

January 13, 2017

Honorable Mitch McConnell
Honorable Charles Schumer
Honorable Paul Ryan
Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Honorable Ryan Zinke

Dear The Honorable McConnell, Schumer, Ryan, Pelosi, and Zinke:

We applaud President Obama's recent designation and protection of several important civil rights sites as our country's newest national monuments and living classrooms: Anniston, Birmingham, and Penn Center.

These historic sites join other important designations made by President Obama and 15 previous U.S. Presidents, courtesy of the Antiquities Act, which are critical to our heritage. Together, these national monuments help portray and honor our continued struggle as a nation toward equality for all.

Most notable among the nation's Antiquities Act designations are the African Burial Ground site in New York, where free and enslaved Africans were laid to rest from 1690s until 1794 and Fort Monroe in Virginia, a Civil War-era fort known as the "Freedom Fortress," since any enslaved person who successfully escaped slavery to reach its gates would be free. In 2013, Colonel Charles Young's home in Ohio was dedicated as a national monument, honoring his important leadership in the U.S. Army, including oversight of a Buffalo Soldier regiment as the first African American Superintendent of a National Park. Importantly, the visitor center for the bipartisan-supported Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument opens this March in Maryland. But, perhaps our most well-known national monument designations are those that are also among the most visited parks in the nation: the Statue of Liberty and the Grand Canyon.

Stewardship of our national public lands and preservation of our historic and cultural heritage is an important part of our responsibility as caretakers of our heritage for the next generation. The Antiquities Act is an important tool in protecting the special places of God's Creation where we play, pray, and learn. The Act authorizes every President to proclaim "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest" as national monuments.

Our responsibility to care for Creation is coupled with our duty to preserve and honor the story of all Americans, and ensure all of our children have equitable access to healthy recreation and the opportunity to find their own story in our park system.

Regardless of our race, religion or heritage, these stories of courage, conviction, and fortitude are reflections of each of us. These monuments document a journey for justice, a core component of our own faith story.

Freedom Riders.
Birmingham.
Reconstruction Era.
Harriet Tubman.
Charles Young.
Fort Monroe.
The Statue of Liberty.

These national monuments and others faithfully commemorate our stories. We ask that you ensure the next President has the opportunity to continue enhancing our system of national parks, monuments and other public lands, and honoring our heritage.

Sincerely,

Alabama State Missionary Baptist Convention
African Methodist Episcopal Church 3rd Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Church 7th Episcopal District (South Carolina)
African Methodist Episcopal Church 9th Episcopal District (Alabama)
African Methodist Episcopal Church 13th Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Alabama Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Eastern North Carolina Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Mid-Atlantic Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Mid-West Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Piedmont Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church South Atlantic Episcopal District (South Carolina)
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church South West Delta Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Western Episcopal District
Baptist E&M Convention of South Carolina
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church 2nd Episcopal District
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church 5th Episcopal District
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church 7th Episcopal District (South Carolina)
Cleveland Baptist Association
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
Creation Justice Ministries
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Earth Ministry
Eco-Justice Ministries
Evangelical Environmental Network
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina
General Missionary Convention of Indiana, Inc.
General Missionary Baptist Convention of Colorado
Missionary Baptist State Convention of Missouri
Missionary Baptist State Convention of Tennessee
National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.
National Baptist Convention of America International, Inc.

Ohio Baptist State Convention
Ohio Council of Churches
Ohio State Missionary Baptist Convention of Ohio
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Progressive National Baptist Convention
Rowan Baptist Association
Sandy River Missionary Baptist Association (South Carolina)
Tennessee Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction – C.O.G.I.C
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
Virginia Baptist State Convention, Inc.
Wisconsin Council of Churches
Woman’s Baptist E&M Convention of South Carolina