



Paleontology team working at Tule Springs site.

TULE SPRINGS FOSSIL BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Picture this: Herds of Ice Age Columbian mammoths – with tusks longer than six feet and molars the size of a human head – each devouring 300 to 600 pounds of leafy vegetation in the lush and verdant wetlands of Las Vegas. That's right. Las Vegas.

America's newest national monument is likely to be located within 30 minutes of the neon lights of the international travel destination of Las Vegas, Nevada. In an arid desert wash now dotted with scrappy salt brush and creosote remain thousands of fossils of Ice Age mammoths, massive bison and American lions, *camelops* (a larger version of today's Bactrian camels), sloths the size of small sports cars, and at least two species of ancient horse.

Scientifically documented, Tule Springs is significant for the vast span of time the fossils represent. Fossils and fossilized pollen in the area span 7,000 to 200,000 years ago, offering important insight into at least two Ice Ages and multiple warming and cooling periods. The national monument is expected to attract scientists from around the world, and will offer travelers and local residents unparalleled access to observe fossil excavations.

Tule Springs also offers glimpses of early native inhabitants, remnants of historic campsites, and a network of paleontological excavations funded by the National Science Foundation and chronicled by National Geographic in the early 1960s.

The area also sustains four unique and imperiled plants, Joshua trees and several species of cacti, as well as threatened desert tortoise, burrowing owls, kit foxes, raptors, kestrels, barn owls, great horned owls and sage grouse.



The proposed national monument is located at the base of the Sheep Mountain Range, an imposing and ruggedly carved mountain range that rises steeply from the desert floor. It adjoins the U.S. Fish and Wildlife-managed Desert Wildlife Refuge, the largest wildlife refuge in the lower 48 states, providing options for vital wildlife corridors.

Tule Springs will be a unique urban park unit serving an ethnically diverse population of nearby residents. Boundaries for the national monument adjoin the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, Clark County, tribal lands owned by the Las Vegas Paiutes, and park land owned by the State of Nevada.

In addition to the area's significant on-the-ground resources, the air above Tule Springs is a critical corridor used by U.S. Air Force combat and training missions between Nellis and Creech Air Force bases. The corridor is used for low-level flight arrival, departure and training routes and is the primary access route to the U.S. military's western ranges. Legislation for the national monument is expected to not only protect priceless fossil resources but also preserve an air corridor that is essential to U.S. defense programs and national security efforts.

Public support for Tule Springs is noteworthy. The national monument has bipartisan backing local elected officials and members of Nevada's Congressional delegation have been engaged and are supportive.

Over four years ago, an active friends group - the Protectors of Tule Springs - was formed by neighborhood leaders. The grassroots group launched a public

awareness campaign and collected more than 10,000 signatures to protect the area. They have since sustained strong awareness and broad community support.

In June 2009, equipped with the National Park Service analysis of the area's scientific significance and evidence of resource destruction, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) mounted a campaign to make Tule Springs a unit of the National Park Service, and built a coalition of supporters who have worked tirelessly for nearly 18 months making presentations, conducting tours of the site, and organizing an impressive clean-up that involved state and city governments, University Nevada Las Vegas, and several conservation groups.

On top of this, over 100 volunteers have completed rigorous training to become site stewards of the area, committing to quarterly inspections of the area that involves photographing site damage and tracking through GPS data methods.

Organizing efforts might be considered a text-book case on how to build community-wide support for a national park unit, how to engage the participation of elected officials and community leaders, and how to build a strong foundation for public lands protection.

Notably, three local government entities – the Clark County Commission, the Las Vegas Mayor and Council, and the North Las Vegas Mayor and Council – voted on and *unanimously* passed a resolution in November 2009 asking Congress to make Tule Springs a part of the National Park System.



Following the unprecedented passage of the resolutions, county and city officials and staff members worked closely with an active coalition of national monument supporters to define boundaries and evaluate acreage, with considerable foresight and enthusiasm to build a foundation for a park management plan that will well serve an urban population.

Working collaboratively, stakeholders and coalition participants defined recommended boundaries and established a national monument of approximately 23,000 acres that wraps around the Sheep Mountain Range, follows a critical watershed, and extends north and west to a military training range. Both Las Vegas and North Las Vegas dedicated land intended for urban development and both voted on and *unanimously* approved the size and shape of the proposed new monument.

Coalition participants include representatives from Nellis Air Force Base and the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, elementary educators and representatives from area colleges and universities including the University of Nevada Las Vegas Public Lands Institute,

conservation organizations and citizen groups, residents of a nearby age-restricted community and retired National Park Service superintendents, Nevada state legislators and state parks representatives, along with business and labor leaders.

Mayors, council members, county commissioners, city-county planners and economic development directors all recognize quality-of-life benefits in developing neighborhood communities, enhancing educational opportunities and attracting new and diversified businesses – centered around the proposed national monument.



Moreover, in a region that has suffered with job losses, record unemployment, as well as steep foreclosure and bankruptcy rates, community leaders look to the economic benefits a unit of the National Park Service offers. Conservative estimates of revenues from Tule Springs in the first years add \$25 to \$50 million to the local economy, annually.

Tule Springs National Monument is expected to have significant impact on the region's employment, wages and salaries. Construction jobs to build facilities and infrastructure in and around the new park unit could conceivably begin shortly after the site is legislated or designated, following adoption of a park management plan.

Jobs within the national monument, with outside businesses that support park "gateway" needs, along with new employment opportunities in related geosciences and technology fields provide long-term employment growth.

Enthusiasm for Tule Springs National Monument is unquestionably inspired by Southern Nevada's tourism-dependent economy. In a competitive world, where gaming has become increasingly popular, community leaders recognize the appeal a national park unit adds to tourism marketing. Currently, nearly two in ten visitors to the Las Vegas area report visiting national landmarks and protected areas such as Hoover Dam (64 percent), Grand Canyon (50 percent), Lake Mead (31 percent), Zion National Park (14 percent), Bryce Canyon National Park (10 percent), Red Rock Conservation Area (8 percent), and Valley of Fire State Park (4 percent).

Local elected officials and community leaders anticipate working with the National Park Service soon to establish entrance points, plan visitor amenities, and establish best-management practices to make Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument a world-class destination.

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