

REDROCK

W I L D E R N E S S

The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
VOLUME 43, NUMBER 1 • SPRING 2026

**THE ENDURING FIGHT TO PROTECT GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE
NATIONAL MONUMENT**



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.

SUWA is qualified as a non-profit organization under section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code. Therefore, all contributions to SUWA are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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OFFICES

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

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

Moab
P.O. Box 968
Moab, UT 84532

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AMERICA'S RED ROCK WILDERNESS ACT REFERENCE MAP

This issue of *Redrock Wilderness* was written by the following staff and outside contributors: Steve Bloch, Scott Braden, Judi Brawer, Neal Clark, Travis Hammill, Joyelle Hatch, Hanna Larsen, Jeremy Lynch, Kya Marienfeld, Heather Rose Martinez, Nicole Milavetz, Landon Newell, Laura Peterson, and Chris Riccardo. It was edited and laid out by Diane Kelly. Newsletter design by Amy Westberg.

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

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THE FORCE THAT DRIVES US

It's been an unusually warm and dry winter in Salt Lake City and throughout Utah's redrock country. Snowpack levels have been dismal, and the beleaguered Colorado River system is nearing crisis as Lake Powell slides dangerously close to "dead pool," the water level at which Glen Canyon Dam can no longer generate power or reliably provide drinking water to downstream users. Fortunately, as I write this in late February, a series of storms are bringing much-needed snow to the parched Rockies. We can only hope it's a lasting shift.

Meanwhile, when it comes to attacks on America's public lands, winter seems to be hitting at full force. *These are the times that try conservationists' souls.*

Last year, the Trump administration and congressional Republicans were focused on ravaging the federal workforce, weakening environmental regulations and review processes, and (unsuccessfully) shoe-horning wildly unpopular public land sell-offs into the budget bill. Now we're seeing aggressive moves to strike at the heart of our nation's most beloved wild places. Republicans are wielding an obscure law called the Congressional Review Act (CRA) in an attempt to roll back protections for treasured landscapes like the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah—all in the name of commercial exploitation and short-term profit.

Utah's own Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) and Representative Celeste Maloy (R-UT-02) are leading the CRA attack on Grand Staircase-Escalante. As you'll learn in this issue, SUWA has launched an organization-wide effort to fight back. But what I want to focus on here is the source of our power to do so: love.

I'm referring to the love of ordinary people all across America who turn their care into action by writing their members of Congress, showing up to rallies, donating in support of our work, and volunteering their time at events like Wilderness Week (see page 11). Love also powers the staff and board of SUWA; it inspires us to do our best each day, even though some days the outlook seems grim.

This community of caring people who share a deep love of place is the antidote to despair, and it has brought the Utah wilderness movement farther than we could have imagined when we first penned our mission statement in 1983. Since then, we've secured 850,000 acres of designated wilderness in Utah and gained administrative protections for millions more.

Love has also powered our ability to influence members of Congress from distant states to take up our cause on behalf of their own constituents. This year we're honoring our Senate redrock champion Dick Durbin (D-IL), who is retiring after sponsoring America's Red Rock Wilderness Act in every Congress since 1997 (see page 13). We're also celebrating the 30th anniversary of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument this year. Its embattled history reminds us just how far we've come and how much we can accomplish when we stay the course together.

All of this confirms to me that our work is necessary and worthwhile, that support for our cause continues to grow, and that love will ultimately prevail in the ongoing effort to *Protect Wild Utah*.

For the Redrock,

Scott Braden
Executive Director

THE ENDURING FIGHT TO PROTECT GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT

As we prepare, once again, to defend Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument—this time from the Utah delegation's attack on the monument management plan and threats yet unknown from an increasingly erratic Trump administration—it's worth taking a moment to remember and learn from our own history.

Grand Staircase-Escalante has never been protected by chance. This extraordinary landscape exists today because, more than 40 years ago and consistently since then, advocates spoke up, took action, and refused to walk away. Throughout the monument's long history, SUWA members, staff, and activists have been a vital part of its story.

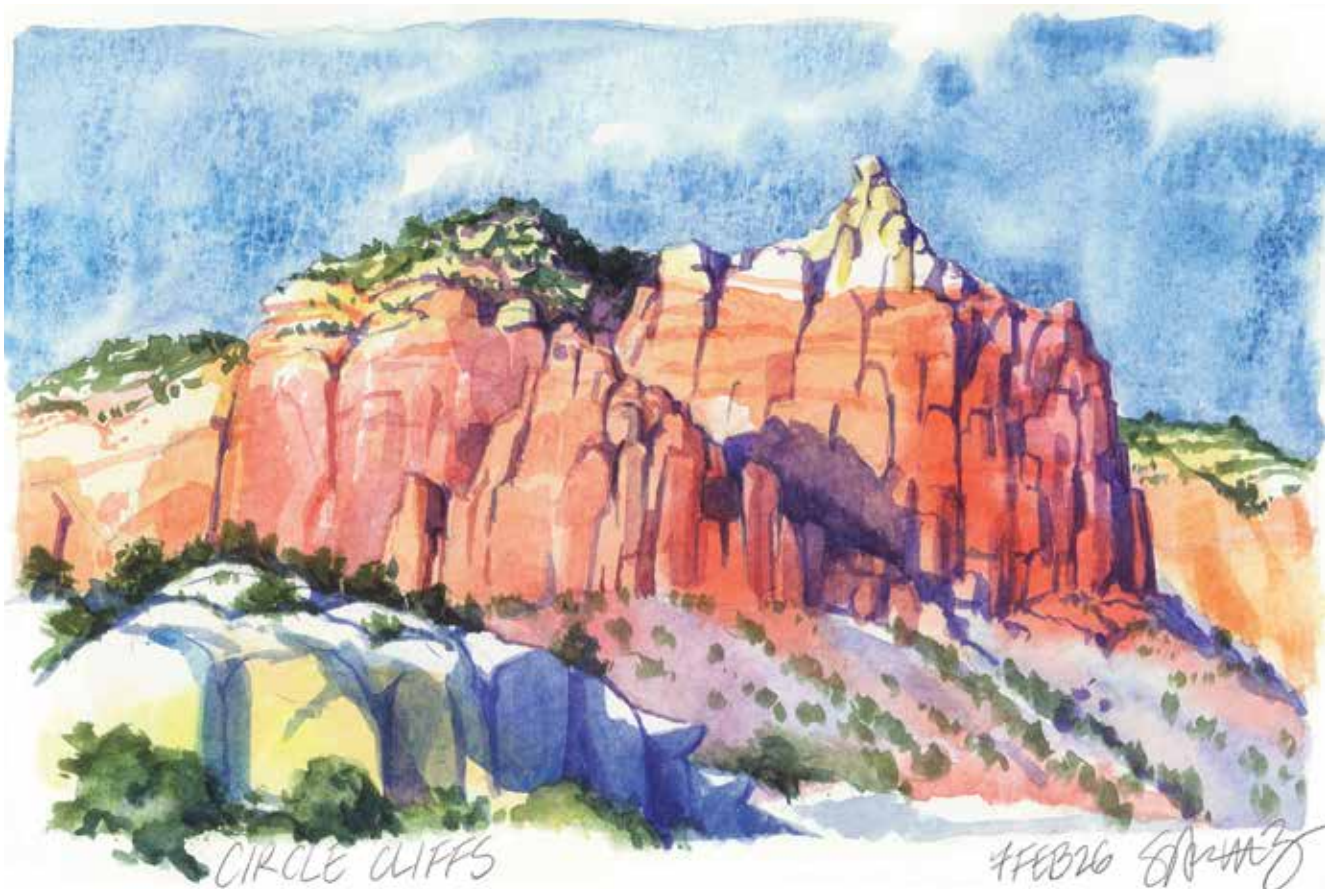
BORN FROM A LONG FIGHT

Long before the monument was designated, conservationists fought for decades to protect the Escalante and Grand Staircase regions from oil and gas development and keep coal mining off the Kaiparowits Plateau—activities that

would turn this wild and remote region into a sacrifice zone for coal, roads, and short-sighted speculation. Resistance to conservation efforts was fierce: in Kane County, actor and Utah resident Robert Redford was even burned in effigy for opposing a power plant there.

When Dutch-owned Andalex Resources entered the scene in the late 1980s, SUWA led a nearly seven-year battle to thwart the company's massive coal enterprise at every turn by challenging permits, generating media attention, and activating our grassroots base. These actions by members and supporters laid the political and legal groundwork that made the monument's eventual designation possible.

When President Bill Clinton signed the proclamation establishing Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument on September 18, 1996, it capped nearly a decade of hard-fought work to protect a vast, wild, and exceptionally remote redrock landscape. The 1.9-million-acre monument was the first ever national monument entrusted to the



Bureau of Land Management (BLM) following its designation, and the seed of what became the agency's robust National Conservation Lands program.

In the years after designation, Grand Staircase-Escalante quietly proved what monument defenders knew all along: that protecting natural resources, wilderness, watersheds, wildlife, dark skies, and solitude on public lands benefits both land and people. The monument safeguards one of the most intact ecosystems on the Colorado Plateau, rich with paleontological treasures, rare plant communities, wildlife habitat, and a millennia of Indigenous cultural history.

The BLM's conservation-focused management and landscape-scale protections helped preserve world-class fossil beds and irreplaceable archaeological resources, while nearby communities built sustainable economies around visitation, science, education, and outdoor recreation. For SUWA, the monument became both a model and a proving ground for what strong conservation of BLM lands could look like.

THE 2017 ROLLBACK AND SUWA'S RESPONSE

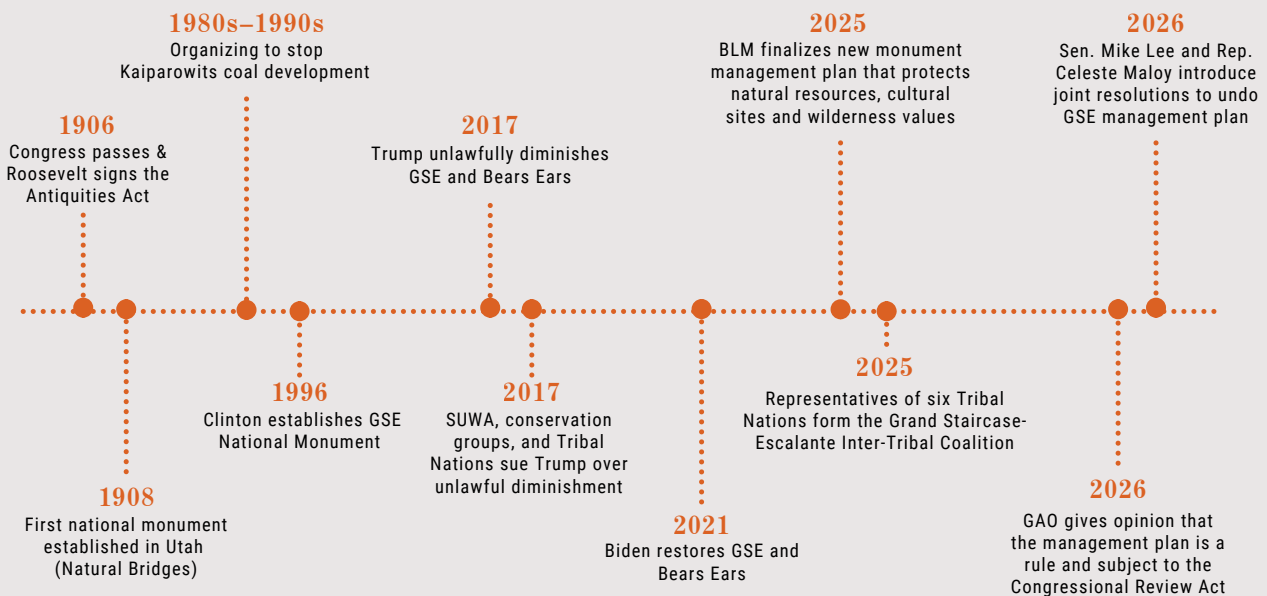
That success—and the power of true, landscape-level protections (coupled with the illogical politics of Utah)—made

Grand Staircase-Escalante a target. At the behest of Utah politicians who ignored both the overwhelming popularity of the monument and the economic engine it proved to be for the surrounding communities, President Trump signed a new proclamation in 2017 slashing Grand Staircase-Escalante by nearly half. Just over twenty years after it was designated, this proclamation unlawfully stripped protections from roughly 900,000 acres and carved the remaining landscape into three smaller units. It was one of the largest rollbacks of federal land protections in U.S. history.

Even for lands that remained part of the shrunken monument, real protection sharply declined in 2020 when the Trump administration's BLM released a new, intentionally weak monument management plan that was structured around maximizing commodity uses, expanding roads and motorized use, and allowing for significant development and disturbance in areas still inside the monument.

That plan failed to adequately protect cultural and paleontological resources that were central to the original designation, leaving historic, scientific, and Native ancestral sites vulnerable to off-road vehicle damage, looting, and other impacts from increased development. And as for the lands that Trump excised from the monument, they were to be managed for a variety of uses, including mining, oil and gas leasing, and utility rights-of-way.

HISTORIC TIMELINE OF GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE (GSE) NATIONAL MONUMENT



SUWA was part of a broad coalition of conservation partners, local businesses, and scientists that challenged this illegal reduction in court. While that litigation moved forward, SUWA organized its members and supporters, helping generate roughly 17,000 public comments on the new management planning process, and pressed the administration to restore the full monument.

RESTORATION AND A NEW PLANNING PROCESS

In October 2021, President Biden signed a new proclamation fully restoring Grand Staircase-Escalante to its original boundaries. The Biden proclamation reaffirmed that Grand Staircase-Escalante is a national treasure, strengthened acknowledgement of Indigenous ancestral ties to the landscape, and confirmed that BLM would once again manage the monument, in full, for conservation and cultural values.

The BLM launched a new, holistic management planning process for the restored monument, with extensive outreach to Tribal Nations, local governments, and the public. The draft plan, finalized in 2025, drew overwhelming support for a conservation-focused approach that reflects the monument's scientific, cultural, and wilderness values.

In 2025, representatives of six Tribal Nations whose ancestral homelands include Grand Staircase-Escalante announced the formation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante Inter-Tribal Coalition: the Hopi Tribe, the Navajo Nation, the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Zuni Tribe. The coalition was formed to both advocate for conservation of these ancestral lands and to bring Traditional Indigenous Knowledge and expertise directly into how the monument is managed.

A NEW THREAT EMERGES

Incensed that the Biden administration restored protections for Grand Staircase-Escalante and finalized a management plan to implement those protections, Utah's congressional delegation (Senators Lee and Curtis, Representatives Moore, Owens, Maloy, and Kennedy) is now turning to an obscure law in their latest attempt to undermine the monument: the Congressional Review Act (CRA).

The CRA requires federal agencies to submit "rules" to Congress for a mandatory review period before those rules take effect. Following submission, and for a limited window



The Grand Staircase National Monument's vast and austere landscape embraces a spectacular array of scientific and historic resources. This high, rugged, and remote region, where bold plateaus and multi-hued cliffs run for distances that defy human perspective, was the last place in the continental United States to be mapped. Even today, this unspoiled natural area remains a frontier, a quality that greatly enhances the monument's value for scientific study." [Clinton Proclamation 6920]



WHAT MAKES GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE SO SPECIAL?

Often called “the science monument,” Grand Staircase-Escalante has yielded extraordinary discoveries of dinosaur species and fossilized plants and animals, making it one of the most important outdoor laboratories for understanding ancient life on Earth. The geological “steps” of the Grand Staircase are a sequence of sedimentary rock layers stretching more than one hundred miles from Bryce Canyon National Park to the depths of the Grand Canyon.

The monument boasts wonders at every scale: from dinosaur bones to a remarkable diversity of native bees. The state of Utah is home to a quarter of the bee species found in the United States, and roughly half of those have been documented in Grand Staircase-Escalante, likely due to the area’s varied topography (from sun-soaked plateaus to winding slot canyons) and incredible variety of flowering plants, which includes half of the state’s rare species.

Tribal Nations have stewarded these lands since time immemorial, and six Nations recently formed an inter-tribal coalition to advocate for protection of the monument. Without management plans shaped in partnership with Tribal Nations, these landscapes—and the history and heritage they hold—would be at risk.

of time (60 “session days”), Congress can vote by a simple majority in each body to overturn or “disapprove” the rule. If that happens, and the president signs the resolutions into law, an agency cannot reissue a rule that is “substantially the same” in the future. The CRA was meant as a tool to review major regulations, not a veto power Congress can use to throw out any agency decision it doesn’t like. But that is how Congress is now using the CRA, setting a dangerous precedent not only for Grand Staircase-Escalante, but for the future of America’s public lands.

The BLM has long maintained that its land management plans are not “rules” subject to the CRA, as have other land management agencies like the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service. However, emboldened by a series of non-binding Government Accountability Office (GAO) opinions, some members of Congress have embraced the novel theory that federal land management plans are indeed “rules” subject to the CRA. In 2025 alone, Congress passed six CRA resolutions to invalidate resource management plans for BLM-managed land in Montana, Alaska, Wyoming, and North Dakota, throwing the management of tens of millions of acres of federal public land into chaos.

Most recently, congressional Republicans have weaponized the CRA to come after the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northern Minnesota. In January, the House passed a resolution to “disapprove” of a mineral withdrawal implemented during the Biden administration to prevent a proposed copper mine from polluting the watershed that feeds and supports the wilderness. As of this newsletter printing, a vote has not been scheduled in the Senate.



Weaponizing the Congressional Review Act to overturn the monument management plan tosses aside years of public input and Tribal consultation on how these lands should be managed for the American people, including families, hikers, scientists, hunters, and guides and outfitters.”

Not to be outdone, and in an unprecedented escalation, Utah’s congressional delegation—led by failed public lands sell-off champions Senator Lee and Representative Maloy—are now trying to use the CRA to target Grand Staircase-Escalante. In early March, they introduced “resolutions of disapproval” under the CRA to undo the current monument management plan. This is the first attempt ever to use the CRA to attack a national monument.

Their goal is nothing less than to fast-track the monument’s destruction by getting rid of its management plan, which guides everything from the protection of endangered species to the location of new campgrounds. Weaponizing the CRA to overturn the monument management plan tosses aside years of public input and Tribal consultation on how these lands should be managed for the American people, including families, hikers, scientists, hunters, and guides and outfitters.

Overturing the monument management plan could also quickly transform this area—with no input from stakeholders—into a very different landscape: one where out-of-control off-road vehicle use, powerlines, landscape-level clearcutting of native piñon-juniper forests, and other extractive activities are all possible.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

While the CRA may be a new threat, it is just the latest one in the long fight to protect Grand Staircase-Escalante. And we certainly are not backing down now. SUWA members, supporters, staff, and conservation partners have been walking the halls of Congress and calling and emailing their representatives and senators to educate them about Grand Staircase-Escalante and the damage that invoking the CRA would cause to this quintessential and beloved redrock landscape.

We are also not naive to the very real threat that President Trump may once again abuse the Antiquities Act to illegally reduce the monument and its protections. We are ready to take up that fight again as well.

From opposing coal development on the Kaiparowits Plateau, to celebrating the 1996 proclamation, to fighting in court against the 2017 rollback, to championing a robust new management plan, to supporting Tribal voices in future management of the monument, SUWA has been there at nearly every twist and turn in the story of Grand Staircase-Escalante. That long arc of engagement—spanning more than 40 years of organizing, litigation, policy work, fieldwork, and grassroots pressure—has helped define how public lands are protected at a landscape scale.

SUWA members and supporters have done so much to keep the monument intact through rollbacks and restorations; together, we will keep it intact in the face of new, unprecedented threats in Congress. The monument's future is not guaranteed, but the last three decades prove that when we all show up—alongside Tribal leaders, scientists, and local communities—we can prevail. Grand Staircase-Escalante's wild canyons, mesas, and badlands have powerful defenders.

—Kya Marienfeld & Laura Peterson

[Ed. Note: SUWA commissioned the artwork in this article for use in defense of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The artist, Samantha Zim, is an illustrator and watercolorist who lives in the Moab Valley. Learn more about Samantha and her art at www.samanthazimart.com]

UTAH BUSINESS LEADERS HEAD TO DC TO ADVOCATE FOR GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE

During the first week of February, as rare blizzard conditions hit Washington, DC, a team of business leaders from southern Utah braved the cold and ice to meet with House members about the importance of protecting Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. These restaurant owners, ranchers, large-scale employers, recreation guides, and other business owners spoke of how important the monument is to their businesses and local economies and urged legislators to oppose any efforts to undo the current management plan.

After meeting with Public Lands Caucus members, Republican offices, and some Democratic offices, the business leaders also spent time distributing educational materials on Capitol Hill and recruiting cosigners for a letter (which they also drafted) opposing the introduction of a “joint resolution of disapproval” on the monument management plan. Many thanks to these business leaders for taking time away from their busy schedules to come all the way to DC and advocate for protecting Grand Staircase-Escalante!



UTAH BUSINESS LEADERS OUTSIDE THE DC OFFICE OF REP. CELESTE MALOY (R-UT-02). PHOTO COURTESY OF CONSERVATION LANDS FOUNDATION.

WHY CONSTITUENT MEETINGS MATTER FOR GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE AND THE CRA FIGHT

These days, threats to Utah's wildest places seem to pile on top of each other like willow branches on the banks of the Colorado River, but the Utah delegation's weaponization of the Congressional Review Act (CRA) looms largest of all right now, threatening to upend the management of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and undo years of scientific study, Tribal consultation, and public input.

Once again, this latest attack on the monument originated with Utah's own legislators. That's why it's so important that folks from across the country stand together in strong defense of this national treasure. As our organizers rally nationwide support, one tactic remains as crucial as ever: arranging in-district meetings so constituents can meet face-to-face with their members of Congress (or their staff) right in their own home state.

In-district meetings make a difference. When a group of constituents ask their representative to oppose attacks on beloved national monuments and other public lands, the impact ripples outward. Congressional staff log these requests and use these meetings to



© DIANE KELLY/SUWA

brief their members of Congress when bills come up for a vote. In-district meetings also help congressional offices track patterns of engagement. A small group of well-prepared constituents can elevate an issue quickly and make it politically relevant.

In February, we partnered with Sierra Club and the Center for Western Priorities on a webinar on Grand Staircase-Escalante that was attended by more than 300 people. These con-

nections, along with countless phone calls, emails, and other outreach efforts, have helped our organizers find redrock supporters across the country who are willing to speak out for this incredible landscape. Meetings with congressional offices are happening—all thanks to you!

Ready to join this critical effort? Start by contacting one of SUWA's regional organizers (find info on our website at suwa.org/regionalorganizers). We can help you schedule meetings with your members of Congress, connect you with other engaged constituents in your district, and equip you with clear talking points and background materials. Organizers make sure you understand the ask, the stakes, and the strategy, and will guide you through preparation and follow-up to maximize the effectiveness of your efforts.

—Chris Riccardo and Nicole Milavetz

LIVE IN A KEY DISTRICT? PLEASE REACH OUT!

While you can always make a difference regardless of where you live, certain key districts are strategically important in this fight. If you or someone you know who loves the redrock lives in Nebraska, the greater Philadelphia area (including both Pennsylvania and New Jersey), Maine, the Western Slope of Colorado, the Lower Hudson River Valley in New York, Tucson and SE Arizona, or the suburbs NE of Sacramento, please visit suwa.org/regionalorganizers and connect with the organizer for your area.

WILDERNESS WEEK ACTIVISTS MEET THE MOMENT

In early March, as Washington DC began to thaw from a wildly snowy winter, nearly 50 activists descended on Capitol Hill for the Utah Wilderness Coalition's annual Wilderness Week event. Just days before, we learned that Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) and Representative Celeste Maloy (R-UT-02) had formally begun the process to fast-track an attack on Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument using the Congressional Review Act (CRA). While this was not unexpected (we've been sounding the alarm since January), it added extra urgency to the week.

Advocates from 21 states, including Utah, spent their weekend preparing for meetings with their elected officials. Their visits included two requests for members of Congress and the Senate: (1) Join the 63 House and 18 Senate cosponsors of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, and (2) commit to voting against joint resolutions to

strike down the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument management plan.

Over the course of the week, activists held 139 meetings; dropped off materials to 91 other offices (including Grand Staircase-Escalante viewmasters and mini keepsake art prints); averaged 11 miles of walking around the Hill; consumed more than 200 bagels, pastries, and granola bars; and ensured that your elected officials know that wilderness and national monuments are important to us all.

The work doesn't stop after these activists head home, so if you are willing to hold an in-district meeting with your elected officials, or if you are interested in joining us in Washington next year, please connect with SUWA's organizing team by visiting suwa.org/regionalorganizers.

—Travis Hammill



WILDERNESS WEEK ACTIVISTS AT THE U.S. CAPITOL IN EARLY MARCH. © SUWA

SENATE COMMITTEE ADVANCES BLM DIRECTOR NOMINEE STEVE PEARCE

Former U.S. Representative (from New Mexico) Steve Pearce advanced one step closer to confirmation as director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in early March when the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved his nomination during a committee markup with an 11–9 party-line vote (all Democratic members of the committee voted against him). We expect a confirmation vote in the full Senate sometime in the coming weeks.

The markup occurred during the Utah Wilderness Coalition's Wilderness Week event in Washington, DC (see adjacent article and photo), and many of our activists were able to attend, wearing bright green t-shirts with the words, "Don't Let Steve Pearce Sell Our Public Lands."

SUWA has publicly opposed Pearce's nomination, citing concerns about his past positions on public lands and environmental protections. The role of the BLM Director requires a strong commitment to safeguarding public lands, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources—priorities Pearce's record does not reflect. Instead, he is a longtime player in unsuccessful efforts to prioritize resource extraction and privatize or sell off public lands.

GOOD NEWS

ALL PUEBLO COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS, SAN JUAN SOUTHERN PAIUTE TRIBE ENDORSE RED ROCK BILL

While it may seem like we're on the constant defensive in this current political climate, SUWA continues to build meaningful relationships with Tribal Nations and broaden the base of support for protecting the redrock. As a result, we're honored to have received formal resolutions of support for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act from the All Pueblo Council of Governors and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe.

In late October 2025, the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribal Council, the governing body of the Tribe, passed a resolution in support of the legislation. Less than two months later, the All Pueblo Council of Governors, the collective voice of the 20 Pueblo Nations of New Mexico and Texas, passed a similar resolution. Both resolutions endorse congressional wilderness designation for lands within the bill. America's Red Rock Wilderness Act has also been formally endorsed by the Zuni Tribe, Hopi Tribe, and Navajo Nation.

"The canyons, mesas, and mountains included in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act are the ancestral homelands of the San Juan Southern Paiute people and comprise one of the most significant cultural landscapes in the United States," said San Juan Southern Paiute President Carlene

Yellowhair. "These aboriginal lands contain the testimony of Ancestral San Juan Southern Paiute occupation and use for thousands of years, and we are honored to support this longstanding effort to permanently protect the region's irreplaceable cultural resources, sacred sites, and critical plant and animal species."

"The protection of cultural landscapes, traditional cultural properties and sacred sites of Pueblo people is paramount to each Pueblo's cultural preservation now and into the future," said All Pueblo Council of Governors Chairman Dominic Gachupin. "The lands in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act are aboriginal lands, containing the testimony of Ancestral Puebloan occupation and use for thousands of years, and should be permanently protected."

America's Red Rock Wilderness Act would protect more than 8 million acres of federal public land in Utah. Sponsored by Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Representative Melanie Stansbury (D-NM-01), it currently has 18 cosponsors in the Senate and 63 in the House. Visit suwa.org/arrwa to learn more.

—Neal Clark

SENATOR LEE'S ANTI-PUBLIC-LANDS CRUSADE

In addition to attacking Utah's beloved Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) has been busy introducing and championing legislation that would sell off or give away public lands, open up national parks to off-road vehicles, and thwart the implementation of responsible land use plans.

Our DC staff continues to monitor bills like these and bring them to the attention of our supporters on Capitol Hill. Here's a quick roundup of the latest terrible measures.

- **The Brian Head Land Conveyance Act (S. 1860)** would transfer 24 acres of federal public land to the town of Brian Head in southwest Utah, with only vague standards for how the town can use those federal lands and no effective mechanism to enforce them. Twenty-four acres may not sound like a lot, but the legislation grants federal land for free, setting a concerning precedent for future conveyances.

There's also no requirement for public notice or consultation, denying nearby residents, recreation users, and Tribal Nations the opportunity to weigh in. And there's no environmental or economic assessment to evaluate how development on the 24-acre parcel could affect wildlife habitat, recreation access, wildfire risk, or forest management. This bill was passed through the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in a markup on December 17, 2025 and will move to the Senate Floor next.

- **The Historic Roadways Protection Act (S.90)** would, for all intents and purposes, prohibit the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) from effectively managing motorized vehicle use across more than 6 million acres of land in Utah. The bill was passed on a party-line vote during a Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Business Meeting on February 4.

Since the State of Utah filed its RS 2477 right-of-way lawsuits in 2011-2012, not a single case has been adjudicated by the district court. Sen. Lee's bill outright prohibits the BLM from finalizing or implementing new and recently-approved travel management plans until the massive backlog of RS 2477 cases is decided—a process that will take decades. In the meantime, the on-the-ground damage from motorized vehicles would continue.

- **The Upper Price River Watershed Act of 2025 (S.3004)** would hand over 125 acres of federal land for free in another attempt to normalize the sell-off or transfer of federal lands. The bill bypasses environmental and cultural resource review and public input as required by the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act; lacks fair compensation; and allows the beneficiary, not the federal government, to decide what is a legitimate “public use” of the land. The legislation was voted through the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on March 4 and is now eligible to be brought to the Senate Floor.

- **A bill to authorize the use of off-highway vehicles in certain areas of Capitol Reef National Park, Utah (S.2970)** would permanently transform Capitol Reef National Park by inviting off-road vehicles onto park roads, shattering natural soundscapes and profoundly diminishing the visitor experience. It received a hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on December 9, 2025.

We'll keep you posted as these bills move forward.

—Travis Hammill



THE UTAH WILDERNESS COALITION PRESENTS SENATOR DURBIN WITH A FRAMED PRINT IN THANKS FOR HIS DECADES OF SUPPORT AS SENATE CHAMPION OF AMERICA'S RED ROCK WILDERNESS ACT. LEFT TO RIGHT: SEN. DURBIN, CLAYTON DAUGHENBAUGH, MARK MARYBOY, CHRISTY GOLDFUSS, AND SCOTT BRADEN. © RACHEL H. GEORGE

CELEBRATING SENATOR DICK DURBIN'S REDROCK LEGACY

On March 3, the Utah Wilderness Coalition (of which SUWA is a founding member) hosted an event in Washington, DC honoring Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), who will retire this year after nearly three decades as lead sponsor of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act in the U.S. Senate.

The evening celebration included Wilderness Week activists, congressional and committee staff, representatives from partner organizations, donors, and other supporters. The program featured SUWA Board Member Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk, Sierra Club Board Member and former SUWA Organizing Director Clayton Daughenbaugh, NRDC Executive Director Christy Goldfuss, SUWA Board Member Emeritus Mark Maryboy, and Representative Melanie Stansbury (lead sponsor in the House), with SUWA's Executive Director Scott Braden serving as the emcee.

It was no easy feat to properly recognize Sen. Durbin's contributions; he's been a tireless champion for our cause, and his persistence has outlasted many of Utah's most anti-wilderness politicians. Speakers focused on three of his most significant accomplishments: the Washington County wilderness and national conservation areas protected in the 2009 Omnibus Public Land Management Act; his adamant support and defense of Bears Ears National Monument; and, most recently, his role in protecting more than 660,000 acres of wilderness in the San Rafael Swell and Labyrinth Canyon areas through the Emery County Public Land Management Act of 2019.

Senator Durbin, we are deeply grateful for all you've done to protect Utah's extraordinary redrock wilderness for all Americans. Thank you!

—Travis Hammill

THE CONTINUING SAGA OF RED CLIFFS NCA AND THE NORTHERN CORRIDOR HIGHWAY

The long-running fight over the proposed Northern Corridor Highway through Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (NCA) near St. George, Utah has entered a new, infuriating phase. In January, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service flipped their own science on its head and reapproved a four-lane, high-speed highway through some of the last best habitat for the threatened Mojave desert tortoise. In an abrupt about-face, the agencies made the decision just two years after they agreed to take a harder look at the damage this road would cause and had declined to approve the highway right-of-way due to its incompatibility with the values of Red Cliffs NCA.

This is at least the eighth time this zombie proposal has lurched back to life, and it's still a terrible idea. The route would carve through the heart of an NCA that Congress specifically

set aside to “conserve, protect, and enhance” its values—not to facilitate highway construction and more speculative sprawl. The agencies' latest decision doesn't resolve these fundamental conflicts; it just pretends they don't exist.

SUWA and our conservation partners are not playing along. On February 4, our coalition filed a federal lawsuit challenging the January 2026 approval as illegal under multiple federal laws, including the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act. The suit also argues that the agencies violated the terms of the 2023 settlement that sent this project back to the drawing board in the first place.

Thankfully, just before this newsletter went to press, the court granted our motion for a preliminary injunction,

halting the Utah Department of Transportation's rush to install fencing, clear vegetation, and move tortoises in advance of any final highway development plan. The injunction will remain in place while the case moves quickly toward a decision, ensuring that Red Cliffs and its threatened tortoise population are not irreversibly harmed in the interim.

As we've been saying all along, the Northern Corridor Highway would fragment tortoise habitat, ratchet up wildfire risk, and send a dangerous message that even our “most protected” public lands are only protected until the next flashy development scheme comes along.

Red Cliffs was promised to the public as a conservation area. We intend to hold the agencies—and Utah—to the law and to that promise.

—*Kya Marienfeld*



THE BLM AND U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ABRUPTLY CHANGED COURSE AND REAPPROVED A FOUR-LANE HIGHWAY THROUGH RED CLIFFS NCA. © BOB WICK

BLM WATERSHED “RESTORATION” PLAN IGNORES PUBLIC INPUT

In early February, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for its Indian Peak Range Watershed Restoration Plan. Unfortunately, the agency’s proposed plan ignores every key recommendation from SUWA, our members, and the public.

Instead, the Indian Peak plan prioritizes the use of a variety of heavy-handed techniques—including chaining, mastication, mechanical ripping, roller chopping, and harrowing—to remove piñon-juniper woodlands, sagebrush, and other vegetation. It also proposes extensive herbicide use and re-seeding with non-native plant species.

These actions, ostensibly to “support healthy watershed function” among other things, would impact over 550,000 acres in Utah’s West Desert—from the Needles Range in the north to the Indian Peak Range in the south, and east across Hamlin and Pine Valleys to the Wah Wah Mountains and Blue Mountain. Within that vast area are tens of thousands of acres proposed for wilderness designation in America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act and recognized by the BLM as wilderness-caliber.

Despite commitments to improve transparency and environmental review, the EA contains no site-specific analysis, no maps identifying proposed treatment areas, and no evaluation of impacts to the wild lands, wildlife, and cultural values we all care about.

On the very first page of the draft EA, the BLM even acknowledged that a prior, nearly identical plan in Hamlin Valley was vacated after a legal settlement with SUWA in 2018. As part of that agreement, the agency promised not to move forward with new projects until completing sufficient site-specific analysis and review of the projects’ impacts. The Draft EA wholly fails to comply with this agreement.

To make matters worse, the BLM severely inhibited public review and comment, providing a mere 15 days for public input—reneging on its earlier promise to provide a 30-day public comment period. Despite the short time frame, SUWA and our nonprofit partners submitted extensive comments on the draft EA. We’re watching this project closely and will keep you posted.

—*Judi Brawer*

NEW LITIGATION FILED TO STOP ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTION ON HOLE- IN-THE-ROCK ROAD

In early February, SUWA filed a new federal lawsuit seeking to halt Garfield County’s unauthorized “improvements” to the Hole-in-the-Rock Road in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument—the access point for many popular day hikes and backpack trips in the monument and adjacent Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. We acted quickly after verifying that Garfield County has been widening and realigning the road and installing new culverts (where none previously existed) to prepare the road for an imminent chip seal treatment. In essence, these improvements would turn the road from a remote dirt road to a high-speed two-lane highway.

Because the Hole-in-the-Rock Road traverses federal land, and Garfield County does not own the road nor the land underneath it, the county is required to consult with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prior to making any such improvements. It did not do so. The BLM, in turn, is required by law to make sure that activities like these do not cause unnecessary damage to public lands and resources. Despite being aware of the county’s unlawful activities and the requisite consultation process, the BLM chose to idly stand by, allowing the county to continue its illegal roadwork and damage the national monument. That is, until SUWA filed suit.

Although the court denied SUWA’s request for a temporary restraining order, both Garfield County and the BLM have since changed their tune, now agreeing to consult over the proposed improvements before the county can move forward with its plans. Because consultation is a detailed administrative process, this means any proposed chip sealing is delayed, effectively giving SUWA the same temporary relief it sought from the court. While that is great news, the fight to protect the Hole-in-the-Rock Road (and the wilderness-quality lands surrounding it) is far from over.

We’ll keep you updated as events unfold.

THE CHIMERA OF “ENERGY DOMINANCE”

From day one, the Trump administration has rushed to reimplement the failed “energy dominance” agenda of its first term—one aimed at leasing and developing as much public land for oil and gas as possible, as quickly as possible, and with as little environmental analysis and public participation as possible. The administration has also manufactured a fake “energy emergency” and pursued an aggressive deregulatory agenda that has neutered our nation’s bedrock environmental laws.

So how do things look one year in? Thus far, it is mostly sizzle, no steak. In 2025, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) held three lease sales in Utah which, in total, offered 65 parcels encompassing approximately 85,000 acres of public land. To date, only 17

of those parcels have been issued and none have been developed. In 2026, the agency so far has proposed two more sales in Utah that together offer 97 parcels encompassing approximately 125,000 acres of public land; none have yet been offered for sale.

Most parcels up for auction are in the southern Uinta Basin in eastern Utah. At risk of development are some of the most important wild landscapes in this region: the scenic White River, Bitter Creek, Sunday School Canyon, and Dragon Canyon areas, to name a few. Development on these parcels would threaten habitat for greater sage-grouse, elk, mule deer, and the endemic Graham’s and White River beardtongue—flowering plants that grow on shale-rich rocks scattered throughout the southern region of the basin.

Fortunately, actual development of new oil and gas leases remains muted due to persistent low prices and the increased cost of labor and materials

brought on by Trump’s illegal trade war. Last year, for example, 226 wells were drilled in Utah (the majority on state and Tribal lands) compared with 237 in 2024 and 289 in 2023. Importantly, no wells were drilled in proposed wilderness lands last year.

All of this demonstrates a few things: (1) there is no energy emergency, (2) oil and gas operators do not need more leases or drilling permits (they’re not using what they already have), and (3) promises to “unleash American energy” and “drill baby drill” were largely based on Utah politicians’ wishful thinking. Nonetheless, the threats from fossil fuel leasing and development are real and increasing.

As always, SUWA will continue to monitor and challenge every lease sale and every drilling application that impacts Utah wilderness.

—Landon Newell

NATIONAL PARKS SUBJECT OF CLOSED DOOR MEETING

Late last year, the State of Utah convened a closed-door meeting in Salt Lake City with Department of Interior leadership, National Park Service superintendents, and county and city elected officials to lay out Utah’s vision for national park management. The “workshop,” which was closed to the public and structured in a way that avoided triggering Utah’s open meeting laws, was an effort by the state to exert influence over national park management, especially in the areas of visitor use and new amenities development.

The laundry list of bad ideas pushed by the Utah Public Lands Policy



UTAH’S UINTA BASIN, INCLUDING THE SCENIC WHITE RIVER AREA PICTURED ABOVE, IS ONCE AGAIN THE TARGET OF OIL AND GAS LEASING. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

Coordinating Office and some county commissioners included:

- Allowing off-road vehicles in Capitol Reef and Canyonlands National Parks.
- Eliminating timed entry at Zion and Arches National Parks.
- Eliminating other longstanding permit systems and pushing to increase visitation numbers at all parks.
- Paving a still-rugged stretch of the Burr Trail, a backcountry road that winds between Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Capitol Reef National Park, and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (Utah politicians have been scheming to pave the full length of the Burr Trail for more than 50 years).

We believe this meeting was the first step in the state's new push to assert management control over national parks in Utah. We've already seen the abrupt removal of Arches timed-entry system for 2026 and we anticipate additional efforts by the Trump administration to implement the state's wish list.

While national parks are not often the focus of SUWA's work, they are part of a larger wilderness landscape and ecosystem that includes adjoining lands proposed for wilderness designation in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. We also view these efforts within the larger context of Utah's longstanding endeavor to dictate management of federal public lands or seize control of them outright. Lacking the National Park Service mission to preserve national parks for future generations, the state has long viewed national parks and other federal public lands as commodities to be exploited, not as treasures to protect.

—Neal Clark



STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEERS ON A PROJECT IN THE ESCALANTE RIVER CORRIDOR. © SUWA

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM KICKS OFF 2026 FIELD SEASON

SUWA's 2026 Stewardship Season is officially underway. Please consider joining us in the field this year!

The Stewardship Program creates opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with the land through hands-on experiential learning. Depending on the project, work includes protecting cultural sites, restoring ecosystems, addressing land use impacts, and installing signage or fencing. We provide the tools and the gloves, you bring the muscle and the passion.

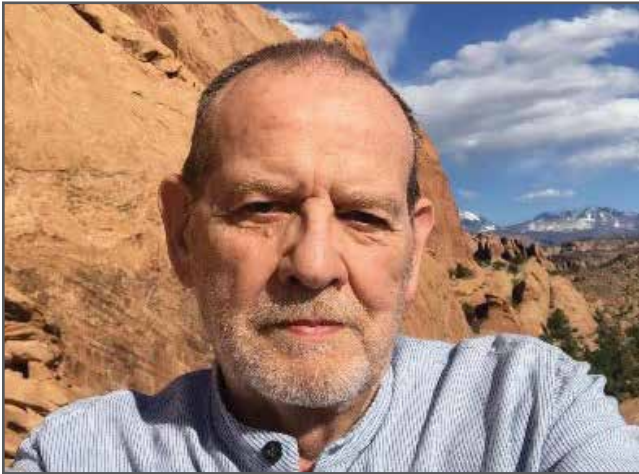
We have a lot of great projects lined up in some truly amazing places this year. Visit our project calendar page at suwa.org/projectcalendar to read more about them and apply. Every listing provides a rundown of the project scope and level of difficulty, as well as the general application and

acceptance process. Some of these projects fill up fast, so we encourage you to apply as soon as you've made your decision.

Right now, we have a strong need of additional hands for our spring projects (April into June). Please consider volunteering with us in Grand Staircase-Escalante or Bears Ears National Monument, the San Rafael Swell, or other locations ranging from Utah's West Desert to the Uinta Basin. Now is the time to register!

For the latest Stewardship Program updates, join our email list at suwa.org/stayinformed or follow us on social media (see back cover). If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact our team at volunteer@suwa.org

—Jeremy Lynch



WAYNE HAS BEEN CENTRAL TO THE UTAH WILDERNESS MOVEMENT FOR AS LONG AS MOST OF US REMEMBER. HE WILL BE DEEPLY MISSED.

REMEMBERING BOARD MEMBER AND LONGTIME WILDERNESS WARRIOR WAYNE HOSKISSON

In January, the Utah wilderness movement lost a dear friend and one of its most dedicated activists with the passing of Wayne Hoskisson. A great-great-grandson of Brigham Young, Wayne was a Utahn to the core, having first explored the canyons and mesas of southern Utah on family trips as a child. Originally from Salt Lake City, Wayne spent the last 26 years as a well-loved member of the Moab community.

Wayne wore many wilderness hats over the course of his lifetime—as a dedicated volunteer for SUWA and the Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club, as the executive director of Redrock Forests, and most recently as a SUWA board member. In the late 1990s, he spent years hiking and photo documenting RS 2477 routes throughout southern Utah—completing extensive fieldwork that set the stage for our longstanding legal battle and compiling a comprehensive data collection that we still reference to this day.

Though humble in demeanor, Wayne was a deeply passionate and effective wilderness advocate who spoke honestly and personally. Returning from military service in Vietnam, Wayne found solace in wild places and carried with him a personal truth and understanding about the importance of wilderness for healing. You could always count on him to show up—with a public comment at a meeting, a letter to the editor, or on a lobbying trip to Washington, DC—bringing a deep knowledge that can only come from dec-

ades of advocacy. It's no exaggeration to say that anyone who has been involved in wilderness issues in Utah has almost certainly crossed paths with Wayne.

Wayne will not only be remembered for his dedication to wilderness preservation and the *Protect Wild Utah* movement, but also, more importantly, for his good humor, calm and thoughtful nature, and unmitigated kindness. We extend our deepest sympathies to his family, friends, and all who had the privilege of knowing him.

TERESA HYATT JOINS STAFF AS NEW FINANCE DIRECTOR

Teresa Hyatt joined SUWA as our finance director (a new position) at the beginning of the year. A California native, she grew up exploring state parks, national forests, and beaches before heading east to Utah, where she discovered a love for trail running in some of the region's most beautiful landscapes. She has completed races in and around Moab, Zion National Park, and the Grand Canyon.

Teresa holds an undergraduate degree in Exercise Physiology from California Polytechnic University and a master's degree in Economics with an emphasis in Finance and Human Resources Management from Utah State University. She brings with her nearly 30 years of upper-level administrative experience with the Utah Aids Foundation and International Rescue Committee.

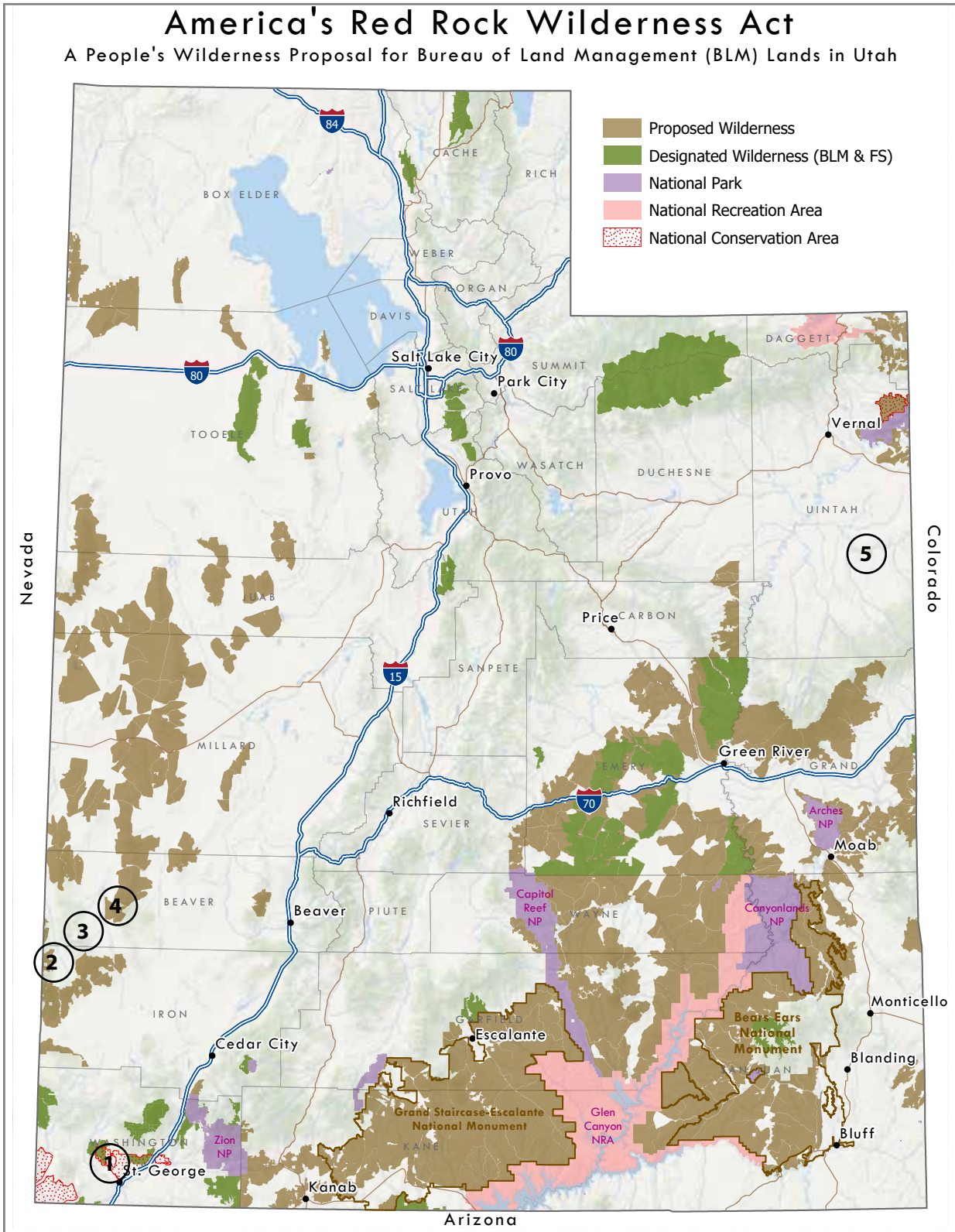
An avid animal lover, Teresa shares her home with a gang of rescues: two bulldogs, two cats, a parrot, and a (still feral) husband. We expect she'll fit right in!



TERESA AT COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT WITH HUSBAND NELSON AND ONE OF THEIR FORMER PUPS.

America's Red Rock Wilderness Act

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



- 1 Red Cliffs NCA (p. 14)
- 2 Needles Range (p. 15)
- 3 Indian Peak Range (p. 15)

- 4 Wah Wah Mountains (p. 15)
- 5 White River (p. 16)



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MEET CANYON KEEPERS: A NEW NAME FOR SUWA'S MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM

Protecting Utah's redrock wilderness has never been about a single moment or a single victory. It's a long, unfolding effort—one that depends on people willing to stand alongside these landscapes for the long haul.

Monthly giving provides a strong and reliable foundation that allows SUWA to focus on our most pressing work: defending against threats of public land privatization and development, fossil fuel leasing, agency mismanagement, and other forms of exploitation. It's support we can count on.

Our monthly donors have been part of SUWA's story for years. This circle of members, whose dependable contributions support our work year-round, are now called "Canyon Keepers." We wanted a name rooted in place and mission—one that gave our monthly donors their own identity within SUWA's larger network of supporters.

Becoming a Canyon Keeper is simple. It only takes a few minutes to set up, and once you do, your gift renews automatically each month. You can increase, decrease, or pause your support at any time. To welcome you to the Canyon Keepers circle, we'll send you a **limited-edition Canyon Wren canvas bag** as a token of our gratitude.

Visit suwa.org/canyonkeepers to join Canyon Keepers today!



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