



# REDROCK

## W I L D E R N E S S

The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance  
VOLUME 42, NUMBER 2 • SUMMER 2025

**UTAH POLITICIANS EXPLOIT HOUSING CRISIS IN LATEST QUEST  
TO SELL OFF MILLIONS OF ACRES OF PUBLIC LAND**



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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This issue of *Redrock Wilderness* was written by the following staff and outside contributors: Steve Bloch, Scott Braden, Judi Brawer, Lauren Hainsworth, Travis Hammill, Diana Haro, Hanna Larsen, Kya Marienfeld, Heather Rose Martinez, Talitha McGuire, Landon Newell, Laura Peterson, Grant Stevens, and Michelle White. It was edited 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](mailto:photos@suwa.org) or via regular mail c/o Editor, SUWA, 425 East 100 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84111.

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## ISING TO THE MOMENT

As SUWA's new executive director, it's an honor to introduce myself to the incredible and dedicated network of members and supporters across the nation. I started my career in wilderness advocacy at SUWA in 2007; returning to the organization to succeed the long and impressive tenure of Scott Groene is both humbling and a tremendously exciting opportunity.

Writing my first *Wilderness Notes* prompts me to reflect on the importance of this newsletter as a tool to educate and inspire. Twenty-five years ago, I found my first copy lying around the boathouse of the Colorado Outward

Bound School river base near Dinosaur National Monument in northeastern Utah. I was starting what I thought would be a summer job packing food and transporting gear in support of river-based outdoor education courses. I ended up staying on for five years and learning to be an outdoor educator and guide in river canyons across Utah.

Witnessing the power of wilderness to inspire our students focused my professional interest on public lands. SUWA's newsletter helped educate me on the very real threats to incredible places and the formidable movement of passionate people defending them. At the same time, I saw with my own eyes how each new oil well drilled or new off-road vehicle track slowly but surely diminished these wild places.

My return to SUWA comes at a deeply challenging time for wilderness and public lands. The State of Utah's lawsuit (cheered on by Governor Spencer Cox), which sought the sell-off of nearly 20 million acres of public land, was rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court, but the state will certainly try again. In Congress, Utah's federal delegation is leading the charge to make sure public lands liquidation is included in the 2025 Budget Bill ("the big beautiful bill") already laden with anti-conservation measures. These efforts have a friend in Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, who sees public lands only as assets on the national "balance sheet," waiting to be leveraged in service of the Trump administration's fossil-fueled dreams.

But I am proud to say that SUWA stands firmly in their way. Unified with the broader conservation community as well as hunters, anglers, and recreationists of all stripes, we say collectively, "Not on our watch!" During my first month at the helm of SUWA, I watched our staff swing into action and mobilize our nationwide network of friends and allies to fight this sell-off of our public lands. Together, we made sure it became a political liability and we were heartened to see it stripped from the House version of the Budget Bill. As you'll learn about in our feature story, opposite, the fight has now moved to the Senate.

It can feel like the special interests, ideological extremists, and extractive industries that seek to despoil our public lands for the benefit of a few are in full control and making gains. Of course, there will be many difficult fights ahead, and some disappointing losses. I'm happy to report, however, that SUWA is stronger and more sophisticated than it's ever been. We are leaders in the conservation community and we're making a difference in Utah and far beyond.

SUWA has always taken the long view in our work to protect millions of acres of land, and I am confident that the *Protect Wild Utah* movement—which enjoys broad support and is grounded in love and awe—will be successful. **Thank you for being part of it.**

For the Redrock,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Braden".

Scott Braden  
Executive Director

## UTAH POLITICIANS EXPLOIT HOUSING CRISIS IN LATEST QUEST TO SELL OFF MILLIONS OF ACRES OF PUBLIC LAND

In June, Utah Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) launched the latest in a long line of attacks by Utah politicians on America's public lands. This time the proposal is for a massive public lands sell-off through the complicated congressional budget process known as Budget Reconciliation. While Lee's goal of upending the very concept of public lands is the same as it ever was, his latest scheme employs new tactics: land sell-offs cloaked in the guise of promoting affordable housing.

Over the past fifteen years in Utah, we have seen numerous attempts to undermine the foundation of our uniquely American public land system. In 2012, the Utah legislature demanded that the United States hand over 31.2 million acres of federal land to the state by 2014. While this was accompanied by plenty of sabre rattling, 2014 came and

went and the federal government unsurprisingly did not comply with Utah's baseless demands.

In 2017, former Utah Congressman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) introduced a bill to sell off millions of acres of public lands across the West. Just two weeks later, after widespread public outcry and backlash from Americans across the political spectrum, Rep. Chaffetz reversed course and "withdrew" the bill, begrudgingly acknowledging the unpopularity of his legislation. He resigned from Congress four months later, just six months into his term.

In 2024, Utah filed a lawsuit at the U.S. Supreme Court to try to force the federal government to sell off or "dispose of" 18.5 million acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-managed lands within the state. The Supreme Court



declined to take the case, and while Utah has yet to re-file its lawsuit in federal district court, Governor Spencer Cox has said that the state intends to do so.

In recent months these attempts to force the sale of the nation's public lands have become more frequent and also more sophisticated, with politicians attempting to repack-age the sale of public lands into something more palatable. The theme of the moment is for Republicans like Senator Lee to link land sell-off with the need for affordable housing.

It's important to cut through the rhetoric and see these schemes for what they really are: brazen attempts to sell off lands that belong to all Americans and put them into the hands of private developers. But before we talk about where we are today, it's useful to look back at how we got here.

## THE HOUSES ACT

Senator Lee's first attempt to push the sell-off of public lands as a solution to housing issues was the deceptively-named HOUSES Act, which he introduced in 2022. Senator Lee claimed that the bill would help address affordable housing in the West by selling off wide swaths of public land. It would have done nothing of the sort.

Under the HOUSES Act, local and state governments could nominate for sale roughly 200 million acres of public land across the West. The lands identified for sale could include wilderness study areas and areas of critical environmental concern (both protective BLM designations), as well as cultural landscapes and important wildlife habitat. Nominations would have to include a residential development plan, but the bill allowed commercial and industrial development on a portion of the lands.

The bill called for a land sale process that cut out the opportunity for public comment, thus leaving the public out in the cold as the fate of their lands was decided. To make matters worse, after 15 years the privatized public lands could be repurposed for uses other than housing, including golf courses or industrial development.

What Senator Lee's HOUSES Act did NOT do is the one thing he touted the most. It didn't contain any requirement that housing developed on sold-off public lands be affordable and it didn't adopt any affordable housing requirement. There was also no provision to prevent public lands from being developed into high-end vacation homes, Airbnbs, or luxury housing projects.

The HOUSES Act was never intended to be an affordable housing bill, but rather a hand-out to real estate developers.

## LAND SELL-OFF VIA BUDGET RECONCILIATION

This brings us to May 2025, when House Republicans tried another tactic to privatize public lands in Utah: mandating a sell-off through the byzantine congressional Budget Reconciliation process. Once again, it was under the guise of affordable housing. At around midnight, at the end of a contentious 13-hour hearing, Representatives Celeste Maloy (R-UT-2) and Mark Amodei (R-NV-2) introduced an amendment to the House version of the Budget Reconciliation Bill that would have sold off over 11,000 acres of BLM lands in Utah (primarily in Washington County, which includes the city of St. George) and nearly 500,000 acres in Nevada.

Rep. Maloy claimed that her public land sell-off was intended to benefit things like affordable housing and infrastructure. However, like Lee's HOUSES Act, nothing in her amendment required that parcels sold off be used for public purposes and there were no limitations on how the lands could be used once sold. In other words, the land could be developed for golf courses, luxury resorts, strip malls, private vacation homes, or simply flipped for sale again.

This sell-off attempt was ultimately thwarted when the House stripped the amendment from the House Budget Bill.

Unfazed by the failure of the public land sell-off to stick in the House version of the bill, Senator Lee has doubled down in the Senate. In his latest scheme, he has repackaged and modified his HOUSES Act and is trying to force the sale of millions of acres of public land across 11 western states to fund tax cuts for the ultra-wealthy. Lee's budget provision targets both BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands and mandates the sale of between 2 million and 3 million acres of public land within five years.

While Senator Lee is once again touting his bill as a way to promote affordable housing, it will in fact do no such thing. Lee's bill contains no provision requiring affordable housing and would sell off public lands at a substantial discount. As with his HOUSES Act, Lee is attempting to sell off lands that belong to all Americans to benefit wealthy developers and donors.

As of the time of publication, Senator Lee's sell-off provision is still in the Senate version of the Budget Bill. Public



ACTIVISTS CONFRONT REP. MALOY (LEFT) AT A CONGRESSIONAL FIELD HEARING IN CEDAR CITY, UTAH TO EXPRESS OPPOSITION TO HER PUBLIC LANDS SELL-OFF AMENDMENT IN THE HOUSE BUDGET BILL. © COURTESY OF CONSERVE SOUTHWEST UTAH

land lovers across the country and across the political spectrum are fighting hard to get it out. We hope to be able to report good news on that front in the next newsletter.

## WHY THE SUDDEN INTEREST IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING?

Attempts to sell off the nation's public lands are deeply unpopular. Polling has repeatedly shown that Americans—especially Westerners—strongly believe in keeping public lands in public hands and reject any efforts that would lead to the sale of these shared and cherished lands. Politicians know that and are desperately trying to re-package the public lands sell-off to seem less threatening.

What makes such unpopular proposals seem potentially palatable is that they capitalize on a real issue: housing affordability and availability. But can federal land sell-offs really help with affordable housing issues? According to a recently-released report from the Center for American Progress—*Will the U.S. Housing Crisis be Exploited for a Massive Public Lands Sell-Off?*—the answer is largely no. While there are limited instances where small, targeted land transfers with clear affordable housing assurance and appropriate legal guardrails could be helpful, it is not a solution in and of itself. Any limited transfers must also be part of a more comprehensive approach to addressing housing needs.

The reality is that the vast majority of public lands are remote and entirely unsuitable for housing development. For the rare circumstances where public lands could be a tool to help with housing, there are provisions in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the Recreation and Public Purposes Act that allow the BLM

to facilitate targeted land transfers and sales to address the needs of local communities.

It's no coincidence that sweeping land transfer proposals under the guise of housing are coming from Utah Republicans who have made their intense hostility toward public lands clear. It's also telling that these proposals are never accompanied by any meaningful solutions to the affordability crisis: things like expanded housing assistance payments and regulatory reform to increase developable land within communities. They are not real proposals to address a pressing issue, but just the latest attempt to make a deeply unpopular proposition seem reasonable.

Selling off public lands is short-sighted, self-serving, and irreversible. Public lands belong to all Americans, not to the highest bidder at the whims of a political agenda. Once they're sold, they're gone for good—fences go up, access disappears, and they are lost to the public forever.

As attacks on public lands continue, it's important to stay vigilant and hold politicians accountable. This is a big part of SUWA's daily work, and your support makes it all possible. For breaking news and action opportunities, please join our email list at [suwa.org/stayinformed](https://suwa.org/stayinformed) or follow us on social media.

—Laura Peterson

## NEARLY 150 ORGANIZATIONS URGE SENATE LEADERSHIP TO KEEP LANDS SELL-OFF OUT OF BUDGET BILL

In mid-June, 148 organizations sent a SUWA-led letter to Senate Leadership urging them to remove Senator Lee's unprecedented sell-off of millions of acres of public land from the Senate version of the Budget Bill. The letter states, in part, "We strongly oppose any attempts to recklessly sell public lands through legislative shortcuts like budget reconciliation, which bypass public input, environmental review, and accountability. Doing so threatens public access, undermines responsible land management, puts environmental values, cultural resources, and endangered species at risk along with clean drinking water for 60 million Americans and betrays the public's trust."

Learn more on our website at [suwa.org](https://suwa.org).

## A BEDROCK ENVIRONMENTAL LAW COMES UNDER ATTACK LIKE NEVER BEFORE

The National Environmental Policy Act or “NEPA” is one of the nation’s bedrock environmental laws. Passed by Congress and signed into law by President Nixon in 1970, NEPA established “a national policy” to, among other things, “encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between [humans and their] environment.”

NEPA has twin goals. First, it aims to ensure that federal agencies carefully consider detailed information regarding the environmental impact of a proposed action before reaching a decision. Second, it ensures that information about a proposal’s environmental impact is made available to members of the public so that they may play a meaningful role in the decision-making process.

At the highest level, NEPA directs federal agencies to think first, then act. SUWA attorneys engage with federal agencies like the Bureau of Land Management on a day-in, day-out basis by reviewing environmental documents prepared according to NEPA, commenting on project proposals, and encouraging SUWA members and supporters to do the same.

The law is far from perfect, but over its more than 55-year history federal agency compliance with NEPA and the regulations implementing that law have undoubtedly made for better decisions, both in terms of reduced environmental impacts and how projects are implemented on the ground. We also use the statute to hold agencies accountable and make sure they are considering and disclosing impacts from proposed projects.

All of that is at risk under Trump 2.0.

From his very first day in office, Trump went on the attack and rescinded President Carter’s 1977 executive order that authorized the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to issue regulations detailing how NEPA should be implemented. That was quickly followed by a directive that the CEQ lead a working group to create a low ceiling for NEPA regulations that must be followed by all federal agencies (that is, to create a set of regulations that cannot be further tightened by individual agencies). That work remains underway today.

Trump has also declared several so-called “emergencies”—including a “national energy emergency”—and in doing so authorized several fast-tracked NEPA processes. Some of the first projects to proceed under these alternative processes are in Utah, and SUWA is closely tracking them.

Finally, in late May the U.S. Supreme Court issued a not entirely unexpected but nonetheless terrible opinion in a case involving the proposed Uinta Basin rail line in eastern Utah. The Court held that federal agencies will no longer be required to analyze certain growth-inducing effects from a project if those later-in-time effects are not under the control of the agency or are speculative. With regard to the Uinta Basin rail line, that means the Surface Transportation Board will not be required to analyze upstream (new drilling) or downstream (increased refining) that is very likely to occur as a result of the line being constructed. In fact, those results are the whole point of the line in the first place! The scope and breadth of this decision will become clearer over the next several years as lower courts grapple with its implications.

The bottom line from all of this should come as no surprise: the Trump administration is doing everything in its power to (1) expedite projects it favors, especially fossil fuel development and mining, (2) drive agency decision making to the lowest common denominator with the hope that NEPA compliance amounts to little more than a rubber stamp, and (3) cut out the public as much as possible from understanding and commenting on what agencies are up to. We’re pushing back on all of these fronts and will keep you posted on our progress. Please keep an eye out for ways that you can engage and support this work.

—Steve Bloch

## TROUBLING LEGISLATION THREATENS REDROCK FORESTS

Last year, the “Fix Our Forests Act” (FOFA) was introduced in Congress by Representative Bruce Westerman (R-AR-4). While FOFA claims to promote forest health and wildfire prevention, a closer look reveals a bill that sidesteps core environmental protections and cuts communities out of crucial land management decisions.

Instead of working with existing environmental laws, FOFA would fast-track logging and vegetation removal



NATIVE PINYON PINE AND JUNIPER WOODLANDS COULD BE DEVASTATED IF THE “FIX OUR FORESTS ACT” IS PASSED IN ITS CURRENT FORM.

projects across millions of acres of federal land—including areas proposed for wilderness designation in America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act. The bill does this by excluding these projects from the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, effectively removing science-based review and public input from the process. The House passed FOFA in January, and now a companion bill is making its way through the Senate.

Native pinyon pine and juniper woodlands—the heart of redrock wilderness—could be devastated. Rather than improving forest health or protecting communities, FOFA would leave landscapes vulnerable to destruction and, thanks to invasive species that thrive on large surface disturbances like mechanical vegetation removal, actually increase the risk of unnatural wildfires. Thankfully, there have been some important improvements in the Senate version of FOFA. For example, the Senate bill limits the size of fast-tracked vegetation removal projects that could occur in fragile woodlands to 7,500 acres (down from 10,000 acres proposed in the House bill) and narrows the House version’s overly-broad definition of when “emergency” actions might apply—but overall, the Senate bill still puts far too much at risk without adequate environmental oversight.

SUWA is working in coalition with local and national partners to oppose FOFA or push for substantial changes. This spring, nearly 800 redrock advocates reached out to key senators on the Agriculture Committee, sharing concerns about the bill’s impacts prior to an important committee hearing. As FOFA moves to the next phase—Senate markup—we’ll need your help again to protect these wild places.

—Kya Marienfeld



## AMERICA’S RED ROCK WILDERNESS ACT GAINS NEW COSPONSORS

While the fight for the protection of our public lands can feel tiring and never-ending, it’s important to acknowledge and celebrate those who are right there with us in the fight.

When America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act was reintroduced in March by Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Representative Melanie Stansbury (D-NM-1), 13 senators and 41 House representatives signed on as original cosponsors. Since reintroduction, 4 more senators and 10 more House members have formally endorsed the bill. They are: Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI), Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Rep. Chris Pappas (D-NH-1), Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT-2), Rep. Andrea Salinas (D-OR-6), Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-1), Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-CA-51), Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN-4), Rep. Maxine Dexter (D-OR-3), Rep. Kim Schrier (D-WA-8), Rep. Jill Tokuda (D-HI-2), and Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL-5). If you’re a constituent of any of the above legislators, please reach out and thank them for their support.

America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act aims to permanently protect over 8 million acres of Bureau of Land Management land in Utah as federally designated wilderness, including iconic landscapes with evocative names like Labyrinth Canyon, Robbers Roost, and the Kaiparowits Plateau.

Senator Durbin and Representative Stansbury continue to be tireless and powerful voices of support for wilderness protection, with 17 senators and 51 representatives now backing them up—but we can’t stop there! If your representative and/or senators have not yet cosponsored, please ask them to cosponsor America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act today. And if you’d like to get more involved, reach out to your regional organizer ([suwa.org/regionalorganizers](https://suwa.org/regionalorganizers)) and ask about joining a group meeting to speak with your members of Congress about cosponsorship.

Learn more at [suwa.org/cosponsors](https://suwa.org/cosponsors).

## A DISAPPOINTING OUTCOME FOR GLEN CANYON

In prior issues of *Redrock Wilderness*, we reported on our successful legal settlement (in partnership with the National Parks Conservation Association) over a 2021 Trump-era off-road vehicle (ORV) plan for Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and asked for your help in securing long-term protections for the region's 1.25 million acres of stunning undisturbed landscapes. Unfortunately, Utah's congressional delegation had other ideas.

Earlier this year, the National Park Service (NPS) issued a final rule updating Glen Canyon's motorized vehicle regulations to provide stronger protections for some of the area's most scenic, fragile, and special places while still balancing opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized recreation (thanks to all who sub-

mitted comments in support of the rule). Among other things, this rule was intended to guard against loud, disruptive ORVs in the Orange Cliffs area, which serves as a backdrop to the Maze District of Canyonlands National Park, while still allowing visitors to explore on designated routes via cars, trucks, Jeeps, and SUVs. In essence, the rule would have made Glen Canyon a quieter, wilder place and helped ensure that both the recreation area and national park are preserved for future generations.

But in an unprecedented move, Congress—led by Representative Celeste Maloy (R-UT-2) and Senators John Curtis (R-UT) and Mike Lee (R-UT)—voted along party lines to undermine the NPS using an obscure statute known as the Congressional

Review Act (CRA) to permanently invalidate the agency's updated rule (meaning that the rule cannot ever take effect). Even more concerning, because the rule was invalidated pursuant to the CRA, the agency can never again issue a rule that is "substantially similar." And because Congress has never utilized the CRA to attack such a niche, localized rule, it is unclear when or how a future rule would be considered "substantially similar" to the Glen Canyon rule.

We're incredibly disappointed with this turn of events. Rather than protect America's crown jewels, Congress has made it much more likely that treasured places in Glen Canyon and Canyonlands—such as the Orange Cliffs, Gunsight Butte, and the Maze—



IN A DEEPLY DISAPPOINTING LOSS FOR UTAH'S WILD COUNTRY, CONGRESS HAS MADE IT MUCH MORE LIKELY THAT TREASURED PLACES IN THE GLEN CANYON REGION WILL BE IMPAIRED BY NOISY, DESTRUCTIVE ORVS. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

will be impaired by noisy, destructive ORVs. But Congress' action also adds fuel to the fire of public lands activism. SUWA remains steadfast in its commitment to doing everything we can to protect wilderness-quality lands at the heart of the Colorado Plateau, including in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

—Hanna Larsen

## ORV GROUPS CHALLENGE TRAVEL PLANS IN COURT

Over the last several years, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) completed three important travel management plans in the heart of redrock country: the Labyrinth Canyon plan, the San Rafael Swell plan, and the Henry Mountains/Dirty Devil plan. Collectively covering nearly 3 million acres of BLM-managed land, these plans designate where off-road vehicles (ORVs) are allowed to travel across some of Utah's most spectacular wild landscapes.

The Labyrinth Canyon plan, finalized in 2023, was a significant step forward for ORV management in Utah. The plan helps protect cultural sites, desert waterways, wildlife habitat, and the experience of non-motorized recreationists while still allowing for motorized recreation on more than 800 miles of dirt trails and routes.

The two more recently completed plans—for the San Rafael Swell (late 2024) and Henry Mountains/Dirty Devil region (early 2025)—were more of a step backwards. These plans fell short of what we were hoping for, both in terms of landscapes protected and total miles of routes designated for ORVs.

On the one hand, they did close certain routes that had reclaimed, had never existed on the ground in the first place, or had caused real and serious environmental damage. However, those improvements were offset by the BLM's decision to open substantial miles of new routes to ORVs, failing to adequately protect wilderness values and wildlife habitat. Overall, the two plans prioritize ORVs and motorized recreation at the expense of natural and cultural resources.

Not satisfied with thousands of miles of routes open to motorized vehicles in these areas, ORV advocacy groups have challenged all three plans in federal court, complaining that the plans do not open enough routes to motorized

## FATE OF UTAH MONUMENTS REMAINS UNCERTAIN

Shortly after his appointment, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum issued a Secretarial Order calling for a review of national monuments. The order, titled "Unleashing American Energy" calls for a review and possible revision to certain land protections. Although the order never specifically mentions national monuments, the roll back of numerous public land protections would apply to monument lands—eviscerating the very purpose for which the monuments were established—all in the name of the president's made-up "energy emergency."

Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments have not been directly targeted yet, but we don't expect that to last. SUWA is actively coordinating with our network of partners to vigorously defend against any attempt to diminish or abolish the protection of these singular landscapes.

vehicles. These lawsuits make clear that ORV advocacy groups are not concerned about access or balance, but instead are bound and determined to make redrock country an enormous playground for ORVs and side-by-sides.

SUWA has intervened in each of the lawsuits, both to defend the positive aspects of these plans and to ensure that the BLM does not backtrack on its decisions by opening even more routes to ORVs. We will keep you updated as these cases move forward.

—Laura Peterson

## MINE THREATENS PROPOSED WILDERNESS IN WEST DESERT

The threat of a 200-acre mine looms over beautiful Modena Canyon in Utah's West Desert region, just south of Hamlin Valley. The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Cedar City field office is preparing an environmental assessment for a pozzolan mine that would overlap with BLM-identified wilderness-caliber lands proposed for wilderness

designation in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act.

Pozzolan, an additive for concrete, is a poorly consolidated volcanic ash. In March of this year, over vocal opposition by local residents, the Utah company Progressive Contracting Inc. received a conditional use permit from Iron County for mining operations across a 200-acre area.

The BLM is in the early planning stages, so we don't have specifics, and before mining can begin the agency must approve Progressive's proposed plan of operations. However, according to information on the BLM's ePlanning website (and the permit), hydraulic excavators would remove the volcanic tuff (igneous rock formed by volcanic ash) from a pristine ridge-line along Modena Canyon Road, which would then be crushed, stock-piled, and loaded for transport.

The canyon's quiet, natural landscape would be further jarred by up to 40 hauling trucks per day traveling at least 10 miles each direction along the scenic, winding dirt road forming the border between the Crook Creek and Paradise Mountain proposed wilderness areas. Additional trucks would haul water for dust suppression and mining operations from Escalante Valley. Water use is estimated at 4,000 gallons per hour.

On a recent visit to the mine area, SUWA staff saw considerable signs of deer, elk, and wild horses within the mine's proposed footprint, which is directly adjacent to a unique rock formation locally referred to as the "ghost rocks."

SUWA will be keeping a close eye on this project and will keep you posted.

—Judi Brawer



THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION IS MOVING FORWARD WITH PLANS TO SELL 14 OIL AND GAS LEASES ENCOMPASSING OVER 19,000 ACRES IN UTAH, INCLUDING IN THE HEART OF EASTERN UTAH'S SCENIC WHITE RIVER CORRIDOR.  
© RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

## OIL & GAS LEASE SALE TARGETS HEART OF WHITE RIVER AREA

The Trump administration has dusted off the old "energy dominance" agenda playbook from its first term and resumed targeting some of Utah's wildest places for oil and gas leasing and development. At the moment, the administration is moving forward with plans to sell 14 oil and gas leases encompassing over 19,000 acres in Utah.

One lease is located right in the heart of eastern Utah's scenic White River corridor, spanning both sides of the river. The White River is a quiet riparian oasis in a region of the southern Uinta Basin that is otherwise dominated by industrial oil and gas development. Thankfully, the ridgetops and deep canyons have isolated the river corridor from the nearby, ongoing industrial activity. But even this last ecological refuge is now threatened by the Bureau of Land Management's newest leasing proposal.

SUWA is actively participating in the leasing process and will continue to fight any proposal that threatens wilderness-caliber lands in the White River region. Thanks to all of our supporters who submitted public comments urging the agency to remove the controversial lease parcel from this sale.

—Landon Newell

## COORDINATION AND TEAMWORK TURNS LA STUDENTS INTO WILDERNESS STEWARDS

In the redrock country of southern Utah in April, as the globemallow emerged and desert spiny lizards soaked in the warming sun, SUWA's Stewardship and Organizing Teams joined West Los Angeles College's California Center for Climate Change Education to launch a project more than two years in the making.

It all started with Jenny Holmes, SUWA's West Coast Organizer. In 2023, Jenny visited West LA College and presented on the role of America's redrock wilderness in climate change mitigation. Her talk sparked an idea: What if these students could experience the redrock firsthand and take an active role in protecting it?

Two years later, ten students from West LA College arrived in Escalante, Utah, at the edge of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. There, they met with SUWA's Stewardship Team to learn about conservation through hands-on service during a weeklong project.

Over the course of the week, students connected deeply with public lands, many for the first time. From planting

native sage species on a fading off-road vehicle (ORV) route to restoring cryptobiotic soil gardens and piñon-juniper forests, students learned about the issues affecting Utah's wild landscapes. Evening seminars led by SUWA activists, attorneys, and organizers taught students about how grass-roots efforts influence decision-makers, how storytelling and civic engagement are essential tools for conservation, and how land management decisions in Utah impact the nation as a whole. Learning these principles while standing in the very landscapes under threat gave students a sense of urgency and purpose that no classroom can replicate.

On one of our final nights, we drove down the Hole-in-the-Rock Road and pulled over to stargaze. Under the quiet shadow of Fifty-Mile Mountain, we reflected on how places like Grand Staircase-Escalante humble us and teach us. One student said it best: "I will carry this experience within my heart forever."

Let us move forward with the redrock, and each other, in our hearts. Together with our expanding community of activists and supporters, we look forward to continuing to honor these landscapes—by giving back, listening closely, and standing strong in the face of threats to public lands.

To learn more about SUWA's Stewardship Program and view our 2025 project calendar, visit [suwa.org/stewardship](https://suwa.org/stewardship).

—*Talitha McGuire*



WEST LA COLLEGE STUDENTS LEARN HANDS-ON LAND PROTECTION AND RESTORATION TECHNIQUES IN GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT. © SUWA

## SUWA WELCOMES (BACK) SCOTT BRADEN AS NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We're excited to welcome Scott Braden back to SUWA, this time as our new executive director in Salt Lake City! Scott fell in love with Utah's rivers and canyons as an outdoor educator and has gone on to devote his career to protecting public lands across the American West. He assumed his new role in early May and comes to us with two decades of experience in conservation advocacy, nonprofit management, and organizational leadership.

"At this pivotal moment for the redrock wilderness, I'm honored to step into this role," Scott says. "The threats to Utah's wilderness are relentless, coming from every direction—but SUWA's ability to win protections and hold the line has never been more critical. Having started my career at SUWA and dedicated my life to defending wild places, returning as executive director is deeply meaningful to me. Working with SUWA's stellar staff and the nationwide community of redrock activists, I'm eager to build on SUWA's legacy, strengthen the organization, and position it for success in protecting Wild Utah for generations to come."

Scott most recently served as co-founder and director of the Colorado Wildlands Project. There, he led efforts to protect Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in Colorado, including a national monument campaign for the Dolores River canyon country, securing a variety of administrative protections, and establishing a collaborative stewardship program. He previously worked as a public lands advocate



LOCAL SUWA MEMBERS HAD A CHANCE TO MEET SCOTT THIS JUNE AT OUR SUMMER SHINDIG IN SALT LAKE CITY. © NATALIE SIMPSON/BEEHIVE PHOTO

at Conservation Colorado and the Colorado Mountain Club.

Scott began his advocacy career at SUWA from 2007 to 2011, learning first-hand how to be a wilderness advocate, connect with passionate SUWA members, and navigate the halls of Congress out of the organization's Moab, Salt Lake City, and Washington, DC offices. Prior to joining SUWA as a staff member, he was an outdoor educator in the Utah Program of the Colorado Outward Bound School. It was during that time that he first attended "Wilderness Week" and lobbied for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, SUWA's signature federal legislation, as a redrock activist.

"We're ecstatic to introduce Scott as our next executive director and to welcome him back to SUWA," said SUWA Board Chair Tom Kenworthy. "He will be a fearless and enthusiastic champion of SUWA's mission to protect the redrock wilderness at a critical time in our organization's history."

A months-long search for a new executive director was conducted by Kittelman and Associates, in partnership with SUWA's all-volunteer Board of Directors, when for-



SCOTT WITH HIS WIFE, KAREN, AND TWO DAUGHTERS AT COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT.

mer executive director Scott Groene retired in December. Groene led the organization from 2004 to 2024 after working on and off at the organization since 1987. During his tenure, he was instrumental in securing the protection of iconic landscapes in Utah, including Bears Ears National Monument (2016) and nearly a million acres of congressionally designated wilderness in the Cedar Mountains (2006), the Zion-Mojave region of Washington County (2009), and Emery County (2019).

The “new” Scott has been busy getting to know the staff and board, our members, and our partners across Utah and in Washington, DC during his first few months. We encourage you to reach out and say hello to him ([scottb@suwa.org](mailto:scottb@suwa.org) or 801-428-3975) or stop by the Salt Lake City office.

## PERSPECTIVE: HOW COLLECTIVE ACTION WILL PROTECT PUBLIC LANDS

BY DIANA HARO

Like many working in the nonprofit sector, much of my energy has been spent responding to the relentless attacks of the Trump administration—attacks that threaten our communities, our environment, and the very idea of a shared public good. But lately I’ve found solace in my garden. There, time slows down. I reconnect with the visible and invisible work of nature. Lessons sprout daily alongside the corn and snap peas.



PUBLIC LAND SUPPORTERS AT A JUNE “STOP THE SELL-OFF” ACTIVIST EVENT IN LA VERKIN, UTAH. © SUWA

Organizing, like gardening, is an act of hope. It requires planning, patience, and perseverance. Both the gardener and the organizer must adopt a long-term perspective, knowing that the fruits of their labor are often far off. Success depends on preparation, but also on the elements, on timing, and on forces beyond our control. Humility, too, is essential.

The Trump administration’s effort to privatize and sell our public lands is the ever-present bindweed we will battle again and again. It will require constant and focused effort to weed out because, if left unchecked, it will sneak past us and wreak havoc.

This past month, Representative Celeste Maloy (R-UT-2) and Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) introduced proposals into the House and Senate budget reconciliation bills in an attempt to do just this: sneak past us. As redrock supporter and Utah musician Gigi Love put it, “It’s clear that the



ACTIVISTS TURN OUT TO DEFEND PUBLIC LANDS AT A CONGRESSIONAL FIELD HEARING IN CEDAR CITY, UTAH. © SUWA

representatives in the West are waiting for any slip in our attention to grab up whatever land they can . . . Not on our watch is what I say!” We agree. Not on our watch.

Time and time again the people, in Utah and across the country, stand up to protect and defend public lands—and we are stronger working alongside each other than apart. SUWA board member Olivia Juarez noted that “Even in the darkest of political times under this final Trump administration, our movement to honor Utah’s sacred wild places has become more confident and vocal than ever.” Come what may, there will be constituent calls, emails, meetings with congressional staff, pointed op-eds, and spirited rallies. Our continued wins will be made possible not by luck, but by the deliberate, courageous, and strategic action of activists and organizations across the country.

We know that those currently in power will continue to unravel decades of struggle and hard earned progress toward a more equitable, just, and safe society for everyone. We know their push to control and commodify our bodies, lands, and communities with zero regard for our collective future will not stop. And we recognize that protecting public lands falls short of the immediacy other threats currently pose to vulnerable populations and frontline communities who bear the impact of unjust policies and provisions.

But we also know this: the only way to defend our lands, waters, and air is to protect our collective future—and each

other. So we’ll keep planting seeds, and like the snap peas climbing toward the sun, we’ll keep reaching together. We’ll keep organizing.

*Diana Haro is SUWA’s Organizing Director & Comunidad Latina Organizer*

## MEMBERS GATHER FOR SUMMER SHINDIG IN SALT LAKE CITY

On June 17th, SUWA members gathered for our annual Summer Shindig at Salt Lake City’s Tracy Aviary. Surrounded by birdsong, good food, and even better company, we came together to celebrate our shared love for America’s redrock wilderness and the power of community in the effort to protect it. It was a lovely evening—and we want to extend a special thank you to everyone who was able to join us in person.

To all of our members: thank you for being part of this fight, for showing up in every way you can, and for helping to ensure that the redrock endures for future generations.

If you’re not already a member of SUWA, please join today at [suwa.org/donate](https://suwa.org/donate) or use the convenient envelope at the center of this newsletter.



IN JUNE, SUWA MEMBERS ENJOYED A BEAUTIFUL SUMMER EVENING AT TRACY AVIARY AND MET NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SCOTT BRADEN DURING OUR ANNUAL SUMMER SHINDIG IN SALT LAKE CITY. © NATALIE SIMPSON/BEEHIVE PHOTO

## THANK YOU, SUWA BUSINESS MEMBERS!

SUWA's Business Membership Program is a great way for your small business or company to support the protection of Utah's redrock country. For an annual donation of \$150 or more, we'll print your company's name in our newsletter once a year and on our website at [suwa.org/businessmembers](https://suwa.org/businessmembers). At higher levels of support we offer additional benefits, such as a featured spot in our monthly e-newsletter.

For more information, please contact us at [membership@suwa.org](mailto:membership@suwa.org) or (801) 486-3161. Listed below are businesses from Utah and across the country that currently support Utah wilderness through SUWA's Business Membership Program.

### KAYENTA MEMBERS

(\$1,000+)

Caffe Ibis Coffee Roasting Co, UT  
Four Corners OBGYN, CO  
Imlay Canyon Gear, UT

Law Office of Robert Miller, AZ  
Mosaic Realty LLC, CO  
Novakinetics Aerosystems Inc, AZ

Powderhound Marketing, NV  
Stone Forest Inc, NM  
Tangerine Restaurants, CO

### WINGATE MEMBERS

(\$500-\$999)

Chris Brown Photography, CO  
Dabney & Dabney PLLC, UT  
Glenn Randall Writing and Photography,  
CO

Holiday River Expeditions, UT  
KÜHL Clothing, UT  
Malach Consulting, LLC, UT

Resonance Printing Solutions, UT  
State 45, IN  
The Wildland Trekking Co, AZ

### MOENKOPI MEMBERS

(\$150-\$499)

A & H Signs, UT  
Arches Retreat, UT  
Brown Bag Farms, CA  
Bruce Spring, MD, CA  
Clayhaus Photography, UT  
Consulting Psychologists, AZ  
Da Vinci Painting, WA  
Escape Goats, UT  
Farios Deck & Fence Refinishing, UT  
Fisher Brewing Company, LLC, UT

Githens Properties, LLC, CO  
Gospel Flat Farm, CA  
J Groene Construction Inc, KS  
James Kay Photography, UT  
Kroesche Schindler LLP, CA  
Lazy Lizard International Hostel, UT  
Maui Mountain Coffee Farm, HI  
Northstar Canoes, MN  
Patagonia Outlet, UT  
Phillips Gallery, UT

Red Rock Brewing Company, UT  
Wagenschmitt VW Service, WA  
Waterwise Design & Landscapes, LC, UT  
William Stone Photography, RI  
Words and Photographs by Stephen  
Trimble, UT  
Workspace Installations LLC, CT  
Yourstory Photography, IN  
ZAK Construction, OR

## A NEW WAY TO WEAR YOUR PASSION FOR WILD UTAH

We're thrilled to unveil our brand-new hooded sweatshirt featuring original artwork inspired by The Golden Cathedral—a stunning natural amphitheater tucked deep within Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Printed on a soft, durable 70/30 cotton-poly blend, this hoodie is a must-have for those cool desert nights. Available in a range of sizes in both sandstone (pictured here) and dusty sage. Cozy up and wear your love for wild Utah!

The artwork was generously donated to SUWA by Utah-based artist Anna Leigh Moore, whose deep connection to the land guides her creative process. “Sublime moments in nature inform my art,” she says, “while the act of creating brings soul to every outdoor adventure.”

We're honored to collaborate with Anna on this special piece—and even more honored to protect the places that inspire art like hers. Visit [suwa.org/shop](https://suwa.org/shop) to get your hoodie today! Available only while supplies last.



ARTWORK ON BACK OF SANDSTONE HOODIE. VIEW ALL SIZE AND COLOR OPTIONS AT [SUWA.ORG/SHOP](https://suwa.org/shop).

### 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?

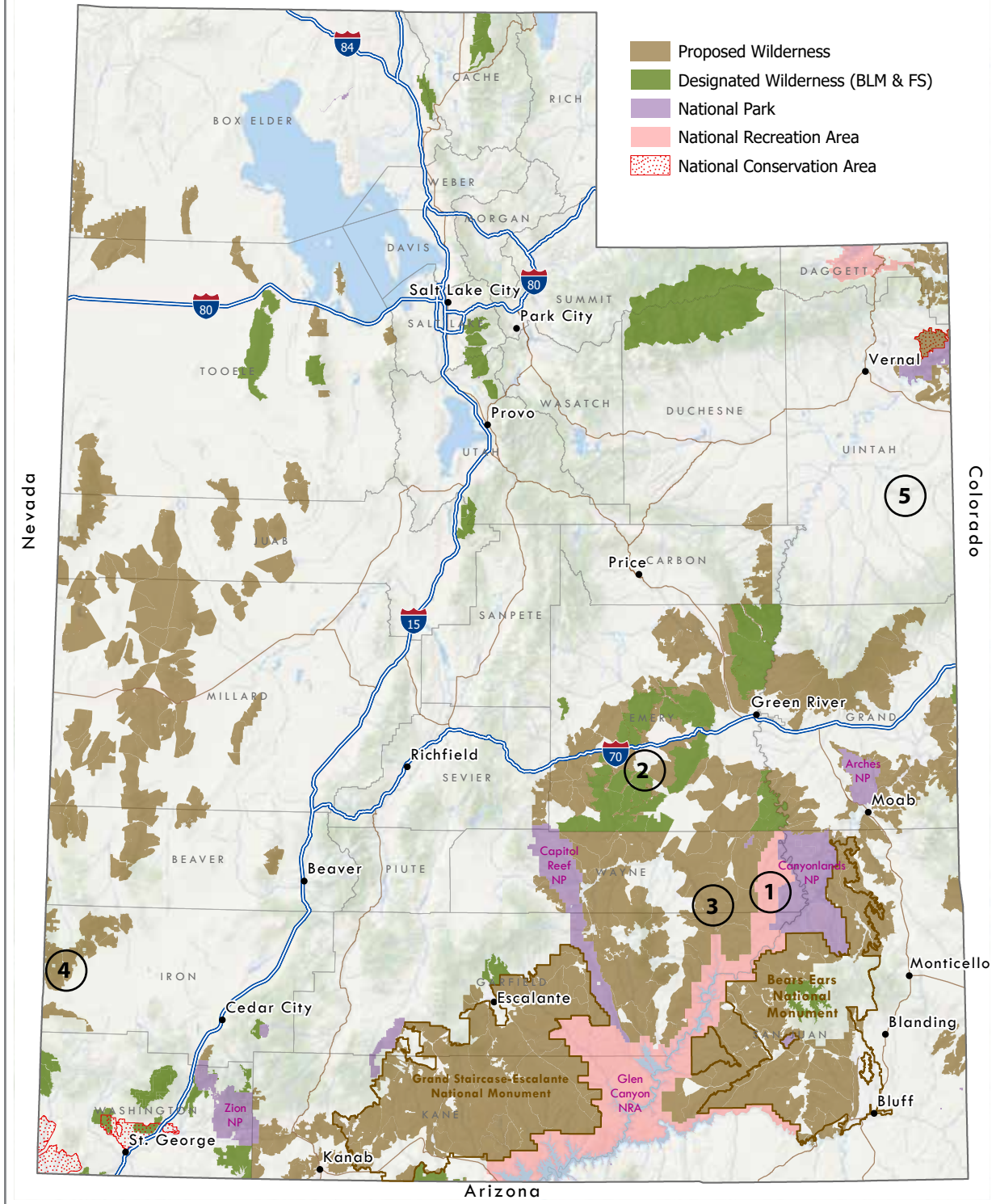
- **It provides year-around support:** Conservation work doesn't stop, and neither do the threats to Utah's redrock wilderness. Having dependable monthly support means we can take action when it's needed most.
- **It helps us stay ready for the long fight:** Some battles take years to win. Having a steady 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](https://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!

# America's Red Rock Wilderness Act

A People's Wilderness Proposal for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands in Utah



- ① Orange Cliffs (p. 10)
- ② San Rafael Swell (p. 11)
- ③ Dirty Devil (p. 11)
- ④ Modena Canyon (p. 11)
- ⑤ White River (p. 12)



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