



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Returns Ancestral Land to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians**

PALM SPRINGS, CA – The State of California Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy has donated 320 acres of ancestral land within the San Jacinto Mountain range to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, a federally recognized Tribe.

“Returning these lands to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians is a powerful example of how we can right historical wrongs and advance healing for the land and people at the same time,” said Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency. “We are committed to working with California Native American tribes to support their return of ancestral lands and to help protect these landscapes for future generations.”

The donated 320 acres was originally purchased in 1997 by the State of California through the Conservancy to protect palm oases and fragile cultural resources near Palm Canyon for conservation purposes. The Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy is a state agency established in 1991 and is directed by a 20-member governing board.

“The Conservancy’s mission is to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Coachella Valley,” said Elizabeth King, Conservancy Executive Director. “This is the Conservancy’s first direct Tribal land-back transfer, and we are proud to be a part of this transfer to the original stewards who have been caring for these lands since time immemorial. With this donation, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians care of these lands and associated cultural resources continues in perpetuity.”

This donation, combined with a previous donation of 280 acres made by the Friends of the Desert Mountains with the help of the Conservancy in April 2024, makes a total of 600 acres of ancestral land donations to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians this year.

In ancient times, the Cahuilla ancestors thrived throughout more than 6,250 square miles in what is now Southern California. The Agua Caliente Indian Reservation was established in 1876 and expanded a year later. Today, the Tribe is steward to 34,000 acres.

“Preservation of our homelands is essential to maintaining our cultural heritage,” said Tribal Chairman Reid D. Milanovich of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. “Integral to the identity of our Tribe is the thousands of years of knowledge and ancient wisdom held within these lands, our homelands.”

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