

REDROCK WILDERNESSES

The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
VOLUME 42, NUMBER 1 • SPRING 2025



TRUMP 2.0: "ENERGY DOMINANCE," CHAOS, UNCERTAINTY



The mission of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) is the preservation of the outstanding wilderness at the heart of the Colorado Plateau, and the management of these lands in their natural state for the benefit of all Americans.

SUWA promotes local and national recognition of the region's unique character through research and public education; supports both administrative and legislative initiatives to permanently protect Colorado Plateau wild places within the National Park and National Wilderness Preservation Systems or by other protective designations where appropriate; builds support for such initiatives on both the local and national level; and provides leadership within the conservation movement through uncompromising advocacy for wilderness preservation.

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OFFICES

Main Office
425 East 100 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84111
801-486-3161

Washington, DC
122 C Street NW
Suite 650
Washington, DC 20001
202-546-2215

Moab
P.O. Box 968
Moab, UT 84532

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This issue of *Redrock Wilderness* was written by the following staff and outside contributors: Steve Bloch, Judi Brawer, Travis Hammill, Diana Haro, Diane Kelly, Tom Kenworthy, Jeremy Lynch, Kya Marienfeld, Heather Rose Martinez, Nicole Milavetz, Laura Peterson, Grant Stevens, and Michelle White. It was edited by Darrell Knuffke and laid out by Diane Kelly. Newsletter design by Amy Westberg.

Contributions of photographs (especially of areas within the peoples’ proposal for Utah wilderness) and original art (such as pen-and-ink sketches) are greatly appreciated! Please send submissions to photos@suwa.org or via regular mail c/o Editor, SUWA, 425 East 100 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84111.

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HERE WE GO AGAIN

A little more than eight years ago, the newsletter cover following the 2016 election featured a dark and stormy scene over Factory Butte. Inside, SUWA's executive director Scott Groene wrote: "From the beginning of SUWA and the campaign for redrock wilderness, the challenge has been difficult. Faced with intransigent Utah politicians, we have rarely NOT been on the defense. That is the nature of what we do. We have ensured that millions of acres of Utah lands are still wild. We have done it by holding the line, by fighting acre by acre to keep it wild."

Now, with Scott retired and the SUWA board engaged in a thorough search for his replacement, it is my unfortunate task to state that, once again, the challenge ahead of us is difficult. Perhaps never in its more than 40-year history has SUWA faced a bigger array of threats than it does at this moment.

We have a president who fancies himself a king and a Congress that prostrates itself like a collection of simpering vassals. Millions of acres of public land in Utah are now subject to the tender mercies of Utah Senator Mike Lee (R)—head of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee—and his ideological sidekicks Senator John Curtis (R-UT), Representative Celeste Maloy (R-UT-2), and Representative Mike Kennedy (R-UT-3).

Congress is attempting to strip presidents of their authority to create national monuments via the Antiquities Act without congressional approval. And our litigation defending President Joe Biden's restoration of Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments continues to work its way through the legal system—while renewed attacks loom again.

Over at the Interior Department headquarters we will soon have Kathleen Sgamma, the oil-soaked head of the Western Energy Alliance, running the Bureau of Land Management, and the equally fossil-fuel-focused former North Dakota governor Doug Burgum as Interior Secretary.

Meanwhile, in Utah, the governor and legislature continue their rogue efforts to sell off or privatize 18.5 million acres of federal public land, despite a recent direct appeal to the Supreme Court, which was quickly rejected. We anticipate a long grind through lower federal courts with the same land grab objective in mind.

All of these threats are explored in greater detail in this issue of *Redrock Wilderness*.

How is SUWA responding? In every way we can. One of the more high-profile ways is that likely by the time you read this America's Red Rock Wilderness Act will have been reintroduced in Congress. And several dozen of our tenacious activists will have traveled to Washington, DC to hold lobbying meetings, building upon decades of work by activists before them to secure such breadth of support in Congress that even when it seems the odds are against us, we're able to defend the redrock.

The challenge ahead remains difficult—but that's never stopped us before, and it certainly won't now. We were able to hold the line during the first Trump administration. With your continued support, we can do it again.

For the Redrock,

Tom Kenworthy
SUWA Board Chair

TRUMP 2.0: “ENERGY DOMINANCE,” CHAOS, UNCERTAINTY

In his final Oval Office address, President Joe Biden delivered a warning: “Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy.” He went on to say, “Powerful forces want to wield their unchecked influence to eliminate the steps we’ve taken to tackle the climate crisis, to serve their own interest for power and profit. We must not be bullied to sacrifice the future of our children and our grandchildren.”

Biden’s warning was spot on. Just a few weeks later President Trump proclaimed “LONG LIVE THE KING” on social media.

It is hard to overstate the impacts of Trump’s policies on our public lands and on SUWA’s mission to protect the redrock wilderness. Instead of advancing conservation as we’ve been able to do for the past four years, our job now is

to hold the line and push back against Trump’s madness at every turn.

The news is moving quickly as every day brings a new outrage. Below, we touch on some of the Trump administration’s initial actions and what they mean for canyon country. For the latest on legislative threats to public lands from the Republican majority in Congress, see page 8.

A BARRAGE OF EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Every president has the power to issue Executive Orders (EOs), but the sheer scope of Trump’s EOs has been staggering. Think of these orders as directives from the president. They set priorities, policies, etc., for the Executive Branch’s many offices and departments. While EOs are not laws (which Congress must pass), they can be reviewed by federal courts, and many of Trump’s EOs are currently the



subject of litigation. Several EOs will influence SUWA's day-to-day work; two in particular stand out.

EO 14154: "*Unleashing American Energy*" states, "It is in the national interest to unleash America's affordable and reliable energy and natural resources." It goes on to say that it is the policy of the U.S.:

- "to encourage energy exploration and production on Federal lands and waters . . ." and
- "to establish our position as the leading producer and processor of non-fuel minerals, including rare earth minerals . . ."

This EO also called for an "Immediate Review of All Agency Actions that Potentially Burden the Development of Domestic Energy Resources" and revoked 12 Biden orders related to climate change.

EO 14156: "*Declaring a National Energy Emergency*" includes several dangerous provisions, including an "Emergency Approvals" section that calls on agencies to ". . . identify and exercise any lawful emergency authorities available to them, as well as all other lawful authorities they may possess, to facilitate the identification, leasing, siting, production, transportation, refining, and generation of domestic energy resources, including, but not limited to, on Federal lands."

Together, these EOs send a message: Trump will do anything in his quest for more leasing and drilling. This is despite the fact that every western state has a surplus of lands already under lease but not in development and that the past few years have seen record oil and gas production on public lands in Utah. Let's be clear: these existing trends are driving our nation and the world deeper into the climate

crisis; doubling down on fossil fuels will only make things that much worse.

Since Trump was elected and launched his blizzard of EOs we've seen a significant uptick in industry nominations for new oil and gas leases in Utah. Whether that produces a corresponding rise in drilling has more to do with energy markets than with lease availability but we're bracing for the worst. At the same time, speculators are staking new hard rock mining claims (for uranium, lithium, and other minerals) in some of Utah's wildest places.

SECRETARY BURGUM FOLLOWS SUIT

The Department of the Interior manages much of America's vast natural and cultural resources. It employs over 70,000 people in 11 bureaus, including the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Most recently, Deb Haaland served as Interior Secretary, the first Native American to do so. Now Trump has tapped former North Dakota governor and billionaire Doug Burgum to serve as Secretary.

Once he was sworn in, Burgum immediately began issuing Secretarial Orders (SOs). These are department-level versions of executive orders and provide department-specific direction. With titles like "Unleashing American Energy (SO 3418)" and "Achieving Prosperity through Deregulation (SO 3421)" there is no question that Burgum sees public lands as something to exploit rather than to protect and cherish. Under Burgum, the scales are now wildly tipped in favor of extractive industry and fossil fuels.

Of particular note, Burgum's "Unleashing American Energy" SO directed Interior staff to compile a series of "action plans" to ensure quick enactment of all the SOs

NEW LEADERSHIP, OLD IDEAS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

In early February, Doug Burgum, former software executive and Governor of North Dakota, was sworn in as Secretary of the Interior following a Senate Confirmation hearing where he made comments about "Indiana Jones-style artifacts" and described America's public lands as a "balance sheet" to make money off of. Though it's clear he has a soft spot for President Theodore Roosevelt (who had a ranch in North Dakota), Burgum seems to have forgotten that Roosevelt was a champion of conservation, not destruction, of America's wild places.

In mid-February, it was announced that Kathleen Sgamma had been nominated to lead the BLM. Best described as a "fossil fuel enthusiast," Sgamma is currently the head of Western Energy Alliance, an oil and gas trade group based in Denver. She's a particularly dangerous choice to lead the agency as she knows what she's doing and is proficient in BLM policy. The agency is mandated to bring a balanced and holistic approach to its management of federal public lands—not the extractive, destructive, and short-sighted approach that Sgamma has repeatedly advocated.

and EOs. Among other terrible things, it calls for a plan to review and revise all national monuments from Devils Tower in Wyoming (est. 1906) to Sástítla Highlands in California (est. 2025), along with Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments.

The Burgum order also calls for plans to eliminate the 2024 BLM Public Lands Rule; review and lay out a path to revise all existing mineral withdrawals (places where oil and gas leasing, as well as new mining claims, are prohibited for 20 years); and identify steps to reinstate “all leases issued by [the BLM] for natural resource development” that were canceled under the Biden administration.

GUTTING THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

In Utah, the BLM manages 23 million acres of public land, including congressionally designated wilderness, more than 80 wilderness study areas, two national monuments, and places like Nine Mile Canyon, Red Cliffs National Conservation Area, and Labyrinth Canyon. In addition to the landscape itself, the federal workforce—including wildlife biologists, recreation planners, wilderness rangers, and trail crews—are under attack from the new administration.

In February, the Interior Department announced mass firings of more than 2,300 people, including hundreds of staff at the BLM. This was a significant blow to effective management of the remarkable public lands and resources in Utah. Already woefully understaffed and under-resourced, the decision is a self-fulfilling prophecy to downgrade the protection and management of public lands, all while furthering the bogus argument that state or private companies could do a better job of “managing” them. Unfortunately, we anticipate more waves of firings.

CHIPPING AWAY AT BEDROCK LAWS

In the alphabet soup of acronyms involved in federal land management, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) may be one of the lesser-known statutes, but it’s present in nearly every aspect of SUWA’s work. Signed into law in 1970, NEPA embodies our nation’s environmental conscience and is considered one of the United States’ bedrock environmental laws. It instituted a national policy of “look before you leap” by requiring that agencies carefully analyze and disclose the potential environmental impacts of a proposed action; NEPA also guarantees that the public has an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.



There’s no doubt we are facing deeply challenging times. While we don’t know all the threats we’re going to face, we will face them together.”

The first Trump administration significantly weakened NEPA by undermining its regulations. Eventually, the Biden administration reversed the damage with a new set of rules to restore certainty, efficiency, and public engagement. But with his Unleashing American Energy EO, Trump has greased the skids to weaken NEPA far more than in his first term.

In February, the Council on Environmental Quality (a division within the Executive Office of the President) announced the removal of its federal regulations implementing NEPA. Some of those had been in place for more than 50 years. While the dust is still settling from this announcement, it’s clear the action will lead to even more uncertainty and confusion among federal agencies, regulated industry, and the public about how agencies like the BLM will go about their work.

What comes next is very uncertain, though we still have Congress’ remarkably clear words in the underlying law to point to and rely on: the purpose of NEPA is “[t]o declare a national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation.”

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH

Energy dominance, chaos, and uncertainty. We’ve covered just a few examples of what we’re up against, and we know there will be many more jaw-dropping developments in the weeks and months ahead.

There’s no doubt we are facing deeply challenging times. While we don’t know all the threats we’re going to face, we will face them together. SUWA will keep you informed, we’ll provide opportunities to use your voice and take action, and we’ll remain focused on defending the redrock. As we’ve been saying since election day: SUWA has never backed down from a hard fight, and we’re not going to start now.

—Grant Stevens and Steve Bloch

UTAH REPS WASTE NO TIME REINTRODUCING BAD LEGISLATION IN 119TH CONGRESS

The beginning of a new Congress usually has a number of bills that are reintroduced from the previous Congress, and this year is no different. SUWA's legislative team has been following a number of concerning bills introduced early this Congress, two of them by members of the Utah delegation.

- **S. 530/H.R. 1206, the Western Economic Security Today Act (WEST Act)** was introduced by Senator Barrasso (R-WY) and Representative Maloy (R-UT-2) this Congress. Senator Curtis advocated for this bill multiple times in hearings and markups when he sponsored it in the House. The bill would force the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to rescind the Public Lands Rule, which reiterates that conservation is part of the BLM's multiple-use mission and ensures that the agency will manage for this use on a day-in and day-out basis. Finalized in 2024, the Rule stands for common sense land management and re-establishes a "... framework to ensure healthy landscapes, abundant wild-life habitat, clean water, and balanced decision-making on our nation's public lands."

- **S. 90/H.R. 376, the Historic Roadways Protection Act**, would prevent the BLM from finalizing and implementing essential travel management plans in Utah. By halting these plans, the agency would be unable to manage and plan for a dramatic spike in motorized vehicle use, leaving millions of acres of wild public lands vulnerable to destruction and degradation. This bill threatens the foundation of some of our most crucial conservation victories—including protections gained for the San Rafael Desert and Labyrinth Canyon. The bill was introduced by Senator Lee (R-UT) and Representative Kennedy (R-UT-3)

- **H.R.471, the Fix Our Forests Act**, introduced by Representative Westerman (R-AR-4), presents a glaring problem for public lands. It would undermine core environmental protection laws, namely the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); proposes to exempt a sweeping range of "vegetation management activities" from environmental review on millions of acres of federal land, leaving forests at risk from reckless logging projects; and prevents citizens from holding federal agencies accountable by limiting their ability to file lawsuits that would undergo review by a judge.

The bill has already passed the House and we anticipate a Senate version soon. In the meantime, we are working with coalition partners to make adjustments to address the most problematic portions of the bill. We hope to hold the line and defeat the bill if it comes to a floor vote in the Senate.

Our legislative team is working hard to keep on top of the myriad shortsighted and problematic bills that are on the horizon. Follow SUWA on social media and join our email list to know when you need to contact your elected officials about legislation that threatens America's redrock wilderness.

—Travis Hammill

GREEN GROUPS CALL ON CONGRESS TO DEFEND ANTIQUITIES ACT

On January 16th, less than one month into the 119th Congress, Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) and Representative Celeste Maloy (R-UT-2), along with Representative Mark Amodei (R-NV-2), introduced S. 220/H.R. 521 in an initial effort to gut the law that first protected nearly half of our national parks: the 1906 Antiquities Act. Members in both chambers have indicated they intend to advance efforts to repeal protections for existing parks and monuments, with the House even proposing to make it easier to dispose of our public lands in the House Rules package.

In response, over 245 organizations, led by SUWA, submitted a letter to Congress strongly urging members to oppose any legislative attempts to repeal or undermine the Antiquities Act, including S. 220/H.R. 521. The letter states, in part:

"For more than 100 years, the Antiquities Act has been one of our nation's most critical conservation tools for preserving our nation's most important public lands and waters. From Bears Ears to Northeast Canyons and Seamounts, our monuments and other protected public lands and waters unite all Americans by protecting our shared heritage for future generations to enjoy. The sheer diversity of historic, cultural, and natural treasures that have been protected by the Antiquities Act is the reason why hundreds of groups representing sportsmen, cultural heritage organizations, evangelicals, conservation, recreation businesses, historic preservation, and many others all oppose efforts to undermine this vital law."

Eighteen Presidents, Republicans and Democrats alike, have utilized the Antiquities Act nearly 200 times to create and expand national monuments across the country. Four of the five national parks in Utah—Bryce Canyon, Zion, Arches, and Capitol Reef—began as national monuments.

The American people overwhelmingly oppose efforts to block the establishment of new parks and repeal protections for the places they love. According to a recently released *Conservation in the West Poll* from Colorado College, 89% of westerners (and 82% of Utahns) are in favor of keeping existing national monument designations from the last decade. The same poll last year revealed that 85% of westerners support creating new national parks and monuments to protect historic sites and areas for recreation. Undermining the Antiquities Act goes against the will of the American public and their support for protected public lands.

While out-of-touch politicians from across the U.S. attempt to undermine bedrock environmental laws with their short-sighted policy proposals, SUWA will continue working with our colleagues at other organizations to ensure that our public lands stay public—and protected.

—Travis Hammill

HOUSE REPUBLICANS USE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING TO THRASH CONSERVATION

On February 11th, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held an oversight hearing titled “Restoring Multiple Use to Revitalize America’s Public Lands and Rural Communities.” Among topics covered by the Republican-led subcommittee (chaired by Utah Representative Mike Kennedy) were their desires to dismantle the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Public Lands Rule, which makes clear that conservation is an important aspect of multiple-use public land management (for more on the Rule, see first article on opposite page).

Ignoring the fact that, currently, 90% of BLM land is open for extraction and drilling whereas only 14% is managed for conservation, subcommittee members repurposed old, constantly-disproven talking points, including the notion that local communities and rural economies in Utah and across the West are worse off from conservation, and that public



HOUSE REPUBLICANS (SPURRED BY THE UTAH DELEGATION) CONTINUE TO PUSH FOR A HIGHWAY THROUGH RED CLIFFS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

lands protection is unpopular and controversial rather than widely popular across the political spectrum.

Along with attacks on national monuments and promises to “unlock” access for oil and gas drilling and mining on federal lands, the hearing revived the long, tired saga of the Northern Corridor Highway. As proposed, the highway would run through Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (NCA) near St. George for 4.5 miles, damaging critical habitat for the threatened Mojave desert tortoise and harming the cultural resources and world-class recreation that the NCA was established by Congress in 2009 to protect.

Listening to the highway proponents, one would think that Congress had promised the highway to Washington County, that the desert tortoise would not be impacted, and that somehow seven prudent denials of the highway in the past decade and a half were an anomaly. Unfortunately, this sort of governance by fiction will be the new normal for at least the next two years.

We applaud minority members of the subcommittee, including Representative Melanie Stansbury (D-NM-1), House sponsor of America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act. They used their time to challenge the subcommittee leaders’ falsehoods and worked hard to keep the focus on real issues such as agency staffing, funding, and fire mitigation.

It is going to be a tough fight, but we’re in it with you, and we’re grateful for all those willing to take a stand for the public lands that a vast majority of Americans and those across the world love dearly.

—Kya Marienfeld

GOOD
NEWS

LAND GRABS, LAWSUITS, AND A BIG SIGH OF RELIEF

On Monday, January 13th at 7:30 am, we were anxiously refreshing our website browsers. On another day, we might have been trying to snag a coveted river or backcountry permit; this time, though, we weren't daydreaming of a future adventure.

But let's back up for a minute.

"Return of the Great Land Grab" was the feature article headline in our Autumn/Winter 2024 issue of *Redrock Wilderness*. In that piece, we told you how last August the State of Utah filed a request (in legal lingo: a motion for leave to file a bill of complaint) with the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), asking it to take the extraordinary step of letting Utah bring a case directly to the nation's highest court and bypass all lower courts.

Utah was arguing that it was unconstitutional for the federal government to own "unappropriated" federal public

lands inside the state's boundaries. As Utah defines it, this open-ended term "unappropriated" excludes national parks, national monuments, conservation areas, and national forests. But at 18.5 million acres, it does include all the remaining BLM land in the state, over 5.4 million acres of which is proposed as wilderness in our signature legislation, America's Red Rock Wilderness Act.

And the relief Utah was asking the court to grant? Nothing less than **an order directing that the federal government begin to dispose of—or sell off—those 18.5 million acres of BLM-managed lands.**

This argument and the request to SCOTUS were so radical that in December 2024, SUWA filed our own litigation against Utah Governor Spencer Cox and then-Attorney-General Sean Reyes. We alleged that they violated the Utah Constitution's provision that the "people inhabiting this State do affirm and declare that they forever disclaim all right and



title to the unappropriated public lands lying within [its] boundaries.” This language was a condition of statehood and is found in both Utah’s Constitution and the Utah Enabling Act, which led to Utah’s entry into the Union.

Back to January 13th. Two results were possible: either a majority of the justices would grant the state’s request (meaning the high court would take up the case and eventually issue a decision) or the court would deny the request. Just two days before, we had rallied on the steps of the Utah State Capitol with nearly a thousand other passionate public lands advocates (see page 15). In a week, President Trump would be sworn in. That morning, you could cut the tension with a knife.

Then, promptly at 7:30, with one simple sentence, some of that tension was released: *The motion for leave to file a bill of complaint is denied.* SCOTUS was not taking up Utah’s lawsuit! We breathed a sigh of relief and began working on a statement to share the good news with our members and the media.

It’s important to emphasize that we said *some* of the tension was released. While it was wonderful news that SCOTUS rejected Utah’s long-shot bid, the state can still follow the more traditional legal path for its lawsuit: filing in federal district court, appealing the case to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, and ultimately petitioning for review once again before SCOTUS. We expect them to follow this path, likely soon. In the meantime, our litigation against the governor and attorney general will continue.

—Steve Bloch and Grant Stevens

FROM SUWA’S PRESS STATEMENT:

We’re grateful the Supreme Court swiftly rejected the State of Utah’s misguided land grab lawsuit. For more than 100 years, the Supreme Court has affirmed the power of the federal government to hold and manage public lands on behalf of all Americans. If successful, Utah’s lawsuit would result in the sale of millions of acres of public lands in redrock country to the highest bidder, an end to America’s system of federal public lands, and the dismantling of the American West as we know it. SUWA will continue our unwavering efforts to ensure every attempted land grab by Utah politicians fails.



THE BLM’S RECENTLY RELEASED MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT TAKES MEANINGFUL STEPS TO PROTECT THIS TREASURED LANDSCAPE. © TOM TILL

GOOD
NEWS

GRAND STAIRCASE PLAN IS HOPEFUL CHANGE

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed proclamations renewing and restoring Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments to their original boundaries and their original purposes: conservation, science, and the protection of cultural resources.

Since then, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has been developing new long-term management plans for both monuments. Early in this new year, the BLM signed the final monument management plan for the restored Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

The BLM’s final plan takes meaningful steps to protect one of the most treasured public landscapes in America. The agency has returned to using “management areas” within Grand Staircase, an approach that marked the first 20 years of the monument’s management before its illegal shrinking by President Donald Trump. Each management area has its own rules and guidelines for different resource concerns. Some areas are more open to established and dispersed recreation sites and active management. Others will rely more on natural processes to preserve both the monument’s undeveloped character and to achieve changes in wildlife and its habitat.

Grand Staircase-Escalante was first designated under the Antiquities Act nearly 30 years ago to protect a range of rare values: remarkable paleontological discoveries and cul-

tural connections, stunning scenery, and outstanding intact and diverse natural ecosystems. It is gratifying to again have real protection in place. Although a change in administrations this year certainly raises questions about what will happen in Washington, DC to impact this incredible monument, no matter what attacks or threats Grand Staircase comes under, we'll do everything in our power to protect and defend the monument for current and future generations. We're glad to have you with us in that effort.

—*Kya Marienfeld*

BLM ISSUES UNIQUE PLAN FOR BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT

In mid-January, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued the final Bears Ears National Monument Management Plan, wrapping up years of hard work by the BLM and the Forest Service, in cooperation with the Bears Ears Commission and with substantial stakeholder input.

The plan is the first of its kind, emphasizing collaboration between the federal agencies and the Bears Ears

Commission, which is comprised of leaders from the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Ute Indian Tribe. And it incorporates Traditional Indigenous Knowledge to elevate cultural and ecological preservation, and education.

Recognizing the Bears Ears National Monument as a region of extraordinary natural and cultural significance, President Biden in 2021 signed a proclamation reinstating the monument's original pre-Trump-administration boundaries. The proclamation also restored the voices of the Tribal Nations with ancestral ties to the region, who led the protection effort in the first place, so they would have a say in the monument's stewardship.

The final plan takes important steps toward protecting Bears Ears' unique natural and cultural landscape while also providing ample opportunities for respectful appreciation and enjoyment. Most notable is the use of four management zones to delineate different levels of resource protection and allowable uses.

For example, the Frontcountry Zone, which is found along paved highways and scenic byways, is the focal point for visitation. It accommodates the primary recreation infrastructure and allows for more active management. It is also



THE NEW BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN IS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND, EMPHASIZING COLLABORATION BETWEEN FEDERAL AGENCIES AND THE BEARS EARS COMMISSION, WHICH IS COMPRISED OF LEADERS FROM THE NAVAJO NATION, HOPI TRIBE, PUEBLO OF ZUNI, UTE MOUNTAIN UTE TRIBE, AND THE UTE INDIAN TRIBE. © BRANDON GARCIA

the principal area for educating visitors about historic and continuing tribal connections and traditional uses of the region.

In contrast, the Remote Zone emphasizes protection of the most fragile and least accessible areas and provides natural and undeveloped experiences for non-motorized and non-mechanized recreation. This zone includes wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, and “lands with wilderness characteristics” that are managed to protect those characteristics.

We know that the future of Bears Ears National Monument is uncertain under the new administration. As we have done before, SUWA will work tirelessly to protect and defend Bears Ears from any efforts to shrink its boundaries or reduce protections. We are keeping a close eye on activities in Washington, and promise to keep you posted.

—*Judi Brawer*

BLM COMPLETES DISAPPOINTING TRAVEL PLANS FOR SAN RAFAEL SWELL & HENRY MOUNTAINS/DIRTY DEVIL REGION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently completed two travel management plans covering more than 2.5 million acres in the heart of Utah’s redrock wilderness. These plans determine where off-road vehicles (ORVs) are allowed across these spectacular wild lands.

On balance, the plans fall well short of what we were hoping for—both in terms of landscapes protected and miles of routes designated for ORVs.

The BLM completed a travel plan for the San Rafael Swell at the end of last year. The Swell, a much-loved backcountry area, is home to irreplaceable cultural sites, important wildlife, and outstanding recreation opportunities. We advocated for the agency to select Alternative B, which would have finally brought some balance between motorized recreation, non-motorized recreation, and resource protection. Instead, the BLM chose a mishmash, Alternative E, which prioritizes ORVs at the expense of natural and cultural resources. The agency opened 240 miles of new routes, bringing the total to nearly 1,500 miles of ORV routes in the planning area.

Early this year, the BLM completed its long overdue travel plan for the Henry Mountains/Dirty Devil area. Spanning from Capitol Reef National Park to Canyonlands National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, this remote and stunning area encompasses several distinct landscapes, including the Dirty Devil Canyon complex, the Henry Mountains, and the badlands surrounding Factory Butte.

While the travel plan does close some routes that have been reclaimed (or that never existed on the ground), and certain routes in areas the agency is required

COURTS PUT PUBLIC LANDS RULE CHALLENGES ON PAUSE AS FATE OF RULE REMAINS UNCERTAIN

Last summer, after extensive public engagement, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) finalized its Conservation and Landscape Health Rule (also known as the “Public Lands Rule”).

In short, the Rule directs the BLM to improve the health and resilience of ecosystems on public lands by protecting intact landscapes and restoring degraded ones, and reiterates that conservation is a use on par with other uses on public lands (like grazing or mining).

Multiple states, including the State of Utah, and industry groups quickly sued over the Rule in federal district courts in Utah, North Dakota, and Alaska. SUWA, The Wilderness Society, Conservation Lands Foundation, and other environmental partners successfully intervened on behalf of the BLM to defend the Rule.

Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, each lawsuit has been stayed (or paused) as the Trump administration determines how it wants to proceed in the cases. We strongly expect that the new administration will attempt to undo the Rule, and we will continue to fight to keep this common-sense conservation rule in place.

to manage for wilderness preservation, these are meager steps in the face of a tidal wave of newly designated routes. The final plan blankets the region with 1,700 miles of ORV trails, opening 114 miles of new routes and prioritizing ORVs. The net result is one step forward and two steps backward.

The BLM must still complete six additional travel plans across southern and eastern Utah. There is no question that getting responsible travel planning will be an even steeper

battle than what we faced over the past few years. Under the Trump administration, we expect these upcoming plans to heavily prioritize ORVs at the expense of Utah's incredible landscapes.

SUWA will work to hold the BLM accountable for unlawful decisions. Stay tuned for updates.

—*Laura Peterson*

MASSIVE VEGETATION PLAN PROPOSED FOR HAMLIN AND PINE VALLEYS

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Cedar City field office is moving forward with plans for landscape-scale vegetation treatments in western Utah. In February, the agency announced its intent to prepare the Indian Peak Range Watershed Restoration Plan, which would authorize vegetation treatments across approximately 550,000 acres in and around the Hamlin and Pine Valleys.

The plan's boundary extends from the Needle Range in the north to the Indian Peak Range in the south, and east across the Hamlin and Pine Valleys to the Wah Wah Mountains and Blue Mountain. Included are tens of thousands of acres proposed for wilderness designation in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, much of which the BLM has also identified as "lands with wilderness characteristics."

The BLM is in the early planning stages with this project, so we don't yet have specifics. However, according to their scoping notice, the Indian Peak Plan would authorize using vegetation removal methods such as mastication, harrowing, chaining, rangeland aeration, mechanical ripping, and herbicides across the landscape under the guise of improving watershed conditions and reducing the threat of wildfire.



THE BLM'S INDIAN PEAK RANGE WATER RESTORATION PLAN WOULD AUTHORIZE VEGETATION TREATMENTS ACROSS ROUGHLY 550,000 ACRES IN AND AROUND THE HAMLIN AND PINE VALLEYS—INCLUDING SUCH HEAVY-HANDED METHODS AS MASTICATION, HARROWING, AND CHAINING. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

While we are encouraged that the plan includes restoring riparian areas, re-establishing native plant species, and re-introducing fire into these fire-dependent ecosystems, we're alarmed by the long list of heavy-handed mechanical treatments allowed.

SUWA submitted extensive scoping comments on the BLM's proposal in early March. We pointed out the need to conduct a full environmental impact statement for such a far-reach-

ing plan and reminded the agency of what's at stake: old growth forest protection, retention of wilderness and cultural values, bird and wildlife habitat, and cryptobiotic soils. And we again urged the agency to consider the role that livestock grazing plays in creating the very degraded ecological conditions the plan seeks to address.

We'll keep a close eye on this project and keep you posted.

—*Judi Brawer*

URGENCY, HOPE SHARE SPACE DURING MAJOR PUBLIC LAND RALLY AT UTAH CAPITOL

On a snowy January day, the steps of the Utah Capitol rang with the voices of hundreds of wilderness defenders gathered at the “Land, Love, and Hope” rally. The event highlighted the power of community, bringing together diverse partner organizations, Tribal Nations, and passionate individuals united by a common cause: the protection of public lands in Utah.

Georgie Pongyesva, a member of the Hopi Nation and Tribal liaison working with Grand Staircase Escalante Partners, emceed the event. Joining Pongyesva were dancers Jesse Chief and Faith Littlestar Browning of the Navajo Nation and drummer Phil Manning, member of the Uintah Band of Northern Ute Tribe. Speakers included State Senator and Minority Leader Luz Escamilla; Autumn Gillard, Cultural Resource Manager for the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah; SUWA intern and college student Louise Fernandez; SUWA board

member Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe; and renowned western/environmental author and activist Terry Tempest Williams. All shared their perspectives on the importance of protecting wild places. Lopez-Whiteskunk started her speech with a song that filled the air as the audience stood together, watching the snow fall and reflecting on the future of the land.

The sense of urgency was palpable. But so was the sense of hope. Nonprofit organizations tabled at the event and provided concrete ways to take action and demonstrate support for public lands. Louise Fernandez’s powerful words, “If not us, then no one,” resonated throughout the crowd, underscoring our collective responsibility to protect these irreplaceable landscapes.

Recognizing the vital role of art in activism, SUWA organizers held two



RALLY SPEAKER LOUISE FERNANDEZ ASKS, “IF NOT US, THEN WHO?” © SUWA

pre-rally community events to create cardboard backdrops representing the redrock, along with uniquely expressive signs. This creative effort allowed supporters to channel their passion into visual statements, adding another layer of impact to the rally.

The event served as a reminder that community is crucial, especially during challenging times. We were all there for the land—for the towering sandstone walls, the hidden canyons teeming with life, and the meandering rivers that define Utah’s wild heart. We were there for Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, and for countless other loved places that have shaped our lives.

Despite the constant attacks on these landscapes, the rally demonstrated that the *Protect Wild Utah* movement is stronger than ever. The energy and commitment of those gathered in the cold served as a powerful testament to Utahns’ enduring love of public lands and our unwavering determination to defend them.



DESPITE COLD AND SNOWY WEATHER, HUNDREDS TURNED OUT FOR THE “LAND, LOVE, AND HOPE” RALLY IN SALT LAKE CITY ON JANUARY 11TH. © SUWA

—Diana Haro and Nicole Milavetz

SCOTT GROENE HAS LEFT THE BUILDING, BUT HIS FIGHTING SPIRIT REMAINS

In December, our staff said their final farewells to longtime executive director and walking Utah wilderness encyclopedia Scott Groene. His 20 years of leadership were defined by unflinching advocacy for the redrock, steady growth in SUWA's influence and financial stability, and a nimble, multi-faceted approach to defending Utah's canyon country from ever-evolving threats.

As many of you know, Scott has been part of the Utah wilderness movement for so long he's inextricable from it. His history with SUWA stretches all the way back to late 1987, when he joined the board of directors (for those keeping count, that's more than 37 years ago). A few years later he became our first staff attorney—one of many roles he would assume as needs arose and he jumped to fill them. In fact, it's safe to say he's held more positions at SUWA and worked in more of our offices (including Washington, DC), than anyone else in the organization's history. Though he left several

times to fight for public lands in other arenas, he always returned to the snowcapped mountains and redrock canyons of Utah.

Scott last returned to SUWA in 2003, and the following year became our fifth executive director. During his tenure in that role, SUWA actively supported tribal efforts to establish and defend Bears Ears National Monument and was instrumental in securing wilderness designations in the Cedar Mountains, the Zion-Mojave region, the San Rafael Swell, and Labyrinth Canyon. His commitment to playing the long game, thinking strategically, and ignoring the naysayers are deeply embedded in SUWA's ethos.

Scott's departure leaves enormous shoes to fill but, as he's been known to say, SUWA always manages to find the appropriate leader to meet the challenges at hand, and we expect to keep that tradition going. In the meantime, Scott remains in southern



SCOTT AT THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS COALITION'S WILDERNESS WEEK EVENT IN SEPTEMBER.

Utah, enjoying a well-deserved break while planning his next adventures. We know we'll be seeing him in the canyons, mountains, and riverways.

All the best to you, Scott. And don't worry . . . we'll keep on saving wilderness!



WE WISH SCOTT COUNTLESS RELAXING DAYS ON UTAH'S RIVERS AND TRAILS, ENJOYING THE WILD PLACES HE HAS WORKED SO HARD TO PROTECT.

"Under Scott's leadership, SUWA is responsible for some of the biggest legislative gains anywhere in the nation for BLM lands."

—Ray Bloxham, Wildlands Field Director

"Scott led the way for SUWA to take risks and try new, bold approaches. He's been instrumental in keeping SUWA focused on its mission and keeping the fighting spirit of SUWA alive and well in both the good and also dark political times."

—Liz Thomas, board member and former staff

"There can be no serious question that the redrock, and all of us who love it, are immeasurably better off because of Scott's years of dedication and hard work."

—Steve Bloch, Legal Director



OLIVIA HAS RETURNED TO SUWA, THIS TIME AS A BOARD MEMBER.

CHAMPION FOR CONSERVATION, COMMUNITY JOINS SUWA BOARD

We are thrilled to welcome Olivia Juarez (they/them), a former SUWA staffer, as the newest member of our Board of Directors. A Tooele native and University of Utah graduate, Olivia has forged a remarkable career of advocacy for environmental protection and the empowerment of marginalized communities.

As the public land program director at GreenLatinos, Olivia's work includes influencing federal rulemaking to safeguard these precious landscapes and lobbying Congress (and relevant agencies) to establish new protected areas essential for resolving environmental injustices. GreenLatinos champions solutions to issues that disproportionately affect communities of color, such as limited access to nature, underrepresentation in environmental decision-making, the dangers of excess heat in urban environments, and the devastating impacts of environmental contamination.

Olivia is also a co-founder of *Of Salt and Sand*, an organization that amplifies the voices of Utahns as they confront the realities of climate change. Through diverse storytelling platforms, including the podcast "Staying Salty" and multimedia art exhibitions, *Of Salt and Sand* illuminates the declining state of Great Salt Lake. These platforms interweave compelling narratives that illustrate the lake's vital role and the cascading effects of its decline on surrounding

communities, fostering deeper understanding of this critical environmental justice issue.

Olivia's accomplishments are a testament to the power of combining passion with dedicated action. They are an inspiring role model for activists across the spectrum, demonstrating that individual commitment can create meaningful change. Olivia's experience as a conservation champion and their unwavering commitment to community advocacy will be invaluable assets to SUWA's board.

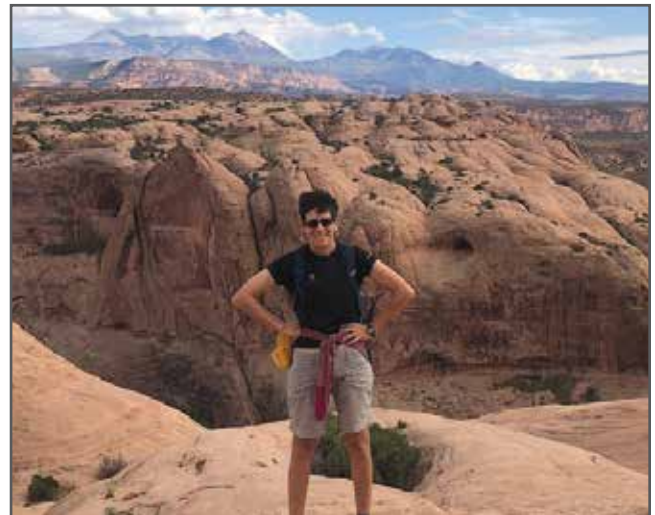
Welcome back, Olivia!

DEEP GRATITUDE TO SHARON BUCCINO FOR LONG BOARD SERVICE

Sharon Buccino joined the SUWA board in 2013 and served for more than 10 years as a steady voice for the redrock and more broadly for federal public lands conservation. She was always interested in getting to know the SUWA staff and made a point to connect at board meetings with both new and longtime employees.

While serving on SUWA's board, Sharon was an attorney and leader of the Natural Resources Defense Council's Land and Wildlife Program, where she worked for more than 30 years.

Sharon and her husband Jay have since relocated from Washington, DC to Laramie, Wyoming. We wish them much happiness in their next adventures.



SUWA BENEFITTED GREATLY FROM SHARON'S INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE DURING THE MANY YEARS SHE SERVED ON THE BOARD.

“WINTER STEW” CELEBRATES SERVICE, CAMARADERIE IN UTAH’S BACKCOUNTRY

Our Stewardship Program started small with a big vision: to ensure that SUWA’s legal and policy wins were implemented on the ground. Inevitably, this effort built more than a program of hands-on volunteerism. A community of dedicated stewards emerged to grow a whole new branch of the *Protect Wild Utah* movement.

In January, we celebrated our accomplishments and previewed the 10th season ahead at our inaugural “Winter Stew” social in Salt Lake City. Well over 100 members, supporters, and stewards joined us for a night of friendship, conversation, and great food.

Our relationship to the land is part and parcel of what defines our conservation ethic. Thank you for ensuring that, together, we remain the leading stewards of Utah wilderness for decades to come. To learn about our upcoming projects, see back cover or visit suwa.org/stewardship.



IN LATE JANUARY, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEERS GATHERED FOR OUR FIRST “WINTER STEW” EVENT, A DINNER SOCIAL AND CELEBRATION TO COMMEMORATE A DECADE OF STEWARDSHIP AND LAUNCH THE 2025 VOLUNTEER PROJECT SEASON. © SUWA

HELP KEEP THE REDROCK WILD: BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

SUWA has been protecting Utah’s redrock wilderness for more than 40 years, but the threats to these lands are more dire than ever. With a presidential administration that is openly hostile to conservation, we are facing an uphill battle to defend Utah’s last wild places. As always, your support is critical.

By joining our monthly giving program, you can help sustain our efforts year-round. For as little as \$5 a month, your monthly contribution protects iconic landscapes across southern Utah from off-road vehicle abuse, fossil fuel projects, and the strain of growing recreation in the backcountry.

Why is monthly giving so effective?

- **It provides year-around support:** Conservation work doesn’t stop, and neither do the threats to Utah’s redrock wilderness. Having dependable monthly support means we can take action when it’s needed most.
- **It helps us stay ready for the long fight:** Some battles take years to win. Having a steady and predictable stream of income helps us stay focused on the big picture.
- **It’s flexible and convenient:** Monthly giving is a customizable and efficient way to support SUWA’s work. Set it up once and adjust your contribution as needed, ensuring continuous support without the hassle of repeated transactions.

Becoming a monthly donor is easy. Simply visit suwa.org/givemonthly, choose the amount you would like to give, and your card will automatically be charged each month, providing continuous support for our work (you can cancel or adjust the amount at any time).

Thanks for all you do to help keep Utah’s redrock country wild!



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STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM KICKS OFF TENTH SEASON

As election news rippled out from Washington, DC just a few months ago, our stewardship team was meeting with Bureau of Land Management staff to build our 2025 project calendar. Inevitably, we were asked how the shifting political winds would affect our stewardship work moving forward.

Our answer? We built this program from the ground up beginning in 2016. Despite national politics, there is always a need for good will and good work at the local level. Though every year is different, where there is a need to fill, we are here to make good on the promise of our mission: to preserve and help manage the outstanding wilderness at the heart of the Colorado Plateau

As we enter our program's tenth season, we're excited to report that we have 26 stewardship projects scheduled, with more in the works. This year our crews will prioritize Utah's most at-risk landscapes. Nearly half of our projects will take place in Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. We'll also manage wilderness in the West Desert and return to the San Rafael Swell to support ongoing management efforts there.

At right is a list of our upcoming projects. You can view the complete schedule and apply at suwa.org/projectcalendar.



© SUWA

Upcoming Spring Projects

April 15-18: West Desert: House Range WSA Protection & Monitoring

April 24-27: Bears Ears: Cedar Mesa Naturalization 1

May 8-11: Burr Trail Scenic Backway: WSA Protection & Monitoring

May 15-18: Grand Staircase-Escalante: WSA Boundary Implementation

May 19-23: Dark Canyon Wilderness: Backpacking & Habitat Restoration