



REDROCK

W I L D E R N E S S

The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
VOLUME 37, NUMBER 3 • AUTUMN/WINTER 2020

A NEW DAWN FOR UTAH WILDERNESS?



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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Cover Photo: Sunlight casts a warm glow on the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness. Copyright Joshua Ladau.

AUTUMN/WINTER 2020

Volume 37, Number 3



4

WILDERNESS NOTES

A New Day, and None Too Soon

6

FEATURES

After Four Dark Years, Will Biden Usher In a New Dawn for Utah Wilderness?



10

DC NEWS

13

CANYON COUNTRY UPDATES

19

INSIDE SUWA



23

AMERICA'S RED ROCK WILDERNESS ACT REFERENCE MAP

This issue of *Redrock Wilderness* was written by the following staff and outside contributors: Steve Bloch, Ray Bloxham, Joe Bushyhead, Neal Clark, Madison Daniels, Scott Groene, Katherine Indermaur, Olivia Juarez, Jeremy Lynch, Terri Martin, Landon Newell, Dave Pacheco, Laura Peterson, Chris Richardson, Jen Ujifusa, and Oliver Wood. It was edited by Darrell Knuffke and laid out by Diane Kelly. Newsletter design by Amy Westberg.

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A NEW DAY, AND NONE TOO SOON

America has evicted the corrupt circus clowns from the White House. I hope we never again have to read Donald Trump's name in a SUWA newsletter. That may be a faint hope, though, given the havoc this unprincipled gang has wrought; the wreckage of the past four years will take time to unsnarl.

We have much to do and undo, but we relish the possibilities. Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments can be made whole with the stroke of a Sharpie, just as they were eviscerated. Imagine the end to sacrificing every other value on our public lands on the altar of "energy dominance." Think anew of the prospect that this nation will re-engage seriously with the challenge of climate change. And welcome the prospect that we will seriously confront the inequality that plagues us.

Jen Ujifusa's lead article describes the view from Washington after this election (see page 6). Here in Utah, we have a new governor, Spencer Cox. Some fear that he will be even more in thrall to Utah's rural county commissioners—and thus more anti-public-lands—than departing Governor Gary Herbert. We will see.

In a legacy moment of sorts, Doug Owens won a state House seat. Doug is the son of Congressman Wayne Owens, the original congressional sponsor of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. He's a bright spot in a Utah legislature that emits precious little light. The legislature will remain backward-looking on public lands matters. And it is almost certain to continue lavishing funding on efforts to seize state control of our public lands through RS 2477 litigation.

TOO CLOSE TO CALL

The lone Democrat in Utah's congressional delegation is Representative Ben McAdams, whose race remains too close to call as this newsletter goes to press. A relative unknown is replacing the retiring Representative Rob Bishop, poster child for anti-wilderness zealotry.

In southern Utah, progressives cemented their hold on the Grand County Commission (Grand County covers the Moab area). With San Juan County to the south, there is now an enormous block of nearly 12,000 square miles of mostly public land where a majority of local elected officials support protection for such places as Bears Ears. This is a dramatic improvement from only a few years ago.

We've survived a murderously difficult four years. It will be a joy to focus on what protection we might gain instead of just trying to stop the next outrage. Over several decades we've pushed the Bureau of Land Management to recognize areas that qualify as wilderness; now we have a real chance to add some protection for them. In the next few years the agency will prepare new off-road vehicle plans for much of southern Utah (see page 17). That process is suddenly an opportunity instead of a threat.

CHANGE NEEDS BOTH THE RIGHT PEOPLE AND THE RIGHT POLICIES

The Biden administration now faces the task of draining a *true* swamp: one teeming with sweetheart deals for the fossil fuel industry and motorized recreation interests and threatening to foul our air, water, and public lands. That task demands both responsible public policies and personnel committed

to carrying them out. Certainly, that means change at the top with a new Interior Department secretary and BLM director. But unless the career employees who run state and district offices are carefully chosen and even more carefully watched, change will founder.

Utah politicians will fight any move towards conservation. Whenever a Democrat lives in the White House, Utah's politicians do what they always do: dig out their sagebrush rebel costumes and start screeching loudly about federal overreach. It is our job to counterbalance that distortion. We will do so by linking our work closely to combating climate change, preventing extinctions, and fostering the interests of the Tribes.

Politicians come and go. The land endures. So does our collective passion to defend and protect the redrock as a national treasure. Our citizen action is unstoppable. It's a new day, the election is over, and it's time to get to work.

For the Redrock,



Scott Groene
Executive Director



SAN RAFAEL RIVER, ARTWORK BY SUSU KNIGHT

AFTER FOUR DARK YEARS, WILL BIDEN USHER IN A NEW DAWN FOR UTAH WILDERNESS?

Unless you've been truly off the grid somewhere in redrock country, or some lawsuit against the November 3rd election result succeeded after this newsletter went to print, you know that in January former Vice President Joe Biden will become the 46th president of the United States.

Changes in administrations always bring changes here at SUWA; the shift between the Clinton and Bush years, or the Bush and Obama years, were significant to our work and strategy. But perhaps no two transitions have been more consequential than the one we endured in 2016—from Obama to Trump—and the one we now have before us. We embark on this new year and new administration with relief, renewed hope and determination, and a bit of reflection on what we've all just experienced.

RELENTLESS ATTACKS ON UTAH

For many of us, it feels like a lifetime ago that Ryan Zinke started his tenure as Interior Secretary in full rhinestone-cowboy style, showing up for his first day on the job

astride a borrowed Park Service horse. His English saddle was barely put away when the Interior Department initiated its farcical “review” of national monument designations. The charade culminated in Zinke slashing Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments by millions of acres—over the objections of millions of Americans from across the country who submitted comments on the proposed atrocity.

When the dust settled, Grand Staircase was cut nearly in half, leaving it vulnerable to new developments such as coal mining, roads, and more—threats from which it had long been protected. Bears Ears was whittled to a sliver of its original size; a scant 15 percent. This was both an assault on the monument and a harsh insult to the five Tribes that advocated for creation of Bears Ears in the first place.

From there we endured the administration's macho doctrine of “energy dominance.” We witnessed the purging from agency websites of important scientific data and any whisper of the reality of climate change. The Interior



RAINBOW OVER REDROCK. © ROBERT HEIL

Department kneecapped policies designed to ensure sensible management of public lands, from the National Environmental Policy Act to the Endangered Species Act. The United States dropped out of the Paris Climate Accord—a decision that, ironically, did not formally take effect until the day after the 2020 election.

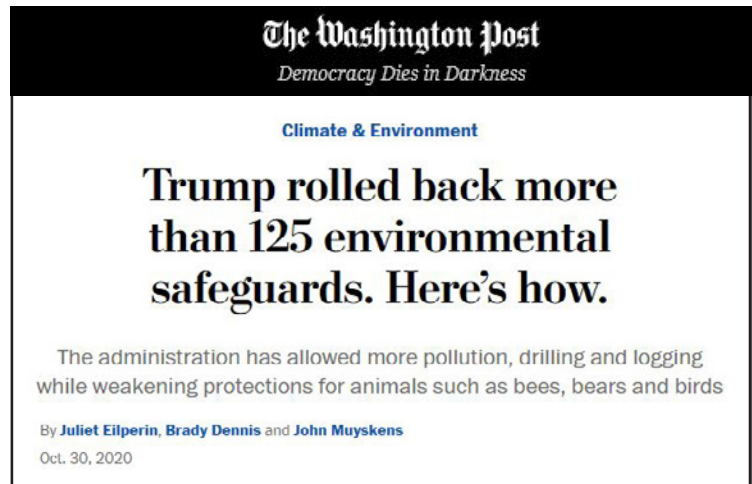
Trump's minions across agencies refused to show up for congressional subpoenas. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) intensified a campaign of vegetation removal in Utah that razed large swaths of public land, ostensibly for the benefit of wildlife and watersheds but in reality to grow more grass to feed more cows. The agency hoped for more clearcuts than it got, but we succeeded in stopping some of the projects. When Zinke left office under the shadow of five separate federal misconduct investigations, an ever-worsening cast of characters filled out the ranks at Interior.

Former oil lobbyist David Bernhardt became Interior Secretary, doubling down on a drill-at-all-costs philosophy of land management that increased seven-fold the number of leases offered for development in Utah. Bernhardt symbolically moved the BLM headquarters to Colorado in an effort to demoralize and drive out career employees and to weaken the agency's ties to Washington.

Eventually, the BLM was headed up by William Perry Pendley, a sagebrush rebel who lusts after the privatization of federal lands. Pendley was such a nakedly unqualified choice for leading the agency that the Trump administration didn't bother to get him confirmed by Congress. Then, this past September, a judge ruled that Pendley's appointment to lead the BLM was illegitimate. That does not mean that Pendley was sent packing, only that Bernhardt would henceforth sign such things as needed an official signature. Little else changed.

FINAL THROES CAN BE THE MOST DANGEROUS

This is nothing near a comprehensive review of the damage already done. And there is indeed likely to be more as the Trump administration heads out the door. We may well be in store for a flurry of additional rollbacks and destructive decisions intended to cement Trump's anti-environmental legacy. In the coming years, suffice it to say, there will be a significant need for cleaning up the astonishing mess Trump and his operatives leave behind.



Despite everything, we managed to survive. We did our utmost to keep Utah's wilderness safe and that made a difference. Of those hundreds of offered leases, none has actually been drilled. Given the fact that Trump is a climate change denier, it is deliciously ironic that we have successfully challenged many of the leases on the grounds that the agency didn't appropriately consider their impacts on climate change.

In early 2019 we helped pass a 663,000-acre wilderness bill for Emery County, following lengthy negotiations between Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and the now-retired Sen. Orrin Hatch (D-UT). The Emery County wilderness bill, enacted as part of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Recreation, and Management Act, was the largest passed anywhere in 20 years—and it protected wildlands in Utah of all places, and during the Trump administration no less.

KEEPING OURSELVES PRIMED AND READY

Our legal team won countless hard-fought court battles, and our field teams continued their monitoring, documentation, and outreach to the BLM regarding on-the-ground conditions in the redrock. Our stewardship team led dozens of volunteer trips cleaning up the backcountry and building bridges with the BLM, and our grassroots team connected energized Americans across the country with opportunities to speak out and push back in support of Utah wilderness. Your continued support and faith in us through this very difficult period made it all possible.

Now we turn the page to a Biden administration. To say there is much work to be done is to understate. It will not be enough for the new administration to simply undo the damage Trump has done. To truly succeed, the Biden



COMB RIDGE, PART OF THE ORIGINAL BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT. © RICHARD BULLOUGH

administration must take positive steps to improve management of our public lands, meet the challenge and urgency of the climate crisis, and work toward the goal of protecting 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Unless a pair of January runoffs changes results in two Georgia Senate seats, the House and Senate will remain split between parties. In that case, we expect legislative movement of any kind to be a slog for at least the first half of the Biden administration. This means the bulk of the action will shift to decisions the agency can implement independent of Congress, and our attention will turn largely to working with the Interior Department to achieve progress.

Naturally, for many people a key item on President-elect Biden's to-do list is restoration of the national monuments Trump and Zinke plundered. Fortunately, restoring Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments was a plank in Joe Biden's platform. We hope to see him follow through on this, to implement strong Tribal co-management for Bears Ears, and to restore the previous management and travel plans for Grand Staircase.

It will also be important for the next administration to press pause on many of the questionable decisions the

Trump administration pushed through. Those range from leases that threaten lands in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act to the agency's posture on RS 2477. That is the Civil War-era law under which the state of Utah and several Utah counties have brought dozens of lawsuits, looking to seize thousands of "routes" across Utah's public lands and thereby thwart wilderness designations down the line.

CLEAN-UP: NECESSARY BUT NOT ENOUGH

But the "clean-up on aisle four" approach—certainly necessary and in some cases urgently so—must be only the beginning. The Biden administration will need to implement its own, forward-looking agenda. That is what we hope to see. That is what the land deserves.

Permanent protection of public lands, especially those in Utah, will be essential. The Biden administration has endorsed the goal of "30 by 30," or protecting 30 percent of the nation's lands and waters by the end of 2030. Large, landscape-scale protections such as those envisioned in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act are necessary to achieve this goal, and to create the connected wildlife corridors that will help species adapt to climate change. Ambition and vision will be the keys and we will demand them.

You'll be hearing from us a lot about travel management over the next four years. SUWA's successful challenges to several travel management plans that were shoved out the door at the end of the Bush administration mean that 11 such plans—essentially the blueprints for dirt roads and off-road vehicle trails on BLM lands—are slated to be completed between 2021 and 2024. These plans are crucial to ensuring routes that are in disuse or in sensitive areas are minimized, and roads are carefully thought through to reduce impacts to wilderness, habitat, and other priority resources. We will advocate for better plans under a Biden administration.

CULTURE SHIFT

Lastly, we hope to see a widespread cultural shift within the BLM, orienting it away from the leasing, grazing, and motorized access that have driven the agency in recent years, and toward a more holistic, protective philosophy. That philosophy will prioritize decisions and actions that help mitigate the climate crisis. It will also mean taking a hard look at the increasing incursions of recreation by emphasizing that what's appropriate for the front country may not be appropriate for the backcountry, and imple-



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menting strong policies and guidelines that empower managers to make those distinctions.

As we head into the new administration and what we hope will be a new era, we recommit to you to do whatever it takes to protect and defend the redrock. Thanks for sticking by us. It's time to get to work.

—Jen Ujifusa



CAP ROCK ON THE RIM OF ESCALANTE CANYON AT DAWN. © JACK DYKINGA

RED ROCK BILL GARNERS 113 CONGRESSIONAL COSPONSORS IN 2020

America's Red Rock Wilderness Act boasts 21 cosponsors in the U.S. Senate and 92 in the House of Representatives as the 116th Congress winds down (see full list, opposite page). We couldn't have reached those impressive numbers without the help of our congressional champions, Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois and Representative Alan Lowenthal of California.

Nor would we be where we are without the energy and enthusiasm of our redrock activists. The cosponsor totals got an early boost in February when 31 of those activists from around the country joined us in Washington, DC for our annual Wilderness Week and shared their personal stories with their members of Congress. In four days these activists held nearly 200 meetings with congressional offices on the Red Rock bill, adding 13 House and Senate cosponsors in the process.

COVID-19 was a curveball for us as it was for everyone else. But even as in-person contact became more and more difficult, the SUWA team quickly adapted, developing inno-

vative strategies to ensure that enthusiasm for the Red Rock bill does not wane in the face of the pandemic. That process continues.

One of our main objectives during this time has been to amplify the voices of our members and activists by helping coordinate their efforts to contact their members of Congress. Among other things, our grassroots team planned a mass action to help activists call and remind their members of Congress to cosponsor the Red Rock bill. That activity produced another welcome boost in cosponsor numbers at a time when the entire country was at near-standstill from the pandemic.

The SUWA staff is now planning how to best advance the Red Rock bill in the next Congress. We will need your help as always, whatever shape the effort takes in the year ahead. We'll let you know as opportunities emerge. Thank you for standing with us as we seek to protect the lands we all love.

—Chris Richardson



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PENDLEY OUT AS BLM CHIEF? LEGALLY, YES; IN PRACTICE, NOT SO MUCH

A federal district judge in Montana ruled in September that William Pendley is serving illegally as acting director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Pendley has served in that position for over a year. Absent confirmation by the U.S. Senate, the judge ruled, acting officials are limited to serving for no longer than 210 days.

The Trump administration has said it will comply with the court's order. Pendley continues to serve in a leadership role in the BLM as its deputy director, but Interior Secretary David Bernhardt will sign off on BLM management decisions. Bernhardt says Pendley will not be replaced during the balance of the current presidential term. While we welcome Pendley's removal as acting director, he remains part

of the BLM management team and his zealous anti-public lands theology will continue to shape the agency's policies.

New Mexico Senator Tom Udall, who did not seek re-election, is reportedly in the running to become Interior Secretary in a Biden administration. And he clearly agrees with the Montana court's ruling. "To try to keep someone running the BLM who doesn't believe in public lands, who has authored racist writings against Native Americans? It's past time he is shown the door," said Udall.

Another positive aspect to the Montana decision, according to the Western Values Project, is the possibility that decisions made under Pendley's watch could be vulnerable to reversal. That might conceivably include approval of major oil and gas projects, travel plans, royalty rate reductions, and even the BLM's decision to move its headquarters to Grand Junction, CO. We will keep you posted.

—Chris Richardson

BENDING THE ARC: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF REPS. CUMMINGS AND LEWIS, JUSTICE GINSBURG

The deaths this year of Rep. Elijah Cummings, Rep. John Lewis, and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg were heavy blows to bear in these tumultuous times.

They were titanic figures, these three; their passing leaves a void unlikely to be filled any time soon. Whatever progress we have made in recent decades toward racial, gender, and environmental justice owes much to their leadership.

While we may first think of them as champions of equality and justice (and they were), all three built strong records on the environment. Rep. Lewis earned a 90 percent lifetime rating from the League of Conservation Voters; Rep. Cummings a perfect 100 percent. Harvard Law Professor Richard Lazarus credits Justice Ginsburg

with playing "a significant role in shaping environmental law" in the United States.

Rep. Cummings represented Maryland's 7th district in Congress for over 20 years. As House Oversight Committee chairman, he was an outspoken leader during the impeachment of President Trump. Cummings was much in the national spotlight in 2015 as he sought justice after Freddie Gray's death in Baltimore police custody.

John Lewis fought for racial equality for over 50 years. He joined the Freedom Riders in 1961, helped organize the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Justice, and was instrumental in passage of the Voting Rights Act. First elected to Congress from Georgia's 5th District in 1986, Lewis was

awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011.

When she joined the high court in 1993, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg became only the second woman to serve on it. She served for 27 years, writing over 483 majority opinions, concurrences, and dissents. Hers was a prominent and influential voice for gender equality and women's rights reaching all the way back to the 1970s when she participated in the Women's Rights Project.

As we continue to bend the arc toward justice, we remain thankful for the lives and leadership of these exceptional public servants.

—Chris Richardson



AERIAL VIEW OF LABYRINTH CANYON. A HELIUM DRILLING LEASE IS LOCATED ABOVE THE RIVER AT UPPER RIGHT. © PETE MCBRIDE/ECOFLIGHT

DRILLING PROPOSAL THREATENS NEW LABYRINTH CANYON WILDERNESS

Congress designated the 54,643-acre Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness in 2019 as part of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. Wilderness designation should have forever protected this world-class landscape, but the area is now at risk from a large industrial development proposal. A Colorado-based company, Twin Bridges Resources, LLC, wants to drill from just outside the area to extract and process helium from within the wilderness.

The project would entail:

- Drilling as many as seven helium wells
- Substantially improving roads (upgrading and graveling of existing two-track routes)
- Trenching and burying pipelines
- Well pad construction with attendant infrastructure
- Building a 10-acre helium processing facility on nearby state lands

This will all take months to complete, and at full development, the project will industrialize one of the most remote areas of the Labyrinth Canyon/San Rafael Desert region.

Unfortunately, this situation was entirely avoidable. The Utah Bureau of Land Management (BLM) offered and sold the helium lease—with no public involvement—to Twin Bridges just as negotiations on the Dingell Act neared agreement (the agency issued the lease on February 8, 2019; the Dingell Act became law a month later). But Twin Bridges wasn't through yet. Even after the wilderness bill became law, the company lobbied the House Natural Resources Committee to redraw the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness boundary so as to exclude the leased lands from the wilderness area.

The Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness and surrounding public lands are simply too special to drill. This is a remote, quiet, and scenic area. Those values will not survive the industrialization Twin Bridges envisions with

this short-sighted project. The BLM continues pushing the Trump administration's damaging public lands agenda. The agency's rush to approve this helium development project before the end of the year is ample evidence of that.

We are gearing up to fight this project to ensure that the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness remains unspoiled for future generations. We will keep you updated.

—Landon Newell and Neal Clark

GOOD
NEWS

APPEAL HALTS MASSIVE CLEAR- CUTTING PROJECT

Following an appeal by SUWA, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has withdrawn its May 2020 approval of a clearcutting project on nearly 20,000 acres in the remote Book Cliffs of eastern Utah. The BLM's withdrawal came in October after SUWA appealed the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA). In particular, we took issue with the agency's refusal to conduct environmental analyses specific to the project area.

The Seep Ridge vegetation removal project would have allowed the removal of native piñon-juniper forest through a practice known as lop-and-scatter. It involves felling live trees, cutting them into roughly three-foot pieces, and scattering them throughout the area. The agency attempted to avoid conducting a site-specific environmental analysis by relying on documents from earlier clearcutting projects. The problem is those earlier analyses only overlapped with 12 percent of the Seep Ridge project's geographic area. After SUWA submitted its opening brief to the IBLA, the agency voluntarily withdrew the project for further analysis.

This is just the latest in a series of setbacks for the Trump administration and its push to clearcut large stands of piñon-juniper forests throughout the West. Whether touted as habitat restoration, fire mitigation, or watershed health, the end result of these projects is the same: deforested landscapes seeded with non-native grass species for cows.

If these projects are as wonderful as the agency would like the public to believe, there's no reason to dodge analyzing and disclosing their environmental impacts as the law requires.

—Oliver Wood



IN RESPONSE TO AN APPEAL FILED BY SUWA, THE BLM HAS WITHDRAWN APPROVAL OF A PIÑON-JUNIPER CLEARCUTTING PROJECT IN THE SEEP RIDGE AREA. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA



SUWA APPEALS HAVE TABLED TWO DRILLING PROJECTS IN NORTHEAST UTAH, INCLUDING ONE PROPOSED FOR DRAGON CANYON, ABOVE. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

**GOOD
NEWS**

SUWA STOPS OIL AND GAS DRILLING NEAR DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT

Following SUWA appeals, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has withdrawn approval for two separate drilling proposals aimed at wilderness-caliber lands in Utah.

In the first, the local BLM manager approved the drilling of two oil and gas wells in a remote area just west of Dinosaur National Monument. In our appeal to the agency's Utah state director, we argued that the project, if implemented, would adversely impact the adjacent national monument, damage greater sage-grouse habitat, destroy wilderness-caliber lands, and exacerbate the ongoing climate crisis. The BLM failed to fully analyze and disclose any of those impacts.

This victory grants a reprieve to one of Utah's wildest and most scenic landscapes. The large industrial equipment required for this drilling project—tanker trucks, drill rigs, and fracking equipment—would have rumbled by within a quarter mile of the monument. Dinosaur is world-renowned for the remarkable density and diversity of its prehistoric sites and artifacts—including petroglyphs and pictographs—and, of course, paleontological resources. It is also treasured for the absence of light pollution. The National Park Service has recognized the monument as “one of the darkest places remaining in the United States.”

The second victory involved lands with wilderness characteristics in the southern Uinta Basin's Dragon Canyon. The local BLM manager approved the drilling of three oil and gas wells there. SUWA also appealed this decision to the agency's state director, arguing that the BLM had failed to fully analyze and disclose the impacts of development on climate change, wildlife, and wilderness-caliber lands. The state director reversed the decision.

(Continued next page)

BLM SIDESTEPS LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR LEASING . . . AGAIN

In 2019, SUWA and its conservation partners largely succeeded in forcing the BLM to pump the breaks on its ill-informed rush for “energy dominance.” Through litigation and administrative appeals, we forced the agency to suspend 242 oil and gas leases covering more than 350,000 acres of public land in Utah.

The BLM was compelled to suspend the leases because it had failed, among other things, to analyze and disclose the greenhouse gas emissions and climate change impacts of offering the leases for development. The agency has now released its “curative” environmental analysis, which purports to resolve those prior legal mistakes. It doesn't.

The BLM acknowledges that its oil and gas program contributes enormous amounts of climate-altering emissions—approximately half of the entire state's annual greenhouse gas emissions. Yet the agency once again failed to analyze and disclose the effects of these emissions on climate change, streams and rivers, wildlife, and public health, among other important issues.

SUWA submitted comments on the BLM's detailed “curative” analysis and we are actively preparing to fight the Trump administration's eleventh hour gift to Industry.

These are just the latest setback for the Trump administration's "energy dominance" agenda in Utah. Earlier this year, because of similar legal shortcomings, the BLM had to withdraw approval of 175 oil and gas drilling permits for lands atop the West Tavaputs Plateau. Over the past two years, SUWA and our conservation partners have forced the BLM to undo oil and gas leasing decisions covering more than 328,000 acres of public land in Utah.

—Landon Newell

SUWA APPEALS UNLAWFUL BIKE TRAIL IN THE SAN RAFAEL SWELL

SUWA has filed an appeal before the Interior Board of Land Appeals challenging the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) approval of the Good Water Rim Trail in the San Rafael Swell. The 15-mile, user-created mountain bike trail runs the length of Good Water Canyon's rim, though its construction was never authorized by the BLM.

SUWA has repeatedly asked the agency to close the trail in order to study its environmental impacts. But the BLM's Price field office has steadfastly refused to directly address the illegal trail. Until now, that is, when the BLM has decid-

ed to approve the trail outright. Unfortunately, that tells the builders of illegal trails that they can construct them wherever they like and then ask forgiveness and authorization from the BLM later.

Our primary concern with the Good Water Rim Trail is that this is the wrong area for a mountain bike trail. As constructed, the trail runs directly through habitat for the endangered San Rafael cactus and through suitable habitat for the threatened Mexican Spotted Owl. To make matters worse, the BLM's approval of the trail includes allowing motorized electric bikes on the trail, which are considered motorized vehicles under the current BLM regulations.

Furthermore, through the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Recreation, and Management Act of 2019, Congress created the San Rafael Swell Recreation Area, which overlays the Good Water Rim Trail. One provision of that legislation is that the BLM must complete landscape-level planning for recreation in the area, considering such projects as the Good Water Rim Trail. By approving this trail without regard for the recreation area, and instead piecemealing recreation projects together, the agency is undermining the process Congress ordered through the Dingell Act.

Stay tuned for more updates as this appeal progresses.

—Oliver Wood



VIEW FROM THE EXISTING USER-CREATED TRAIL ON THE RIM OF GOOD WATER CANYON. © OLIVER WOOD/SUWA

GROUPS CHALLENGE TERRIBLE SAN RAFAEL DESERT TRAVEL PLAN

In late August, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released its long-delayed motorized vehicle travel plan for the San Rafael Desert in eastern Emery County. Left unchecked, this plan will forever change the area's stunning and remote wild lands, turning them into an off-road vehicle (ORV) playground.

SUWA and The Wilderness Society have appealed the destructive travel plan decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

The stunning San Rafael Desert encompasses the newly-designated Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness and wilderness-quality lands such as Sweetwater Reef and the San Rafael River. It features redrock canyons, important cultural sites, and an outstanding diversity of native bee species. The BLM's plan inundates this remote area with ORV routes, more than doubling the miles of motorized routes, from 300 to more than 765.

Federal law requires the BLM to minimize impacts to natural and cultural resources when designating ORV routes. That includes minimizing damage to soils, watersheds, vegetation, wildlife habitat, and cultural sites, as well as minimizing wildlife harassment, conflicts between user groups, and impacts on wilderness values such as naturalness and solitude. The plan fails miserably.

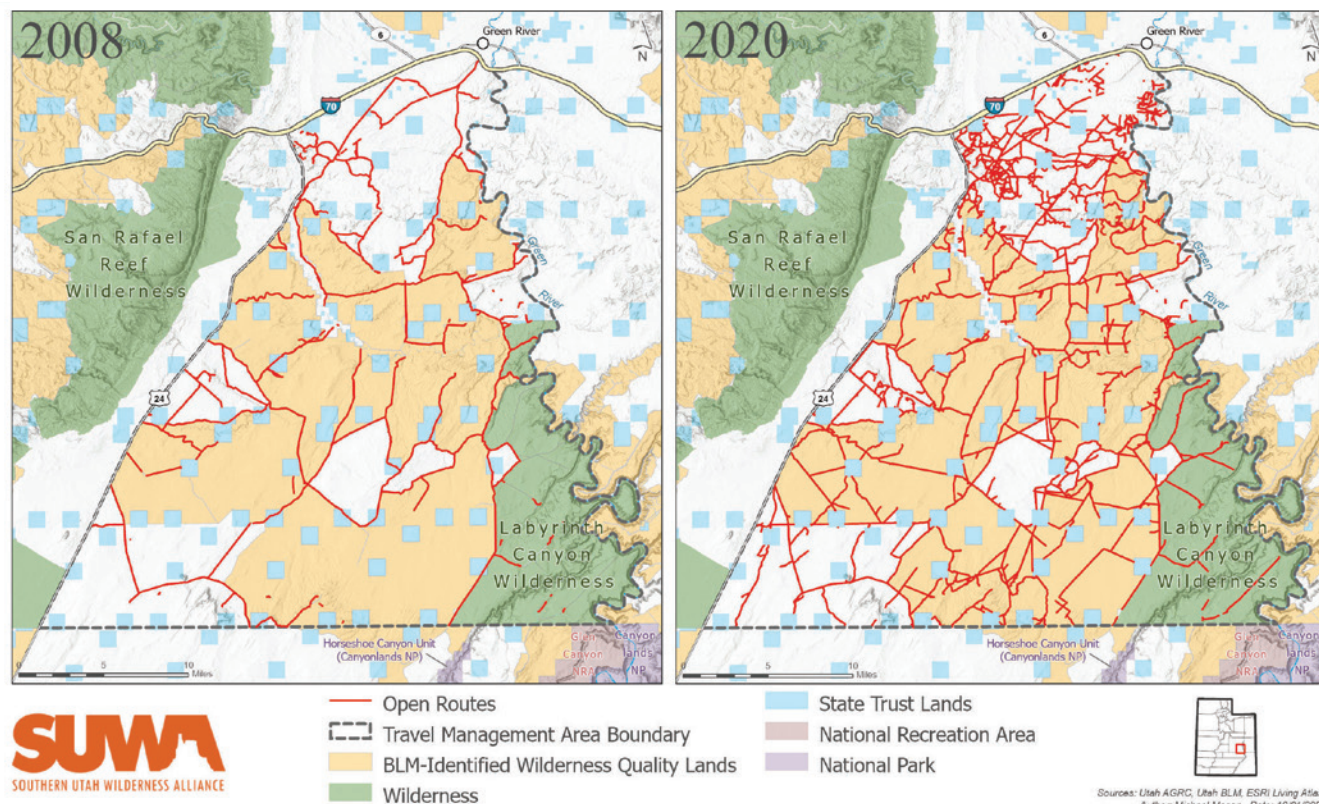
In its own words, the agency sought instead to "emphasize maximum mileage available for [ORV] recreation." Thus, the BLM designated virtually every cow path, wash bottom and line on a map as open to ORVs. We will keep you updated as this appeal moves forward.

UPCOMING TRAVEL PLANNING

The San Rafael Desert travel plan is the first of 13 plans the BLM will complete over the next five years as part of a 2017 settlement agreement SUWA and our conservation partners entered into with the agency and three ORV groups. The agreement set out a schedule and process for updating travel planning decisions in 13 specified travel management areas.

Thus far, the BLM has had difficulty complying with the court-ordered schedule. It was supposed to release the

COMPARISON OF 2008 AND 2020 SAN RAFAEL DESERT TRAVEL PLANS



AS COAL INDUSTRY SPUTTERS, BLM PROPOSES MINE EXPANSION IN BOOK CLIFFS

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently released two separate proposals to expand operations at the Lila Canyon coal mine in the Book Cliffs region at the very edge of the Desolation Canyon Wilderness. Utah American Energy, Inc.—a wholly owned subsidiary of the bankrupt Murray Energy Corp.—operates the mine.

First, the BLM proposes to expand the company's existing lease by 1,272 acres, adding three years to the mine's life and over 9 million tons of coal to its output.

The second proposal would expand the lease area by another 4,231 acres. That translates to another 10 to 15 years of mine life and another 32 million tons of coal. The proposals are additive; the total new lease acreage under the BLM proposal is over 5,500 acres.

The dying coal industry has been a major greenhouse gas contributor, emitting billions of tons of climate change-driving pollution into the atmosphere each year. SUWA submitted comments on both of the above projects and will continue to fight to protect our climate, public lands, and wild places from the Trump administration's fossil fuel giveaways.

travel plan for the Henry Mountains/Freemont Gorge area, an area blanketed with particularly egregious ORV routes, in November 2019. The BLM now says it will not complete that plan until late 2023, four years late. The BLM has also delayed release of the travel plan for lands around Dinosaur National Monument from November 2020 to January 2022. The agency has yet to adequately explain these delays.

The BLM's Moab field office recently released a draft plan for Canyon Rims area and expects to complete that plan on schedule. As the travel planning process continues, we will hold the BLM accountable and ensure that the agency complies with its regulatory duties to minimize damage to Utah's wild lands.

—Laura Peterson

A NEW KIND OF RS 2477 CASE

As regular newsletter readers know, SUWA has been fighting RS 2477 battles for decades. The 1866 "Revised Statute 2477" granted rights-of-way for "public highways" over federal lands. Though Congress repealed the statute in 1976, the state and many counties have since claimed tens of thousands of miles of route, in over 20 federal court lawsuits, as "highways." This is all in an effort to disqualify millions of acres of land from wilderness protection.

Now we're fighting a new kind of RS 2477 case. Not content to let their lawsuits play out, Garfield and Kane counties have undertaken significant work on back-country roads based on claimed RS 2477 "rights." Last year, Garfield County chip-sealed seven miles of the Burr Trail just east of Capitol Reef National Park, a previously-graveled road cutting between the Mount Pennell Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and the Long Canyon wilderness character area. This year, Kane County installed a concrete-and-steel bridge on the Skutumpah Road. The new bridge spans the Bull Valley Gorge, within Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and adjacent to the Paria-Hackberry WSA.

In normal times, the counties would need authorization from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) before undertaking such projects and the agency would need first to evaluate the projects' environmental consequences. But these are not normal times. In both instances, Kane and Garfield counties claimed their work fell within the width of RS 2477 rights-of-way and BLM bowed to the counties' wishes, allowing the work to proceed without environmental analysis.

That acquiescence to the counties isn't just misguided, it's illegal. The BLM ignored the National Environmental Policy Act, which ensures that federal agencies fully consider the environmental consequences of, and alternatives to, projects such as these. And the BLM sidestepped its own governing legislation, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which sets out the necessary steps for approving road work on public lands.

It's been up to SUWA to hold the BLM's feet to the fire. We have filed lawsuits against the agency challenging both the Burr Trail chip-sealing and the Skutumpah bridge construction. We'll keep you posted.

—Joe Bushyhead

SUWA UNVEILS NEW TOOLS FOR ACTIVISM IN A CHALLENGING TIME

The essential first step in organizing effectively for wild lands conservation in Utah is to acknowledge the reality that faith and religious community involvement are big deals here. While Utah has a wide range of faith communities, over 60 percent of Utahns are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS church).

To more effectively reach those communities, SUWA brought Madison Daniels on board as an organizer to work with them. As a self-described “tree-hugging Taoist Mormon Mystic,” Madison believes he was made to do this work.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged all of us at SUWA to adapt our work to new constraints. For Madison, this meant recruiting writers and poets from within the LDS church and other faith communities to write about the intersection of faith, spirituality, and environmental issues. He has assembled these compositions on *Bristlecone Firesides*, a new website and blog he launched earlier this year.

To quote the site, “Our goal [at *Bristlecone Firesides*] is to reground the spiritual conversation in the stuff of the Earth. . . . We will do this by exploring our spiritual

responsibility of stewardship, examining the Earth through the lens of spirituality, and examining spirituality through the lens of the Earth, all in an attempt to heal the rift that has grown between each of us and the Earth . . .”

Madison is also developing the *Bristlecone Firesides* podcast that will feature casual conversations about faith, the Earth, and the universe. The podcast will feature poets, scholars, scientists, and activists who are spiritually rooted in the Earth and Utah’s wild places. SUWA will begin releasing episodes of the podcast in early 2021.



Bristlecone Firesides

To learn more about SUWA’s faith organizing efforts, visit

BristleconeFiresides.com where you

will find dozens of poems and essays about faith, activism, and environmentalism. And be sure to subscribe to the *Bristlecone Firesides* podcast when it’s launched in the spring.

You can follow *Bristlecone Firesides* on social media at:

Twitter: @bconefiresides

Instagram: @bristleconefiresides

Facebook: facebook.com/bristleconefiresides



INTERN RANDY NAVARRETE WORKS TOWARD A JUST, SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Randy Navarrete is a Salt Lake Community College undergrad and wild Utah activist on several fronts. Randy has made noise at street protests over oil and gas leasing in wild places, built ORV travel management infrastructure in the Sierra La Sal (La Sal Mountains) on a stewardship project, and most recently served as SUWA’s summer grassroots intern and Uplift climate justice fellow. Through it all, Randy’s wilderness advocacy and deep commitment to activism were exemplary.

“It is our duty to not simply conserve wilderness,” said Randy, “but to radically rework our societies so that we can live and flourish in a world where land exploitation, environmental racism, and detrimental climate change don’t exist. I couldn’t be more grateful to SUWA’s staff for their open ears, their time, and wisdom as it affirmed for me the need for movements like these—movements that honor this world and the various smaller worlds that live within it.”

And SUWA couldn’t be more grateful for your hard work and dedication, Randy. We wish you all the best!

SUWA ORGANIZERS ADAPT TO CHANGE, EXPAND VIRTUAL OUTREACH

Despite sharply limited opportunities for in-person events and presentations, SUWA organizers have persevered by conducting live online events, making virtual presentations, and expanding our podcast presence. We even created an educational Fish Springs Wilderness Study Area craft project for students in mixed learning situations along Utah's Wasatch Front (see photo below).

SUWA HOSTS FILM AND PANEL ON PUBLIC LANDS

In September, SUWA hosted an advance screening of the film, *Public Trust: The Fight for America's Public Lands*, and a panel discussion by speakers whose lives and hearts are intertwined with public wild lands in Utah. Produced by Patagonia Films, *Public Trust* explores the unprecedented threats public lands face from extractive industries and the politicians in their pockets. Our

panel featured Angelo Baca, a Diné (Navajo) filmmaker, scholar, and activist working to protect Bears Ears; Nate Waggoner, owner of Escalante Outfitters; Lauren Wood, trip director for Holiday River Expeditions; and Olivia Juarez, SUWA Latinx community organizer. You can find the film and panel discussion at suwa.org/publictrust.

WILD UTAH PRESENTATIONS GO VIRTUAL (FOR NOW)

In cities and towns across the country, virtual gatherings to protect Wild Utah are giving people an in-depth look at the Utah wilderness movement and a better understanding of how to make a difference in protecting our public lands. A member of our organizing team hosts each event, which also features our award-winning short film, *Wild Utah: America's Redrock Wilderness*. The one-hour interactive

presentations are the virtual equivalent of our in-person outreach tours. Email issues-action@suwa.org to schedule a virtual presentation for your business, organization, or community group today!

PODCAST OFFERINGS GROW FROM ONE TO THREE

Our *Wild Utah* podcast continues to grow in listenership as we interview special guests about the latest issues affecting Utah's redrock country. Find our latest podcast at suwa.org/podcast or subscribe on your favorite podcast app by searching for "Wild Utah."

But wait, there's more! SUWA will soon be hosting not one, but three podcasts.

We have long hoped to produce a podcast relating to faith, wilderness, and activism and now we have. The *Bristlecone Firesides* website, which SUWA Faith Community Organizer Madison Daniels launched earlier this year (see article on page 19), will host conversations on just those topics. We're aiming to launch the first season of these podcasts in early 2021. Visit BristleconeFiresides.com to learn more.

Meanwhile, a bilingual, mini-series podcast is underway for Spanish speakers and anyone new to public lands advocacy. This podcast will describe, in both Spanish and English, the basics of federal land management and protection. We will release this series, plus a few more surprises, in the spring. Big things are on the way for wild Utah in Latinx communities.



AS PART OF THE UTAH CULTURAL CELEBRATION CENTER'S DISPERSED DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS CELEBRATION THIS YEAR, FAMILIES ALONG THE WASATCH FRONT LEARNED ABOUT WILDLIFE IN WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS THROUGH AN EDUCATIONAL ART PROJECT SPONSORED BY SUWA. PHOTO COURTESY OF NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE.

SEASONAL FIELD TEAM GATHERS CRUCIAL DATA FOR LEGAL, ADVOCACY WORK

With another field season wrapping up, SUWA would like to acknowledge the invaluable work of this year's seasonal field workers: Nick McEachern, Sam Bey, and Andrew Kooyman. Their ground-truthing work has been particularly helpful as we weigh in on the many travel management plans the Utah Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing across the state. The data they have helped us amass will inform our work to get decent travel plans out of an agency that rarely sees a road it doesn't like.

The reality of field inventory work doesn't quite match people's often-romanticized perceptions of it. In actuality, it is a slog—demanding, tiring, hard work and not for the faint of heart. Nick, Sam, and Andrew were more than equal to the challenge of gathering the necessarily detailed inventory information. This information matters. We must make the case as to why a route is a bad idea, threatens other values or, in far too many cases, ignores the law. That means detailed, on-the-ground examinations of proposed new travel routes as well as unplanned, user-created routes the BLM intends to sanctify.

Our work on BLM travel management plans has produced thousands of GPS inventory photos and other information on routes within these planning areas. SUWA now has the most complete and detailed inventory record in Utah—yes, much better than the BLM's. Interns like Nick, Sam, and Andrew have contributed mightily to that effort and we thank them sincerely for their exceptional work.

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM WRAPS UP SUCCESSFUL SEASON DESPITE 2020 CHALLENGES

The coronavirus pandemic entered the American psyche the week our stewardship season was slated to begin, requiring that we redefine how we work on the landscape. Today, as we plan for the 2021 season, adaptation remains critical in protecting the health of our people and the integrity of Utah's wild places.

We accomplished a great deal more in 2020 than seemed likely or even possible given the context. In all, we tackled 14 projects on Utah public lands. We monitored and reclaimed over 50 unauthorized vehicular routes, removed over 1,200 square feet of graffiti from sandstone walls in wilderness, and installed thousands of feet of defensive barriers along protected land boundaries. Our volunteers installed dozens more wilderness and wilderness study area boundary signs, reclaimed extensive undesignated campsites, and removed countless bags of refuse. We are deeply grateful to everyone who participated this year!

Learn more about SUWA's Stewardship Program at suwa.org/stewardship.



A BIG THANK YOU TO SUWA LEGAL INTERN STEPHANIE HANAWALT

Though the coronavirus pandemic has turned the world upside-down (and turned SUWA's legal team into homebodies), it's done nothing to stem the tide of threats to Utah wilderness. That's why we're so grateful to have had the help of summer legal intern Stephanie Hanawalt.

A California native, Stephanie is currently a law student at the University of Utah's S.J. Quinney College of Law in Salt Lake City. Stephanie joined us in June and immediately jumped into a range of projects, including our litigation over the BLM's Burr Trail paving approval (see Spring 2020 issue) and ongoing oil and gas leasing challenges. She proved herself to be a valuable addition to our team during a busy and in many ways unprecedented summer.

Thank you, Stephanie, for your hard work and positive energy!

SUWA'S SALT LAKE CITY OFFICE GOES SOLAR

In the interest of transitioning to clean energy sources, we're excited to announce that SUWA's headquarters in Salt Lake City has gone solar! Panels were installed this summer and we are all set to harness the power of the sun.

Thanks to Creative Energies Solar and a grant from Rocky Mountain Power, we expect to generate over 1500kWh of clean energy in the summertime. Special thanks to Creative Energies' Mike Walton for his help making this possible.



THE CREATIVE ENERGIES SOLAR INSTALLATION TEAM

GIVE THE GIFT OF THE REDROCK THIS SEASON

'TIS THE SEASON FOR SUWA GIFT MEMBERSHIPS

A \$25 gift membership to SUWA is the perfect local, ethical, and environmentally friendly gift for all the conscientious consumers on your list. Your gift recipient will receive a welcome packet that includes a newsletter and a yellow "Protect Wild Utah" sticker. Purchase gift memberships on our website at suwa.org/giftmemberships. (Please order by November 23rd to guarantee delivery in time for Hanukkah, or by December 7th for delivery in time for Christmas.)

FIND MORE GREAT GIFTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS IN OUR ONLINE STORE

Looking for that special something for the wilderness lover on your list? Our online store has you covered. Check out our cozy T-shirts sporting the orange SUWA logo, available in multiple fits and sizes for just \$25. Other SUWA swag options include our "Protect Wild Utah" bandanas for your (or your pets') outdoor adventures, our popular trucker hats, and our "Protect Bears Ears" tank tops. Find them all at suwa.org/goodies or click 'SHOP' at the top of our home page.

RESOLVE TO DEFEND THE REDROCK EVERY MONTH OF THE YEAR

Whether your New Year's resolutions in 2021 include doing more for the redrock, stepping up your charitable giving game, or simply streamlining your finances, our monthly giving program is for you! Monthly giving of any amount is easy and secure. It includes all the benefits of membership, and your sustaining support provides SUWA with reliable, year-round funding to fight current and future threats to our redrock wilderness.

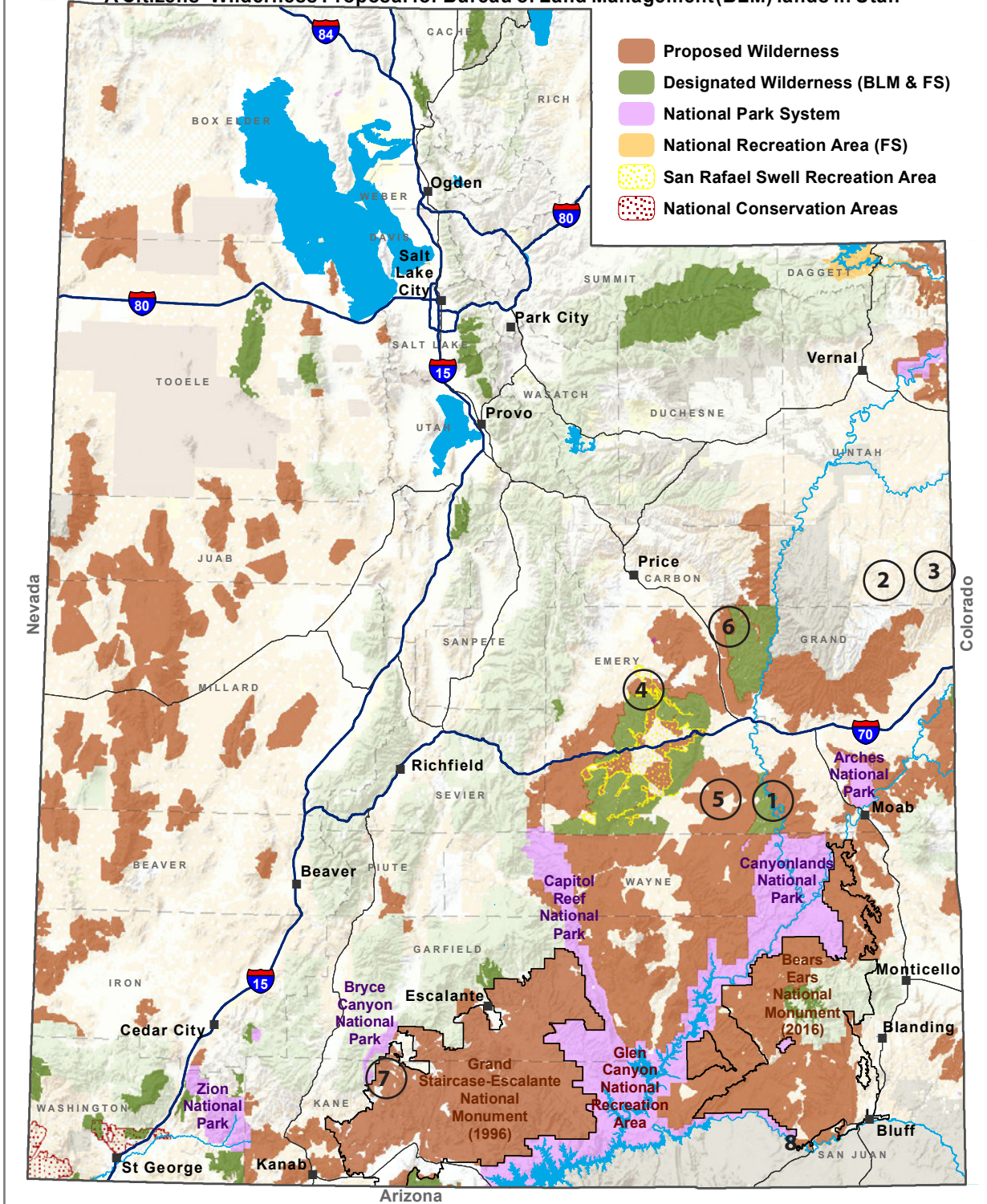
Is protecting the redrock worth \$5 or \$10 a month to you? That adds up to \$60 or \$120 a year, which goes a long way to helping keep your public lands wild.

Already a sustaining member of SUWA? 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 in defense of your public wild lands no matter who holds political office.

For more details on joining SUWA as a sustaining member, please visit our website at suwa.org/monthly.

America's Red Rock Wilderness Act

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



- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Labyrinth Canyon (p. 13) | 4 Good Water Canyon (p. 16) | 7 Bull Valley Gorge (p. 18) |
| 2 Seep Ridge (p. 14) | 5 San Rafael Desert (p. 17) | |
| 3 Dragon Canyon (p. 15) | 6 Lila Canyon (p. 18) | |



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METATE ARCH, GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT. © TOM TILL

“Wilderness revives the memory of unity. Through its protection we can find faith in our humanity.”

~Terry Tempest Williams