

REDROCK

W I L D E R N E S S

The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Volume 35, Number 1 • Spring 2018

Vegetation Removal:
BLM's High Stakes Gamble with Our Public Lands

Cover Photo: One of a pair of bulldozers implementing a controversial BLM chaining project to remove pinyon pine and juniper trees from public lands in Utah's Hamlin Valley. Photo by SUWA/Twig Media Lab.



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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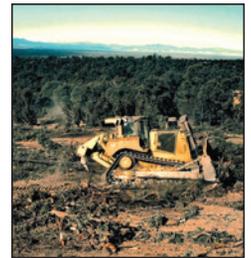
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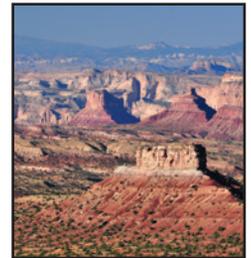
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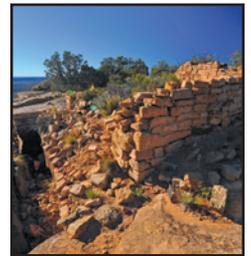
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This issue of *Redrock Wilderness* was written by the following staff and outside contributors: Steve Bloch, Joe Bushyhead, Adrienne Carter, Neal Clark, Scott Groene, Mathew Gross, Travis Hammill, Luke Henry, Olivia Juarez, Diane Kelly, Jeremy Lynch, Kya Marienfeld, Landon Newell, Dave Pacheco, Terri Martin, and Jen Ujifusa. It was edited by Darrell Knuffke and laid out by Diane Kelly.

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Contributions of photographs (especially of areas within the citizens’ proposal for Utah wilderness) and original art (such as pen-and-ink sketches) are greatly appreciated! Please send with SASE to Editor, SUWA, 425 East 100 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84111.

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wilderness notes



Utah: Where Foul Land Policies Find Eternal Life

History never really says goodbye. History says see you later.

~Eduardo Galeano

Official Utah's favorite conservation project is recycling bad ideas. We describe one in our lead article: the barbaric practice of "chaining" to destroy pinyon-juniper forests, mostly to create cow pasture. Twenty-five years ago, the Utah BLM was shamed out of the brutal practice. Astride his horse, Ken Sleight (AKA Seldom Seen Smith from *The Monkey Wrench Gang*) blocked bulldozers chaining trees above his Pack Creek Ranch outside Moab. TV news cameras rolled; the footage aired repeatedly. Public outrage ended the practice. Now it's back.

We often find ourselves facing such resurrected demons along with new and unimagined challenges such as the Trump administration. This repeated testing has annealed SUWA. It serves us best when times are toughest but readies us equally for new opportunities.

One such is the chance to protect wild lands in the San Rafael Swell and portions of Labyrinth and Desolation Canyons. New Utah Rep. John Curtis and retiring Sen. Orrin Hatch are ready to begin discussions over the fate of these places, most of them in Emery County (see article on p. 11).

SUWA will try hard to reach an agreement with Utah's elected officials, as we always have, and we are better armed than ever with leverage gained from decades of hard work. Through years of organizing and successful legislative fights we've built national grassroots strength, and significant congressional support, for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, our vision of protecting America's most evocative and spectacular lands. In an extraordinary political shift stretching back to the days of Ronald Reagan, the Bureau of Land Management now agrees almost entirely with the qualifications of land within the Red Rock proposal in this region.

And after nearly a decade of legal challenges, we overturned a deeply flawed off-road vehicle plan which would otherwise control the lands at issue. Now the BLM must prepare a new travel plan, this time addressing environmental conflicts. Any legislation for Emery County must reflect this positive change.

We've worked hard to make Utah wilderness a national issue. There's no other way to protect it from purely parochial concerns and short-sighted economic fantasies. Utah's politicians have complained that, unlike their peers in other states, they can't enact public lands legislation without addressing national concerns. Exactly.

And if the Utah delegation chooses, as it has often in the past, to instead advance a wish-list bill for local elected officials, we'll fight. We'll need your help and the help of our congressional champions, and still it won't be easy. But we'll stop it. Then we'll move forward to protect the canyons from off-road vehicle use through the new travel plan and wait until our opponents get serious about negotiations.

The Trump administration, disastrous as it is for our public lands, will eventually end. SUWA will clean up the carnage and endure. It is our job to fight the immediate threats this administration poses, but always with an eye to the future. The canyon country deserves nothing less.

For the Redrock,

Scott Groene
Executive Director

features

Vegetation Removal: BLM's High Stakes Gamble with Our Public Lands

A quiet morning in the desert, high on a remote plateau, you've hiked to find solitude and solace and are just beginning to enjoy the first rays of sunrise in Utah's canyon country. Suddenly, the splendid silence you hiked so hard to reach is shattered by the rumble of engines and the heart-wrenching sound of pinyon pine and juniper trees being ripped from the ground. You race down from your sunrise perch to see a massive anchor chain being dragged between two bulldozers, scalping biological soil crust, uprooting vegetation, and leaving nothing but splinters in what was once an intact forest.

Surely, something is terribly wrong. Who has crept out at the crack of dawn to commit this crime? Making your way closer, you find a group of pickup trucks with the unmistakable white license plate, faint American flag in the background, clearly stating: U.S. Government, "For Official Use Only."

Rolling, chopping, crushing, chaining, shredding—all words that describe destruction—are also words that, according to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), should be associated with public lands. Every day, new vegetation removal projects are being rushed to completion on public lands across Utah and the West. In the last several issues of *Redrock Wilderness*, we've included updates on the BLM's removal of pinyon pine, juniper, and sagebrush. Sadly, the agency shows no signs of slowing down in its quest to mechanically strip native vegetation from millions of acres of public land—all under the guise of "habitat improvement" or "watershed restoration" projects.

If you live in Utah or follow us on social media, you've likely seen SUWA's advertisements showing a chaining project in Utah's West Desert (see sidebar, p. 7). This is the opening salvo in what will likely be a long fight against bad science, an



© SUWA/Twig Media Lab

Two bulldozers (second one behind trees, far right) drag an Ely chain through a pinyon pine and juniper forest on the western side of Indian Peak in Utah's Hamlin Valley.

features



© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

A chain harrow ripping out sagebrush in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

entrenched and head-in-the-sand agency worldview, a lack of public scrutiny, and the rampant devastation these projects can have on Utah's wilderness-quality lands.

Munch, Crunch, Scrape: How the Mulch Gets Made

Vegetation removal projects, most often called "treatments" by the BLM, take many forms. The simplest is hand-thinning: agency staff or contractors go out on foot with chainsaws, felling pinyon and juniper trees and scattering pieces around the site. More commonly, the agency employs heavy machinery. A particularly destructive method is mastication. A "bullhog" masticator attached to a front end loader or excavator mows down vegetation, turning living trees or sagebrush into a pile of woodchips and stumps.

"Chaining," the cheapest, easiest, and most environmentally-destructive option, typically utilizes a large anchor chain dragged between two enormous bulldozers to rip trees out of the ground, roots and all. Bulldozers travel back and forth as the anchor chains, which can weigh more than 20,000 pounds, uproot hundreds of trees and other vegetation with every pass. The chains rake the ground, destroying soils, sagebrush, grasses, and forbs and leaving discarded trees in their wake, which litter the landscape

for decades. The BLM all but abandoned chaining in the 1990s due to public outcry over its devastating impacts, but in the last decade we've seen its re-emergence as a favored method across Utah.

We've also recently seen a significant uptick in both the BLM's eagerness to conduct vegetation removal activities and in the funding available for these projects—increasing the size and scope of projects, and the associated risk to Utah's wilderness-quality lands.

Money Makes the Chains Drag the Ground

In 2006, a coalition was created with the express purpose of planning, promoting, and funding vegetation removal projects in Utah. The Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative (UWRI) includes, among others, the BLM, the Forest Service, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and hunting advocacy organizations such as Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, the Mule Deer Foundation, and the Safari Club. Since UWRI's inception, it has funneled tens of millions of dollars toward vegetation projects on over one million acres of public, state, and private lands throughout Utah.

The money-pooling function of UWRI has produced a continual increase in proposed and approved projects on BLM-managed public lands

features

in Utah—from the West Desert to the redrock of the Colorado Plateau, including wilderness study areas and other wilderness-quality lands. In the last 10 years, nearly every BLM field office in Utah has removed or proposed to remove native pinyon and juniper forests or sagebrush from lands proposed for protection in America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act.

It has become crystal clear that money, not sound science or best management practices, drives the BLM’s obsession with vegetation removal projects. For a cash-strapped federal agency, the choice between dollar signs and sound science has become sadly predictable.

Shifting Rationales: It’s a Bird! It’s a Deer! No . . . It’s Still a Cow

Vegetation removal projects have been occurring on public lands since the 1950s, and the agency’s rationale for these landscape-level gardening projects has been in continual flux. Sixty years ago, the BLM made no secret of the fact that chaining and other forms of vegetation removal were meant to get rid of “undesirable” native species and replace them with cattle-friendly forage grasses. As times have changed and public lands ranching has come under increased scrutiny, the BLM’s response

has been to concoct new justifications for this decades-old practice. Instead of citing a single goal, the agency usually claims an assortment of unobjectionable “purposes” from the following list:

- Creating habitat for sensitive species, such as greater sage-grouse.
- Improving habitat for game species like deer and elk.
- Fire prevention.
- Improving water quality and watershed health.
- Restoring native vegetation by removing “invasive” or “encroaching” pinyon pine and juniper trees.

Not incidentally, all these project purposes improve forage for cattle. Rather than defining meaningful goals for vegetation removal projects, with clearly stated standards for judging success or failure, the BLM gives itself a cluster of justifications to hide behind and thus avoids any real scrutiny—let alone accountability. This also makes projects easier to fund and harder to challenge.

In reality, the idea that most of these benefits can be realized by removing vegetation lacks signifi-

SUWA Goes on the Air . . . and Strikes a Nerve

The practice of chaining is so unbelievably savage that most people can’t imagine how destructive it is. That’s why SUWA launched a new statewide television campaign in Utah at the end of January.

The ad, which ran on Utah’s four major broadcast networks as well as cable news stations, advised viewers that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was proposing chaining in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, and urged viewers to call the Utah BLM to voice opposition.

The BLM definitely got the message. We’re told hundreds of calls and emails poured into the state office—and it’s clear the ad struck a nerve. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) aired a rebuttal ad claiming that “special interests” were misleading the public by neglecting to show video of cute deer frolicking in a meadow. Without citing any statistics, the ad tried to argue that chaining was good for watersheds, the environment . . . and yes, adorable deer.

We’re glad that DWR has joined the public discussion about chaining and “vegetation restoration.” For too long, chaining projects have lurked in the shadows, with little public participation. It is always good when we bring such controversial issues out into the open and make them part of the conversation about how to manage (or mismanage) America’s public lands.

To view SUWA’s ad, visit suwa.org/chaining.

features



© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

The aftermath of a bullhog project on Steamboat Mountain. This picture was taken a year after the project was completed.

cant scientific support. For example, studies show that the native grasses and forbs favored by game and nongame species alike often fail to take hold in areas disturbed by heavy machinery. Science also tells us that disruptive treatments like chaining and bullhogging an area's existing vegetation often result in the invasion of weeds such as cheatgrass and Russian thistle—an invitation to catastrophic wildfire.

These risks continue to increase as climate change results in a hotter, drier climate that favors proliferation of invasives. Mechanical removal methods like chaining tear up sensitive cryptobiotic soil crusts, which are critical to preventing erosion and retaining scarce moisture on the fragile Colorado Plateau, resulting in increased desertification rather than better watershed health.

What Do We Want? Science! When Do We Want It? After Peer Review!

What is most concerning is that the BLM and other proponents of large-scale vegetation removal projects simply do not acknowledge that these projects are not the cure-all for degraded ecosystems and that they come with a high-degree of risk. In fact, the science behind these million-dollar “experi-

ments” on some of our most fragile public lands is uncertain and even contradictory.

SUWA's campaign against large-scale vegetation removal seeks to educate the public about what we view as one of the most destructive practices currently aimed at wilderness-quality lands in the West. The necessity of this is evident in the most consistent response to our initial TV ad showing a chaining project—a shocked question: “Is this REALLY happening?!” Unfortunately, yes.

Our goal is to push the BLM towards cautious, defensible management practices rooted in consistent monitoring, rigorous science, and long-term native ecosystem health. We are not advocating that truly degraded ecosystems can never benefit from human help, merely that the agency must take a precautionary approach rather than automatically reaching for the most large-scale and heavy-handed actions first.

The BLM could, for example, easily take a number of low cost and low risk approaches from the outset. These include removing livestock from degraded areas, aerially applying native seed, and conducting small-scale field tests and comparing

features

them to untreated exclosure areas to ensure that the proposed treatment method does in fact lead to a specific desired outcome. Never, ever, should scientific development and a results-based approach take a back seat to ease and cost-effectiveness. The BLM should also avoid surface-disturbing activities in wilderness-quality lands until they can prove that these projects will not result in unintended consequences.

This is a complicated subject, but it is important. These “treatments” show no sign of slowing and,

in their current forms, pose a huge threat to the untrammled nature of Utah’s redrock wilderness. The management practices of 60 years ago simply cannot be carried forward any further into this century—“sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t” is not judicious land management, it is Russian Roulette. Until the BLM shows that these projects can be done in ways that are more beneficial than harmful to natural ecosystems, we’ll be there, with your help, taking bullets out of the chamber.

—*Kya Marienfeld*

SUWA Files Lawsuit Over Hamlin Valley Pinyon-Juniper Removal Project

Late last year, SUWA brought a lawsuit in federal district court challenging the BLM Cedar City field office’s approval of a devegetation project that threatens both proposed wilderness and old-growth pinyon-juniper in Western Utah’s Hamlin Valley. The “Indian Peak-Stateline Chaining/Bull Hog Project” covers roughly 900 acres in the Needle Mountains proposed wilderness on the Utah-Nevada state line (and near the aptly named ghost town of “Stateline”) and 2,800 acres below Indian Peak, a prominent feature in the eastern part of the valley.

The BLM proposes to bullhog (shred) roughly 1,700 acres at both project areas and chain the remaining 2,000 acres at Indian Peak. Much of the proposed project area contains old-growth pinyon and juniper trees that represent the natural order of things in this part of the state. They are scarcely “invasive,” as the BLM likes to claim.

After suffering an initial setback when the court denied our motion for an emergency injunction prohibiting the project from proceeding, we are now briefing the merits of our case and will have oral argument in mid-May.

This is an important case because the BLM is trying to shortcut the environmental review process by relying on a larger, programmatic environmental analysis that it prepared in 2014 to approve on-the-ground projects without individualized analyses and opportunities for public review and comment. We’ve squarely challenged that approach in this lawsuit.

SUWA attorneys Joe Bushyhead, Luke Henry, and Steve Bloch are representing the organization in this case.



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Two bulldozers sit idle in churned-up soil, waiting to resume chaining near Indian Peak.

DC news

Utah Pols Move Quickly to Codify Trump's Illegal Monument Attacks

President Donald Trump traveled to Salt Lake City in December to sign two presidential decrees—one reducing Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by 47 percent, the other slashing the Bears Ears National Monument by 83 percent. His illegal actions were immediately challenged in court (see p. 13).

Members of the Utah delegation also seemed to realize the president's actions were illegal: they moved quickly to codify the Trump proclamations. On the very day Trump signed them, Rep. John Curtis (R-UT) introduced HR 4532, the Shash Jáa National Monument and Indian Creek National Monument Act. Just two days later, fellow Utah Republican Rep. Chris Stewart attacked the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument with a similarly detestable piece of legislation.

Curtis's bill replaces Bears Ears National Monument with two dramatically smaller monuments while effectively giving San Juan County and certain

individuals chosen by the Utah delegation authority to manage some of our most spectacular national lands.

Curtis specifically limits the voices of Native Americans by, among other things, excluding three out of five tribal representatives from the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition. Tribes were not even consulted during the drafting of this legislation.

The first hearing on the Curtis bill was held in early January before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands. Only one Native American was allowed to testify. Committee Democrats requested a second hearing; it was held on Jan. 30 and all five tribes were invited to testify. All voiced opposition to the Curtis bill.

"This is not a bill designed to help protect the lands for the tribes," said Navajo Nation Council Delegate Davis Filfred. "It is a bill that provides near-exclusive control of these federal lands in the state and



© Terri Martin/SUWA

Virgil Johnson, chairman of the Utah Tribal Leaders Association, speaks at a press conference denouncing Rep. Curtis's Bears Ears giveaway bill (HR 4532).

DC news

local counties' hands, and gives only lip service to tribal interests.”

Rep. Stewart's HR 4558, introduced two days later on December 6th, is cynically titled the Grand Staircase-Escalante Enhancement Act. Like the Bears Ears legislation, it creates a management scheme for the monument that would be dictated by parochial local interests. It also contains a bait-and-switch proposal to establish a new national park—that is, a park in name only which would prioritize grazing, hunting, and recreation. The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on the measure in mid-December.

The two shameful monument measures are likely to move in tandem. We'll keep you posted on their progress.

Not all current monuments legislation is doom and gloom, though. Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) recently introduced the Bears Ears National Monument Expansion Act (HR 4518). This legislation would protect the original 1.9 million acres identified by Tribes as culturally sensitive and sacred. Gallego's bill has been referred to the Subcommittee on Federal Lands.

—Adrienne Carter

Next Up: Legislation for Emery County?

Sen. Orrin Hatch and Rep. John Curtis, both Utah Republicans, have begun work on a comprehensive public lands bill for Emery County, setting up the next big opportunity for large-scale wilderness protection in Utah.

The good news is that, as home to the San Rafael Swell and Desolation Canyon, Emery boasts more than 1.5 million acres of proposed wilderness in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, and is also the county that theoretically seems to hold the most potential for a compromise through a fair, brokered process. The bad news is that Emery County's current proposal is a non-starter.

The proposal would protect only about a third of the deserving wilderness in the county. And it features several carve-outs to the Wilderness Act. It establishes a so-called National Conservation Area that



© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

Wilderness-quality lands in Emery County, including parts of Desolation Canyon and the San Rafael Swell (above), could be at stake in a new legislative proposal.

proposes no discernible conservation management. It seeks to enshrine a travel plan that we've already gotten overturned, and to give away public lands to the state of Utah. Bottom line? Not only is this proposal worse than what was envisioned for Emery in Rep. Rob Bishop's (R-UT) failed Public Lands Initiative; it is also worse than the status quo on the ground. That means there's no chance of it passing muster with our congressional champions.

Both Hatch and Curtis have said they are willing to work with us, and we certainly hope that's the case. There is a real chance, if the Utah delegation learns from past mistakes, to get to a good bill here. But without improvement, the Emery bill will end up like so many past efforts: on the scrap heap.

—Jen Ujifusa

Wilderness Advocates Descend on Nation's Capital

What happens when the oil, gas and mining industries that seem to have our government in a chokehold decide that public lands should be sacrificed for short-term profit? People get mad and anger turns to ACTION. Congress heard from some of those angry citizens in March during the Utah Wilderness

DC news

Coalition's Wilderness Week, co-hosted by SUWA, Sierra Club, and NRDC.

Every year, activists from across the U.S. come to Washington to lobby Congress on Utah public lands issues. This year, a dozen teams went to Capitol Hill and visited over 200 offices in just three days! From a home base at SUWA's DC office, activists collectively walked over 300 miles around the Hill and through long congressional halls. Next year, everyone needs an activity tracker so we can know exactly how many miles it takes to get a new cosponsor for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act (ARRWA).

To prepare themselves before heading to the Hill, activists spent a day digging into the issues. They learned about bills by Utah Republican Reps. John Curtis and Chris Stewart to codify President Trump's illegal gutting of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments (see p. 10). They also heard details of an impending Emery County, Utah, bill that could end up being antithetical to true wilderness protection (see p. 11).

A staff member for Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) provided activists with an inside look at the work

of a Hill staff person. She also helped prepare the activists for their visits with congressional staff.

Notably, our volunteers visited the offices of ARRWA's Senate champion, Richard Durbin (D-IL), and cosponsor Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM), as well as Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-VT). On the House side, an important stop was the office of Rep. Alan Lowenthal (D-CA) champion and co-sponsor. They also visited the offices of Utah Reps. Curtis and Stewart.

Love for the redrock moved activists to share their personal stories and connections to the canyon country during congressional meetings. Those stories struck a chord in many offices and we expect many members of Congress to become ARRWA cosponsors in the coming weeks.

For those unable to attend Wilderness Week, there is still an important part to play: No matter where you live, please contact your members of Congress and ask them to cosponsor America's Red Rock Wilderness Act! Learn more at suwa.org/arrwa or text "ARRWA" to 52886 to take action now!

—Travis Hammill



© Kevin Lefeber

Wilderness Week activists from Illinois and Utah meet with Sen. Durbin to discuss strategy for ongoing redrock defense. From left: Connor Nipper, Nate Waggoner, Vicky Cooper, Anne McKibbin, Garon Coriz, John Holland, and SUWA Midwest Field Organizer Clayton Daughenbaugh.

canyon country updates

SUWA Challenges Trump's Illegal Assault on Grand Staircase-Escalante, Bears Ears

SUWA and its conservation partners have filed two lawsuits challenging President Donald Trump's unlawful decision to dismantle both the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments. In addition to the suits our conservation coalition has brought, five Native American Tribes and a coalition of other organizations and businesses have also sued Trump in two separate cases over Bears Ears. Another group of plaintiffs, including the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, has sued Trump over his gutting of the Grand Staircase-Escalante.

Trump's actions are truly unprecedented in the scope of their attack on these treasured federal public lands. Trump would cut Grand Staircase-Escalante nearly in half (from 1.9 million acres to just over 1 million acres) and Bears Ears by more than 80 percent (from 1.3 million acres to just over 200,000 acres). He has laughably claimed that these vastly reduced boundaries adequately protect the objects and resources Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama identified in their original proclamations (or that the resources aren't even worth protecting). His actions have drawn widespread and richly deserved condemnation across the country.

Given that our lawsuits challenge actions Trump has taken on the recommendations of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, we chose to take the fight to his doorstep. We filed the cases in federal district court in Washington, DC, just down the street from the White House and the Interior Department. In response, the Justice Department filed a motion asking that the cases be transferred from DC to the federal district court in Utah.

The Justice Department argues principally that these are local cases that implicate primarily local interests and thus should be decided in Utah. This motion fundamentally misconstrues what the cases are about: challenging decisions made by the President of the United States to assault nationally significant federal public lands and resources. Furthermore, the Tribes are sovereign nations with homelands in more than one state. They have equally strong and separate arguments as to why Washington, DC is precisely the right place for these cases to be decided. We expect a decision shortly.

Meanwhile, we are watching closely for any mischief on the lands that Trump excluded from Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears. This includes

Take Action: Help Protect Your Monuments from Trump

When Trump gutted Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments, he removed protections from over two million acres of land. In response, SUWA has launched "Monument Watch," an eyes-on-the-ground campaign to identify and fight any illegal activity. But we need your help to keep the monuments safe!

When you visit lands within the monuments' original boundaries, please watch for any action that may disturb, or is disturbing, the natural setting or archaeological sites. If you live in southern Utah, listen and look for any evidence that such an action is being planned or initiated.

With the help of SUWA members and supporters, we can ensure that no destructive projects take place within either monument—as originally proclaimed—until we win our lawsuits and restore the integrity of these landscapes. If you're in the area, please help us monitor on-the-ground conditions. You can submit information via email or through a mobile app the SUWA team has developed. For more information, please visit: suwa.org/monumentwatch.

canyon country updates

the filing of new mining claims (there haven't been many—yet), county road “maintenance,” and rogue ATV use. See our Monument Watch sidebar (previous page) to learn how you can help us keep eyes on the ground.

—Steve Bloch

Energy Leasing Ramps Up as Trump Administration Declares War on Wildlands

The newest threat to Utah's redrock wilderness is the Trump administration's short-sighted push to achieve “energy dominance” by offering up our most spectacular public lands for oil and gas leasing and development.

A SUWA-led coalition of conservation organizations has challenged 45 of the 75 parcels that were offered at the BLM's December 2017 oil and gas lease sale. Within the 94,000 acres are controversial leases in the Molen Reef region of the San Rafael Swell, the Desolation Canyon region, and along the entrance road to Dinosaur National Monument.

In similar fashion, the Utah BLM plans to auction off 43 parcels covering 51,400 acres of federal public land managed by its Moab and Monticello field offices at the agency's March 2018 lease sale. Included in this sale are parcels near Bears Ears, Hovenweep, and Canyons of the Ancients National Monuments, parcels in the culturally rich Alkali Ridge region of San Juan County, and in wilderness-caliber lands such as Hatch Point / Hatch Canyon, Labyrinth Canyon, and Goldbar Canyon. We intend to challenge this ill-founded decision too.

The Obama administration, to its credit, set in place policies to push the BLM to better balance energy leasing and development with environmental protection. The Trump administration found these forward-looking policies to be intolerable and recently scrapped them, returning instead to the “lease first, think later” failed policies of the Bush administration that made oil and gas leasing and development the primary use of our public lands.

To further expedite its sell-off of our public lands for oil and gas leasing and development, the Trump administration has made it harder for the public to participate in and challenge the BLM's leasing decisions and easier for the BLM to lease everything in



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In a headlong rush to exploit our public lands in the name of “energy dominance,” the Trump administration is auctioning off lease parcels in wild and culturally-rich landscapes like Tin Cup Mesa near Hovenweep National Monument.

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sight. The agency has also eliminated the master leasing plan concept—a planning process which had struck a more informed balance between oil and gas leasing and development and protection of environmental values.

SUWA will continue to engage at every step of BLM’s oil and gas leasing process that threatens Utah’s redrock wilderness. Stay informed of our ongoing work by signing up for alerts at suwa.org.

—Landon Newell

RS 2477 Right-of-Way Saga Enters New Phase

We have new threats to report from the RS 2477 front—the state of Utah’s effort to establish title to thousands of miles of two-tracks, trails, and wash bottoms under the long-repealed 1866 mining law.

To recap, between 2010 and 2012 the state and many of its counties filed over 20 coordinated lawsuits in federal court asserting title to 14,000-plus road rights-of-way across public lands. The state and counties seek a 66-foot-wide right-of-way for each claim—including the many faint and narrow tracks in wilderness and wilderness-eligible lands, national parks, and national monuments. The litigation poses one of the gravest threats to Utah wilderness. The state and counties’ endgame is to disqualify vast areas of land from wilderness consideration.

For the last two and a half years, we’ve held this flood of claims at bay. We counterattacked in state court, arguing that the state and counties filed their claims too late under Utah law. Our case was fast-tracked to the Utah Supreme Court, which ultimately turned us away by a single vote.

Now we’re back to square one in federal court, where the parties—including SUWA and several of our conservation partners as “defendant-intervenor” on behalf of the United States—have resumed the “bellwether” process, a “mini-trial” on a small subset of claims in Kane County. The federal judges conceived of the bellwether process in 2015 as an attempt to make some progress on the logjam of RS 2477 cases that have sat pending for more than six years.

But there will be nothing “mini” about this process. The parties have tentatively agreed to try 15 claims, the same number at issue in an earlier RS 2477 case brought by Kane County and the state in 2008. Nearly a decade later—and after a nine-day trial in federal district court and an appeal to the Tenth Circuit—the case is still not fully resolved.

We also have a new foe in the RS 2477 fight: the Trump administration. Department of the Interior (DOI) officials have been in talks with state and county officials to “resolve” RS 2477 outside of the courtroom. We’ve been here before. In 2003, Interior Secretary Gale Norton struck a back-room deal with the state to facilitate a potentially sweeping RS 2477 giveaway. The giveaway never happened; intervening legal decisions forced the Interior Department to put its illegal deal on hold.

But we anticipate that DOI—more brazen now than ever—will again try to rubber-stamp the state and counties’ claims on threadbare evidence and at the expense of Utah wilderness. We submitted Freedom of Information Act requests to find out more about DOI’s plans, and, after months of delay, recently sued the agency to compel release of the requested records. When we see a bad deal, we’ll be ready to fight it.

We are very fortunate to be working on these cases with talented attorneys from across the country, including from the law firms of Manning Curtis Bradshaw & Bednar in Salt Lake City; Cooley LLP in Palo Alto; Oppenheim + Zebek, LLP in Washington, DC; Kirkland and Ellis in Washington, DC; Jenner and Block in Washington, DC; Strindberg & Scholnick in Salt Lake City; and Denko & Bustamante LLP in Austin, Texas.

—Joe Bushyhead

SUWA Appeals Beaver County ATV Event

There’s just one way to get a permit for a rip-and-roar all-terrain vehicle (ATV) event from the Utah BLM: ask for one. Case in point: the BLM’s Cedar City field office recently approved a “special recreation permit” for Beaver County to host an ATV event on a number of routes throughout lands the field office is responsible for. The routes are located

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on sage grouse habitat and wilderness-quality lands. Problem? Not hardly. The ever-compliant BLM signed off on this permit without conducting any environmental analysis.

The decision to proceed without this analysis would be bad enough, but a few key issues render the situation completely unacceptable. First, the routes for the ATV event run through greater sage-grouse priority habitat management areas. That classification imposes specific requirements on the agency (notably, that they give the birds the benefit of any doubt—priority, you might say). The BLM never addressed this conflict or how it was resolved—if it was resolved—in any of its permitting documents.

Second, the BLM has not updated its travel management plan for the routes within the field office's purview since the 1980s. Many of these routes have never been surveyed for cultural resources. This means that if the ATV event increases travel on the routes, which it is likely to do, there could be negative consequences of which the agency chooses to be utterly ignorant.

Third, the agency failed to consider what the BLM itself called an arbitrary boundary for wilderness characteristics before allowing the event to cross wilderness-quality lands beyond that boundary.

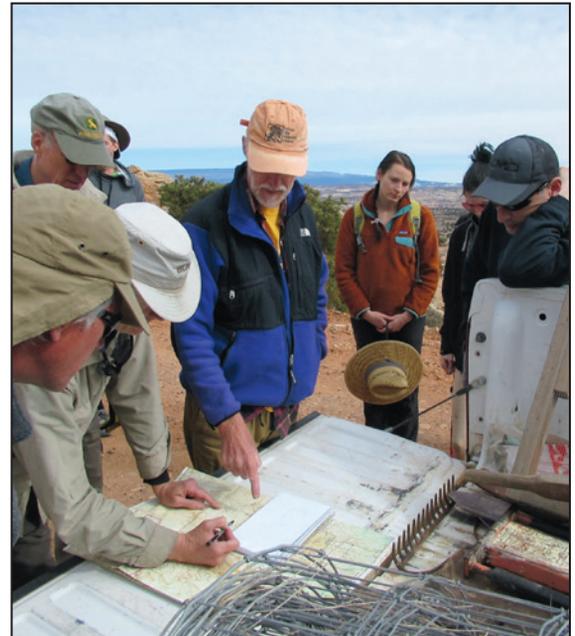
For all these reasons, SUWA has appealed the issuance of the permit to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, the administrative court of first resort. We'll keep you updated as the case proceeds.

—Luke Henry

Service as Recreation: Field Volunteers Kick Off 2018 Season

As policy makers roll back regulations and promote greed-driven exploitation of our public lands, it is more important than ever to re-examine why and how we are spending our time outside (and let's not forget our own impacts on the land as we enjoy the redrock country).

In this third year of our Service Program we invite you to join us in demonstrating real public land



© Jeremy Lynch/SUWA

Volunteers plan their day in the field.

stewardship. Since early January our volunteers have worked the boundaries of wilderness study areas near Moab, in Washington County's designated wilderness, at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, and in the far reaches of the West Desert.

In April, we will bring our crews to the canyons of Cedar Mesa in Bears Ears National Monument and again to Grand Staircase. We will round out a busy month marking Earth Day with a two-day service project in the Cedar Mountains Wilderness.

In early February we organized the first Wilderness Stewards' training with the BLM's St. George Field Office. Thirty-six local supporters participated, equipping themselves with the skills and tools to monitor wilderness. From this foundation of collected data, we will identify and address critical needs across Washington County's designated wilderness. As our program grows, we will continue to bring this model of stewardship—from monitoring to management—to public lands across Utah.

Please join us! To learn more or subscribe to our email list, visit suwa.org/fieldvolunteers. You can also peruse our 2018 project calendar at suwa.org/events. We hope to see you in the field this year!

—Jeremy Lynch

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Activists Show Up Again and Again in Defense of Utah's National Monuments

The last few months brought some body blows to Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. Late last year, President Trump issued illegal orders to shrink their boundaries; Utah Republican Reps. John Curtis and Chris Stewart immediately introduced legislation to make permanent Trump's radical reductions (see p. 10).

What followed was an extraordinary outpouring of citizen activism that shows Trump and the Utah delegation they are on the wrong side of history. At rallies, protests, demonstrations and town hall meetings, citizens decried the attack on the monuments, demonstrating their resolve to show up again and again until full protection is restored.

The massive "Rally against Trump's Monumental Mistake" set the stage. On the cusp of his visit to Utah, an enormous crowd of 6,000 people gathered at Utah's State Capitol, sprawling across its expansive stone steps and extensive lawns. They stood

shoulder to shoulder, Native and non-Native, young and old, holding signs and banners that proclaimed their united message: "We stand with Bears Ears and Grand Staircase."

When Trump spoke in Salt Lake City a day later thousands again showed up in protest, despite a storm that dumped half a foot of snow. Shared passion and commitment braced them against the cold. Their unified voices became chants that reverberated to the Capitol: Defend the Sacred! Protect our Monuments!

That was only the beginning. A week or so later, hundreds of people turned out (again in frigid air!) to stand with speakers from SUWA and other conservation groups at a press conference denouncing Rep. Stewart's Grand Staircase giveaway bill. Within the month, hundreds more packed another press conference in Salt Lake City—this one criticizing Rep. Curtis's bill codifying Trump's reduction of Bears Ears National Monument.

Month by month, citizens continued to seize opportunities to make their voices heard. When Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke came to Salt Lake City in February to speak at a hunting expo, over 150



© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

A crowd of 6,000 Utahns rallied in support of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments at the State Capitol just two days before President Trump repealed them.

inside SUWA

SUWA Veteran Anne Williams Graduates to Retirement!



© Lindsey Oswald Smith

Anne's future will surely include more time in the redrock.

In December, we raised a bittersweet glass to administrative director Anne Williams as she wrapped up her long and productive 16-year-plus tenure at SUWA and embarked on a well-earned retirement.

We owe Anne such an enormous debt of gratitude that it's hard to know where to begin. More than just an employee and a colleague, Anne was den mother to all of us—keeping us in line, making sure we got paid on time, offering support and encouragement as needed, and tackling the least glamorous of tasks on our behalf (arranging installation of a new heating/cooling system in our Salt Lake City office and dispatching the occasional cockroach, to name just a few). And as many can attest, she always went the extra mile to make sure the “new kid” on staff felt welcomed and part of the family from day one.

Anne was with us so long that she wore many hats (administrative associate, membership coordinator, administrative director) and experienced a fair

amount of turnover within her teams. More than once she trained a new employee in her previous position while learning the ropes in her new one, even bridging the gap between hires by working two jobs simultaneously for a spell. If that's not the very definition of going above and beyond one's duty, we don't know what is!

Anne's many responsibilities (and voluntary contributions) over the years included: maintaining our membership database; planning and staffing events; managing payroll; shopping for employee health coverage; paying our bills; overseeing the annual audit; having the driveway repaved, the building repainted, and the snow plowed; fending off roosting pigeons; keeping the office clean and orderly; and even cooking delicious meals for board meetings and staff retreats.

In short, Anne was dependable to a fault. And through it all, she maintained a sense of humor and joie de vivre that spoke volumes of her commitment to the cause, and to her colleagues. Though she's only a few blocks away, we already miss her terribly and, truth be told, the Salt Lake City office is a slightly less joyful place without her little dog Rosie to greet us at the door every day.

Thanks for everything, Anne. We wish you (and Rosie) the very best!



One of Rosie's favorite hangouts: the recycling bin.

inside SUWA

From Castledale to the Capitol: SUWA Welcomes Adrienne Carter

Castledale, Utah native Adrienne Carter joined SUWA in September as the new legislative advocate in our DC office, and we are as happy to have her as she is to have a Diet Coke.

Adrienne graduated from the University of Texas at Austin after a brief flirtation with engineering and speaks fluent Russian (useful in DC these days). Her feline Purrrscilla has added considerable talent to the Team Cat roster in SUWA's longstanding Cat vs. Dog tug-o-war—though Adrienne would quickly protest she loves both.

Since joining us, Adrienne has secured 38 cosponsors for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, and her robust efforts on the Hill have added up to 139 miles in 2018 alone! Go get 'em, Adrienne.



She may look like a city girl, but Adrienne grew up in redrock country.

Seasoned Community Activist Rebecca Chavez-Houck Joins SUWA Board



Rebecca Chavez-Houck brings a wealth of public service experience to SUWA's board.

SUWA is honored and delighted to welcome Utah State Rep. Rebecca Chavez-Houck to our board of directors! Rebecca brings a strong background of leadership and public service and a deep personal love of public lands to her new role at SUWA.

She has served in the Utah Legislature since 2008, representing Salt Lake City's House District 24. Her primary legislative interest is health and human services policy. She has a 30-year track record as a media relations and public affairs professional, serving the nonprofits Centro de la Familia de Utah, the Natural History Museum of Utah, and the Girl Scouts of Utah. She has also served as a board member for a number of Utah nonprofits, among them Intermountain Healthcare, ACLU of Utah, YWCA of Salt Lake City, Envision Utah, Planned Parenthood Association of Utah, United Way of Salt Lake, and HECHO (Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors).

Rebecca holds a B.A. in Journalism and Mass Communication as well as an M.P.A from the University of Utah. She teaches nonprofit management and governmental ethics there as an adjunct faculty member. She is a Council of State Governments 2012 Henry Toll Fellow and a 2009 graduate of the CSG's Western Legislative Academy. Further, she holds many notable awards for her commitment to justice and service in

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the community, including the 2002 Cesar Chavez Peace and Justice Award from the Utah Coalition of La Raza, the 2017 Equality Utah Allies Award, and the state Democratic Party's 2017 Eleanor Roosevelt Award.

Rebecca and her husband, Martin Houck, have two children and love traveling cross-country in their recreational vehicle. They live in Salt Lake City.

Rebecca's dedication to social equity will surely bolster SUWA's newest endeavor in Latinx community organizing. We look forward to working with her!

The Intern Who "Badgered" Rep. Mike Noel

Connor Nipper, a junior in the University of Utah's Parks, Recreation and Tourism program, spent his fall semester interning with us in Salt Lake City. Working with the organizing team, he proved a quick study when thrust into action, repeatedly, at several rallies supporting our national monuments. He even took a turn appearing before Rep. Noel's state legislative committee in badger face paint!

We rely on interns to deliver hundreds of Protect Wild Utah lawn signs across three Wasatch Front counties. It's an unglamorous job, but, growing up in the Salt Lake Valley and knowing the area well,



Connor Nipper puts his internship experience to work during Wilderness Week 2018 in Washington, DC.

Connor handled a particularly busy period extremely well, quickly reducing a backlog.

"I was so excited to get the position because SUWA is an organization that does work that I see as imperative to preserving our beautiful wilderness lands here in Utah," said Connor of his experience with us. "I learned a lot about activism and public action. When I arrived, I didn't have very much prior experience working in an office setting, event planning, being an activist and volunteering. This internship provided that for me."

Connor has another year to go at school and then hopes to put his education towards furthering protection of Utah's public lands. We wish him the best of luck and thank him for his help.

Many Thanks to SUWA's 2017 Field Organizers!

After the 2016 election, we knew that the incoming Congress and the Trump administration would mean nothing but bad news and trouble for the redrock. So SUWA assembled a team of organizers in target states around the country to build the grassroots support we'd need to block anti-wilderness legislation, keep oil and gas leasing and development in check, and keep our national monuments intact.

The team came to Washington early in 2017 to meet with our legislative crew and spent two days in intensive study and training on the nuts, bolts and splendor of Utah wilderness. Over the remainder of the year, they were an effective presence at over 100 speaking and tabling events across the country.

All told, our field organizers collected more than 10,000 postcards, recruited a new and enthusiastic crop of grassroots leaders, and held dozens of meetings with members of Congress in their home states. Thanks to their hard and dedicated work, SUWA is well-positioned in the key states of Washington, Oregon, California, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and Maine.

We thank these organizers for their amazing boots-on-the-ground work to #ProtectWildUtah: Ryan Mykita and Brad Phillips (CA), Jenny Holmes (WA/OR), Mike Salaski (PA), Allahandro Bradford (FL), and John Demos (ME/NH).

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New Spring Merchandise Available in SUWA's Online Store

Just in time for spring, we've stocked our online store with new merchandise to help you enjoy the great outdoors in style—including a swank new trucker hat (featuring our brand new logo!) and a 10-liter dry bag for all your redrock river adventures.

All of this and more can be found at www.suwa.org/goodies.



Make a Longterm Investment in Utah Wilderness

Join Our Monthly Giving Program

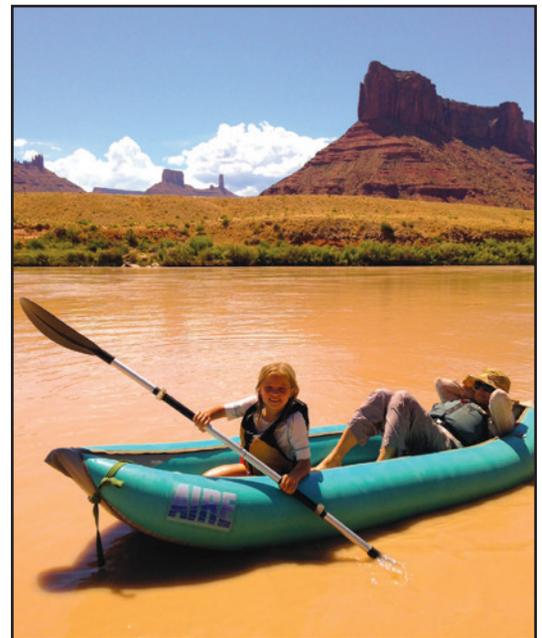
If you're looking for a convenient, hassle-free way to help SUWA over the longterm, our monthly giving program is for you. Monthly giving is easy and secure, and provides us with reliable, year-round funding to fight current and future attacks on Utah wilderness. To sign up, use the enclosed envelope or go to suwa.org/donate, select a monthly amount, and check the recurring donation box.

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. You can also create a bequest so that the needs of your heirs are taken care of first.

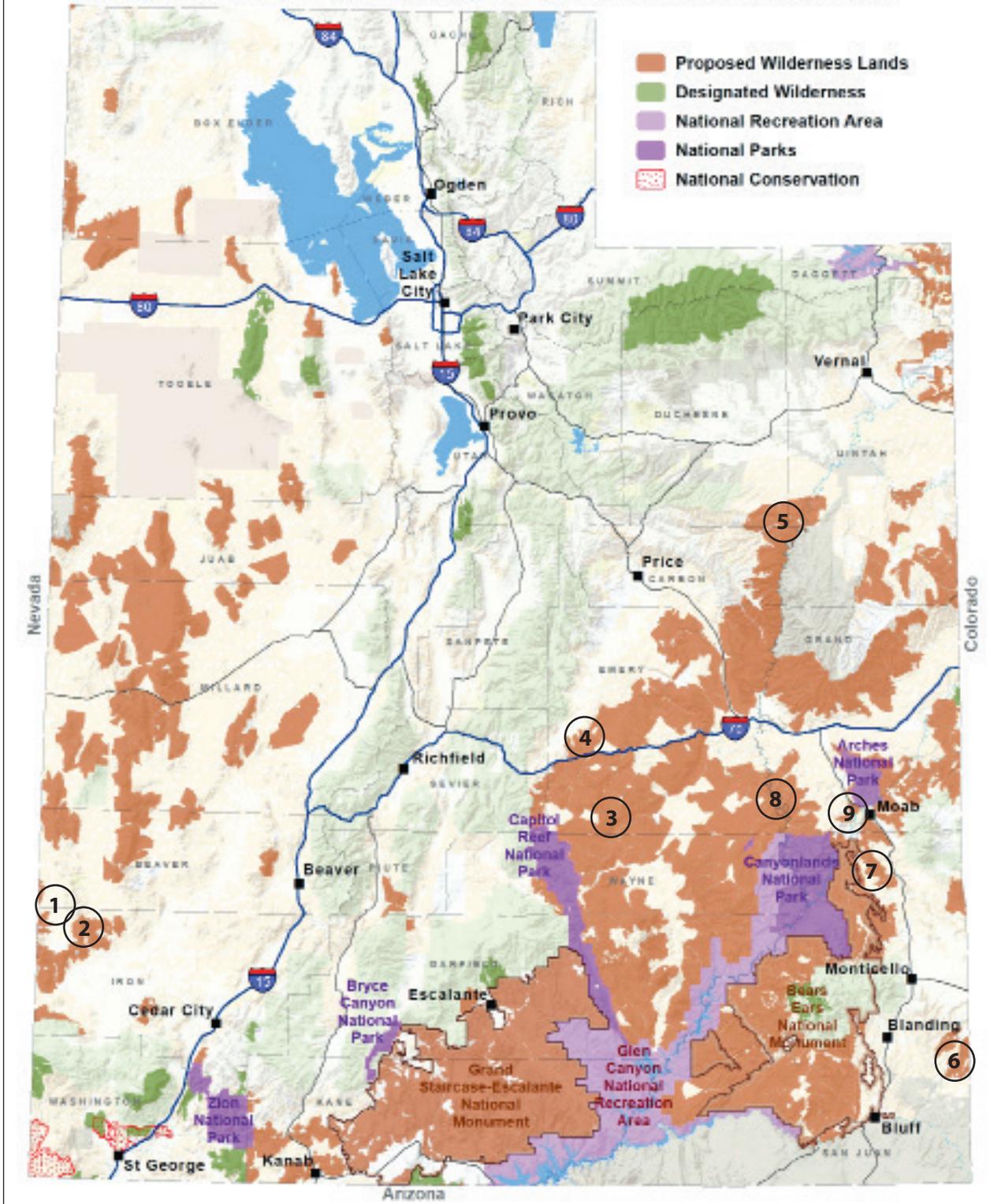
A bequest for SUWA (or any other charitable organization) is very simple to establish. Just name the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance in your will, trust, retirement plan, or life insurance policy, along with our contact information and tax I.D. number and the dollar amount or percent of your estate 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 (801) 428-3971 or visit us online at suwa.org/plannedgiving.

America's Red Rock Wilderness Act

A Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in Utah



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| 2 Steamboat Mountain (p. 8) | 5 Desolation Canyon (p. 14) | 8 Labyrinth Canyon (p. 14) |
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“I have found that people go to the wilderness for many things, but the most important of these is perspective. They may think they go for fishing or the scenery or companionship, but in reality it is something far deeper. They go to the wilderness for the good of their souls.”

—Sigurd Olson