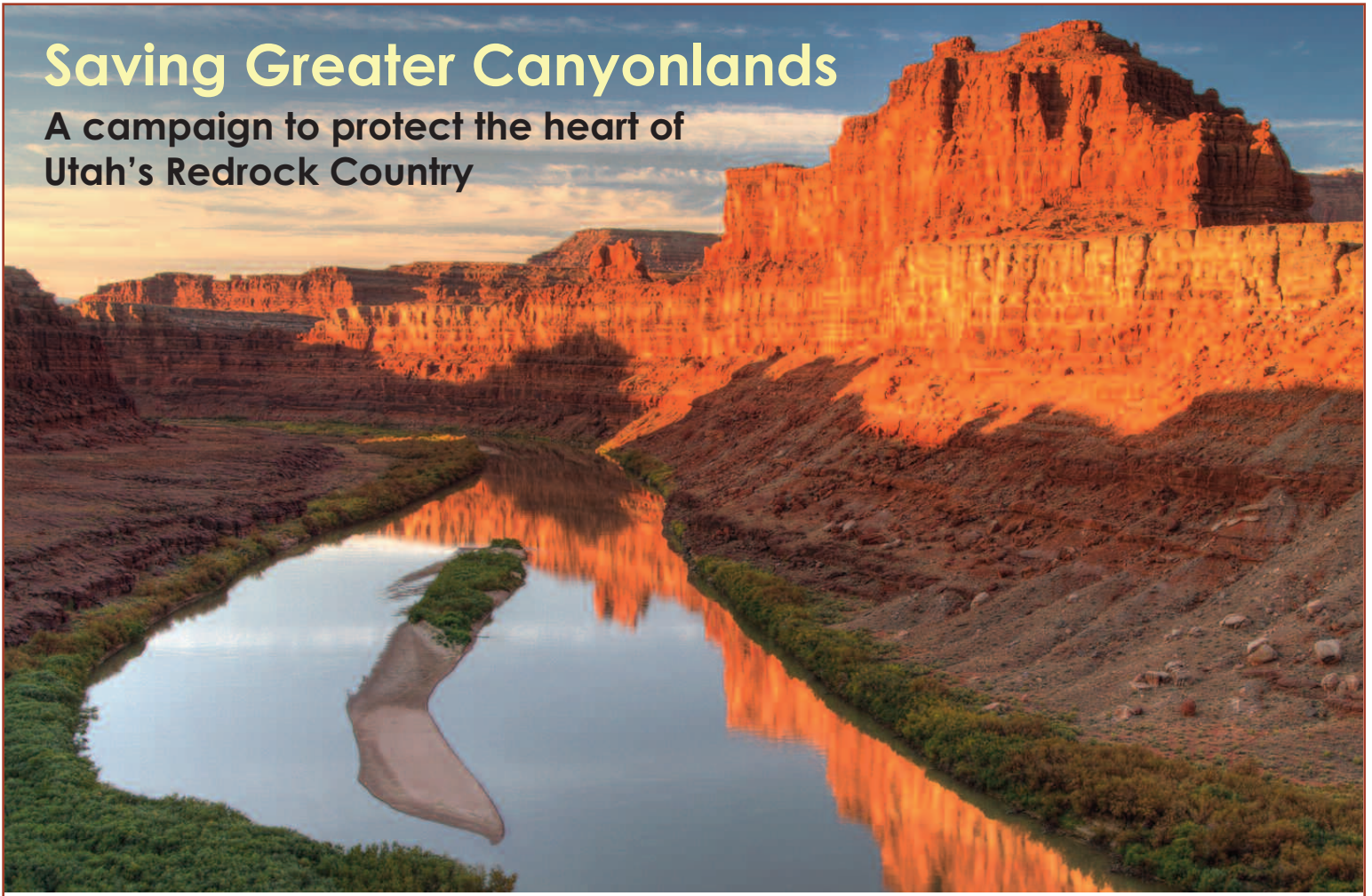


Saving Greater Canyonlands

A campaign to protect the heart of Utah's Redrock Country



The Colorado River as it flows through Greater Canyonlands. Photo copyright Jeff Clay/Clayhaus Photography.

There are few enough places left in the lower 48 where we can truly lose ourselves, stand alone and bask in creation's splendor. One of them is Greater Canyonlands, the 1.8 million acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service land surrounding Canyonlands National Park in southeastern Utah.

Though dry and remote, Greater Canyonlands is the heart of one of the West's most critical watersheds. Here, the Green, Dirty Devil, and San Rafael Rivers wind south to meet the Colorado—the river upon which 40 million Americans and 15% of our nation's crops rely. Along the way they nourish some 960 species of desert flora and a rich array of wildlife, from black bears in the Abajo Mountains, to mountain lions and desert bighorn sheep at Hatch Point, to peregrine falcons in Labyrinth Canyon. Seven endangered or threatened species find refuge there today and perhaps nowhere else.

This is a place of cliff, canyon and valley; spire and castle; lush and improbable hanging gardens; echoing alcoves and amphitheaters. It is a source of quiet renewal for backpackers, pristine darkness for stargazers, untold wonder for river runners, and economic vitality for southern Utah.

The Lifeline of the Southwest

Protecting Greater Canyonlands has never been more urgent. Increasing pressures from oil and gas development, potash and

uranium mining, and even tar sands development threaten the archaeological, biological, and recreational values of this unique region—not to mention the Southwest's most critical watershed.

These industrial activities present major concerns for the Colorado River Basin, both directly through pollution and indirectly through the phenomenon known as Dust on Snow. Research shows that activities that destabilize soils—such as off-road vehicle use and oil and gas development—greatly increase the susceptibility of desert soils to wind erosion. Scientists also say that the Colorado Plateau—including Greater Canyonlands—and the Great Basin are likely the major source of dust on snow in the Rockies. Research shows that dusty snowpack in the Rockies has robbed the Colorado River of up to 5 % of its flow before it reaches the Grand Canyon, equating to about 750,000 acre-feet annually, or about twice Denver's annual use.

The ongoing development of oil and gas fields in Greater Canyonlands will not only create industrial-level carbon emissions; they are creating their own network of roads, pipelines, and drilling pads that will disturb thousands of acres of native soils. The federal government has identified the area as one most vulnerable to climate change. Thus, mitigation of human disturbance here is all the more important, and a clear, unified management plan essential.

A 12,000-Year Human Record

Mind-bending as the geologic record is, the archaeological record may be even more exceptional. Archaeologist Jerry Spangler calls it “a largely untapped library of 12,000 years of human history.” Well-preserved Ice Age hunting camps remain as well as artifacts of later agrarian civilizations. Taken together, these constitute “some of the most scientifically important cultural resources in North America, each with evidence that could help unravel secrets into our collective human past.”

Tucked in cool side canyons are archaeological remnants of the Basketmaker people, telling the details of life in an ancient civilization. Ingeniously built cliff dwellings still cling to shady canyon walls, much as the Ancestral Puebloans left them. Often nearby are granaries that held their last stores of corn a millennium ago. Rock art panels depict hunting scenes and village life along with symbols whose meanings are mysterious.

Franciscan priests Francisco Dominguez and Silvestre Escalante explored the region in 1776. A century later the first settlers arrived—sent from Salt Lake City to initiate the Mormon settlements still thriving in the region. The area’s wild character was reaffirmed when Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid successfully hid out in the latter part of the 19th century.

Getting America’s Best Idea Right

The national parks have been called “America’s Best Idea,” and the idea of protecting Greater Canyonlands has a long history. The Department of Interior first proposed a national monument protecting Greater Canyonlands and the surrounding canyons of the Colorado River in 1936, and President Franklin Roosevelt’s



An archaeological site in the Arch Canyon proposed wilderness. Photo copyright Liz Thomas/SUWA.



Dark Canyon proposed wilderness. Photo copyright James W. Kay.

Interior Secretary Harold Ickes pushed for a 4.5 million-acre Escalante National Monument covering the region until 1940. World War II derailed efforts to permanently protect the area, but in 1961, John F. Kennedy’s Interior Secretary Stewart Udall directed the National Park Service to draft plans for a new national park. Canyonlands National Park was finally established in 1964, but Congress had whittled the park down to just 257,640 acres—about a tenth the acreage of Yellowstone National Park.

Although Canyonlands was expanded to 337,530 acres in 1971, the boundaries around the existing park are political rather than natural boundaries, which have left the park vulnerable to degradation from industrial development. Indeed, that degradation has already begun, with the Island in the Sky district of Canyonlands National Park becoming known as “Oil Land in the Sky” among many locals.

The good news is there are tools available to protect Greater Canyonlands. President Obama can use the authority of the Antiquities Act to protect a place of national historic and scientific value. Presidents of both parties have used the Act in Utah to establish national monuments.

Greater Canyonlands sweeps across a vast network of canyons and mesas filled with scientific, cultural, and historic treasures—precisely the sort of place that the Antiquities Act was designed to protect.

As the Centennial of the National Park Service approaches in 2016, President Obama has a unique opportunity to fulfill the original vision for Canyonlands National Park by establishing the Greater Canyonlands National Monument—and get America’s best idea right.

Support for a National Monument

Tens of thousands of individuals from Utah and all 50 states have written President Obama in support of the Greater Canyonlands National Monument. Among the leading protection proponents are the Outdoor Industry Association and more than 100 outdoor recreation businesses. Conservation organizations have also joined together to create the Greater Canyonlands Coalition including Grand Canyon Trust, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, CaluWild, and the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance.

In February of 2013 a joint resolution was introduced in the Utah House and Senate calling on Congress and the President to act to protect Greater Canyonlands; and in July 2014, fourteen US Senators wrote the President, urging him to create Greater Canyonlands National Monument.



The existing boundary of Canyonlands National Park (the park is to the left in this photo) fails to protect the Greater Canyonlands watershed. Photo copyright Bill Rau.



Floating the Colorado River. Photo copyright Ray Bloxham/SUWA.



An oil well near the boundary of Canyonlands National Park. Photo copyright Liz Thomas/SUWA.



White Canyon proposed wilderness. Photo copyright Chris Case.

Threats to Greater Canyonlands



Proposed Greater Canyonlands National Monument

Oil and Gas Development

Potash Development

Tar Sands Leasing and Development

Uranium Deposits

Past Uranium Producers

Uranium Mills

Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Threats

Cultural Resource Looting

State Owned Lands

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

