

# REDROCK

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

The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance  
Volume 35, Number 3 • Autumn/Winter 2018

Wilderness in Emery County Still Threatened by  
Bad Public Land Bill



**Cover Photo:** Many spectacular landscapes of the San Rafael Swell, including the Muddy Creek proposed wilderness pictured on the cover, would receive inadequate protection under the proposed Emery County Public Land Management Act (see page 6). Photo copyright Ray Bloxham/SUWA.



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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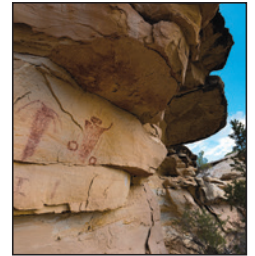
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## Redrock Wilderness • Volume 35, Number 3 • Autumn/Winter 2018

This issue of *Redrock Wilderness* was written by the following staff and outside contributors: Steve Bloch, Ray Bloxham, Adrienne Carter, Karin Duncker, Mathew Gross, Luke Henry, Olivia Juarez, Jeremy Lynch, Kya Marienfeld, Creed Murdock, Landon Newell, Dave Pacheco, Laura Peterson, Terri Martin, Jen Ujifusa and Michelle White. It was edited by Darrell Knuffke and laid out by Diane Kelly.

Newsletter design by Leslie Scopes Anderson.

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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SUWA, 425 East 100 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84111

**wilderness notes**

## What the Midterms Mean for the Redrock

Harry Truman once wished for a one-armed economist because he'd grown tired of hearing "On the one hand . . . on the other hand." This post-election wrap-up is a bit like that: slivers of hope set against hard reminders.

For public lands, the election's best news is probably this: the blue wavelet that washed over the House also swept away Rob Bishop's chairmanship of the House Resources Committee. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) will likely replace Bishop. Think Emperor Furiosa replaces Iago. It will be much more difficult for the Utah congressional delegation to move bad wilderness legislation.

We won't really celebrate, though, until we get past the dangerous uncertainty of a lame duck Congress. Retiring Utah Senator Orrin Hatch is trying to ram through his Emery County legislation. This late in the game, his likeliest avenue is to slip his anti-wilderness bill by inside some larger legislative package. It's our job to see that he fails. Labyrinth Canyon, Muddy Creek, and the San Rafael Badlands are in the balance.

But we hope the election will embolden Democratic leadership to block bad legislation in these few remaining weeks, even as their Republican counterparts redouble efforts to do all the damage they can before losing power. Lame duck Congresses often prove to be duds; they can also be dangerous. Muddying this lame duck's waters even further, Trump is relieved of whatever pressure he felt to act like an adult prior to the election. With a budget deadline of December 7th, he may yet have the chance to shut down the government to indulge some momentary whim.

We'll have to contend with the Trump administration for two more years; the election doesn't change that. But Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke faces a number of ethics-related investigations that may distract him some from his assaults on public land. Offsetting that faint hope is the likelihood that the Bureau of Land Management will be ever more servile in its acquiescence to local Utah politicians and their anti-public lands demands.

The midterms did nothing to quash Utah Governor Gary Herbert's massive litigation seeking control over national parks, monuments, and wilderness through the antiquated and repealed statute known as RS 2477 (see article on page 17).

There were some changes among Utah's congressional delegation. In potential good news for the environment, it appears Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams beat incumbent Republican Representative Mia Love. The outlook is less clear regarding former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney who returned to Utah to collect the retiring Hatch's seat. During his senate campaign, Romney pandered to the right-wing on public land issues. We'll see if he chooses to stay on the fringe.

At the state level, in what is the very essence of rotating bald tires, former San Juan County commissioner and all-terrain vehicle protest rider Phil Lyman replaced longtime State Representative Mike Noel. A leader in the State House, the bellicose Noel did his best to drag Utah backwards with false claims on public land issues and a penchant for wasting Utah tax dollars pushing his anti-federal views. Perhaps Lyman will surprise us by being something else. We doubt it.

Notably, this election brought real change to San Juan County, home of Bears Ears National Monument. Native Americans Kenneth Maryboy and Willie Grayeyes won two of three county commission seats. Both support Bears Ears; both beat candidates who didn't. This is an extraordinary shift of power to the Native American majority in a county where gerrymandering Anglo politicians have long suppressed native needs and native voices.



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**wilderness notes**

Make no mistake, Kenneth and Willie will face hostility from the entrenched county forces seeking to make them fail. Those forces were at work from the very beginning. The San Juan County Clerk sought to falsify documents in order to keep Willie off the ballot, but was busted by a federal judge. We wish the new commissioners success, and thank them for the courage to take on these offices.

We have survived half of the national nightmare of Donald Trump's reign. Each year becomes more dangerous as blatantly unqualified political appointees remain in place and work their mischief, twisting and distorting the bureaucracies that manage our public lands.

We operate in an ever-changing political environment at every level. Politicians, bureaucrats and judges come and go. The constant is the redrock wilderness and our resolve to defend it. Thank you for being part of this movement.

For the Redrock,



*Scott Groene*  
*Executive Director*



© Tom Till

*An aerial view of Jacob's Chair and White Canyon—wild lands in San Juan County formerly within the boundaries of Bears Ears National Monument.*



## features

### Hatch-Curtis Emery County Development Bill Worse than Bishop's Public Lands Initiative

We are at last in the waning months of the 115th Congress, arguably one of the most wretched in our country's history. The past two years have felt like decades because of President Trump's ceaseless attacks on public lands and the hostile climate they created nationally. But our final big battle in this Congress is a more parochial one and more familiar: fighting our own delegation over its continued failure to appreciate the public lands within Utah for the gems that they are.

Following the collapse of Representative Rob Bishop's Public Lands Initiative (PLI) last spring, one mangled component of that bill crawled out of the rubble—the piece that involved Emery County. The Emery County Public Lands Council eagerly seized on it as a vehicle for even worse anti-wilderness legislation. The council is desperate to designate as little wilderness as possible in the county because deep down they know how much is really there.

So do we, and the roll call is magical: the San Rafael Swell, Muddy Creek, Labyrinth and Desolation canyons, and the San Rafael Badlands. All told, nearly 1.5 million acres in the county are worthy of wilderness designation, and recommended for such in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. But what the county envisions for protection is a mere third of that.

#### Even Worse than the PLI

In many ways, the 2018 Emery County Public Land Management Act that Senator Orrin Hatch and Representative John Curtis are advancing is even worse than what the county cooked up with Bishop in the PLI. That is saying something. Wilderness proposed in earlier versions, such as Cedar Mountain, has dropped off the map. There is gypsum on Cedar Mountain and the main-changers are now staking the county's economic future on gypsum mining, just the latest in a long line of



© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

*Two thirds of the deserving wilderness in Emery County is left completely unprotected in the bill proposed by Sen. Hatch and Rep. Curtis, including the San Rafael River proposed wilderness, above.*



## features



© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

*The Emery County Public Land Management Act envisions no protection whatsoever for the San Rafael Badlands, a landscape rich in prehistoric cultural sites.*

industrial delusions there. Can't let wilderness get in the way of a bonanza like that, eh?

From the get-go, the county sought to achieve legislatively what it could not get any other way: thousands of miles of designated routes across public lands. Those were part of a travel plan that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) crafted to satisfy county demands. SUWA and our partners successfully challenged the travel plan in court, emerging with the requirement that the BLM must redo the travel plan in 2021. Emery seeks to nullify that result, asking Congress to overrule the courts.

We spent months trying to convince county officials that the only way to have an adult conversation about the bill was to drop the travel plan provision and move on to negotiating other matters; eventually, they came to see we were right, but not before squandering massive amounts of time. The awful travel plan provision was stripped from the bill only a week or so before a Senate committee marked up the measure. Getting that far was Step Zero. Now we can finally move on to Step One: fixing the woefully inadequate protections in the bill.

### What's Still Wrong with the Bill?

The bill leaves more than two thirds of the deserving wilderness in Emery County completely unprotected. It lacks sufficient protection for Muddy Creek, which, as the largest piece of proposed wilderness in the county, would be a no-brainer in a legitimate bill. Hatch and Curtis also leave important parts of Labyrinth Canyon unprotected, bizarrely designating wilderness on only the western side of the canyon corridor, and artificially curtailing boundaries to protect illegal mountain biking routes. And the bill envisions no protection whatsoever for the San Rafael Badlands, a rugged and incredibly wild landscape that is chock full of unique and precious archaeological sites.

But even if those three places were added, only half of the deserving wilderness identified in the Red Rock act would be safe.

House sponsor Curtis is fond of lecturing that nobody will get everything they want in this bill. What he apparently means is that wilderness advocates won't get all they want or even close. The

## features



SUWA Wildlands Field Director Ray Bloxham.

© EcoFlight

### Taking to the Air with EcoFlight

In September, SUWA staffers linked up with Bruce Gordon of EcoFlight to show journalists what's at stake in the truly awful Emery County Public Land Management Act. The aerial tour took media representatives over the San Rafael Swell and Desolation and Labyrinth Canyons.

For more than 15 years, SUWA has partnered with EcoFlight to bring its unique perspective to bolster our conservation efforts on the ground. These overflights in EcoFlight's Cessna 210s are a critical tool in helping decision makers, stakeholders, and journalists understand what's truly on the line in the wilderness debate in Utah. EcoFlight works with grassroots groups such as SUWA as well as national and international organizations to promote conservation. To learn more, visit [EcoFlight.org](http://EcoFlight.org).

Representing SUWA on the overflights were Wildlands Field Director Ray Bloxham, Wildlands Program Director Neal Clark, and Media Director Mathew Gross.



SUWA staffers with journalists after the flight.

© EcoFlight

other goodies in the bill, though, prove that a tiny band of Emery County officials is getting just about everything it wants on lands that belong to all Americans. Not only does the bill fail to protect hundreds of thousands of acres of wilderness, it also takes a bite out of an existing wilderness study area to facilitate a coal mine—exactly what our warming planet needs more of.

### Land Giveaways and Recreational Wreckage

The bill will worsen recreation impacts in many sensitive areas. A designation that was to be a National Conservation Area (NCA) in early versions of the bill has been downgraded to a "Recreation Area," completely changing the way the BLM will manage the lands. The bill turns over land around the existing Goblin Valley State Park to the State of Utah, effectively imposing a state user fee on lands visitors can now explore at no cost.

Finally, in order to get the bill through the mark-up stage, Hatch's office removed a federal-state land exchange that would have traded scattered state parcels in designated wilderness for non-wilderness lands elsewhere. Done well, land exchanges like these can be a conservation gain. But it became clear that Utah wanted to trade into a disputed parcel of land that the Ute Tribe claims as its own. Rather than tell the state School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) to come up with a better proposal, Hatch's office instead chose to sweep the issue under the rug.

The Utah delegation loves to hide behind school kids as it bludgeons public lands. Well, if the bill passes in its present form, the SITLA trust lands—meant to support education in Utah—will remain stranded. School kids? They will get diddly.

### What Comes Next?

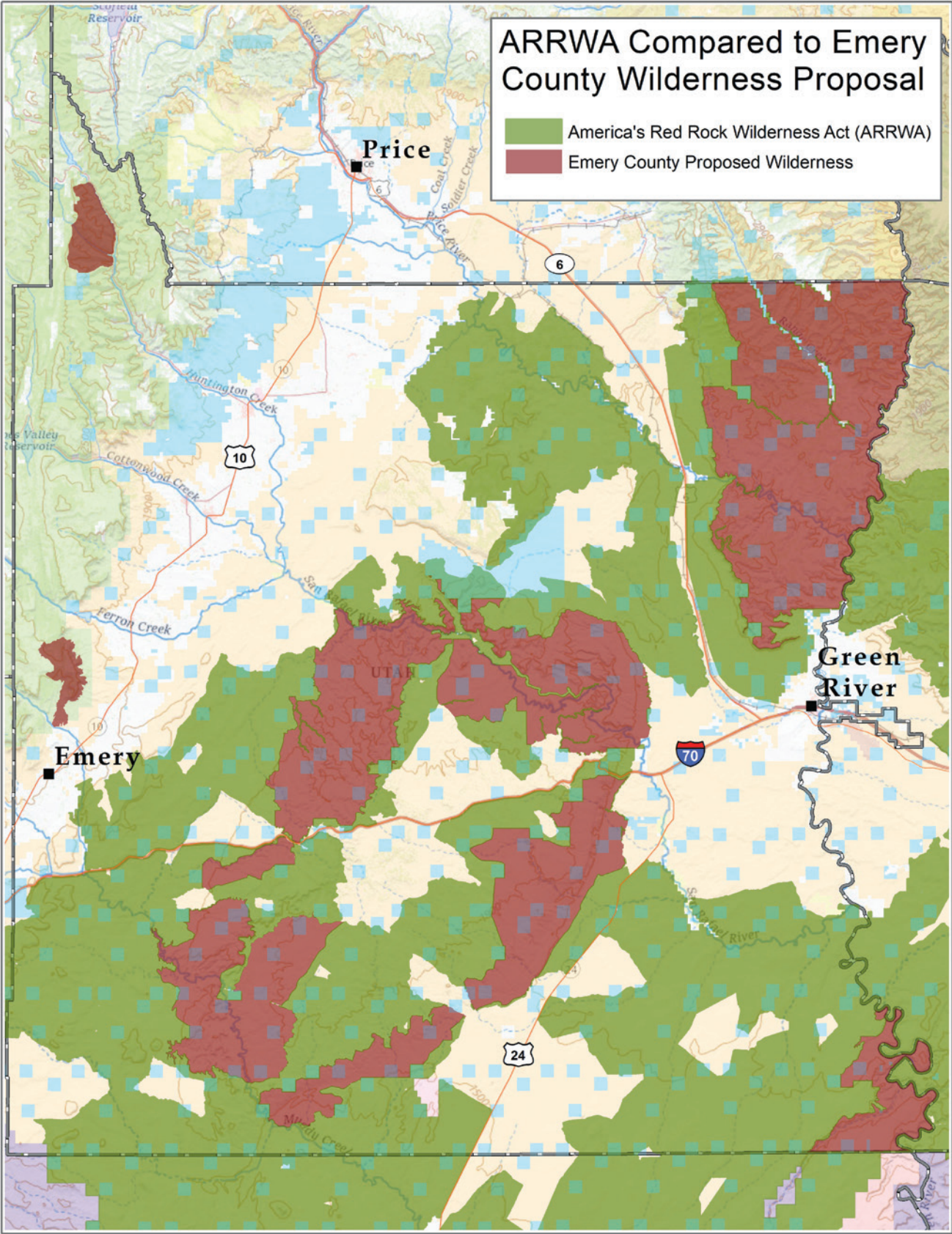
The bill has already had a mark-up in the House and Senate, passing out of committee in both chambers, but not before Representative Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), the champion of our Red Rock bill in the House, attempted to add Muddy Creek, Labyrinth Canyon, and an NCA for the San Rafael Badlands. The amendment failed, but we remain deeply grateful to Mr. Lowenthal for working so diligently to defend wilderness.

Likewise, Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL), the Red Rock bill's Senate champion for more than 20

*(Continued on page 10)*



features



## features

years, has been pressuring Hatch to try to improve the bill. The results remain uncertain, but we know this much: we've been successful countless times over the past few decades thwarting the Utah delegation's attempts to wreck the Swell, and the clock for floor time remaining in this congressional session is not on Hatch's side.

For just that reason, Hatch may act in desperation to attach the bill to some unrelated, must-pass measure in Congress. We are working to warn the cosponsors of the Red Rock bill of that possibility and urging them to fight back.

Lately it's impossible to know when the next item before Congress (think Brett Kavanaugh) may erupt into a national catastrophe, chipping away at the scarce remaining time for passage of lower-priority items such as public lands bills. Our crystal ball is foggier than ever.

But the one thing we do know is this: Utah's wilderness is better off without this bill than with it, and we are committed to fighting it to the end.

—Jen Ujifusa



© Terri Martin/SUWA

## Hundreds Speak Out at People's Hearing on the San Rafael Swell

Frustrated by the refusal of Senator Orrin Hatch and Representative John Curtis to provide the public a meaningful opportunity to help shape a public lands bill for the San Rafael Swell, the Utah Wilderness Coalition (which includes SUWA) and 15 other organizations hosted a "People's Hearing" in Salt Lake City in late August. More than 300 passionate wilderness advocates jammed the city's Main Library auditorium.

Speaker after speaker described how the Emery County Public Land Management Act fails to do justice to the globally significant wild lands in the San Rafael Swell and nearby Labyrinth and Desolation Canyons. Among those opposing the legislation were Salt Lake City's mayor, the Ute Tribe, archaeological professionals, outdoor recreation companies, a climate expert, and dozens more who know and love the Swell. For more about the hearing, including statements from some of the speakers, see our blog post at [suwa.org/PeoplesHearing](http://suwa.org/PeoplesHearing).



**DC news**

## Bill to Undercut Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Stalls but Still Threatens

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a mark-up in early October for over 50 bills. It was rumored that legislation included in what was rightfully nicknamed the “monster mark-up” could be the foundation of an omnibus public lands bill. SUWA was relieved, then, that S. 3297, the Washington County, Utah, Public Land Act, was not on the docket.

That bill, introduced by Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), provides for a 300-foot right-of-way for construction of a four-lane highway across the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. No alternate routes are being considered, and no real review of the current proposal has been conducted. There haven’t even been public meetings for concerned citizens to weigh in on this issue.

The roadway, besides fragmenting intact wild lands, would cut into prime habitat for the threatened

desert tortoise—a principal focus of protecting the reserve in the first place.

Though not yet marked up, the bill has been heard in the Senate. Its House companion, HR 5597, has been heard, marked up, and reported out of committee. Though it looks as if this bill has stalled in the Senate, there are still ways it could move before the end of the year.

—Adrienne Carter

## Surprise! No Designated Wilderness in Bishop’s Public Land Bill for Northern Utah

The 115th Congress has nearly run its course. That means there is little time left for hearings or mark-ups. But for Representative Rob Bishop (R-UT) there’s always time to introduce more terrible legislation. In late September, almost immediately before the House went into a month-long recess, Bishop introduced H.R. 6843, the Northern Utah Lands Management Act.

*(Continued on page 12)*



© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

*A bill introduced by Utah Senator Mike Lee would facilitate construction of a four-lane highway across the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve, compromising protected lands and prime desert tortoise habitat.*

## DC news

To say that a Bishop bill is fraught with fatal flaws is to repeat oneself. But this one is a doozy. Among its most outrageous provisions are these. It:

- Gives away public lands and resources, including over 1,000 acres to Uintah County, 80 acres to the city of Hyde Park, the Jones Hole Fish Hatchery to the State of Utah, and the Big Sand Wash Dam and surrounding facilities to the Central Utah Water Conservancy District.
- Undermines bedrock environmental law, including the national forest roadless rule.
- Undermines the National Landscape Conservation System by establishing a National Conservation Area with uses that actually undermine the NCA. The NCA language also advocates release of a phantom wilderness study area that doesn't seem to exist in the NCA.

- Fails to protect wilderness-quality lands that both Bishop and Uintah County earlier proposed to include in Bishop's Public Lands Initiative.

This bill has been rushed and it shows. There was no opportunity for public input nor, apparently, did Bishop want any. The bill also raises tribal issues, pointing to an even more compelling need for public review and comment.

This is, in short, a very bad bill. While it has not yet moved in Congress, Bishop could be hoping to make it the centerpiece of a House public lands package. That threat is very real. We'll keep you updated on what actions you can take. For now, please contact your members of Congress and let them know that this bill is unacceptable and should not pass—as a stand-alone measure OR as part of a package.

—Adrienne Carter

### Good News!

## Congressional Support for Red Rock Bill Strong in the 115th Congress

Support for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act has been impressive in the 115th session of Congress. Currently, the bill has 121 cosponsors in the House of Representatives and 26 in the Senate.

Additions since the summer newsletter include Rep. Richard Nolan (MN-8), Rep. Judy Chu (CA-27), Rep. Danny Davis (IL-7), Rep. Andre Carson (IL-7), Sen. Tina Smith (MN) and Sen. Bernie Sanders (VT). Support for the bill has surpassed that of the last Congress when the bill had 111 House cosponsors and 20 in the Senate.

These cosponsorships matter. When the bill becomes law it will protect much of the land area in the original Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National monuments as wilderness. It would also protect all 1.5 million acres of deserving lands we are fighting to protect in Emery County. In the interim, those lands remain at risk. The bill's congressional sponsors are our staunchest allies in fending off threats aimed at wild Utah.

While we have remarkable congressional support already—over a quarter of the members in both the House and Senate—we need to reach other members who haven't cosponsored the bill. Visit [suwa.org/arrwa](https://suwa.org/arrwa) and click on the link at the bottom left to ask your senators and representative to become cosponsors.

You can find the full list of cosponsors at [suwa.org/cosponsors](https://suwa.org/cosponsors). If any of your legislators have endorsed the bill, please take a moment to thank them for helping protect Utah's wild redrock country. And when the bill is reintroduced next year in the 116th Congress, we'll need your help to build support once again. Thank you!



## canyon country updates

Good  
News!

### Court Cases Challenging Trump's Unlawful Attack on Monuments to Stay in DC

We have cleared an important hurdle in our lawsuits challenging President Trump's unlawful attack on the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears national monuments. Recall that last December, the same day that Trump flew to Utah to announce his evisceration of the monuments, several lawsuits were filed in federal district court in Washington, DC challenging these unprecedented attacks.

The Department of Justice, with the state's full support, moved to transfer the cases from federal court in Washington to Utah. All the plaintiffs opposed the motion, including SUWA and its conservation partners, Native American tribes, and several businesses.

In late September, federal district court judge Tanya Chutkan denied the motion to transfer, noting: "... where cases involve substantial national implications, as these cases do, they cannot be considered the type of purely localized controversy that

would warrant transfer to a local district court. The national implications of these cases is abundantly clear. . . . given the natural and scientific resources, as well as cultural prehistoric and historic values of the monuments, the disposition of this case affects not only residents of Utah but all Americans."

The United States promptly filed a motion asking the court to dismiss our lawsuits under a variety of theories. Predictably, one was the specious argument that the Antiquities Act's grant of presidential authority to establish national monuments comes part and parcel with the power to destroy or largely eliminate them. All the plaintiffs have opposed those motions. We expect a ruling in the coming months though there is no set schedule.

Meanwhile, and per the judge's order, the parties have worked out an arrangement by which the United States will provide the plaintiffs with advance notice about such things as mining propos-



*Valley of the Gods, formerly protected as part of Bears Ears National Monument.*

© Judith Zimmerman

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**canyon country updates**

## Yes, Your Comments on Trump's National Monument Management Plans Really Do Matter

Ever since Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke released the rushed plans for what's left of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments (as well as the lands removed from monument status entirely), we've received calls and emails from supporters asking why they should even bother submitting comments if they will just be ignored.

Simply put, well-written, heartfelt comments in defense of these spectacular places establish a permanent historical record of public opinion (and these are, after all, our public lands). For example, after the sham Bears Ears "comment period" in the summer of 2017, we could confidently, and with evidence, point to the 2.9 million public comments submitted, 98 percent of which favored keeping the Bears Ears boundaries established by President Obama.

We cannot allow the Trump administration to proceed with its inadequate planning process as if nobody's watching, or worse, nobody cares. We know *you* care, so if you haven't already commented there's still time to weigh in on the administration's plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (the deadline for Bears Ears will have likely passed by the time you receive this). Visit our website at [suwa.org/GSENMcomments](https://suwa.org/GSENMcomments) and submit your comments by **November 30th**.

als and other surface disturbing activities inside the original monument boundaries. This will make sure that we can take the steps necessary to protect these places before any damage occurs.

The bottom line: while Trump's orders dismantling the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears monuments took only the stroke of a pen, it may take years of hard work to restore them to their full glory. With your continued support, we're in it for the long haul.

—Steve Bloch

## BLM Backs Down on West Desert Vegetation Project but Pushes Ahead Elsewhere

SUWA filed a lawsuit last fall to stop the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) from destroying pinyon-juniper woodlands in Hamlin Valley in Utah's West Desert.

In 2014, the BLM's Cedar City field office completed an analysis that broadly considered how

vegetation removal projects in the area, via chaining and bull-hogging (mulching) across almost 200,000 acres, would impact our public lands. The agency has ramped-up these so-called "treatments" in recent years using one shaky pretense after another (see our feature article in the spring 2018 issue).

The analysis did not describe how many of the 200,000 acres would be subject to the agency's ungentle manipulation, nor where it would occur. Its stated emphasis was "on analyzing the cumulative effects of multiple future activities rather than the direct and indirect effects of a single activity."

We assumed that the analysis of direct and indirect effects would follow at some point. Silly us. The BLM started approving and implementing projects without looking into any site-specific impacts and completed the first project with no public notice.

When we saw what the BLM was up to, we immediately contacted the agency and demanded that it live up to its commitment to perform additional analysis. The BLM balked, so we filed a lawsuit in federal court arguing that the agency had a duty under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to analyze and disclose the direct and indirect effects of these projects.



## canyon country updates

Even though two more projects were completed while the case was underway, we continued litigating, hoping to prevent further devastation from additional projects. After months of back and forth between us and the agency, the BLM finally backed down and agreed to prepare site-specific analyses for any additional projects in the greater Hamlin Valley area. With the BLM's commitment in hand—and one made expressly to the court—we agreed to dismiss our lawsuit.

### One Step Forward, One Step Back

Meanwhile, the BLM's Price field office just gave the green light to remove pinyon pine and juniper on over 3,000 acres of wilderness-quality lands west of the Green River. SUWA has formally challenged the decision.

The Tavaputs Project is particularly alarming because it would allow the BLM to demolish forest stands on over 2,500 acres in the Jack Canyon and Desolation Canyon Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). The agency will chop and shred these natural and native forests, then seed the land with non-native grasses.

WSAs are an important category of land proposed for protection in America's Red Rock Wilderness

Act, because they've already been recognized as having intact wilderness values. The BLM's duty to these wilderness-areas-in-waiting is clear and unambiguous: manage WSAs "so as not to impair" their suitability for permanent protection as wilderness, keeping them wild until Congress decides their fate. How, then, can the BLM undertake a scalping project on thousands of acres of public lands they're legally bound NOT to impair?

It is as simple as saying that up is down and night is day. The agency claims it is allowed this intrusion because the deforestation will actually "enhance" wilderness values, not impair them. Yet nowhere does the BLM explain how, specifically, the project will "enhance wilderness values," beyond claiming, with no supporting data, that it will benefit sage-grouse habitat.

We first learned of the BLM's plans for this project in early 2017 and have tried since to persuade the agency to abandon its planned tree removal activities in the Jack Canyon and Desolation Canyon WSAs. Nonetheless, the BLM pushed through its original plans. We've appealed the decision to the Interior Department's administrative law board.

—Luke Henry and Kya Marienfeld



© Twig Media/SUWA

*Scientifically unproven chaining and bull-hogging projects are destroying pinyon-juniper woodlands across Utah. In response to a lawsuit filed by SUWA, the BLM has at least agreed to prepare site-specific analyses for future projects in the greater Hamlin Valley area.*

## canyon country updates

## Trump Administration Targets San Rafael Desert, Dirty Devil for Energy Leasing

The Trump administration's quixotic "energy dominance" agenda continues to prioritize oil and gas development over all other uses of public lands, sacrificing Utah's wildest and most remote places in the process.

In its September lease sale, the most recent, the Utah Bureau of Land Management (BLM) offered 109 parcels spanning 204,178 acres of America's public land. Seventy-two of these lease parcels (158,944 acres) are located in the San Rafael Desert and northern Dirty Devil region—a remote wild

corner of Utah redrock country and one rich in cultural resources. The BLM sold 69 of the 109 lease parcels, many for the minimum bid of \$2 per acre.

With our partners, SUWA protested the sale, alleging violations of a long list of bedrock national environmental statutes. This practice of offering hundreds of thousands of acres at a time—regardless of what sensitive resources that puts at risk—is especially egregious in light of new BLM policy guidance which severely limits public involvement in the sales. The agency has eliminated the comment period on lease sale environmental assessments and shortened the time for protests over proposed lease sales from 30 days to just 10 days.

Happily, in September a federal magistrate judge in Idaho, in the Western Watersheds Project v. Zinke

### Taking It to the Streets

Big thanks to the activists who attended our September 11th press conference in Salt Lake City to protest the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) September oil and gas lease sale (see article above). The event was held jointly with the Utah Chapter Sierra Club and Center for Biological Diversity. Despite a formal protest submitted by SUWA and these partner organizations (among others), the Trump administration's BLM, led by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, went ahead with the sale anyway. What a pitiful and greedy sham. But all is not lost. While we fight them in the courts, we're taking our case to the American public by showing up in the streets. Your voice and physical presence make a difference. Keep showing up!



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SUWA Grassroots Organizer Dave Pacheco addresses a crowd of activists at a press conference protesting the BLM's September oil and gas lease sale.



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**canyon country updates**

case, issued a nationwide injunction prohibiting the BLM from following the Trump-Zinke accelerated leasing policies, at least with regard to parcels in proposed sage grouse habitat. The magistrate so ruled precisely because the BLM's new policy so severely constrains public participation that it is likely illegal.

The BLM's planned December 2018 lease sale, which was poised to be the largest in Utah in more than a decade, has been slimmed down in response to this decision. However, rather than delay the entire lease sale to ensure the legally-required opportunity for public participation, the BLM is moving forward with leasing over 150,000 acres of public land. The sale includes leases in Desolation, Labyrinth, and Monument canyons, Tin Cup Mesa, and the White River area.

SUWA will continue to be engaged at every step of the BLM's leasing processes. Stay informed of our work by signing up for alerts at [suwa.org](http://suwa.org).

—Laura Peterson

## Bellwether Trial: RS 2477 Case Hits the Road

SUWA continues to oppose Utah's state and county claims to thousands of "public highways" across America's public lands under a Civil War era statute known as Revised Statute (RS) 2477. If the state and counties win, more than 30,000 miles of dirt tracks, including faint paths through sensitive wild lands, have the potential to become paved, multi-lane highways—disqualifying vast areas from wilderness designation.

Over 20 cases filed by the counties and the state are on pause while awaiting the outcome of a "Bellwether trial." The Bellwether trial will focus on 15 claimed "public highways" in Kane County, 13 of which cut through the recently eviscerated Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The trial will give the parties a better understanding of the factual and legal issues that will apply to adjudication of the remaining claims.

As part of the lead-up to the trial, all parties and the court traveled to Kane County and drove the entire length of each of the 15 claims. Many required util-

ity task vehicles (UTV) to traverse the routes. UTVs are a souped-up cross between a golf cart and an all-terrain vehicle and can travel almost anywhere.

SUWA objected to the site visit on multiple grounds. We argued, for example, that it was irrelevant and prejudicial to view the condition of the routes more than 40 years after state and county rights would have to have been established. Joined by the United States, we also objected to driving multiple routes that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had kept closed for more than a decade. The court overruled our objections, intent on seeing every foot of every route.

Mother Nature failed to scuttle the trip, too. Despite rain and cold, and mud so deep that nearly all UTVs in the group had to be winched out, the tour of Kane County was completed. We remain very concerned that no formal record was made of the site visit; the court believed it would be "impractical" to have a court reporter present. It remains to be seen how the observations of the court will affect its final decision after trial, which is set for the first two weeks of February 2019.

—Michelle White

## Myopic BLM Chopper Decision May Doom Potash Bighorn Herd

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Moab field office recently approved a multi-year special recreation permit authorizing a private helicopter company to shuttle customers in and out of Mineral Bottom, south of Labyrinth Canyon and north of Canyonlands National Park in the Green River corridor.

The shuttles, which could occur every week during boating season, would bring the war-zone din of sustained helicopter landings to a backcountry airstrip that currently has no commercially-permitted traffic, either from fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters. The adjacent Hell Roaring, Mineral Bottom, Spring, and Tenmile canyons are all critical lambing and rutting habitat for a rare native population of desert bighorn sheep, the Potash herd. Unlike most other desert bighorns in Utah, those in the Potash herd are

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not transplants but descendants of sheep native to the place.

The best available science shows that bighorns are particularly sensitive to helicopter traffic; they perceive fixed-wing aircraft differently and with less alarm. The BLM's decision to grant this commercial permit will increase helicopter traffic to the area, traffic that could severely disrupt the sheep's breeding and lambing cycle—perhaps driving them from this excellent habitat altogether.

SUWA consistently expressed concerns over the permit's potential impacts, including suggesting specific measures to protect the herd in its most vulnerable seasons and places. The BLM went ahead with the permit in August. It includes no real protection, no closures, and no use restrictions to protect this important and vulnerable population of bighorn.

This permit stands out for its shortsightedness, and could cause the sheep herd irreparable harm. We have appealed the decision to the Interior Department's administrative law board and will keep you posted on the appeal's progress.

—*Kya Marienfeld*

## Roads-R-Us: Local Decision-Making at its Worst

The Trump administration's three-ring circus in Washington has diverted our attention from outrages against Utah wild lands by managers at the local levels of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Utah's BLM field office managers have always been too willing to do the bidding of county commissioners, cowboys, and off-road users regardless of environmental impact. But in the current political climate they have moved past willing, through eager, and on to outright zeal.

Here's a recent example from the Desolation Canyon proposed wilderness area. We wish it were atypical; it isn't. The Price BLM manager directed his staff to the remote Beckwith Plateau to bulldoze an old, rough, and practically reclaimed route to the top of the plateau. Did the BLM inform the public? No. Did it conduct any environmental analyses? Zero. Did agency staff talk to anyone about the project? Well, yeah: Emery County officials.

The agency's first excuse was "hunter access," but it quickly cooked up a better-sounding dodge: "improved access for search and rescue." The Emery County Sheriff's Department got into the game with a letter claiming, "We have needed to use these roads for access on several search and rescue efforts. Many times we have entered these areas by helicopter, however if a life or death situation arises these roads would be crucial access points for rescue." Got that? If a life is at stake, the sheriff could dispatch a helicopter as in the past but would probably go the slow way by road.

This isn't the first time the BLM has dispatched bulldozers to perform illegal work on our wild public lands in the past year. The Deep Creek Mountains and Steep Creek Wilderness Study Areas have been affected too. It's pretty clear that the agency will twist law and regulation until forced to stop. SUWA is reviewing legal and other options to do just that.

—*Ray Bloxham*

## Service as a Source of Regeneration—in More Ways than One

When the destruction we witness daily on our public lands becomes disheartening, service work is our most immediate antidote. The personal, existential anxiety brought on by witnessing drought-death among the piñon-juniper woodlands of southern Utah, or learning of yet another environmentally-destructive policy impacting our public lands, will find reprieve in direct, hands-on service.

It is a balm for fiery times to convene with those who share our concerns and restore dignity to the landscapes so severely impacted by an "energy dominance" agenda in Washington. We all live at the intersection of environmental and social justice, and our stewardship of wild places is a measure of the health of our human communities.

SUWA's service program was created to implement and support appropriate and effective land management practices among the agencies entrusted with protecting wild Utah. We are grateful for our volunteers and the good people in positions of authority



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*A service project in the San Rafael Swell with the University of Utah Bennion Center's first generation college students.*

willing to do the right thing to ensure that Utah's wilderness-quality lands remain wild.

### Taking Account of Our Accomplishments

In 2018, 226 volunteers joined 21 specialized SUWA service projects across Utah. Our committed crews tackled off-road vehicle (ORV) compliance issues, working hard to reclaim, naturalize and revegetate miles upon miles of closed and illegal routes in the Deep Creek Mountains, the San Rafael Swell, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, the Cedar Mountain Wilderness, and hard-hit wilderness study areas (WSAs) everywhere in between.

Our volunteers also dismantled and naturalized over 100 non-permitted campsites scarring the canyons of Cedar Mesa and the Wah Wah, Notch Peak and Swasey Mountain WSAs.

We installed signs and built strategic natural barriers of downed wood and drystacked stone to protect the magnificent wild lands identified in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act from errant motorized vehicles. Where appropriate, we also built, repaired, or improved over 2,000 feet of boundary and enclosure fence in places like Bears Ears National Monument to protect natural and cultural

resources from further degradation by people and—you guessed it—good old fashioned ungulates.

In January, we piloted the Wilderness Stewards—a volunteer-driven initiative to monitor and assess reclamation needs on public lands. Thirty-six Washington County residents attended a two-day session with our field staff and local BLM rangers to train in monitoring the county's extensive wilderness. In 2019, we will expand this initiative throughout Utah's counties, working with you to ensure that our public lands are protected.

Essential to our mission (and our future), we increased efforts to provide access to the tools and training necessary to empower Utah's young people to serve on public lands. We worked with first generation college students from the University of Utah, alternative break students, gap-year high schoolers, and young professionals in Utah's recreation industry—all with the explicit goal of empowering these rising generations to serve as stewards of our state's living redrock legacy.

We invite you to register as a Field Volunteer with SUWA this winter and—come Spring—to join us as we continue our work across Utah. Register today at [suwa.org/fieldvolunteers-apply](https://suwa.org/fieldvolunteers-apply).

## inside SUWA

### Utah Native Michael Mason Joins SUWA as GIS Analyst

We are pleased to announce that Michael Mason will join SUWA as a full-time geographic information systems (GIS) analyst to work alongside our wildlands and legal teams.

Michael is a Utah native who received his undergraduate degree in geography and a master's degree in GIS from the University of Utah. He has volunteered for SUWA in a variety of ways over the past few years, from GIS projects, to tabling at events, to visiting members of Congress in DC during Wilderness Week.

When Michael is not geeking out with all things GIS in the SUWA Salt Lake office he can be found playing guitar, practicing his salsa dance moves, or hiking his favorite trail in the redrock of southern Utah.

Michael is passionate about protecting Utah's wild places and we are excited to have him on our staff.



*Michael Mason at Havasu Falls, Grand Canyon.*

### New "Wild Utah" Film Premieres in Salt Lake City and Washington, DC



*SUWA's new film premiered to rave reviews in October.*

SUWA recently premiered our new documentary film, "Wild Utah: America's Red Rock Wilderness." The 14-minute film looks at the movement to protect Utah's last remaining wild places. With stunning videography, the film takes viewers through magnificent redrock landscapes and draws upon diverse voices to explain why these lands are worth protecting from the threats of fossil fuel extraction, off-road vehicle damage, hard rock mining, and anti-wilderness legislation from Utah's own politicians.

Watch our new film online at [suwa.org/videos](https://suwa.org/videos). If you belong to a business, organizational, or student group that would like to schedule a film screening and activism presentation, please write to us at [issues-action@suwa.org](mailto:issues-action@suwa.org).



## SUWA Introduces New “Wild Utah” Podcast

Over the past year or so, SUWA staff and board have considered ways to give our members, followers, and the general public a deeper dive into our work and the issues we’re tracking. We also wanted to provide a portable platform for you to engage SUWA on your own terms and schedule. The result is our new Wild Utah podcast. It is also meant to be a permanent repository for the ever-evolving story of the lands we all love, and we’re thrilled to bring it to you.

You can listen to Wild Utah at [www.suwa.org/podcast](http://www.suwa.org/podcast), under the News tab, or search for WILD UTAH on your preferred podcasting application or service. Subscribe to the Wild Utah podcast on Spotify, iTunes, RSS or your favorite podcast app.



## Uplifting Young People for Climate Justice

When the 2018 Uplift Climate Conference convened in Albuquerque in September, SUWA was well-represented by Olivia Juarez, Latinx community organizer, and several of SUWA’s grassroots leaders.

Uplift seeks to empower and unite young leaders to address climate change on the Colorado Plateau, asserting that climate issues are matters of justice. Uplift centers communities on the frontlines of climate disaster to resist exploitative systems that perpetuate climate injustices. Wilderness advocacy has a place in this mission.

Our perspectives on what drives young activists to engage in public lands conservation was broadened at Uplift. We learned that conference participants didn’t buy into the romanticized idea of wild public lands as a pristine refuge separate from human relation. They care about addressing the dark history at the dawn of land conservation in the U.S., which took place with the displacement of indigenous peoples in places now known as national parks. Participants see the need for confronting that history and reconciling it with today’s efforts to protect land from extractive industry and degradation.

Conversations arising from the conference panel on protecting Greater Chaco illuminated how valuable

justice and indigenous and multicultural leadership is to young people in the region. It’s clear that young people’s support for public land conservation springs from the goal to end sacrificing the West’s most culturally and ecologically significant places to the oil, gas, and coal industries—a task we’ve been up to for decades.

At an equal risk to the wild lands at stake, though, is the health of communities disproportionately impacted by these disastrous activities. Moving forward, it will be increasingly important for our work to prioritize issues where environmental justice and public land conservation intersect, from connecting more people of color to wilderness, to supporting frontline communities resisting climate injustices on public lands.

## SUWA Thanks Summer Interns Kaden McArthur and Sarah Beth Ross

We salute and thank our 2018 summer DC intern, Kaden McArthur, who has returned to Utah State University to complete his junior year.

Kaden impressed us early on with his passion and his preparedness. He arrived equipped to discuss everything from monuments to Emery County to RS 2477. The native Utahn’s passion for the issues was equally evident in any task he was given, whether

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*Big thanks to Kaden McArthur for assisting our DC team.*

working with our grassroots team or our legislative team.

SUWA's goal for internships is to make them valuable to the intern and helpful to the organization. Kaden suggests that we succeeded. "As an intern with SUWA's Washington office I felt like my input and skills were valued," he said. "I really enjoyed being a part of the efforts to defend the amazing landscape of southern Utah, something I am very passionate about, while experiencing how policy is made in the nation's capital."

Back in Salt Lake City, we had the pleasure of working with 2018 Weissman intern Sarah Beth Ross. SUWA is grateful to the family of Dr. Norman Weissman, which funds Internships for the Preservation of Wild and Scenic Utah in the doctor's name.

A Salt Lake Valley native, Sarah will soon graduate from Utah State University with a degree in environmental science. She headed up our outreach at a wide variety of festivals and fairs this summer and, in a separate summer job apart from her internship with us, completed field research on mountain amphibian populations. The practical experience of activism, organizing, and field research provided just what she was looking for as she finishes coursework and jumps into the workforce full-time.

Of her time at SUWA, Sarah says, "I learned that even small actions make large impacts in people's



*Best wishes to Sarah Beth Ross as she graduates from USU this spring.*

lives and for the future of our public lands. These lessons will be with me throughout my career." We offer Sarah our thanks and best wishes and once again thank the family of Dr. Norman Weissman for so generously funding our internship program.

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

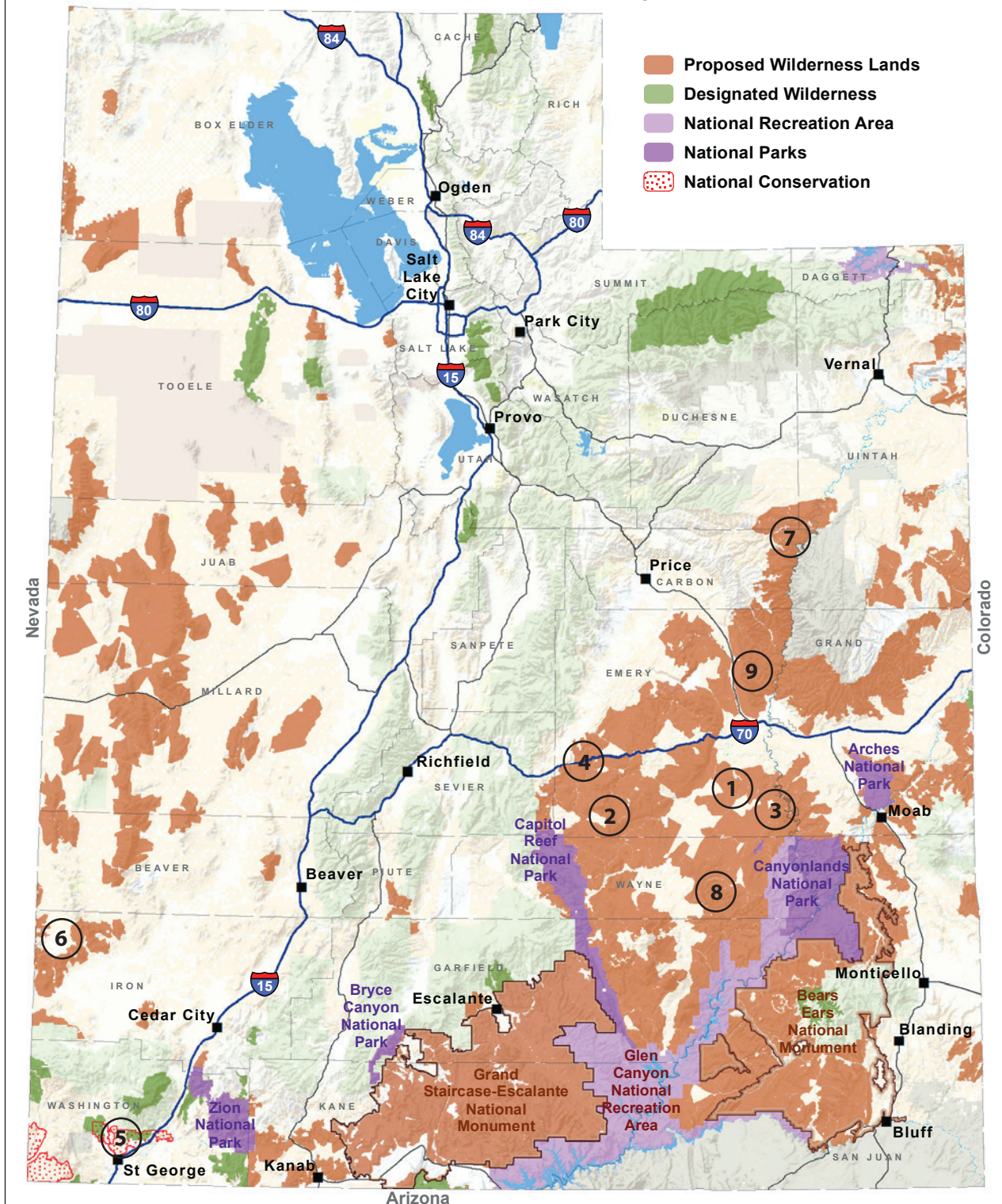
A bequest for SUWA is very simple to establish. Just name the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance in your will, trust, retirement plan, or life insurance policy, along with our contact information and tax I.D. number and the dollar amount or percent of your estate you wish to contribute.

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](https://suwa.org/plannedgiving).



# America's Red Rock Wilderness Act

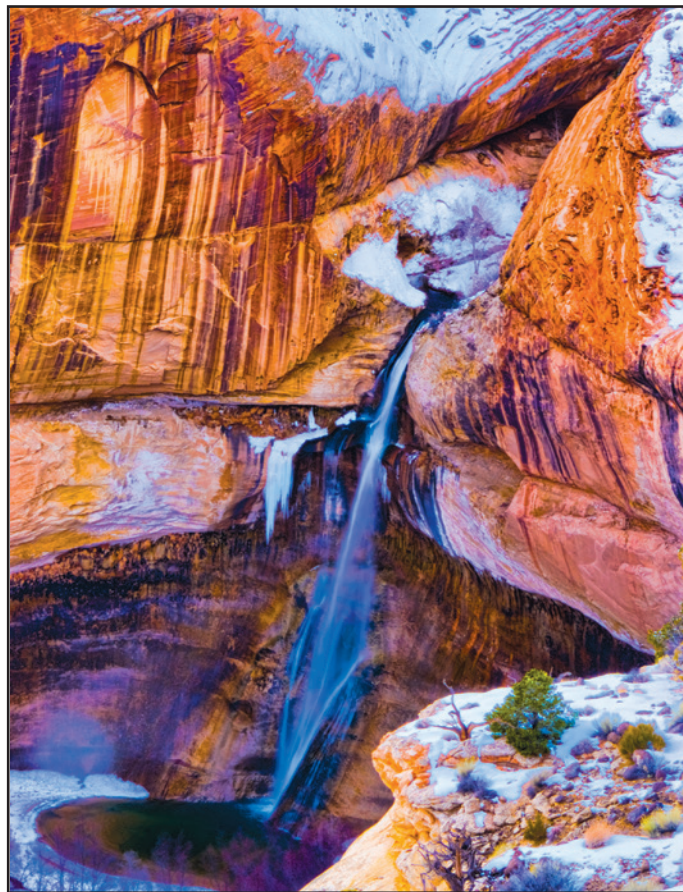
A Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in Utah



Reference Map for Articles in this Issue

- |                           |                                     |   |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| ① San Rafael River (p. 6) | ④ San Rafael Badlands (p. 7)        | ⑦ Jack Canyon/Desolation Canyon (p. 15) |
| ② Muddy Creek (p. 7)      | ⑤ Red Cliffs Desert Reserve (p. 11) | ⑧ Dirty Devil (p. 16)                   |
| ③ Labyrinth Canyon (p. 7) | ⑥ Hamlin Valley (p. 14)             | ⑨ Beckwith Plateau/Desolation (p. 18)   |





© Tom Till

*Calf Creek Falls in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument*

## Get a Free SUWA Beanie with Year-End Gift Membership Purchases!

'Tis the season for SUWA gift memberships. Purchase a \$25 gift membership during the month of November or December and receive a free SUWA beanie! You can even buy a gift membership for yourself (we won't tell anyone). New members will receive a welcome packet containing a newsletter and yellow "Protect Wild Utah" sticker. Purchase gift memberships on our website at [suwa.org/giftmemberships](http://suwa.org/giftmemberships) (order by Dec. 7th to guarantee delivery in time for Christmas).

## Become a Sustaining Member with SUWA's Monthly Giving Program

If you'd like a convenient, hassle-free way to help SUWA, our monthly giving program is for you. Monthly giving of any amount is easy and secure, includes all the benefits of membership, and provides SUWA with reliable, year-round funding to fight current and future threats to the redrock. Is protecting the redrock worth \$5 or \$10 a month to you? That's only \$60 or \$120 a year and goes a long way to helping keep your public lands wild.

Already a sustaining member? For just \$5 or \$10 more a month, you can make an even greater impact and provide SUWA with a reliable funding source to keep fighting for your public wild lands in these very challenging times.

For more details on joining SUWA or becoming a sustaining member, please visit our website at [suwa.org/donate](http://suwa.org/donate).