

PROGRESS

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

SUWA
SOUTHERN UTAH WILDERNESS ALLIANCE

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance 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 wilderness character through research and public education; supports both administrative and legislative initiatives to permanently protect the Colorado Plateau wild places within the National Wilderness Preservation System, 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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PROGRESS

SCOTT GROENE

Executive Director

During 2022 we made progress in defending Utah's redrock country while laying the groundwork for future gains in protection under the Biden administration.

Over the course of twelve months we shielded portions of the San Rafael Desert from off-road vehicle (ORV) use. We peeled back energy leasing left over from the Trump administration as well as rules promoting vegetation removal, including destroying old growth piñon-juniper forests. We challenged a coal mine expansion in the Book Cliffs and continued the multi-year battle against the State of Utah's massive litigation to seize control of wilderness and national parks through an archaic law known as RS 2477. We also joined in the effort to defend the re-established Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments from ongoing attacks by Utah's politicians.

The past year also brought a midterm election that pleasantly surprised many of us, but left a Congress divided nonetheless. And so we've turned much of our focus toward making gains through the executive branch during the remainder of this

administration's first term. This includes establishing new wilderness study areas, implementing balanced travel plans to control ORV use in the Labyrinth Canyon area and elsewhere, and finalizing new monument management plans that fully protect the landscapes' cultural and natural values.

Last summer, a massive flash flood blew through Mill Creek Canyon in southeast Utah, a place I often visit. Bursts of torrential rain filled the canyon with a temporary and raging river that hauled decades-old debris downstream, rearranging the canyon floor. Wandering the canyon afterwards, I was awed by how the flood uprooted or snapped mature trees, created new slickrock bowls where thickets of willow and tamarisk had stood, and washed out heavy brush to leave a parklike stand of tall cottonwoods rising over a floor of smooth bare sand. But I know that next spring, the undergrowth will return. The soils and plants will reestablish themselves where there is now only exposed and water-sculpted stone. The canyon will slowly but surely return to its former state; that is, before the next flash flood changes everything again.

Our work to protect wild landscapes like Mill Creek fluctuates through cycles as well. Sometimes we find ourselves filing lawsuits and appeals just to hold onto what we have. We are now in a time of renewal and progress. Under the current administration, we have an opportunity to gain ground by adding to the over 5 million acres of land within our wilderness proposal that have already gained some form of protection under our watch.

I'm proud of what we accomplished in the past year. And I hope as you read the team reports that follow, you'll take equal pride in helping us protect Utah's amazing wild landscapes for generations to come.

The finish line for 2022 is really the starting point for a two-year dash to the end of President Biden's first term. There will be much opportunity and work in the months ahead. Thanks for everything you've done to get us here; your ongoing dedication and support are what make our work possible.



LEGISLATIVE

Election years are always challenging when it comes to passing legislation and drawing attention to public lands issues—even more so in the heat of a supercharged midterm election like that of 2022. But with the help of SUWA members and activists, we made some significant progress on legislation and administrative actions while also keeping problematic

and downright dangerous initiatives at bay.

Early in 2022, SUWA and a coalition of green groups worked with stalwart redrock champion Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) on a letter to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, asking her to use her authority under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to establish new wilderness study areas (WSAs). The letter received additional signatures from senators across the U.S.

The middle of the year was relatively quiet, which allowed members of our legislative and legal teams to meet with Department of Interior officials as well as many Senate offices to discuss public lands related items in the Inflation Reduction Act. We gained some significant wins with the passage of the bill, especially in the realm of oil and gas leasing fee reform.

In August, Senator Durbin and the same group of co-signers from January sent a



Colt Mesa, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.
© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

second letter to Secretary Haaland and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Tracy Stone-Manning that continued to press the administration to take action to protect public lands. Additionally, Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) took the lead on a letter (co-signed by western senators) supporting WSAs and other types of administrative land conservation.

With the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, we also saw the so-called “Manchin side deal,” which presented drastic and problematic changes to permitting law. SUWA, along with organizations across the public lands and environmental justice landscape, pushed hard to prevent the side deal as a stand-alone bill or a rider to other must-pass legislation and eventually prevented its passage in the 117th Congress. We are grateful for our supporters and partners who called their members of Congress and told them, in no uncertain terms, that this legislation would be a step backward for environmental values.

Sadly, longtime House sponsor of America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act, Representative Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), retired at the end of 2022. During his tenure as our champion, he has visited Utah multiple times, defended the redrock from harmful legislation such as the Public Lands Initiative, stood in solidarity with House colleagues to protest the Trump administration’s unlawful attack on Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, and served with distinction on the House Natural Resources Committee. He will be truly missed!



In December, after lots of discussions and meetings, we were excited that Representative Melanie Stansbury (D-NM) agreed to take the baton from Mr. Lowenthal and become our new champion for the Red Rock bill. She is a strong advocate for environmental issues, public lands, and Indigenous rights, and we look forward to having her lead the charge in the House.



Rep. Melanie Stansbury (D-NM), the new House sponsor of America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act

LEGAL

2022 felt like what we expected from the Biden administration's sophomore year: an uneven performance with flashes of brilliance that left us wanting more. We favorably settled two cases with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regarding the San Rafael Desert, we challenged Trump-era decisions that promoted fossil fuels, we pushed the BLM to do better as it works toward a new travel management plan for the Labyrinth Canyon region, and we held the line in the State of Utah's misguided and long-running RS 2477 litigation.

In February, we settled a SUWA-led lawsuit challenging the 2020 travel management plan for the San Rafael Desert. In October, after months of additional review and ground-truthing, the BLM agreed to close 120 miles of designated off-road vehicle routes that it determined didn't exist on the ground, were actively reclaiming, or were redundant. These are the same arguments for closure that SUWA has

been making for years. In December, we settled another case, also for the San Rafael Desert, that challenged Trump-era oil and gas leasing. The BLM has agreed to reconsider the sale of dozens of leases across thousands of acres of proposed wilderness.

Over the summer, we sued the BLM over a last-minute Trump administration decision to extend the life of the Lila Canyon coal mine, which lies on the western slope of the Book Cliffs. You might have thought the Biden administration's BLM would reverse this kind of decision on its own . . . but you would be wrong.

We also spent hundreds of hours in both the field and the office preparing detailed comments aimed at pushing the BLM into adopting a balanced travel management plan for the Labyrinth Canyon region. The agency is required to complete eight other such plans in the coming years, including in the Dirty Devil and Henry Mountains, San Rafael Swell, and Book Cliffs regions. These plans will determine

where motorized vehicles are permitted to drive for the next 20 years, so getting them right is crucial.

Meanwhile, SUWA's attorneys continued to defend against the state of Utah's yawning suite of RS 2477 cases, which claim rights-of-way across more than 12,000 miles of Utah's public lands. The overwhelming majority of these so-called highways are actually stream bottoms or cow paths, and many are located in proposed wilderness, national monuments, and designated wilderness areas. If successful, the state would have the power to significantly widen and improve each of them into 66-foot highways. In one case involving three rights-of-way in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, we participated as full parties in a three-day trial and vigorously contested the scope of each of the routes.

Finally, SUWA and its conservation partners stepped-up to defend President Biden's establishment of Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments from two lawsuits led by the

State of Utah. The cases seek nothing less than the undoing of these monuments by attacking the Antiquities Act of 1906, which authorizes presidents to declare them in the first place.

SUWA is deeply grateful to our members, and to the following law firms that donated their time and services in defense of America's redock wilderness in 2022: Cooley LLP and Manning Curtis Bradshaw & Bednar PLLC.

BY THE NUMBERS

OIL AND GAS LEASES SOLD
IN PROPOSED WILDERNESS

0

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED LEASES
(2015-2021) NOW BEING
RECONSIDERED (APPROX.)

370

MILES OF ORV ROUTE
CLOSED IN SAN RAFAEL
DESERT

120

MILES OF RS 2477
RIGHT-OF-WAY CLAIMS
ACROSS UTAH (APPROX.)

12,000

RIGHT-OF-WAY MILES
ADJUDICATED IN FAVOR
OF UTAH IN 2022

0



Hoodoo formations, Grand Staircase-Escalante
National Monument. © Jack Dykinga



Labyrinth Canyon at Tidwell Bottom.
© James Kay





Metate Arch, Grand Staircase-Escalante
National Monument. © Jack Dykinga

WILDLANDS

Two full years into the Biden administration, it finally feels as though the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) ship is righting itself after the turmoil of the previous administration. While instilling



Sids Mountain Wilderness in the San Rafael Swell.
© Ray Bloxham/SUWA

the agency with a strong conservation ethic is a long-term process, the current administration has taken the first steps in setting a new course that emphasizes the protection of our nation's public lands and waterways. For our part, 24 months of advocacy and strategic engagement in policy and planning seems to be paying off, and we haven't lost the optimism that we felt going into 2022.

This past year, our team focused on highlighting the much-needed management of human-powered recreation on BLM lands throughout Utah, and advocating for policies that we believe would help the agency proactively address this issue. Implementation of smart recreation management strategies, including a tailored approach to the management of frontcountry and backcountry landscapes, is critical as public lands continue experiencing increased visitation pressure. The BLM has the opportunity to put visionary recreation management into practice as it works to develop management plans for both Bears Ears

and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. If done right, these two plans can be models for how to manage public lands for an increasingly diverse recreating public while protecting cultural and natural resources, wildlife, and wild places.

We also continued to advocate for scientifically-sound vegetation removal practices with BLM leadership and congressional offices, with a focus on fixing bad policy decisions put in place by the past administration. In 2022, we used administrative appeals and grassroots advocacy to push back on the agency's use of "categorical exclusions" under the National Environmental Policy Act—a loophole exploited by the Trump administration to approve large-scale mechanical piñon pine and juniper deforestation projects.

Meanwhile, SUWA's Stewardship Program continues to serve as a force for good—engaging our members to literally get their hands dirty working to protect public lands while assisting the BLM in addressing its much-needed management backlog.

In 2022, we worked with the agency to engage 145 volunteers from across the nation in helping protect designated and proposed wilderness throughout Utah from illegal off-road vehicle use, vandalism, and other recreational

BY THE NUMBERS

COMMENT LETTERS
SUBMITTED

34

CALLS AND MEETINGS
WITH AGENCY STAFF

123

FIELDWORK DAYS

235

MILES OF TRAVEL PLANNING
ROUTES INVENTORIED

1,300

TRAVEL PLANNING FIELDWORK
PHOTOS GEOTAGGED

9,700

STEWARDSHIP PROJECT
VOLUNTEERS

145

STEWARDSHIP HOURS
COMPLETED

2,437

impacts. Stewardship crews spent more than 2,500 volunteer hours over 50 days assisting the BLM in better managing Utah's public lands.

Finally, our fieldwork crew focused on conducting motorized route inventories throughout eight travel management areas and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in support of SUWA's ongoing participation in the BLM's travel planning processes. Our on-the-ground knowledge of these areas and routes allows us to effectively push back against erroneous agency inventories and analysis. Last year alone, we were able to collect nearly 10,000 georeferenced photo points over 1,500 miles of routes. Our field team has also been monitoring the BLM's implementation of new management regimes for lands and waters permanently protected in the San Rafael Swell wilderness bill of 2019, making sure the agency adheres to the spirit and intent of that legislation by prioritizing the protection of natural and cultural values.

All told, 2022 proved to be a busy year full of both challenges and opportunities. Much of this work will continue through 2023, and we remain hopeful that BLM leadership will continue to challenge agency staff to place the conservation of wilderness-quality lands at the forefront of its planning and management decision making.



A 2022 stewardship project in Bears Ears National Monument.
© Jack Hanley/SUWA

ORGANIZING

SUWA's organizers were able to slowly emerge from pandemic-driven isolation in 2022, and it was exciting to once again experience face-to-face interactions with redrock enthusiasts across the country. We doubled our number of appearances at

community events and tripled the number of postcards signed and ready to hand-deliver to legislators in Washington, DC. Still, it seems that life continues to take place half in-person and half virtually. Balancing both remains a challenge.

Our members and volunteers continued to rise to the occasion in 2022. A big focus

for us was stepping up the number (and quality) of public comments submitted on agency planning processes. Under SUWA's guidance, especially motivated activists bolstered their on-the-ground knowledge by visiting specific planning areas and documenting current conditions. When Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments went through their first public comment periods in a multiyear management planning process, our supporters generated thousands of electronic comments.

Redrock advocates also played a crucial role in garnering support from U.S. senators for the designation of new wilderness study areas, which provide the strongest interim protection for wilderness pending congressional action. Another focus of our work was demonstrating ongoing support for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, and we're happy to report that two hundred activist leaders took part in an equal number of conversations with congressional offices. As a result of their efforts, we ended the 117th Congress with



Grassroots Leaders Retreat in southern Utah. © Rachel Carlson/SUWA

19 cosponsors in the Senate and 94 in the House of Representatives. We're excited to return to in-person lobbying in Washington, DC in 2023!

We also continued to cultivate digital engagement through our *Wild Utah* podcast, which garnered more than 10,000 downloads in 2022. Particularly noteworthy

was the bilingual 4-part *Utah Silvestre* miniseries, which proved quite popular and provided an outstanding primer for wilderness and public lands advocacy.

We are now looking forward to 2023, when we can bring home management plans that truly honor the unique cultural and ecological values of Bears Ears and Grand

Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, get the Bureau of Land Management on the right track for conservation with a series of quality travel management plans, and grow congressional support for the overall vision embodied in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. Your contributions of time, money, and activism are what make us run. Thank you for your support!

BY THE NUMBERS

NEW CONTACTS MADE BY ORGANIZERS	2,379
ACTIVIST POSTCARDS DELIVERED TO CONGRESS	2,295
ACTIVIST-LED EXCHANGES WITH CONGRESS OR AGENCY	189
GRASSROOTS LEADERS RECRUITED	188
PRESENTATIONS GIVEN BY STAFF OR VOLUNTEERS	64



SUWA outreach table at the Common Ground Fair in Unity, Maine
© Heather Rose Martinez/SUWA

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2022 FINANCIALS

STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION FOR THE 12 MONTHS ENDED DECEMBER 2022

Note: Due to rounding, numbers may not add up precisely to the totals provided

ASSETS		LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Current Assets		Equity	
Cash & Cash Equivalents	2,002,289	Fund Balance	25,236,856
Pre-paid expenses	30,068	Net Income (LOSS)	(2,961,547)
Long-Term Investments		TOTAL EQUITY \$22,275,309	
Property & Equipment	799,633	TOTAL LIABILITES & EQUITY	\$22,275,309
Endowment	3,442,833		
Investments & Stocks	16,000,486		
TOTAL ASSETS \$22,275,309			



* Figures are unaudited – please see www.suwa.org for audited financial information in June 2023

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE 12 MONTHS ENDED DECEMBER 2022

REVENUES		EXPENSES	
Donations	3,435,019	Wilderness Programs*	920,915
Bequests	621,484	Member Services	422,007
Grants	202,000	Fundraising	27,210
Events & Sales	9,964	Administrative & Facilities	563,899
Other Income	21,059	Total Employee Compensation	2,481,975
		(*Not including employee compensation)	
TOTAL REVENUES	\$4,289,525	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$4,416,006
NET ORDINARY INCOME (LOSS)		-\$126,481	

INTEREST & INVESTMENTS INCOME/EXPENSES

Interest & Investment Income

Bank Interest Income	263
Investment Income	303,384
Total Interest/ Investment Income	303,647

Investment Expenses

Total Loss on Sale of Investments	(250,596)
Unrealized Losses	(2,815,765)
Investment Fees	(72,352)
Total Investment Expenses	(3,138,713)

TOTAL INTEREST & INVESTMENT INCOME (LOSS) **-\$2,835,066**

TOTAL NET INCOME (LOSS) **-\$2,961,547**

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