Anti-Wilderness Overreach and the Rise of the Utah Resistance
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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In this issue:

Wilderness Notes:

Utah Pols’ Attack on Bears Ears Monument: A Dangerous Beginning .................. 4

Features:

Utah Uprising: A Story in Four Parts ........................................................................... 6

DC News ................................................................................................................................. 11

Canyon Country Updates .................................................................................................. 14

Inside SUWA ....................................................................................................................... 20

America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act Reference Map .................................................. 23

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SUWA, 425 East 100 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84111
Utah Pols’ Attack on Bears Ears Monument: A Dangerous Beginning

The Kaiparowits Plateau is tough country, remote and wild. A buddy and I once trudged through August heat up Monday Canyon through ankle-deep ash from a recent wildfire. Thirsty, sweaty and soot-begrimed, we looked long for water, finally stumbling on a cow-trampled spring. It was welcome. But the real prize lay ahead: the sweeping vistas from the top of Fifty Mile Mountain. We dropped our packs and stared across the Escalante Canyons to the Henry Mountains, east to the Bears Ears, south to Navajo Mountain.

That solitude, sublime, is now imperiled by the ridiculous. The Trump administration, with Utah’s congressional delegation and governor yapping at its heels, threatens the serenity of the Kaiparowits. It’s not the first time. In the 70s, the region was slated for coal mines and a power plant to send electricity to California. A few years later, Utah schemers got congressional approval for the Trans-Escalante Highway which would have splintered the enormous Kaiparowits/Escalante/Glen Canyon roadless area. The 90s brought another effort to industrialize the plateau with coal mines, this time with Utah promising subsidies to make mining “economical.”

That spate of nonsense ended when President Bill Clinton stepped in to designate the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. In a last gasp, Conoco tried drilling state parcels on Four Mile Bench for oil. And Garfield county cooked up road claims in an effort to bulldoze away the wilderness.

A generation or two of people who love these lands—many of them Utahns, thousands of others from across the country—made sure the threats remained only that. The Kaiparowits sits silent and grand today, just as it has for 80 million years. Two decades after the monument was proclaimed, many local residents have become monument supporters and polls show that most Utah residents share that view.

None of that is to say that Utah’s politicians are resigned to that splendid silence. They find it deafening and always have. But there is a major difference this time: Donald Trump. His election has Utah politicians positively giddy for their fantasies of seizing control of America’s public lands. Their primary push is for Trump to overturn the Bears Ears National Monument. But that’s not enough for them. They’ve never gotten past their theological resentment of the earlier monument; they want it eliminated too.

Utah politicians are lodged in the belief that if a thing was so yesterday, it must perforce be so today and tomorrow. Thus, Utah’s future belongs to King Coal, a dirty old soul to paraphrase the poem. Especially the coal holding up the Kaiparowits Plateau. And never mind that the Navajo Generating Plant, visible from Fifty Mile Mountain, is shutting down, along with mines that feed it, because of economics.

We are sharply focused on defending the Bears Ears monument with a superbly united conservation community, alongside the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition and the outdoor industry. But SUWA must also pay very close attention to the other nine million acres of redrock wilderness that we are pledged to protect. Official Utah is hell-bent on pillaging them too.

Yesterday’s activists fought hundreds of battles for this landscape. In each fight, there were moments when it seemed certain that the greed-fueled crackpot schemes must surely triumph. It is hard now even to imagine what some of those schemes portended: dams blocking the Escalante River, a highway built from Moab to Big Water down the west side of the Colorado River, a nuclear waste dump in Lavender Canyon adjacent to Canyonlands National Park, or legislation mandating development of 21 million acres of Utah public lands.
They were threats, real ones, averted only because conservationists here and elsewhere united against the state’s feloniously myopic politicians.

Like noxious weeds, the dishonesty, stupidity and overreach of official Utah—from the governor and the congressional delegation down to the state legislature—are in full flower. The White House will likely back them. This time it falls to us to stop them. Together, we will. Two thoughts may help sustain us. Every fight for the redrock has left us stronger than when it began. And Trump will not be president forever. Our job is to ensure that the canyon country survives the convulsion of which he is the avatar.

For the Redrock,

Scott Groene  
Executive Director

Kaiparowits Plateau, GSENM  
© Stephen Trimble  
© Tom Miller
Utah Uprising: A Story in Four Parts

Spring: A Stormy Day in Washington

At 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, March 1st, the U.S. Senate voted 68-31 to confirm Rep. Ryan Zinke (R-MT) as President Donald Trump’s Interior Secretary.

Zinke had barely settled into his first lunch hour when dozens of people rallied outside the Interior Department building in support of the Bears Ears National Monument. (SUWA’s entire DC staff was there, some wearing bear costumes in solidarity with Bears Ears.)

Two thousand miles away at the Utah Capitol in Salt Lake City, a group of business owners from the communities surrounding Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument held a press conference highlighting the importance of monuments to local economies, and delivered more than 200 letters from local residents and businesses asking Zinke to reject calls from Utah politicians to reduce the size of the 20 year-old monument.

Meanwhile, inside Zinke’s office, the phones were ringing off the hook. SUWA had just launched a nationwide phone banking operation, and every few minutes a kind but undoubtedly beleaguered woman named Kathy would answer the phone in the Secretary’s office, take down a SUWA member’s name and where they were calling from, and note their support for keeping Bears Ears National Monument fully intact. Then the phone would ring again. Poor Kathy. Sisyphus at a desk.

Welcome to Day One on the job, Secretary Zinke! We’ve been waiting for you!

An Outbreak of Crazy in Utah

Near the top of Secretary Zinke’s agenda is a trip to Utah to investigate what he’s called the “problem”...
of the Bears Ears National Monument. During his confirmation hearing in mid-January, Zinke vowed to visit with those “affected” by the new monument and make a recommendation to President Trump about the monument’s future. He called the monument a “five-meter target” (i.e., the thing immediately in front of you), to be dealt with as soon as he took office.

Sensing opportunity, Utah legislators rammed through a resolution calling on Trump to rescind President Obama’s Bears Ears proclamation (see sidebar, p. 8). Utah Gov. Gary Herbert, flanked by the state Senate president and the House speaker, gleefully signed the resolution on Friday, February 3rd, smiled for an official photo, and sent the resolution to the White House.

Tipsy with joy at having so effortlessly passed their symbolic-but-toothless resolution, Utah politicians went back for more. They passed a second resolution two weeks later demanding that Trump shrink the acreage of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument that President Bill Clinton proclaimed in 1996 (see sidebar, p. 9). The unspoken hope, of course, was that Trump would neatly excise the Kaiparowits Plateau from the monument, thus opening up for development the coal reserves beneath it.

The irony (to which the state’s pro-fossil-fuel politicians remain oblivious) is that you can stand on top of the Kaiparowits Plateau today, look to the south, and see the smokestacks of the Navajo Generating Station, the 2250-megawatt coal-fired power plant near Page, Arizona. The kicker? The station’s operators recently announced they will close the plant in December 2019 because low natural gas prices have made coal-fired electrical generation a money-losing proposition. The nearby Black Mesa coal mine in Arizona will shut down too.

Governor Herbert also signed the resolution calling for a smaller Grand Staircase (a stepping stool?), again on a Friday. But this time there was no official photo, no Senate president nor House speaker, and not much of a smile. Because two days earlier, Governor Herbert’s anti-public lands rhetoric and actions had finally blown up in his face, causing this pro-growth Governor to lose nearly $50 million in revenue for the state of Utah each year.

Good job, Governor!

The Outdoor Industry (and Nearly Everyone Else) Strikes Back

Earlier in February, Patagonia—which has long been an ardent supporter of the Tribally-led campaign to protect Bears Ears as a national monument—sent shock waves through the outdoor industry when the company announced that it would no longer attend Outdoor Retailer, the massive outdoor industry show that comes to Salt Lake City twice a year and brings in nearly $50 million in direct revenue. Its overall economic reach in Utah is estimated to be three to four times that amount, according to Visit Salt Lake, a non-profit that promotes business and tourism in the greater Salt Lake area. Outdoor Retailer is Utah’s largest convention, if not its biggest event—so large, in fact, that a new 750-room hotel had been proposed to be built (with tax-payer subsidies) next to the Salt Palace Convention Center.

What transpired in the days following Patagonia’s announcement was breathtaking to observe. The day after Patagonia announced its boycott of Outdoor Retailer, a handful of companies followed suit, including Arc’teryx, one of the largest clothing manufacturers in the outdoor market. Two days later, a number of companies declared that while they would still attend Outdoor Retailer, they would continue to raise concerns with Utah over the state government’s hostile attitude toward public lands.

It seemed a sort of stasis had been achieved, with the outdoor industry united in their criticism of
Resolution Urging the President to Rescind the Bears Ears National Monument Designation (H.C.R. 11)

**Alternative Fact:** WHEREAS, the designation of the Bears Ears National Monument sets a dangerous precedent of allowing special interest groups to unduly influence the monument designation process and silence local voices . . .

**Truth:** The monument was proposed by an unprecedented coalition of five tribal nations after Native voices were largely excluded from public lands discussions led by Utah Rep. Rob Bishop. The Obama administration met with the Utah delegation, held several public meetings in southern Utah, and incorporated local feedback in the final monument designation.

**Alternative Fact:** WHEREAS, local Native American groups with historical ties to the area have passed resolutions opposing the designation of the Bears Ears National Monument . . .

**Truth:** “Let me make one thing very, very clear: Native people are overwhelmingly unified in our support for designation of Bears Ears National Monument. Twenty-five regional tribes, the entire National Congress of American Indians, six of seven Navajo chapter houses, and every council member from my tribe have approved formal resolutions of support for Bears Ears National Monument.”
—Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk, former co-chair of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition and former tribal council member, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (Op-ed, Deseret News, June 13, 2016)

**Alternative Fact:** WHEREAS, San Juan County residents, including local Native American tribes, fear that woodcutting, pinion gathering, traditional religious and cultural practices, and a host of other historical uses of the area will be restricted or entirely prohibited . . .

**Truth:** The monument proclamation prioritizes “the protection of Indian sacred sites and traditional cultural properties in the monument” and specifically provides for “traditional cultural and customary uses . . . including collection of medicines, berries and other vegetation, forest products, and firewood for personal non-commercial use . . .”

**Alternative Fact:** WHEREAS, Governor Gary R. Herbert noted that another monument designation would “inflame passion, spur divisiveness, and ensure perpetual opposition” . . .

**Truth:** Utah politicians haven taken it upon themselves to “inflame passion, spur divisiveness, and ensure perpetual opposition” by encouraging the spread of misinformation and leading an ideological anti-monument campaign.

Utah’s delegation and governor, but split on whether to keep attending Outdoor Retailer or boycott the show outright. Seeking to find some common ground and ease tensions, Governor Herbert organized a conference call with outdoor industry leaders—and stumbled headlong into the biggest misstep of his political career.

The conference call, by all accounts, was an unmitigated disaster. Herbert performed his usual shtick: Utah is a public lands state; we love, love, love our public lands; they’re the best. The outdoor industry was having none of it. What about your constant attacks on the Bears Ears, Guv? What about your lawsuits to establish routes in wilderness? What about your attempts to seize federal public lands for the state, and eventually for private developers?

At the end of the call, the outdoor industry leaders told Herbert that the state had one to two weeks to cease its attack on Bears Ears or Outdoor Retailer would find another host city. “If you’re giving me an ultimatum here on the phone,” Herbert said, “the answer, I guess, is we’re going to have to part ways.” The call ended abruptly soon after. Just hours later, Outdoor Retailer officials announced the show would be leaving Utah “as soon as possible” and would not even accept bids from the state for future conventions.

In less than 10 days, Herbert had lost Utah’s biggest convention, dealing a major blow to the Wasatch Front’s hospitality, restaurant and retail businesses. Not to mention the poor Uber drivers.

Having apparently learned nothing from the fiasco, the governor’s spokesperson called the Outdoor Retailer’s decision “offensive.” Rep. Jason Chaffetz insisted that the delegation’s war on Bears Ears (which is a proxy war on tribal sovereignty) wasn’t to blame. “Nobody needs to grovel with these folks,” Chaffetz declared. A thousand barstool wits across Utah finished his sentence for him: “We reserve groveling for the extractive industries.”

To be fair, Rep. Chaffetz had been through a rough couple of days when he told Outdoor Retailer officials not to let the door hit them in the ass as they left Utah. A week earlier, he faced a rebellious, overflow crowd of nearly a thousand constituents at a town hall meeting in Cottonwood Heights; another thousand stood outside the high school auditorium. His constituents upbraided him for his attacks on
Bears Ears and public lands in general, as well as his stance on the Affordable Care Act and his refusal to investigate snowballing allegations of Trump’s Russian connections.

True to form, Chaffetz dismissed those who disagreed with him: the crowd was made up not of constituents but of “paid protestors.” He did solemnly don his investigative mantle, though. It was soon reported that the House Oversight Committee he chairs had launched an investigation into a tweet sent from Bryce Canyon National Park the day after President Barack Obama proclaimed the Bears Ears monument in December. The tweet welcomed Bears Ears to the national park “family” and noted that a slot for the new monument’s map had “long been held” at the Bryce Canyon visitor center. Rep. Chaffetz demanded to know whether the park ranger had any foreknowledge that the Bears Ears would be proclaimed a monument, and in doing so echoed that famous mantra from Watergate:

“What did the park ranger know, and when did she know it?”

The Future Is a Foreign Country Too

This next part of the story is up to you. As this issue of Redrock Wilderness goes to press, Interior

Resolution Urging Federal Legislation to Reduce or Modify the Boundaries of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (H.C.R. 12)

Alternative Fact: WHEREAS, for more than 20 years, the GSENHM has had a negative impact on the prosperity, development, economy, custom, culture, heritage, educational opportunities, health, and well-being of local communities . . .

Truth: “New Construction in Escalante is at an all-time high. Businesses are struggling to keep up with demand. And secondary, non-tourist oriented businesses are popping up as economic activity increases and diversifies.”

—January 28, 2017 press release issued by leaders of the Escalante Chamber of Commerce who visited Utah’s congressional delegation in Washington, DC to highlight the monument’s economic benefits.

Alternative Fact: WHEREAS, the GSENHM has resulted in diminished grazing rights, energy and mineral rights, public road access, state trust land properties, and resource use and preservation . . .

Truth: Valid existing rights such as grazing permits, existing energy leases, and private property are honored under the monument proclamation.

Truth: “Although grazing use levels have varied considerably from year to year due to factors like drought, no reductions in permitted livestock grazing use have been made as a result of the Monument’s designation nearly 20 years ago.”

—BLM 2015 fact sheet on grazing in the monument

Truth: “SITLA, along with Utah’s congressional delegation, worked with the federal government to ensure a fair land trade and even secure compensation for lost mineral royalties. A portion of lands acquired by SITLA in that exchange . . . generated $1.5 million monthly in royalties from coal bed methane development for more than a decade.”

—State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) website
Secretary Zinke has been in office for only a few weeks. We still don’t know when he will come to Utah. But we remain cautiously optimistic that he will live up to his reputation of honoring tribes and tribal sovereignty. We hope he’ll see through the fulminations of Herbert and the Utah delegation and realize there is no political upside in undoing either the Bears Ears or the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. Herbert and the Utah delegation may be rabid in their hatred of the Antiquities Act, but in a recent poll, 80 percent of western voters stated that they want to see existing national monuments remain in place. (See the poll at http://coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/.)

Secretary Zinke should do the right thing. And that right thing is to tell Herbert and the Utah delegation that if they want to recast either Bears Ears or the Grand Staircase, they have to go through Congress. The president doesn’t have the authority to repeal or reduce an Antiquities Act designation in any case. If Trump attempts to do so, SUWA will see his administration in court.

In the meantime, our national phone banking operation is up and running, directing callers to the Interior Secretary’s office . . . and ruining Kathy’s day. In Utah, we’ve launched a major TV and digital ad campaign to remind Utahns that despite the rhetoric of Utah politicians, the Bears Ears National Monument is a good thing for Utah (see sidebar below). And our organizers are poised to rally supporters of the new monument from across the state when Secretary Zinke does come to the Beehive state.

We rely upon your continued support to defend Bears Ears and to push back against the many attacks on Utah wilderness that we expect the Trump administration to launch in the next four years.

But here’s a cause for hope: at the end of February, the Utah governor was in Washington for the winter meeting of the Western Governors’ Association. Reporters asked whether he spoke about Bears Ears with Trump or with Vice President Mike Pence during several meetings.

Herbert replied, “That didn’t come up. That’s kind of a Utah-specific issue.”

Tail, meet legs.

We’re going to hold this line.

—Mathew Gross

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### SUWA Goes on Air to Defend Bears Ears

As Utah politicians continued their rabid attack on Bears Ears National Monument in February, SUWA went on the air in the middle of the month with a new statewide television ad campaign to push back against the misinformation being spread by Governor Herbert and the Utah delegation.

The month-long campaign—which was supplemented by a robust online ad buy—reminds Utahns of the shared heritage to be found at Bears Ears and of the widespread support among Native American Tribes in Utah for the designation.

To see the latest television ad, visit suwa.org/BearsEarsTV.
After widespread public outcry from hunters, anglers, recreationists, and public lands enthusiasts across the country, Utah Rep. Jason Chaffetz promised to withdraw his legislation (HR 621) to sell off millions of acres of public lands across the West. Since there isn’t any mechanism for withdrawing a bill once introduced, we assume this means that though the measure remains “introduced,” Chaffetz does not intend to advance it.

The bill targets 3.3 million acres of public land across 10 states for “disposal” (read: “sale”) including roughly 133,000 acres in Utah. Chaffetz’s assertions rely upon a stale, decades-old report from the Interior Dept. identifying the lands. In an adroit bit of cherry-picking, Chaffetz neglected to mention that the report also specified that many of those parcels contain a number of “impediments to disposal,” including cultural, historical, and paleontological resources as well as endangered plants and animals. Thankfully, citizens from across the country who treasure these public lands flooded the congress-man’s office with calls and hosted two rallies in Montana and New Mexico to voice their outrage at the land grab, leading Chaffetz to withdraw the legislation in late February.

This is a major victory for public lands across the West and a testament to the power of grassroots activism, but the broader fight surrounding the fate of our nation’s natural treasures is far from over.

Though Chaffetz sought to distance himself from that bill, he said nothing about another one he recently introduced, the “Local Enforcement for Local Lands Act” (HR 622). This egregious piece of legislation would eliminate roughly 300 law enforcement officials at the BLM and another 700 at the Forest Service and replace them with deputized local officials. That would undoubtedly compromise the agencies’ ability to ensure public safety as well as to protect the critical wildlife, ecosys-
tems, minerals, timber, and archaeological resources of our nation’s public lands. HR 622 represents yet another attempt by Utah lawmakers to undermine public lands in the West, one that could ultimately endanger public workers and embolden extremists.

In the backdrop to all of this, the Utah delegation continues to wage war on our national monuments and the very law that made them possible, the Antiquities Act of 1906. Rep. Rob Bishop and Rep. Chaffetz have repeatedly lobbied the Trump administration to overturn the newly-proclaimed 1.35-million-acre Bears Ears National Monument, and to eliminate sizeable portions of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument as well. These landscapes are places of recreation, inspiration, reflection, joy, and discovery. They remain in grave danger.

The battle to protect our public lands in the 115th Congress has only just begun. SUWA will fight every step of the way against those who would rather plunder our public lands than protect them. We will need your help as never before. And we’ll keep you posted as new threats emerge.

—Jordan Giaconia

With Sec. Zinke Sworn In, Utah Visit Expected

On March 1st, Ryan Zinke, a congressman from Montana, was sworn in to be the new Interior Secretary. A self-proclaimed outdoorsman and former Navy Seal, Rep. Zinke has a mixed record on public lands. Though he has spoken in favor of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and says he’s against the selling of public lands, he has also cast votes that contradict that position.

In Congress, Zinke voted against policies that would cut carbon pollution, and for those that would block the creation of new national monuments and eliminate protections for wildlife. That’s why at SUWA we opposed his appointment. For an Interior Secretary, opposition to the selling off of public lands should be the barest minimum, not the bar. As the chief steward of our nation’s public lands, overseeing agencies as diverse as the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service, Zinke’s past votes paint a worrisome picture of how he would manage our nation’s lands and wildlife. Even if lands aren’t sold off, it’s cold comfort if they’re pummeled for dirty fuels of the sort Zinke champions.

At his confirmation hearing, Zinke said his first order of business as Interior Secretary would be to go to Utah to review the Bears Ears National Monument. Utah’s politicians have been pressuring him to repeal or reduce the monument—and, ridiculously, are even going after the 20-year-old Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument!

At SUWA, we’re gearing up for Zinke’s visit. We sent him a letter asking him to meet with us when he comes, and we plan to greet him at every turn with undeniable reminders that our members and supporters love their public lands.

Rep. Zinke has called himself “an unapologetic admirer” of Teddy Roosevelt, so let’s hope he can take that admiration to heart and follow in the footsteps of his hero, who not only proclaimed the first national monuments, but said, “I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us.”

Shrinking or repealing any of Utah’s national monuments would be just such a robbery and a waste. We plan to fight it every step of the way.

—Jen Ujifusa
Activists Flood Capitol Hill in Spring Wilderness Week Blitz

Turn our government over to anti-environmentalists, throw in an empowered, wilderness-loving citizenry whose clarion call is “Resist!” and what do you get? Well, first you get out of the way! You may also get one of the largest and most enthusiastic Wilderness Week events to date.

In early March, 47 impassioned activists from across the country gathered in Washington, DC for our annual Wilderness Week fly-in. Cohosted by SUWA, NRDC, and the Sierra Club, Wilderness Week plays an integral role in elevating Utah wilderness issues during the fledgling months of Congress. More directly, it helps us garner cosponsors for America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act (ARRWA) before its reintroduction.

After an extensive training session covering the ins and outs of lobbying, Utah wilderness issues, and the legislative process, activists took to the Hill to put their newfound skills to work. Teams scheduled over 220 meetings with members of Congress. In office after office their stories of the redrock reinvigorated old legislative champs, educated new ones, and challenged the assertions of opponents. Their work has already begun to bear fruit. We’ve recruited a number of ARRWA cosponsors and have received numerous pledges from other members to help defend Bears Ears National Monument from the wildly misguided Utah delegation.

Our Utah activists met with the entirety of their home delegation with one notable exception: Rep. Rob Bishop. Bishop’s office didn’t bother to even respond to our meeting requests. The congressman must have been busy trying to use taxpayer money to sell off public lands . . . or perhaps he was just making a Dr. Pepper run. Either way, his office showed no interest in hearing from his constituents. In spite of such behavior, in spite of the long hours, variable weather, and the many miles our activists traveled, they exhibited nothing but perseverance, enthusiasm, and a deep love for the redrock.

The spectacular beauty of Utah’s wildlands never ceases to inspire us in our work to protect them. But nothing fires us up more than working alongside the dedicated, wonderful people who attend Wilderness Week and make it the success it is. We can’t thank them enough for coming out!

—Jordan Giaconia
SUWA and Conservation Partners Win Big Victory for Bears Ears

We have some great news to report, but first a bit of background.

Just two weeks before President Barack Obama moved to permanently protect the Bears Ears National Monument in December, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) decided to once again push forward with its failed plans to construct a network of all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails in Indian Creek at the heart of the new monument. There was no opportunity for public review or comment.

Indian Creek ATV routes have been a San Juan County obsession for years and the BLM has been scrambling to comply, first approving construction of the project in early 2015. SUWA and several local partners challenged the BLM’s 2015 decision and won a stay from the Interior Board of Land Appeals (the Board), which sent the project back to the agency for additional environmental analysis.

Despite the Board order, the BLM’s latest decision repeats the same mistakes as its initial approval of the project, but this time authorizes the construction of new trails and associated parking areas on public lands that are not only wilderness-quality but also now a part of Bears Ears National Monument. The Bears Ears proclamation calls for a full planning process before the agency designates new roads or trails. Carving up the Indian Creek area, with no public involvement in the decision, is antithetical to that requirement and ought to be withdrawn on that ground alone.

Indian Creek, like the rest of the new monument, contains a wealth of irreplaceable cultural resources. It is also an internationally treasured rock-climbing destination and the breathtaking gateway into the Needles District of Canyonlands National Park. New ATV trails would expand motorized use into a part of the region that currently does not suffer from

An emergency stay won by SUWA and our conservation partners means construction of a new ATV trail at the heart of Bears Ears National Monument is on hold pending resolution of our appeal.
Hundreds Join Bears Ears Monument Celebration

More than 400 Salt Lake residents packed an auditorium on the University of Utah campus in early February to join Native American leaders in celebrating the designation of Bears Ears National Monument. A rapt audience heard speakers from several tribes describe the historic effort to win protection for Bears Ears and share what the region means to their communities. Here are a few words from Zuni Tribal Councilman Carleton Bowekaty:

You’re wondering why Zuni is involved in an effort up in Bears Ears in Utah? I’ll tell you why we’re here: because my parents, my grandparents, my elders, have told us that we belong here. Through our prayers, through our songs, and our history tells us that we have been here. And every time we come back, we come home. When we prepare an offering at our shrine or a place where our ancestors have gone, we reconnect with them. And every time we reconnect, we’re bringing the world back into balance. Not for Zuni, but for the entire world.

Settlement on Bush-Era Plans Draws Closer

Parties to a nearly ten-year-old challenge to six damaging Utah land use plans took an important step toward ending the dispute in January when they filed a proposed settlement agreement for a federal court’s review. The parties seeking approval of the settlement include a coalition of conservation groups—SUWA, The Wilderness Society, Earthjustice, and eight others—along with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and three off-road vehicle (ORV) groups.

SUWA and our partners filed this case in 2008, challenging deeply flawed BLM land use plans and off-road vehicle travel plans the agency rushed to completion at the end of the George W. Bush administration. The plans guide land management decisions and ORV trail designations on more than 10 million acres of federal public lands across eastern and southern Utah, including some of the nation’s most remarkable redrock wilderness landscapes.

The settlement agreement sets out a schedule and process for updating travel planning decisions, reconsidering certain proposed land designations, and incorporating air quality considerations into oil and gas leasing. Senior District Court Judge Dale Kimball will review the agreement and, if it is approved, will oversee the schedule for the BLM’s
Oil and Gas Sale Spares
Nine Mile Canyon, Puts Other Treasures at Risk

The news from the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) mid-December oil and gas lease sale is mixed. The agency intended to offer leases on two parcels in Nine Mile Canyon, celebrated as the “world’s longest art gallery” and an “outdoor museum” because of its lavish prehistoric rock art and other archaeological resources. However, in the face of fierce opposition from environmental and historic preservation groups, the agency deferred offering those leases. Opponents include the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Rocky Mountain Wild, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, and Utah Rivers Council.

Conservation groups that are plaintiffs and parties to the settlement agreement are: the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, The Wilderness Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Grand Canyon Trust, National Parks Conservation Association, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Rocky Mountain Wild, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, and Utah Rivers Council. Attorneys from SUWA, Earthjustice, NRDC, and the law firm of Waltzer, Wiygul and Garside represented the conservation groups. Special thanks to our colleagues Nada Culver (TWS) and Robin Cooley (Earthjustice) for their long hours and hard work to get this settlement over the finish line.

—Steve Bloch

Completion of various plans and compliance with other benchmarks.

A Worthwhile Compromise

Few, if any, settlements are perfect; neither is this one. But it reflects hard-fought compromises that we believe will focus the BLM’s time and resources on the places most at risk from things like ORV damage—even in a Trump/Zinke administration. The settlement specifies a detailed process for the agency to follow as it takes a fresh look at where it will allow ORVs to drive, this time with an eye towards protecting the very things that make Utah’s redrock country so special: its wildness, opportunities for solitude, and irreplaceable archaeological sites.

We believe that process will result in the closure of the most damaging trails or, at a minimum, will require the BLM to prepare an administrative record that will make it easier for us to hold the agency’s feet to the fire down the road.

The conservation groups, intervenors from ORV groups, and the BLM support the agreement; other intervenors, including the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration and several oil and gas companies, do not oppose it. The State of Utah and several Utah counties are challenging the agreement, alleging, among other things, that it does not recognize claimed rights-of-way under RS 2477—a legal loophole under the 1866 Mining Act and a popular tool for thwarting wilderness designation. Both Judge Kimball and the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals will review the settlement before it can be finally approved and implemented.

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Unfortunately, other spectacular places in Utah did not fare so well. The BLM offered and issued several leases in the Desolation Canyon region, one of the largest blocks of roadless BLM public lands within the continental United States. SUWA and
several of our conservation partners have appealed the agency’s decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

Leasing on Zion’s Doorstep

The BLM’s Saint George field office is preparing to lease federal public lands for oil and gas development on the doorstep of Zion National Park. Two proposed lease parcels are located less than two miles from the park, on the south side of Smith Mesa, along the Kolob Terrace Road (a popular tourist route). Oil and gas development in this area will be visible from the gateway community of Virgin as well as from inside the park, threatening pristine night skies, air quality, and tourism.

This proposal to lease on lands within view of Utah’s most popular national park has encountered predictably strong opposition. Local residents packed the Virgin Community Center to express their concerns during a recent public meeting with BLM officials. Both the Washington County Commission and the City of Springdale (gateway to Zion National Park) have passed resolutions in opposition to the sale.

SUWA submitted extensive comments on the proposed lease sale, highlighting numerous legal inadequacies and shortcomings in the agency’s analysis of, among other things, impacts to Zion National Park, air quality, climate, and wilderness characteristics. We’ll stay actively involved in the issue and will keep you informed of opportunities to help us protect one of our great national parks.

—Landon Newell

The Fight to Protect Horse Bench Continues

Benjamin Franklin wrote that “energy and persistence conquer all things.” It’s a good mantra for fighting bad public lands projects, which tend to lurk for years.

In December 2008, just as the administration of George W. Bush was leaving office, the BLM hastily sold 77 oil and gas leases in wilderness-quality lands throughout Utah. SUWA and our partners filed suit and a federal judge stopped the leases from being issued, finding a likelihood that the BLM violated a number of federal laws that protect the environment and cultural resources. Shortly thereafter, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar stepped in, withdrawing the leases and ordering a report into why and how the BLM had made such massive errors.
The Interior Department “audit” found an agency predisposed to oil and gas development and disinclined to seriously consider the effects of development on wildlife, air, water, and priceless cultural artifacts. The report recommended indefinitely deferring leasing on many of the parcels pending additional agency reviews. Four of those parcels sat on Horse Bench, a spectacular prow of land overlooking the Green River’s Desolation Canyon.

Just a few years later, in 2011, the BLM re-offered the four lease parcels on Horse Bench. In March 2015, SUWA filed suit to halt BLM approval of XTO Energy’s proposal to drill seven natural gas wells on one of the leases. At the same time, SUWA challenged the legality of the four leases, citing the BLM’s failure to consider alternative leasing scenarios that would protect this wilderness-quality landscape.

Late this past fall, as a direct result of the lawsuit, the BLM withdrew its approval of the seven-well project—an important victory over the imminent, on-the-ground development. But the larger fight remains: namely, the BLM’s improper sale and issuance of the four Horse Bench leases. A federal district court judge heard oral argument on our claims in March and we expect a decision later this year.

—Joe Bushyhead

**BLM Brings Dubious Devegetation Scheme to Grand Staircase-Escalante**

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is one Utah’s most untamed landscapes and a gem in our National Landscape Conservation System. But these two superlatives may not protect the monument from the very agency charged with shielding it from human-caused harm.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) seems unable to resist the impulse to drastically manipulate high desert ecosystems using large-scale vegetation “improvement” projects. With the Skutumpah Terrace habitat manipulation project, the agency is proposing to permanently alter the monument’s primitive landscape through aggressive removal of existing plant communities.

The project covers 19,000 acres of public land within the monument, 14,000 of them proposed for wilderness protection in America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act. The BLM plans to “convert” existing vegetation through a variety of ground-disturbing methods. These may involve removing pinyon pine and juniper with chainsaws, using giant machines to masticate and shred existing trees,
mechanically ripping out dense stands of sagebrush, and using herbicide to maintain these invasive treatments.

This proposed project is egregious not only because it occurs within some of the most breathtaking country in Utah, but because it falls entirely within the boundaries of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, designated only 20 years ago for the express purpose of ensuring that its remote and rugged nature remain for generations.

Although the BLM has not yet conducted its full environmental analysis for the proposed project, we are concerned that the agency will ignore the fact that these massive landscape gardening schemes have very little scientific support. The agency must demonstrate, conclusively, that such projects can actually achieve the desired land conditions before continuing down the path of extensive soil disturbance and destruction of native vegetation and wilderness-quality lands.

We submitted preliminary comments on the project this winter and SUWA staff will be visiting the area frequently this spring to ensure that the BLM upholds its responsibility to protect the fragile and irreplaceable resources that make Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument the rare treasure it is.

—Kya Marienfeld

Agency Undertakes Long-Overdue Cultural Inventories

Over the last year, SUWA has been participating in cultural resource inventories taking place across the state—including culturally-rich central and southeast Utah—providing information, critiques and improvements to the ongoing process. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is conducting the inventories in part as a result of SUWA’s successful litigation over the Richfield Resource Management Plan (RMP), in which a Utah federal court directed the agency to complete detailed, on-the-ground surveys for historic and cultural resources before authorizing motorized use on designated routes. SUWA has also argued successfully for years that the BLM’s approach to oil and gas leasing—“leasing first, thinking later”—violated the National Historic Preservation Act’s precautionary mandate to instead “think first, then act.”

Utah’s BLM-managed lands contain both high density and high value cultural and historic resources, remnants of nearly 12,000 years of human history. Our state’s meandering canyons, desert riparian oases and high plateaus have preserved a rich history ranging from Ice Age mammoth hunters to ancient hunter-gatherers to infamous Western outlaws. The landscape has preserved everything from the spears of Paleoindian hunters, clay figurines from Archaic hunter-gatherers, cliff dwellings, and complex rock art of Ancestral Puebloan and Fremont peoples to historic trails and shelters used by early Utah settlers. Cultural resource inventories help the BLM account for this wealth of resources in its land management planning and on-the-ground decision making.

The high-level inventories currently being performed—known as “Class I inventories”—are planning documents for the management of cultural resources. They provide an overview and analysis of all existing cultural resource data in the various field offices and outline directions for future archaeological research. These Class I inventories also include a predictive model that is supposed to help the BLM better predict the potential location of cultural and historic resources based on a number of environmental variables associated with known cultural and historic sites. To aid in this process we have reviewed early drafts, provided comments, and attended stakeholder meetings.

While the BLM claimed to have done Class I inventories when it prepared the agency’s 2008 RMPs for the Monticello, Moab, Price, Vernal, Richfield and Kanab field offices, in fact this never occurred. Likewise, the BLM did not prepare Class I inventories for any earlier land use planning decisions.

Class I inventories do not supplant the more intensive on-the-ground surveys the BLM must conduct before approving specific ground disturbing projects (such as oil and gas drilling or constructing roads or pipelines), but it is an important first step toward more informed decision-making. The inventories will hopefully allow the agency to better protect Utah’s iconic historic and cultural resources.

—Laura Peterson
Field Organizers Expand SUWA’s Outreach in Key Regions

The November election greatly raised the stakes for protection of the redrock, and SUWA has mobilized in response, hiring six organizers to expand our outreach in states with senators that are key to the process. Our ultimate goal is to persuade these senators to become cosponsors of America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act.

The new organizers and their regions of focus are: Jenny Holmes (Washington and Oregon), Ryan Mykita (northern California), Miguel Perla (southern California), Allahandro Bradford (Florida), Mike Salaski (Pennsylvania), and John Demos (New Hampshire and Maine).

The field organizers trained in our Washington, DC office before hitting the road. They strategized with our legislative team and with one of SUWA’s regional organizers about how best to build the redrock nation in their respective states and to be ready for the public lands fights that are to come.

If you live in one of the above-mentioned states and would like to reach an organizer, please email field@suwa.org and we will connect you.

SUWA Welcomes David Robles to Grassroots Team

We are pleased to announce that David Robles has joined SUWA’s staff as Latino Community Organizer in our Salt Lake City office.

Born and raised in Salt Lake City, David earned his undergraduate degree from Weber State University and will graduate from Westminster College in May with a master’s degree in community leadership. Throughout graduate school, David’s focus has been

Left to right: Ryan Mykita (NorCal), Mike Salaski (PA), Jenny Holmes (WA/OR), Allahandro Bradford (FL), and Miguel Perla (SoCal). Not pictured is John Demos (NH/ME).
on understanding the factors that inhibit members of diverse communities from becoming environmental stewards. He has also studied nonprofit management, global and local activism, and struggles for social justice.

“In order to meet our personal goals for public land protection, we must all find our own unique connection with the lands and truly understand why we value them as a culture,” said David.

He remembers his first visit to southern Utah’s redrock country on a family road trip to Mexico. He fell in love with the redrock country and “couldn’t believe he was still in Utah.” Annual trips to southern Utah later became journeys of personal solace, empowerment, and connection.

In his spare time, David enjoys playing soccer and reading, as well as hiking with his wife Destiny and dog Griffin, biking, paddling—essentially, anything that gets him outside. He brings passion and enthusiasm to the world of organizing, and we are happy to have him.

Welcome to SUWA, David!

Thanks to Eyrie Horton, SUWA’s First Weissman Intern

Utah wildlands benefitted last fall from the great work of Eyrie Horton, a Westminster College junior who spent a semester with us as the first recipient of the Dr. Norman Weissman Internship. Eyrie worked with our grassroots organizing team, coordinating student advocacy for Bears Ears at campuses across the state and gathering signatures on a letter to President Obama seeking Bears Ears protection.

The Dr. Norman Weissman Internship for the Preservation of Wild and Scenic Utah is generously funded by the family of the late Dr. Weissman as a practical education legacy to protect the redrock country. The scholarship, available to a college student each semester for the next three years, supports an internship in SUWA’s Salt Lake City office.

Eyrie is majoring in environmental civics and political science. She came to Utah from her coastal Oregon home in part to learn from, explore, and play in southern Utah. She heard about SUWA and our campaigns through her day job at Westminster’s Environmental Center.

We thank Eyrie for all her hard work and perseverance and we wish her the best. And we again thank the Weissman family for this important contribution to the fight for wild Utah!

SUWA thanks Eyrie for her great work last fall.
Become a SUWA Field Volunteer in 2017!

Are you looking to give back in a new way this year? Hoping to turn that feeling of unrest and the will for change into action? Join SUWA in the field and experience the great diversity of Utah’s backcountry while protecting some of our most precious natural resources. Broaden your network and make a few new friends along the way.

Following 2016’s inaugural season with the Field Service Volunteers, we are gearing up for a busy schedule in 2017. There is more ground to cover than ever before in Utah and the program is aiming to broaden its reach. As we continue to collaborate with local land managers, building bridges throughout the state, we aim to expand opportunities into some of our most magnificent landscapes—all the while proving that it is the will of the people that can bring a platform of environmental ethics into active service.

Volunteers can anticipate opportunities in the San Rafael Swell, the high elevation canyons of the Tavaputs Plateau, the La Sal Mountains and redrock canyon country around Moab, and the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments. We aim to continue the conversations picked up last year and help to foster a network of interested collaborators and active constituents moving forward.

Contact Jeremy at volunteer@suwa.org to sign up with the Field Service Volunteers and learn more about upcoming trips. Keep an eye on suwa.org and click the Act Now button to keep informed.

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Books, DVDs and T-Shirts on Sale Now!

We’re cleaning out our online store to make way for some fun new swag, and many items are marked down by half. Older books, DVDs and t-shirts are all available for $15 or less. If you’re searching for a special gift or just looking for a great deal, view our online catalogue at suwa.org/goodies.

Join Our Monthly Giving Program

If you’re looking for a convenient, hassle-free way to help protect the redrock, our monthly giving program is for you. Monthly giving is easy and secure, and provides us with reliable, year-round funding to fight current and future attacks on Utah wilderness. Simply select a contribution of $5 or more per month, enter your credit card information, and we’ll do the rest. To sign up for monthly giving, go to suwa.org/donate.

Leave a Legacy for the Redrock

Please consider leaving a gift to SUWA in your will or trust. Bequests are a simple, effective way for those of us who love the redrock to ensure that when we’re gone, the work to protect these amazing landscapes continues.

A gift to SUWA from your estate—whatever the amount—is entirely free from federal estate taxes. This means we are able to use the full amount of the bequest to protect the redrock. Also, bequests generally are not subject to state inheritance or estate taxes.

A bequest for SUWA (or any other charitable organization) is very simple to establish. Just name the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance in your will, trust, retirement plan, or life insurance policy, along with our contact information and tax I.D. number and the dollar amount or percent of your estate you wish to contribute. If you’d like to make a gift to SUWA or have already included a gift to SUWA in your estate, please contact Karin Duncker at karin@suwa.org or (801) 428-3971. You can also visit us online at suwa.org/plannedgiving.
Reference Map for Articles in this Issue

1. Kaiparowits Plateau (pp. 4 & 7)
2. Indian Creek (p. 15)
3. Nine Mile Canyon (p. 17)
4. Smith Mesa (p. 17)
5. Skutumpah Terrace (p. 18)
6. Horse Bench (p. 19)
Become a Mobile Activist: Text SUWA to 52886
Join our mobile action network in defense of Utah’s wild places! Just text SUWA to 52886 and we’ll send text alerts to your phone so you can act fast when wilderness is threatened or Utah’s national monuments are under attack. We’ll also let you know about important rallies and other events in Utah and around the U.S. Sign up today!