



Native Plant Society of New Mexico

July 26, 2015

Judy Ackerman
Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition
3344 Eileen Drive
El Paso TX 79904-4501

Dear Ms. Ackerman:

The Native Plant Society of New Mexico is writing to support conservation of the US Army Fort Bliss Castner Range in El Paso. Although based in another state, we have an interest in this issue because the El Paso Native Plant Society is affiliated with the NM state organization, a non-profit with approximately 800 members in eight chapters. The mission of NMSNM is to educate the public about native plants by promoting knowledge of plant identification, ecology, and uses; foster plant conservation and the preservation of natural habitats; support botanical research; and encourage the appropriate use of native plants to conserve water, land, and wildlife.

The Castner Range is a parcel of approximately 7000 acres, within the city of El Paso, formerly used as a firing range. Clearance of unexploded ordnance would be required before public access is possible. The property comprises mid to lower elevations on the east side of the Franklin Mountains. It is bordered on the north and northwest by Franklin Mountains State Park, the nation's largest urban state park, and otherwise surrounded by densely developed private residential and commercial property. NPSNM supports conserving the Castner Range by adding it to the state park, or by pursuing alternative mechanisms such as a new urban National Wildlife Refuge or state Wildlife Management Area.

The topographic relief and complex geology of the Franklin Mountains, as well as the presence of active springs, results in high biodiversity within the northern Chihuahuan desert setting. Botanically, the area is best known for spectacular floral display from extensive fields of Mexican poppy, and it appears to be at or near the easternmost range limit for Southwestern barrel cactus, another conspicuous and esthetically pleasing plant. According to Dr. Richard Worthington (ret.) of UTEP, the granite substrate in El Paso County is uncommon and isolated from other igneous rock mountain masses and supports species from Sonoran areas to the

west. A number of species that are found in the Castner Range occur in Texas only on the granite substrate. The species are not rare elsewhere but constitute a state resource. Good examples are the poppy and the barrel cactus. Something close to 20 species enter Texas on the granite of Castner Range.

Other values which would be promoted by conserving the Castner Range include scenic beauty (from Highway 54 and from residential neighborhoods of El Paso), urban open space, wildlife movement corridors and the potential for recreation and education. NPSNM supports increased opportunities for access and appreciation of the natural world by urban populations.

Sincerely,

Rachel Jankowitz, Conservation Chair
Native Plant Society of New Mexico