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Mojave Cross Settlement Lauded by Legion

INDIANAPOLIS (April 25, 2012) – A federal district court decision that ended a decade of legal battles over a cross that served as a World War I veterans’ memorial in the Mojave Desert was praised today by the leader of the nation’s largest veterans organization.

“We are delighted that the court approved a land exchange that will finally enable the Mojave Cross to be restored as the monument to World War I veterans that was first erected on Sunrise Rock in 1934 by a World War I veteran, Riley Bemby,” said Fang A. Wong, national commander of the 2.4 million member American Legion.

A federal judge approved the lawsuit settlement Monday, permitting the U.S. Park Service to turn over a remote hilltop area known as Sunrise Rock to a Veteran of Foreign Wars post in Barstow, Calif., and a nearby veterans home.

The park service will give up the acre of land in exchange for five acres of donated property elsewhere in the 1.6 million-acre preserve in Southern California.

The American Legion was involved from the beginning, filing friend-of-the-court briefs in support of the memorial, up to and including an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in April 2010. The Court refused to order removal of the cross and directed a federal judge to look again at the congressional transfer plan.

Once the land exchange is complete, the park service will fence the site, leaving entrances for visitors, and post signs noting that it is private land. A plaque will be placed on the rock noting that it is a memorial to U.S. war veterans.

"We will continue to monitor the progress of this settlement closely until the land exchange is completed and the Mojave Cross, which was stolen by vandals during litigation, is replaced, as a fitting tribute to our World War I comrades," Wong said.

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