



June 2, 2022

Attention:

Ms. Samantha Murray, President California Fish and Game Commission

P.O. Box 944209

Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

fgc@fgc.ca.gov

Re: Western Joshua Tree CESA protection

Dear President Murray:

We are writing today in support of listing the Western Joshua Tree as a threatened species, and giving it full and lasting protection under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA).

We are certain you have received many comments listing the virtues of the western Joshua Tree as an important part of the Mojave Desert ecosystem, and the threats these iconic trees face due to climate change, wildfire, and rapidly spreading development. Perhaps you have also heard opinions opposing the continued protection of Western Joshua Trees under CESA, because doing so would jeopardize economic development, or because they are currently relatively widespread.

We sympathize with both viewpoints; however we urge you to avoid this framing when making your decision. Joshua Trees are indeed important to small mammals and moths, lizards and birds, and they are *equally* important to people. It is because of the Joshua Trees, and all the species associated with them, that people have been, and continue to be, drawn to the Mojave desert to live, work, and play, from the original indigenous peoples to tourists and short term renters. Joshua Trees are a vital part of the livelihoods of the communities in and around the Mojave Desert - they are the backbone of local prosperity, including continued economic development. Many research studies have shown the economic value of intact biodiversity, outdoor recreation, and exposure to nature, and the love for Joshua Trees is self-evident, on the covers of books and albums, and the social media feeds of the people who visit.

Therefore, we urge you to protect Joshua Trees not just for their sake, but for ours. The best available science and climate modeling by researchers at the University of California, Riverside is clear: no matter how widespread the Western Joshua Tree is today, the population is headed for a cliff. Their population is already crashing, one wildfire or drought at a time, and is expected to



dramatically decline, or even disappear, from its current range within decades. We should see this unprecedented change as an imminent crisis, but also an opportunity. You can act now, and by granting lasting protections to the Western Joshua Tree, ensure that we not only have the tools to protect native habitats, but to ensure the prosperity of the people of California.

At CactusToCloud, we have experienced the value of these protections first hand. It was the listing of the Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard, native to our area, that led to a habitat conservation plan that allowed for both the survival of these State Endangered lizards, and the economic prosperity of the communities of Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage, La Quinta, and more. Today, Fringe-toed Lizards (state endangered), desert tortoises (state threatened), and the peninsular population of desert bighorn sheep (state threatened) live alongside hotels, resorts, and agriculture.

This should be the model the Western Joshua Tree follows: once legally protected, the state can work together with the community to identify places where the Western Joshua Tree can survive the worst effects of the climate crisis. Among these climate refugia, the purposeful development of renewable energy, tourist amenities, and affordable housing for all Californians can and should continue.

We thank the California Fish and Game Commission for their time and consideration of so many of the pressing environmental issues facing our great state. We urge you to act with speed and singular purpose in the face of unprecedented threats to the Western Joshua Tree, and to the people who live amongst them.

Respectfully,
CactusToCloud Institute

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