



SANTA ROSA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

The Santa Rosa Mountains National Scenic Area . . . where sharply defined mountain peaks create a near-perfect scenic backdrop for the communities and resorts of the Coachella Valley, where palm trees spring up from fault lines to dance in the breezes, where the rare peninsular bighorn sheep struggle to survive in a harsh environment.

Why a National Scenic Area? The Santa Rosa Mountains became a Scenic Area through a natural evolution, for the region is a spectacular ecosystem that the people who live in its shadows want to protect from the development so common on many other mountains and hills in rapidly urbanizing Southern California. The Santa Rosas, created through a Secretarial order in March 1990, are part of the Congressionally designated California Desert Conservation Area. During the preparation of the management plan for the Conservation Area, attention was paid to the Santa Rosas, though in a piecemeal manner: as a bighorn sheep habitat under a cooperative plan with the California Department of Fish and Game and, for a portion of the area toward the south, as a wilderness study area recommended by the Bureau of Land Management as suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The 1980s saw tremendous growth in the Coachella Valley, with the number of resorts more than doubling (led by the billion-dollar PGA West complex), the year-round residential population increasing, and the expansion or creation of new incorporated cities. By the end of the 1980's, eight cities were growing along the base of the mountains, each coveting its scenery, each harboring developers and development plans that would lead to encroachment to the base and then into this spectacular range. Few wished to see that happen.

The answer was to create America's fourth National Scenic Area through a cooperative effort among all entities having a stake in the mountains: BLM, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, the California Department of Fish and Game, the County of Riverside, the City of Cathedral City, the City of Coachella, the City of Desert Hot Springs, the City of Indian Wells, the City of Indio, the City of La Quinta, the City of Palm Desert, the City of Palm Springs, the City of Rancho Mirage, and the People of the Coachella Valley. Soon after designation, the Coachella Valley Mountains Trust was created, sharing similar goals for the Scenic Area.

The result is a partnership that will develop a comprehensive umbrella plan embracing the needs of all, dedicated to protecting the scenic values and allocating uses and users space and opportunities consistent with the natural resource management goals. The plan also will provide a basis for coordinating uses and proposals between all the entities involved, as well as facilitate land acquisition as needed to assure appropriate nondevelopment.

The Scenic Area concept is still evolving. While sharing some aspects in common with the California Desert's other National Scenic Area, the East Mojave, the Santa Rosas have an entirely different character and will be managed in a different manner. Just as the traditional uses of cattle grazing, mining, hunting, and rockhounding give the East Mojave its Old West character, the rare desert slender salamander and majestic bighorn sheep, the traces of Native American occupation of old, the palm trees rising from fault-line seeps in rugged canyons, and the true solitude of wilderness create a different personality for the Santa Rosas. Yet within both are the vistas and open spaces which BLM is committed to managing and protecting, and for which a special designation assures added emphasis and public sensitivity to preserving their values.

