

Mountain's trash problem inspires push for new national monument

May 2 2023, by Taylor Lane



Credit: Stan Shebs, CC BY-SA 3.0 , via Wikimedia Commons

When environmental advocacy organization Get Outdoors Nevada holds volunteer clean up events at public lands around the valley, they typically bring buckets.

When they clean up Frenchman Mountain—they bring dumpsters.

The east Las Vegas landmark has long been plagued by illegal dumping,

tarnishing pristine areas of outdoor recreation enjoyed by Sunrise Manor residents and visitors alike.

A battle to keep Frenchman Mountain free from trash is gaining momentum after local advocates joined forces to potentially make the area a national monument.

Since Get Outdoors Nevada began holding clean up events in 2016, approximately 15,000 pounds of trash have been collected by the organization at Frenchman. Two cleanup events at Frenchman held last year netted about 6,000 pounds of trash alone.

"The evidence abounds of folks who have been firing firearms, and using this area for target practice; that has created in, over a large swath of this area, huge amounts of glass and trash debris," Rachel Bergren, executive director for Get Outdoors Nevada, said.

Volunteers often spend hours clean up everything from tiny shards of glass to tires to construction debris, Bergren said.

Hence, the dumpsters.

But the problem of dumping and vandalism in the area isn't new. Steve Rowland, a geology professor at UNLV who has spent his career studying Frenchman Mountain's unique rock formation, has worked to clean up the area since the early 1990s.

Rowland helped form the advocacy group Citizens for Active Management of French & Sunrise Mountain Area, or CAM, to organize mountain clean ups and educate the public on the area's geological significance. The group worked with BLM to build educational signs near the mountain for visitors in early 1995, but not long after they were installed, vandals destroyed them.

Undeterred, Rowland said he has refused to let the area decay into a roadside trash dump.

"We've been trying to get that area cleaned up for a long time," Rowland said. "We would eventually like to have a higher level of management protection by the BLM, or whatever agency, to make sure that people don't feel like it's an OK place to go out and just throw their beer bottles around and leave trash."

Bergren, Rowland and Clark County Commissioner Segerblom, who represents District E which oversees the East Side, are part of a growing local coalition of Las Vegas residents who hope to see the area receive national monument designation, just as Avi Kwa Ame received its designation in March, as part of a long-term solution to for a cleaner Frenchman Mountain.

Just as Red Rock Canyon received additional management resources by becoming a national conservation area in 1990, the Frenchman Mountain area could also see increased resources with national monument status, Bergren said.

"It's not an apples to apples comparison, but that potential certainly exists at Frenchman Mountain," she said.

Some protection does already exist for the area, which is designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern to protect the rare Las Vegas bear poppy, a state-designated endangered plant, according to Stephen Leslie, assistant field manager at BLM's Las Vegas Field Office.

The BLM alone lacks the authority to change the designation of the land without an act of Congress or through presidential proclamation, he said.

"It is unfortunate that we do see such a high amount of dumping and

graffiti and other types of incidents," Leslie said. "I think the more people understand about the area, the more invested in it they would become."

The coalition states on the monument campaign's website that they believe the ACEC designation is not doing enough to bring adequate resources and oversight for the area.

Right now, the movement to make Frenchman Mountain a national monument is still in early stages, Bergren and Rowland said. As a grassroots movement, advocates have focused primarily on educating the public about the need for increased protection and resources in the area, and getting members of the public to sign a petition to support making the area the East Las Vegas National Monument.

"There's so many valuable characteristics of this space that we think put it on the same playing field as something like Avi Kwa Ame," Bergren said. "It's a much smaller area—but there are many similarities because of all the resources and the values that are there."

The Great Unconformity rock formation, for example, brings international geologists to Las Vegas who want to better understand the unique, abnormal rock layers there that are only visible in Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon, Rowland said.

"It's a little embarrassing to take them to a world-class geological site, and have to step over broken glass and beer cans and old bed springs," Rowland said.

Segerblom said his office is working closely with senators, congresspeople, and the Biden administration to make the national monument a reality—especially to give added protection to The Great Unconformity.

"That's going to be another part of the push we're trying to do and really make it a place where tourists and locals can go and enjoy it," Segerblom said. "The view up there is just phenomenal."

Getting an area [national monument](#) designation isn't something that will happen overnight. Avi Kwa Ame was 20 years in the making before receiving its status, and came after tribal groups and environmental activists spearheaded a public awareness campaign in 2021.

But, Segerblom said more immediate solutions to the trash problem are in the works.

Segerblom recently spearheaded the installation of concrete barriers along Los Feliz Street between Washington Avenue and Bonanza Road to deter would-be trash dumpers and off-roaders from entering the desert behind residential communities. Soon, he hopes to add cameras to some of the East Side's dead-end streets to record illegal activities near Frenchman.

"Hopefully, there's a barrier there, they won't just get out and carry their mattresses over," Segerblom said.

He also plans to push for a Neighborhood Services Department in his next term. The department will focus on being a one-stop-shop that residents can contact to report [illegal dumping](#), among other community issues that need to be resolved that would coordinate with BLM and the county.

In the meantime, members of the public can help support [public lands](#) through volunteer efforts and by signing the petition to support the designation on eastlasvegasmonument.org. You can also call BLM's dispatch center at 702-293-8998 to report dumping.

Although there are no scheduled clean ups at Frenchman Mountain yet, Get Outdoors Nevada is planning to organize a mass clean up of the area in the fall, Bergren said.

"It's a really beautiful area, and we think it deserves to be cared for and have attention brought to it," she said. "Whatever we can do to support and to raise awareness and get the community involved is something that we're really committed to."

2023 Las Vegas Review-Journal.

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Mountain's trash problem inspires push for new national monument (2023, May 2)
retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2023-05-mountain-trash-problem-national-monument.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--