California Desert Studies Consortium

Strategic Plan 2025-2030

Final Draft Approved 8/29/2025

The California Desert Studies Consortium (CDSC) was established in 1974 to oversee activities related to the California State University (CSU) Desert Studies Center (DSC), a 1,280-acre satellite CSU campus located in the United States National Park Service (NPS) Mojave National Preserve (MOJA). Situated on the western shore of dry Soda Lake at the terminus of the Mojave River, the DSC is an ideal location for field instruction and research in the Soda Springs area, as well as a convenient base of operations for activities in the broader Mojave Desert. The DSC provides overnight accommodations and meal service for up to 75 people at a time, as well as meeting rooms, a classroom, laboratory, small library and natural history collections, and outdoor gathering spaces. Users of the DSC represent a broad range of disciplines, such as anthropology, art, astronomy and physics, biology, chemistry, creative writing, engineering, environmental studies, geography, geology and earth science, mathematics, meteorology, and music.

The Board of Governors of the CDSC is comprised of faculty and administration representatives from 7 southern California CSU campuses, at-large members, and representatives from MOJA, with CSU Fullerton (CSUF) as the home, administrative campus. The DSC is operated through a cooperative agreement between the CDSC, representing CSU, and the NPS, which was initiated at the time of the formation of MOJA by the U.S. Congress with the passing of the Desert Protection Act of 1994.

VISION: To be the premier alliance for desert education and research in California.

MISSION: To facilitate education, research, and creative activities related to California's deserts and promote use of the CSU Desert Studies Center.

PURPOSE OF THE DSC: To provide the infrastructure, resources, and spaces that are essential to support the CDSC's mission, i.e., to facilitate immersive, experiential learning and research that improve understanding, appreciation, and conservation of deserts and arid lands and their natural and cultural resources.

CORE VALUES

- A commitment to place, by promoting research and educational activities that take advantage of the unique location, natural and cultural history, and facilities at Soda Springs and in the surrounding Mojave National Preserve.
- A commitment to immersive, experiential, field-based education and workforce training, centered on mission rather than profit.
- A commitment to long-term basic and applied research that addresses critical problems for the sustainable management of the natural resources of arid lands, including priorities for MOJA and other governmental agencies.
- A commitment to providing welcoming, inclusive access and opportunities to all members of California's diverse populations, at a reasonable fee schedule that recognizes cost barriers to participation faced by different user groups.

GOALS (2025-2030)

GOAL 1: Upgrade DSC facilities to improve efficiency, ensure health, safety, and comfort of staff and visitors, while protecting its natural and cultural resources.

GOAL 2: Improve administrative procedures and governance to provide greater institutional resilience, effectiveness, and long-term economic sustainability.

GOAL 3: Raise the profile of the DSC and its use by educational groups and the public.

GOAL 4: Expand research activity at the DSC.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES (2025-2030)

GOAL 1:

- Upgrade critical components of our aging photovoltaic (PV) solar energy system to safeguard the health, safety, and comfort of staff and visitors, ensure a consistent water supply to endangered fish and aquatic habitat in the lakes, reduce dependence on expensive and polluting fossil fuels, and allow for future expansion and improvements of DSC facilities, helping promote the CSU as a leader in sustainability.
- Upgrade HVAC systems in the Castle apartment units to allow more regular summer use and ensure more reliable temperature controls for the internet server and IT equipment.
- Work with MOJA to upgrade and replace components of shared utilities, e.g., sewer, water.
- Partner with MOJA to devise and implement strategies to better regulate public access and security.
- Modernize reservation, invoicing, and reporting procedures.

GOAL 2:

- Revisit and renew the Cooperative Agreement between the CDSC and NPS for the management of educational and research programs and facilities at the DSC.
- Review and update the Memorandum of Understanding and the Articles of Operation among CDSC campuses to develop a more equitable distribution of operating, maintenance, and unexpected costs among Consortium members, clarify responsibilities and expectations of campus representatives, and consider expansion to add other campuses to the Consortium.
- Seek an increase in the annual CSU allocation for DSC Operating Expenses to better match actual costs.
- Modernize DSC office budgeting and reporting procedures.
- Formalize staffing priorities to reflect current DSC needs and opportunities for growth, including staff lines for a full-time September-May cook and part-time student position for engagement and outreach.

GOAL 3:

- Develop and offer weekend and short courses through CSUF University Extension targeted toward the public and other stakeholders, with the aim of eventually creating a program of courses on desert studies that will facilitate workforce training and development.
- Develop and make available a variety of successful modular field activities that take advantage of existing data sets, to make it easier for short-term visitors to plan their time and make their trips more meaningful, and give students career-useful skills and experiences.
- Maintain an updated website that serves as the main portal of visitor information.
- Develop outreach and media strategies to engage past visitors and identify new ones, including community groups, professional societies, tribal groups, and artists, with the aim of hosting at least 80 user groups per year and at least 5,000 user-days by 2030.
- Increase engagement of alumni and prospective donors, including targeted use of social media.
- Plan a celebration of DSC's 50th anniversary in 2026, inviting campus representatives and past and current users to reflect on our history and accomplishments and discuss the future.

GOAL 4:

- Establish a research-grade, networked weather station at the DSC, with real-time meteorological and other environmental data available online.
- Maintain and upgrade on-site infrastructure to better attract and serve researchers.
- Identify and pursue establishment of long-term ecological and environmental monitoring efforts, especially in programs that link DSC and Consortium researchers to established networks and communities, and those that align with key priorities of agency partners, e.g., NPS, Bureau of Land Management (BLM).
- Upgrade and increase the visibility and online accessibility of information about our natural history collections and consider collecting new specimens and replacing damaged or lost ones through new field surveys.
- Update the DSC website with data and information useful to researchers, including recent literature, long-term datasets, grant opportunities, species lists, and lists of dissertations, theses, and publications from the DSC and surrounding areas, as well as useful links and advice to help researchers initiate and sustain projects, e.g., how to obtain MOJA research permits.
- Increase the visibility and profile of DSC-funded grant opportunities (Presch Student Scholarships, Faculty Grant-Writing Awards) and double the number of annual awards available in each program.