as potential renewable energy zones as a part of its Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative draft proposal. It is important the Department of the Interior act as soon as possible to rectify the situation before more time, effort and money is wasted by government agencies and private industry pursuing projects on these lands that will never come to fruition.

I urge you to direct the BLM to suspend any further consideration of leases to develop these former railroad lands for renewable energy or for any other purposes. Furthermore, I would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department of the Interior on legislation to protect these areas and encourage energy development on more suitable lands within the California desert.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my request. I look forward to working with you on these issues.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

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