

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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C.S.S.R. 506
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Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
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Committee Report (Substituted)

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Castner Range in El Paso is one of the most rugged and pristine landscapes in Texas, encompassing 7,000 acres of undeveloped desert and foothills.

The land was previously known as the Castner Range Complex at Fort Bliss and was used as a United States Army artillery range, but the Department of Defense ceased operations there in 1971; unexploded ordnance remained behind, rendering the land unsuitable for development, and under the stewardship of the army, it has been allowed to rest in its natural state.

Since 1995, the army has been clearing old artillery rounds from the surface of the land; surface clearance, as opposed to subsurface clearance, was found to offer the best risk-reduction-to-cost ratio and is most compatible with a minimal-disturbance future land use, such as passive recreation on protected parkland.

Although the Castner Range is off-limits to the public, El Pasoans have long cherished the area for its surpassing beauty; bordering Franklin Mountains State Park on the west, the range contains some of the most geologically complex and visually striking parts of the Franklins and is prized for its Mexican gold poppy, which carpets the lower slopes in brilliant color in the spring.

Also remarkable for its biodiversity, Castner Range provides a number of distinctive animal habitats, and its unique soils and location combine to make this the only known site in Texas where several rare plants can be found; moreover, the range holds the greatest concentration of springs in the Franklins, supporting unexpectedly lush pockets of vegetation.

Castner Range is further distinguished by military history and archaeological sites.

In 1981, the Texas Legislature provided for the adjustment of the boundaries of Franklin Mountains State Park in anticipation of the future addition of Castner Range lands, an idea strongly favored by area residents; both the El Paso City Council and the El Paso County Commissioners Court unanimously passed resolutions in recent years advocating that the Castner Range be left undeveloped and be conserved for recreational use; furthermore, the Franklin Mountains State Park management plan takes the range into account, envisioning a network of trails in the canyons and lower elevations, and the U.S. Department of Defense recently made a \$300,000 grant to the Frontera Land Alliance to collect data concerning a conservation conveyance for the area.

The Castner Range is one of the Lone Star State's unequalled treasures, and its conservation will provide enormous benefits to future generations of Texans.

RESOLVED

That the Senate of the 82nd Texas Legislature hereby express its support for the conservation of Castner Range.

That the secretary of the senate forward official copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to the commanding general of Fort Bliss, to the secretary of the U.S. Department of Defense, to the president of the Senate and the speaker of the House of Representatives of the

United States Congress, and to all the members of the Texas delegation to Congress with the request that this resolution be entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.