



# REDROCK

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

The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance  
VOLUME 42, NUMBER 3 • AUTUMN-WINTER 2025

**CONGRESS RAMPS UP ATTACKS ON UTAH WILDERNESS,  
OTHER PUBLIC LANDS**





The mission of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) is the preservation of the outstanding wilderness at the heart of the Colorado Plateau, and the management of these lands in their natural state for the benefit of all Americans.

SUWA promotes local and national recognition of the region's unique character through research and public education; supports both administrative and legislative initiatives to permanently protect Colorado Plateau wild places within the National Park and National Wilderness Preservation Systems or by other protective designations where appropriate; builds support for such initiatives on both the local and national level; and provides leadership within the conservation movement through uncompromising advocacy for wilderness preservation.

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This issue of *Redrock Wilderness* was written by the following staff and outside contributors: Steve Bloch, Scott Braden, Judi Brawer, Neal Clark, Scott Groene, Lauren Hainsworth, Jeremy Lynch, Heather Rose Martinez, Landon Newell, Laura Peterson, and Grant Stevens. It was edited and laid out by Diane Kelly. Newsletter design by Amy Westberg.

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

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## BUILDING THE FUTURE WHILE DEFENDING THE REDROCK

While SUWA and the *Protect Wild Utah* movement remain strong and vibrant, the political landscape around us continues to rapidly deteriorate. As I write this, the federal government is shut down and the Trump administration has begun furloughing federal workers. The impacts on land management agencies like the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are deeply concerning.

Congress recently used the little-known Congressional Review Act to undo several BLM Resource Management Plans finalized during the Biden administration—plans that involved years of collaboration and public input (see page 5). Closer to home, the BLM is in the process of reopening motorized routes along the Green River in Labyrinth Canyon that were closed in 2023 to protect wildlife habitat, cultural sites, and quiet recreation opportunities (see page 10). And let's not forget the State of Utah's lawsuit demanding that the federal government sell off 18.5 million acres of public land in Utah. While the U.S. Supreme Court rejected that lawsuit in January, we know we haven't seen the last of it.

The strategy is to make our system of public lands fail so that corporate interests can swoop in. Energy, mining, and development companies are the beneficiaries; the American people get robbed. **But today, the fight isn't just about how public lands are managed—it's about the very survival of the federal public lands system itself.**

Yet, in the middle of all this, we've seen glimmers of what's possible when we build broad coalitions. When Utah Senator Mike Lee tried to sneak a massive public land sell-off into Congress's budget negotiations this summer, the public response was swift and bipartisan—uniting everyone from legacy environmental organizations to hunters and anglers to right-wing podcast hosts. The proposal collapsed under the weight of its own cynicism, with the help of four key Republican senators from Idaho and Montana and the backstop of bipartisan opposition in the House of Representatives. My takeaway: we have allies everywhere, if we're willing to reach for them.

This spirit of relationship-building is driving our work in Washington, DC right now. In September, I joined wilderness advocates from across the country in DC for the National Wilderness Coalition's second annual fly-in (see page 8). SUWA helped found this coalition to reinvigorate the wilderness movement—making it more inclusive, connecting regional and local activists, engaging with Indigenous communities and, critically in this moment, cultivating new champions for wilderness in Congress. The work is slow and long-term, but essential.

Over the next few years, SUWA will be talking a lot about the defensive battle we're fighting to hold onto the redrock wilderness. At the same time, we are also building the future of the *Protect Wild Utah* movement—one grounded in collaboration, inclusion, and shared purpose. Both are necessary. It's that work of building for the future that gives us the hope and fortitude to endure through the bruising fights of today. Thank you for making that work possible.

For the Redrock,

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

Scott Braden  
Executive Director

# CONGRESS RAMPS UP ATTACKS ON UTAH WILDERNESS, OTHER PUBLIC LANDS

When the last issue of *Redrock Wilderness* (Summer 2025) was published, we were in the thick of a fight to keep a public lands sell-off proposal out of Congress's 2025 Budget Bill. Pushed by Utah's own Senator Mike Lee under the guise of affordable housing, the various iterations of the proposal were extraordinarily unpopular and denounced across the political spectrum.

After many rounds of back-and-forth and amid some drama with the Senate Parliamentarian, Senator Lee admitted defeat and withdrew his proposal. The collective outrage from people across the country convinced four Republican senators (Jim Risch and Mike Crapo of Idaho, Steve Daines and Tim Sheehy of Montana) to buck the party and threaten to vote no if necessary. In a moment where every vote counted, Senator Lee knew he was out of luck.

Just a few days later, Congress passed the 2025 Budget Bill, known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). While it fortunately did not contain provisions enacting the outright sale of public lands, the legislation still guts tax credits for clean energy, undermines the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and creates new handouts to extractive industries—all of which will threaten wild public lands for decades to come. We're already starting to see the ramifications of this singularly awful bill. In just a few short months, oil and gas leasing has increased (see page 13), and the Trump administration has announced it is making millions of acres of public land available for coal leasing (see page 12).

## CONGRESSIONAL ROLLBACK OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS

Not content with just interfering in public land management through bad budget legislation, Republicans in Congress tapped an obscure law known as the Congressional Review Act (CRA) to further hamstring land management agencies. In a first, they used the CRA to invalidate three recently completed Resource Management Plans (RMPs) in Montana, Alaska, and North Dakota. Prior to this, the CRA had largely been confined to rules or regulations finalized by a federal agency under a previous administration.

RMPs were not viewed as rules or regulations until this current Congress. They are essentially blueprints that guide how the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages pub-



**Congress's unorthodox use of the Congressional Review Act has raised big concerns . . . It has also raised lots of questions, such as: what rules will govern after a land management plan has been disapproved and how will the BLM issue a new plan for that area."**

lic lands within a specific area, including where activities such as oil and gas leasing, mining, off-road vehicle (ORV) travel, conservation, and various forms of recreation are prioritized. These behemoth documents, covering hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands, often take years to create, with many opportunities for public input and compromise.

Congress's unorthodox use of the CRA has raised big concerns among western elected officials, conservationists, hunters and anglers, and even regulated industry across the nation. It has also raised lots of questions, such as: what rules will govern after a land management plan has been disapproved and how will the BLM issue a new plan for that area? People have theories about how to answer these questions but we're truly in uncharted waters.

SUWA's staff in Washington, DC worked with our partners to try to convince the handful of moderate Republicans in Congress that undoing RMPs is a terrible idea and can lead to real mischief in how our public lands are managed. Unfortunately, our warning fell on deaf ears. The votes in Congress to disapprove of these three plans fell neatly along party lines.

Since the initial three RMPs were invalidated, similar "resolutions of disapproval" have been introduced for plans in Northeast Wyoming and Western Alaska. We're keeping an anxious eye out for a resolution targeting redrock country.

## NEW LEGISLATION FROM UTAH SENATORS MIKE LEE & JOHN CURTIS

While the government is shut down (as of press time) and thousands of federal workers are furloughed, Utah's senators have kept themselves busy by introducing more



**It is shameful that [Senator Lee] would so blatantly use the disability community in his ongoing attempts to dismantle public lands, build and prioritize roads, and sell lands to the highest bidder. People with disabilities are not political pawns to be used while catering to special interests.”**

**—Syren Nagakyrie, Founder and Director of Disabled Hikers**

anti-public lands legislation. Senior senator and longtime public lands adversary Mike Lee introduced the Border Lands Conservation Act, which would undermine the Wilderness Act and effectively hand over all public lands within 100 miles of either U.S. border to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to establish a domestic surveillance zone. Specifically, the bill would amend the Wilderness Act to allow the DHS to use motorized vehicles and to construct new roads, physical barriers/fences, towers, and other infrastructure (remote video surveillance, motion sensors) within designated wilderness areas.

To make matters worse, the language of the bill would apply to any wilderness area so long as the DHS asserted that their activity was related to the broad, vague, and undefined purpose of “securing” either border. It also removes any and all ability for land management agencies to limit U.S. Border Patrol activities on all public lands within 100 miles of either border.

Joining Senator Lee on four other public lands-related bills is Utah’s junior senator and former representative, John Curtis. First up is the Brian Head Town Land Conveyance Act, which directs the Secretary of Agriculture to convey approximately 24 acres of public land within the Dixie National Forest to the Town of Brian Head, Utah, at no cost. The bill authorizes the town to use the land for a public works facility or other municipal purposes as determined by local officials.

The Brian Head bill represents a concerning precedent for federal land management. Most public land transfers require financial compensation or land exchanges of equivalent value to ensure that taxpayers are not subsidizing local or private interests; this legislation grants federal land for free. There’s no requirement for public notice or consulta-

tion, denying nearby residents, recreation users, and Tribal Nations the opportunity to weigh in. Additionally, 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.

Second is the deceptively-named Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act. The bill exploits Americans with disabilities to push a radical motorized recreation agenda—one where public lands are blanketed in ORV routes and land managers have no discretion to limit motorized use to protect resources or balance competing uses. To be clear, it is not the disability community advocating for this bill, it is the off-roading groups. Importantly, there are already provisions in federal law that enable people with disabilities to access public lands with power-driven mobility devices. This legislation is nothing more than an attempt to significantly expand destructive motorized use under the guise of disability access.

SUWA worked with disability and conservation groups to respond to the legislation, which garnered media attention with this powerful quote from Syren Nagakyrie, Founder and Director of Disabled Hikers: “The Americans with Disabilities Act is landmark civil rights legislation that disability rights activists fought for decades to achieve, and the principles of which Senator Lee has repeatedly voted against. In contrast, it appears that the ‘Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act’ does not have input from the broader disability community and prioritizes one type of access at the expense of all others. It is shameful that he would so blatantly use the disability community in his ongoing attempts to dismantle public lands, build and prioritize roads, and sell lands to the highest bidder. People with disabilities are not political pawns to be used while catering to special interests.”

Senators Lee and Curtis are also sponsoring two new bills that would open national parks to ORVs, fundamentally altering the visitor experience and damaging landscapes that draw millions of visitors each year. They’re called, respectively, the State Motor Vehicle Laws in National Park System Units Act and the OHVs in Capitol Reef National Park Act.

The State Motor Vehicle Laws in National Park System Units Act would open National Park Service roads to ORVs nationwide, including “street-legal” all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) on paved roads, and dirt bikes, ATVs, and side-by-sides (UTVs) on dirt roads and trails. Currently, nearly all National Park Service units prohibit ORVs, with only a few exceptions permitted by specific legislation for some National Recreation Areas, National Seashores, and National Lakeshores.





THE "OHVS IN CAPITOL REEF NATIONAL PARK ACT" WOULD AUTHORIZE ORV USE ON A DOZEN PAVED AND DIRT ROADS IN THE PARK—ROUTES THAT ARE CURRENTLY CLOSED TO SUCH USE TO PROTECT SPECIFIC CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES AS WELL AS THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

The OHVs in Capitol Reef National Park Act would authorize ORV use on a dozen paved and dirt roads in Capitol Reef National Park (the term OHV, or off-highway vehicle, is synonymous with ORV). These routes are currently closed to such use to protect specific cultural and natural resources as well as the visitor experience. Opening any Park Service paved or dirt roads to ORV use would directly contradict National Park Service staff expertise and on-the-ground knowledge, which makes clear that such a decision would cause irreversible damage.

Collectively, these final three bills are intended to prioritize motorized recreation at the expense of natural and cultural resources as well as other public lands users. Utah's congressional delegation is driven by an extreme and out-of-touch vision for public lands, where wild places are turned into motorized playgrounds, motorized recreation is viewed as the highest and best use of our shared heritage, and the value of public land is defined by how many places you can drive your ORV.

## GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

At the time of publication, the federal government is shut down—sadly, we've been through this before and know the

dramatic impacts it will have on the already beleaguered and decimated federal workforce (who have been threatened with additional reductions in force), as well as on the public lands themselves. Prior shutdowns have resulted in countless incidents of intentional damage to public lands (including illegal ORV use) and vandalism. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum is using the shutdown to push forward an "energy dominance" agenda (approving more fossil fuel and mining projects) while nonessential staff are furloughed.

Right now is a scary time for the redrock and public lands, with more attacks sure to be coming from Congress. It's more critical than ever that we build congressional support for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act (ARRWA), which is both our vision for protected public lands in southern Utah and a key source of political power. You can find a current list of ARRWA cosponsors on page 9; if your elected officials aren't on it, please urge them to become cosponsors. In this time of powerful new coalitions and a rapidly changing political landscape, don't underestimate the importance of contacting your elected officials and speaking up for the redrock!

—Steve Bloch, Laura Peterson, & Neal Clark

## NATIONAL WILDERNESS WEEK BRINGS DOZENS OF ADVOCACY GROUPS TO WASHINGTON, DC

In September, the National Wilderness Coalition (NWC) headed to DC for the second annual National Wilderness Week fly-in. More than 60 individuals representing over 27 different organizations and 21 different states came together with the same goal: advocating for wilderness and the protection of public lands. SUWA was well-represented, with a mix of staff, board, and redrock activists in attendance.

Over three days, advocates held over 100 meetings with members of Congress across the political spectrum; nearly a third of the meetings were with Republican legislators. At a moment when it feels like there is an ever-deepening divide between parties, the NWC was committed to reminding elected officials that wilderness designation should not be, and has not always been, a partisan issue.

Mixed into the packed days of meetings, the NWC held two fantastic events. First, a live podcast was recorded with Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN) in partnership with *The Wild Idea* podcast hosted by Bill Hodge and Anders Reynolds. The conversation covered the importance of our connections to place, the threats from Congress and the Trump administration, and the necessity of coming together to care for ourselves and each other as we continue the difficult work of advocating for the protection of these wild spaces.



DURING THE SEPTEMBER FLY-IN, THE NWC'S INDIGENOUS COMMITTEE HOSTED A POWERFUL INDIGENOUS VISIBILITY EVENT IN FRONT OF THE CAPITOL. © SUWA

Second, the NWC's Indigenous Committee hosted a powerful Indigenous Visibility Event in front of the Capitol in partnership with Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández of New Mexico (D-NM-3). This event highlighted the deep connections of Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Nations to wilderness and public lands, the impact communities have felt from environmental injustice, and the important leadership role Indigenous Peoples have always played and continue to play in the wilderness movement.

SUWA is grateful to be a founding member and active participant in the NWC. For more information about the fly-in, and to listen to a recording of *The Wild Idea* podcast or watch a video of the Indigenous Visibility event, visit [nationalwildernesscoalition.org](https://nationalwildernesscoalition.org) and click on "Our Work."

—Lauren Hainsworth

### PUBLIC LANDS RULE IN JEOPARDY

In September, the Trump administration began the process, long anticipated by conservationists, of rescinding the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Public Lands Rule. Finalized in 2024, this landmark rule reiterated the common sense point that conservation is one of the many uses Congress intended for BLM-managed public lands, along with things like recreation, renewable energy, grazing, and mining. Broadly speaking, the Public Lands Rule laid out steps for restoring degraded public lands, improving land health, and conserving some of the West's wildest places.

Instinctively opposed to everything the rule stands for, and whipped into a frenzy by oil and gas, grazing, and motorized recreation interests, Republicans worked to prevent the rule from being finalized. Utah's own Senator John Curtis and Representative Celeste Maloy (R-UT-2) did their part by introducing companion bills in Congress that aimed to undo it. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum then picked up the mantle and began a formal process to roll back the rule, kicking off a 60-day public comment period that closed on November 11th (thanks to all who submitted comments!). We'll let you know what happens next and how to stay involved.



## MEMBERS OF CONGRESS NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU!

America's Red Rock Wilderness Act was reintroduced in the 119th Congress (both House and Senate) on March 27, 2025. This visionary legislation would designate more than 8 million acres of Bureau of Land Management land in Utah as federally protected wilderness. As the ancestral home of many Native American tribes, the region contains abundant and significant cultural resources. Protecting this spectacular and world-renowned landscape would also keep polluting fossil fuels in the ground and provide a vital corridor for the movement and climate adaptation of western wildlife species.

If your members of Congress are listed below, please thank them for their cosponsorship of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. If any of them are not listed, please visit [suwa.org/cosponsorARRWA](https://suwa.org/cosponsorARRWA) and ask them to become a cosponsor today! For tips on making your outreach more effective, contact one of our regional organizers and they'll be happy to assist you (see [suwa.org/regionalorganizers](https://suwa.org/regionalorganizers)).

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## TRUMP ADMINISTRATION GOES AFTER LABYRINTH CANYON

In September, the Trump administration announced its plan to expand destructive off-road vehicle (ORV) use in the Labyrinth Canyon area. The move came less than two years after the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) finalized a plan determining where ORV use is and is not allowed in the region (see autumn-winter 2023 feature story).

Few places in redrock country are as well-known and loved as the Labyrinth Canyon stretch of the Green River, which was congressionally designated as a “scenic river” under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 2019. For more than 40 miles, the river’s placid waters flow through towering canyon walls, providing an unparalleled multi-day wilderness adventure suitable for boaters of all ages and experience levels.

The 2023 Labyrinth Canyon Travel Management Plan struck a thoughtful balance between motorized and non-motorized recreation and protected this internationally recognized river corridor, including its irreplaceable cultural and

historic sites, critical wildlife habitat, and unmatched quiet recreation opportunities. The plan was a long overdue step forward, closing about 300 miles of dirt routes and two-tracks while keeping open over 800 miles of routes across a roughly 300,000 acre planning area—in addition to the more than 4,000 miles of routes that remain open in the greater Moab area. Over 4,500 SUWA members and supporters submitted comments on the plan.

Now, at the behest of the State of Utah and others, the Trump administration is planning to reverse course and open 141 miles of previously closed routes, including along the Green River and within Hell Roaring and Mineral Canyons. The people pushing this course reversal aren’t seeking reasonable access or balance in public land management. They simply want to allow ORVs anywhere and everywhere, regardless of the impact to ecosystems, wildlife, and other public land visitors.



THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION PLANS TO REVERSE COURSE ON THE EXISTING LABYRINTH CANYON TRAVEL PLAN AND OPEN 141 MILES OF PREVIOUSLY CLOSED ORV ROUTES, INCLUDING ALONG THE GREEN RIVER AND WITHIN HELL ROARING AND MINERAL CANYONS. © SUWA/ECOFIGHT

## OTHER TRAVEL PLANS HANG IN THE BALANCE

In addition to the Labyrinth Canyon Travel Plan, three other recently completed travel plans are now at risk: the San Rafael Swell, Henry Mountains/Dirty Devil, and San Rafael Desert. Completed between 2022 and 2025, these travel plans were more of a mixed bag, falling short of what we were hoping for both in terms of landscapes protected and total miles of routes designated for ORVs.

In each of the plans, the BLM opened substantial miles of new routes to ORVs and failed to adequately protect wilderness values and wildlife habitat. At the same time, the agency did close certain routes that had reclaimed, had never existed on the ground, or where vehicle use caused serious environmental harm.

Not satisfied with the thousands of miles of routes already open to motorized vehicles in these areas, ORV advocacy groups and the State of Utah have challenged all three of these plans in federal court. We expect that the BLM will try to revisit these decisions and walk back even the minimal progress those plans made, further expanding destructive ORV use in these spectacular and wild areas. We'll keep you posted and let you know when and how to make your voice heard.

We expect the BLM to issue a decision later this year to expand ORV use in Labyrinth Canyon. While this is a significant step back, it is not the final word. We will not stop fighting to Keep Labyrinth Canyon Wild.

—Laura Peterson

## BLM RUSHES TO APPROVE MINE IN PROPOSED WILDERNESS

With astonishing speed, and just before the government shutdown, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Modena Mine, which would permanently scar beautiful Modena Canyon in Utah's West Desert region, just south of Hamlin Valley. The pozzolan mine area intrudes into BLM-identified wilderness-caliber lands proposed for wilderness designation in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. Pozzolan is used as an additive for concrete.

The BLM's decision ignores the significant concerns raised by local Hamlin Valley residents, Tribes, recreation users, and SUWA about the mine's likely impacts to public health and safety, cultural resources, air quality, water use, bird and other wildlife habitat, and wilderness values. In fact, the agency failed to analyze the mine's potential impacts on any of these resources.

The almost 20-acre mine area occupies a small ridge directly adjacent to the winding, unpaved Modena Canyon

Road, which forms the border between the Crook Creek and Paradise Mountain proposed wilderness areas. To mine the pozzolan, hydraulic excavators would remove the entire ridge down to road level. The peaceful Modena Canyon would be further shaken by the onsite "impact crusher" used to crush the rock down to a marketable size.

The BLM's decision also approves a 5-acre gravel pit several miles south of the mine that would facilitate the roadwork necessary to enable up to 40 industrial haul trucks per day to travel through the scenic canyon.

SUWA is extremely concerned that the mining company, Progressive Contracting Inc. (PCI), and BLM are chopping a much larger mining operation into small pieces to avoid conducting a comprehensive environmental analysis of the larger mine's significant impacts.

While the recent decision approves only 20 acres of mining across three mining claims, Iron County recently approved a conditional use permit for mining operations across a 200-acre area, and the mining company has at least 13 total mining claims. Yet, neither PCI's plan of operations nor the BLM's decision make any mention of the likelihood that the Modena Mine will expand appreciably in the future.

We're looking into all avenues to challenge this decision and will keep you informed as things move forward.

—Judi Brawer



## INTERIOR DEPARTMENT OPENS MILLIONS OF ACRES TO COAL LEASING, PUTTING PARKS AND MONUMENTS AT RISK

Tucked into President Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" that became law this past summer was a section requiring the Interior Department to make at least four million acres of "known recoverable coal resources" available for lease. Perhaps in an effort to preen for his boss (the president), or maybe because he really believes his own "mine baby mine" rhetoric, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum announced in October that he was making more than 13 million acres of public land available for coal leasing nationwide.

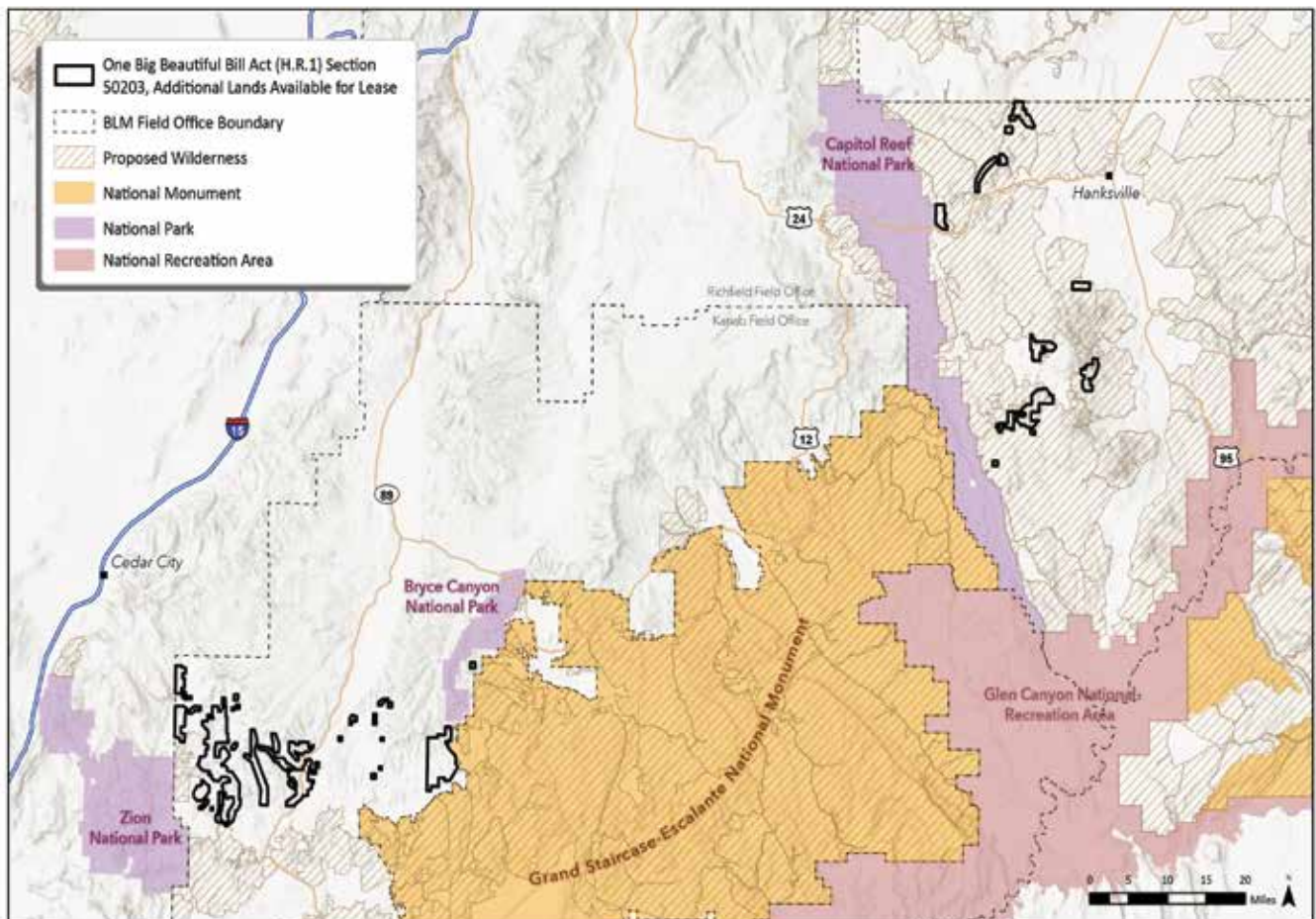
On its face, Utah's share of the 13 million acres—a modest 48,000 acres compared to 6.7 million acres in Montana—appears relatively insignificant, but upon closer examination we discovered two alarming facts.

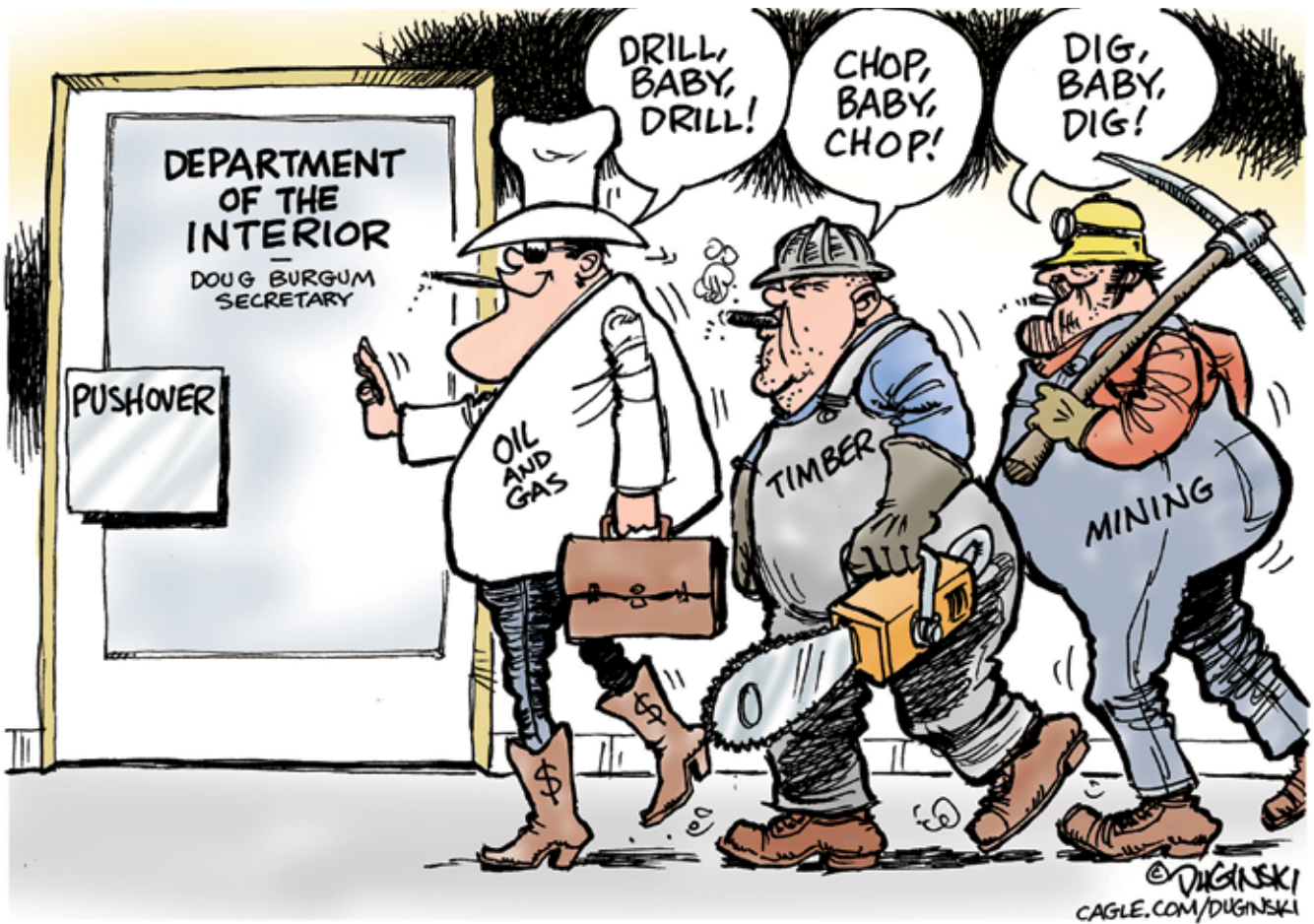
First, many of these newly opened lands were immediately adjacent or very close to three national parks (Capitol

Reef, Bryce, and Zion) as well as Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (see map). If Burgum has his way, the views from both the eastern entrance to Capitol Reef and Yovimpa Point at the southern end of Bryce Canyon's scenic drive could be marred by industrial development.

Second, the vast majority of those 48,000 acres were identified by the BLM in 2008—under Republican Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne—as unsuitable for coal mining, in part because of their proximity to parks and monuments. Nothing has changed since then, except for Trump and Burgum's utter contempt for protected western public lands and their insistence on propping up a dying industry. We'll be keeping a close eye out for lease applications for any of these 48,000 acres and will work to defeat them.

—Steve Bloch





## BOOK CLIFFS REGION TARGETED FOR OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT

The Trump administration's "energy dominance" agenda has clearly arrived in Utah as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) moves forward with three separate—and controversial—oil and gas leasing proposals. These proposals would blanket the Book Cliffs region of eastern Utah with fossil fuel leases, threatening the region's big game, black bear and greater sage-grouse habitat, and wilderness-caliber lands. There are even several lease parcels in the scenic White River corridor, a quiet stretch of river that is managed for the protection of its stunning visual and riparian values.

This latest push for development is part of the Trump administration's relentless attack on public lands. From the beginning, the administration moved quickly to eliminate environmental regulations, reduce oil and gas oversight—

including the royalties paid to the public for the use of their public lands and minerals—and open new areas to development.

Now, the BLM is marching in lockstep with the administration's agenda. The agency has piecemealed its leasing decisions to avoid having to prepare a comprehensive review of their environmental impact. Specifically, the BLM offered 15 parcels at its September sale, plans to sell an additional 46 parcels at its upcoming December sale, and is preparing to offer 59 parcels at its 2026 spring sale. Combined, these lease sales encompass more than 157,000 acres of public land in eastern Utah, primarily in the scenic Book Cliffs region.

Amid the seemingly endless onslaught of bad ideas, SUWA is doing what it does best: fighting back. We are actively engaged in each leasing proposal and building a strong legal foundation for challenging them. Stay tuned for future updates and for opportunities to get involved.

—Landon Newell



# NOW'S YOUR CHANCE: HELP SHAPE RECREATION PLANNING ACROSS CENTRAL UTAH

The Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation (UDOR) is developing a long-term recreation plan to provide a vision for the future of recreation across portions of central Utah and the West Desert. Importantly, the Utah Central Region Recreation Master Plan will also direct state funding for recreation projects to local, state, and federal agencies and organizations, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service.

## SO WHERE DO YOU COME IN?

The plan's website includes an interactive map where members of the public can provide information on favorite places they'd like to see protected, and where recreation improvements or developments may be needed and appropriate. The map is also available in Spanish. Visit [suwa.org/RecreationSurvey](https://suwa.org/RecreationSurvey) to access the page and make suggestions.



THE UTAH CENTRAL REGION RECREATION MASTER PLAN COVERS TENS OF THOUSANDS OF ACRES OF WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS AND OTHER WILDERNESS-QUALITY LANDS AS WELL AS GLEN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA (PICTURED) AND PARTS OF CAPITOL REEF AND CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARKS. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

## WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

The planning area covers Juab, Millard, Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, and Wayne Counties. This means it includes tens of thousands of acres of BLM-managed wilderness study areas and other wilderness-quality lands included in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act as well as Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and parts of Capitol Reef and Canyonlands National Parks. The odds are pretty good that at least one of your favorite places is on that list.

This planning process is an ideal opportunity for the state to work with other land management agencies, recreation users, and local communities to develop a science-based, comprehensive and proactive plan that protects Utah's natural and wilderness-quality landscapes while accommodating increased demand and providing meaningful recreational experiences.

## DOING OUR PART

SUWA is participating in this process to ensure that the plan incorporates the management recommendations of our report, "Outdoor Recreation and Ecological Disturbance, A Review of Research and Implications for Management of the Colorado Plateau Province," including:

- "[C]oncentrating visitor use in previously impacted or hardened sites and trails will likely be a successful management strategy, while dispersal strategies may result in a proliferation of recreation disturbance."
- "Activity types and behaviors that result in expanding recreation use from concentrated, high-use areas to new, less visited and undisturbed locations are perhaps the most serious consideration."
- "Unused locations are the most precious and fragile, and thus should be intensively protected and managed to avoid the proliferation of impacts."

We'll keep you updated as this process moves forward. In the meantime, learn more about the report at [suwa.org/ReimaginingRecreation](https://suwa.org/ReimaginingRecreation)—and don't forget to provide input on the UDOR map!

—Judi Brawer





DESPITE THE SHUTDOWN, OUR STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM TACKLED MORE PROJECTS WORKING ALONGSIDE MORE VOLUNTEERS THIS YEAR THAN IN 2024. © SUWA

## THROUGH FRAUGHT TIMES, OUR STEWARDSHIP WORK ENDURES

SUWA's Stewardship Program kicked off 2025 with a celebration of our decade-long collective effort to build bridges and make friends while restoring wild public lands across Utah. A few days after the presidential inauguration in January, staff and volunteers gathered to reflect upon where we've been, swap stories, and renew our commitment to working together to ensure wilderness protections for decades to come.

After all, when it comes to protecting public lands, our hard-fought legislative and legal victories aren't final until they're implemented on the ground. Now, with land management agencies contending with multiple rounds of firings and a government shutdown, the work of our stewardship volunteers is needed more than ever.

We accomplished much this year by building on the strength of our partnerships (both longstanding and new) with agency field offices. Despite the shutdown, we tackled more projects working alongside more volunteers this year than in 2024. This is a testament to the program, its people (you!), and our staying power.

"Conservation is a state of harmony between [people] and land," wrote naturalist and author Aldo Leopold. We will continue to provide opportunities for people to connect with the land through hands-on, experiential learning in 2026. As many of you know, stewardship participants give back through volunteer service while gaining a deeper understanding of the issues affecting public lands in Utah. Our work includes protecting cultural sites, restoring ecosystems, and addressing land use impacts.

Today, as our collective human footprint grows heavier, it is essential that we take the responsibility of stewardship seriously. Working together, we can continue to protect and restore our remaining wild places.

Stay tuned this winter for a full year-in-review along with a preview of where we're headed next year. Our 2026 project calendar will be shared with members around midwinter (a benefit of membership!), and with the general public shortly thereafter. Visit [suwa.org/stewardship](https://suwa.org/stewardship) for more information.

As always, we thank you for your support. Our team is proud to continue this important work with you in 2026 and beyond.

—Jeremy Lynch

## WILDERNESS MOVEMENT LOSES A GIANT

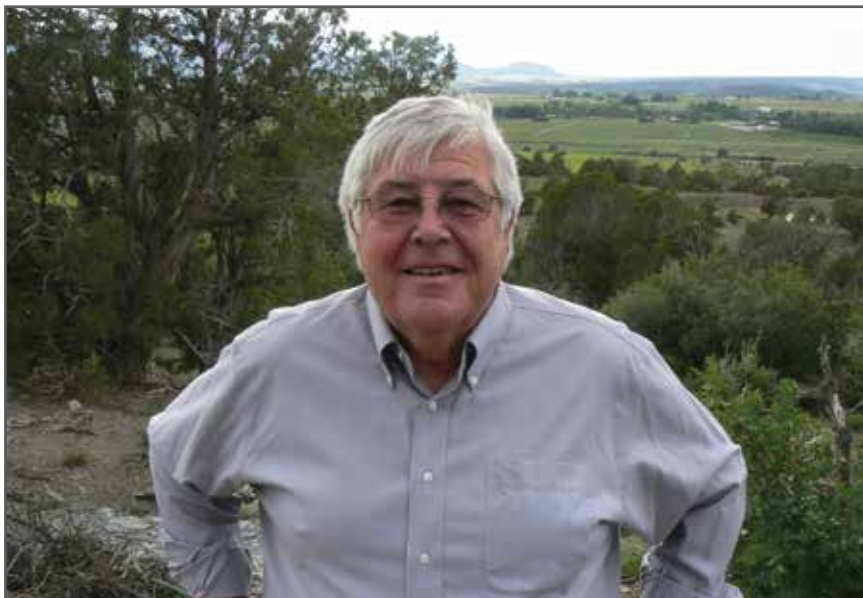
Both the Utah and national wilderness communities have lost one of their best. Darrell Knuffke passed away this summer at the age of 84.

Darrell was a son of the West. Born in Craig, Colorado, and raised in Brighton (northeast of Denver), he attended college at the University of Denver, majoring in Mass Communications.

He began his career editing western newspapers in Littleton, Breckenridge, Gunnison, and Idaho Springs before moving to Washington, DC. There, among other things, he served as Special Assistant to the Solicitor of the Department of the Interior as well as the department's Deputy Undersecretary. He returned to Colorado in 1981 to work for the state before joining the Wilderness Society, where he stayed until retirement.

Darrell was instrumental in the formation of SUWA, having recognized early on the need for a fierce advocacy organization in Utah dedicated to the defense of redrock country. He served on the SUWA Board of Directors for nearly thirty years, and as chair for eight of those, bringing an equal measure of wit and insight to that role.

Darrell's guidance was invaluable in the early days, when SUWA was strong on passion but lacking in experience. He shepherded the organization as it grew to become a player on the national stage—keeping us grounded and always focused on protecting the redrock. His dry sense of humor meant he could always be counted on to lighten the mood of board meetings with moments of joy and laughter.



FEW COMPARE TO DARRELL KNUFFKE WHEN IT COMES TO FIERCE AND UNFLAGGING DEFENSE OF AMERICA'S WILDEST PLACES. HIS LEGACY LIVES ON IN THE WORK OF ACTIVISTS HE BEFRIENDED, MENTORED, AND INSPIRED.

A gifted wordsmith, Darrell edited the SUWA newsletter for many years, even after leaving the board. If a reader noticed a clever turn of phrase, a perfect quote, or an apt historical analogy, there was a strong chance Darrell had inserted it, without credit. It's unfortunate he can't write this farewell, as it would have been a much better read.

Darrell's influence was far-reaching and consequential. He was a key figure in securing the enactment of the Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993, among other legislative accomplishments. At various times he served on the governing boards of the National Outdoor Leadership School, Northeast Minnesotans for Wilderness, and Friends of the Boundary Waters.

He was passionate, articulate, and dogged in advocating for protection of the lands that belong to all Americans. He could be angry, strategic, civil, fearless, and gracious all in the same moment. He coached that the truth should be sought, even when it was the most difficult choice.

Darrell leaves behind a remarkable legacy—one filled with protected wild landscapes and the cultivation of new leaders and advocates that will honor his memory. Above all, Darrell was a wonderful, funny, and deeply kind person.

Damn, we will miss him.

## STAFF ATTORNEY MICHELLE WHITE MOVES ON

This summer we bid a fond farewell to staff attorney Michelle White. Michelle came to SUWA in 2018 from the University of Colorado Law School where she had recently graduated and was then working at the Getches-Wilkinson Center for Natural Resources, Energy, and the Environment.

She immediately immersed herself in the arcane legal statute known as RS 2477 and over the next seven years





MICHELLE AND POPPY (PICTURED HERE IN THE SPRING CREEK WSA) ARE OFF TO NEW ADVENTURES—WE WISH THEM WELL!

led our work in fighting efforts by the State of Utah and many of its counties to seize title and control over more than 12,000 so-called “highways” throughout the state. This included spending hundreds of hours reviewing historical records and writing legal briefs late into the night on obscure topics like the fine line between “maintenance” and “improvement” of claims and the distinction between chip sealing and paving.

Accompanied by her dog Poppy, Michelle visited thousands of miles of dirt roads, two-tracks, streambeds,

and cow paths, all of them claimed as vital transportation corridors under RS 2477. Poppy was also a frequent visitor at the far-flung depositions Michelle attended, much to the delight of the witnesses and lawyers alike.

We wish her the best of luck and look forward to seeing her at the dog park, at SUWA events, or on the trails.

## DAVE LJUNG JOINS SUWA BOARD

We’re thrilled to welcome Dave Ljung to SUWA’s Board of Directors, and specifically to his role as Board Treasurer. Dave brings decades of experience helping nonprofits thrive, along with a deep personal connection to the Colorado Plateau landscapes we work to protect.

As CEO of Gilbert, a Sacramento-based CPA firm serving nonprofit organizations across California, Dave has spent more than 30 years guiding mission-driven groups toward financial sustainability, strategic growth, and good governance. His work helps strengthen a variety of community organizations, from social service providers to environmental groups. Along

the way, he’s volunteered his time and expertise through board service at more than a dozen nonprofits, including our friends at Grand Staircase-Escalante Partners.

Dave’s connection to southern Utah runs deep. About 25 years ago, he discovered the redrock country and was instantly captivated, returning nearly every year to explore its canyons, mesas, and backroads by motorcycle. He brings both professional insight and heartfelt passion to our shared mission of protecting the redrock wilderness for generations to come.



DAVE LJUNG BRINGS A PASSION FOR THE REDROCK AND VALUABLE EXPERTISE IN NONPROFIT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TO SUWA’S BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

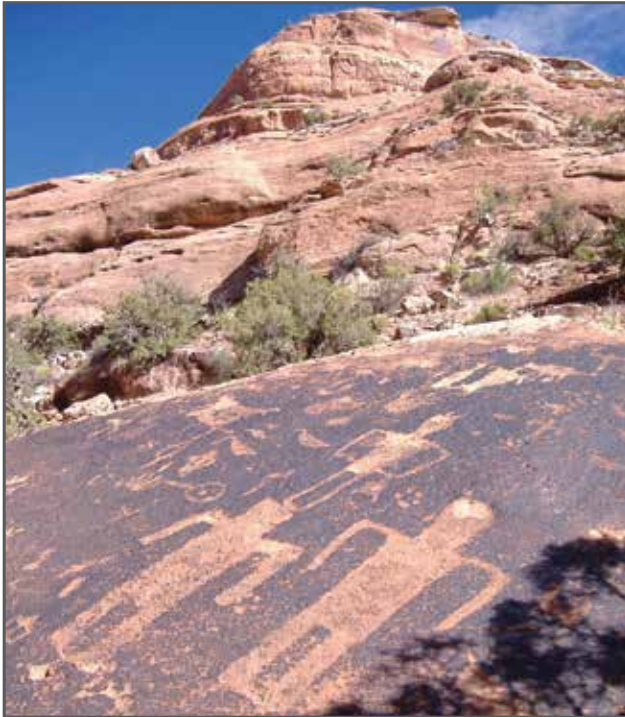


## VISIT OUR ONLINE STORE FOR GIFT MEMBERSHIPS AND OTHER HOLIDAY GIVING IDEAS

SUWA memberships make wonderful gifts for the holidays. For just \$25, your gift recipient will receive a welcome packet that includes our latest newsletter, a *Protect Wild Utah* sticker, and a letter naming you as the membership donor. To purchase, go to [suwa.org/giftmemberships](https://suwa.org/giftmemberships).

Looking for something wrappable? Our online store offers SUWA hoodies, party shirts, warm knit beanies, logo caps in two styles, and more! Visit [suwa.org/shop](https://suwa.org/shop) or click on the “Shop” link at the top of our home page to view our list of products.





© STEVE HILLYARD

## LEAVE A LEGACY FOR THE REDROCK

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. If you choose to add SUWA to your estate plans, we now offer FreeWill, an free online estate planning tool that makes it easy for you to create a will or trust.

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. Though entirely optional, the FreeWill tool provides a simple and effective way for anyone who loves southern Utah to leave a legacy of wilderness preservation for generations to come.

Visit [suwa.org/plannedgiving](https://suwa.org/plannedgiving) for more information. If you have any questions or have already included a gift to SUWA in your estate, please contact Development Manager Heather Rose Martinez at (801) 428-3971 or [heather@suwa.org](mailto:heather@suwa.org).

## MONTHLY GIVING: ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO HELP PROTECT WILD UTAH!

SUWA has been protecting Utah's redrock wilderness for more than 40 years, but the threats to these lands are more dire than ever. With a presidential administration that is openly hostile to conservation, we are facing an uphill battle to defend Utah's last wild places. As always, your support is critical.

By joining our monthly giving program, you can help sustain our efforts year-round. For as little as \$5 a month, your monthly contribution protects iconic landscapes across southern Utah from off-road vehicles, fossil fuel projects, and the strain of growing recreation in the backcountry.

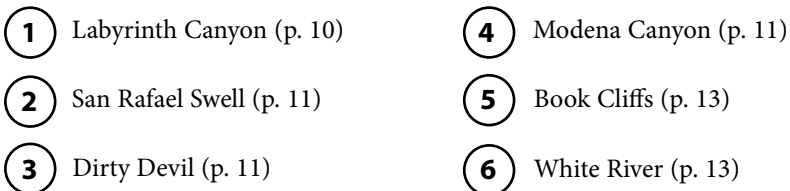
Why is monthly giving so effective?

- **It provides year-around support:** Conservation work doesn't stop, and neither do the threats to Utah's redrock wilderness. Having dependable monthly support means we can take action when it's needed most.
- **It helps us stay ready for the long fight:** Some battles take years to win. Having a steady and predictable stream of income helps us stay focused on the big picture.
- **It's flexible and convenient:** Monthly giving is a customizable and efficient way to support SUWA's work. Set it up once and adjust your contribution as needed, ensuring continuous support without the hassle of repeated transactions.

Becoming a monthly donor is easy. Simply visit [suwa.org/givemonthly](https://suwa.org/givemonthly), choose the amount you would like to give, and your card will automatically be charged each month, providing continuous support for our work (you can cancel or adjust the amount at any time).

Thanks for all you do to help keep Utah's redrock country wild!

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







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