



## All I Want for the New Year is a Castner Range National Monument

There really is nothing like hitting one of the many trails in and around El Paso to just get away and reconnect with what is important in life and be thankful for one's blessings in life.

As we head into 2023, I hope that these natural places that I and my people hold dear remain unspoiled. These natural places deserve to be protected and to be cherished for us and for generations to come.

Across the country, Indigenous peoples, Latinos and other people of color lack access to nature. That's true even for those of us in El Paso, surrounded as we are by the Franklin Mountains and a desert full of unique and rare species of flora and fauna. As one of the largest cities in the U.S. — El Paso's the 24th, according to Yahoo! Sports, just behind Boston (#23) — El Paso should have more protected open spaces for its 85 percent Latino community to enjoy. And one way that can happen is for President Joe Biden to designate Castner Range as a national monument.

If President Biden protected El Paso's Castner Range by declaring it a national monument, 7,081 acres of our 16-mile-long Franklin Mountains would be protected from development forever. If you ever glance at other parts of the Franklins, you'll see they carry undeserved scars from years of mining and development. These mountains are the first thing — from 100 miles away — that people see when driving toward El Paso. We would like to protect all the beauty of the Franklins for those who live here and even those who are simply driving through.

As a member of El Paso's Tigua Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and a volunteer with The Frontera Land Alliance, I want to protect Castner Range for all young ones so they will always have a place to escape from the stresses of life. Castner Range is a place where members of my pueblo and my community can visit and explore and learn about the animals and plants that are around them. It's right in our backyard and we should teach children at a young age to respect such beautiful places as these.

All I want for 2023 is to see the more than 51 years of campaigning by many El Pasoans — including the late Judy Ackerman, who is no longer with us in body but walks with us in soul — come to fruition. All I want for the new year is a Castner Range National Monument. Wouldn't protecting open spaces for El Paso's past, present, and future generations be one of the greatest ways to start off 2023? I hope you will join us in our call for President Biden to protect Castner Range by signing a letter of support at [CastnerRange.org](https://CastnerRange.org).

Raphael "Shorty" Gomez is a councilman of El Paso's Tigua Ysleta Pueblo del Sur and a volunteer with The Frontera Land Alliance.



**[Castner4Ever.org](https://Castner4Ever.org) | [#Castner4Ever](https://#Castner4Ever)  
Submit your letter via QR code or to [info@fronteralandalliance.org](mailto:info@fronteralandalliance.org)  
To coordinate the physical return of letters, contact Frontera Land Alliance (915-351-8352).**