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Joshua trees display unusually abundant blooms in the Mojave National Preserve, which will connect with other areas of scenic California wilderness that were granted national monument status Friday by President Barack Obama.

SoCal deserts get monument status

President Barack Obama granted national monument status Friday to nearly 1.8 million acres of scenic Southern California desert, a move the White House says will maintain in perpetuity the region's fragile ecosystem and natural resources, as well as provide recreational opportunities for hikers, campers, hunters and others.

Obama, in California this week for a fundraising swing, signed proclamations establishing three regions as national monuments: Mojave Trails, Castle Mountains (both in the Mojave Desert) and Sand to Snow in the Sonoran Desert.

The White House says the designations will nearly dou-

ble the amount of public land that Obama has marked for national monument status since taking office.

"In addition to permanently protecting incredible natural resources, wildlife habitat and unique historic and cultural sites, and providing recreational opportunities for a burgeoning region, the monuments will support climate resiliency in the region," the White House said in a statement.

The designations will also connect those regions to other protected government land, including Joshua Tree National Park, the Mojave National Preserve and 15 other federal wilderness areas.

Mojave Trails National

Monument, at 1.6 million acres, is by far the largest of the three new ones.

Sprawling across the vast Mojave Desert, it contains ancient lava flows, spectacular sand dunes and ancient Native American trading routes.

Castle Mountains National Monument, also in the Mojave Desert, links two mountain ranges as it covers nearly 21,000 acres that hold numerous important Native American archaeological sites.

Sand to Snow National Monument rises from the floor of the Sonoran Desert to the 11,503-foot peak of Mount San Geronio.

Associated Press

Sand to Snow National Monument