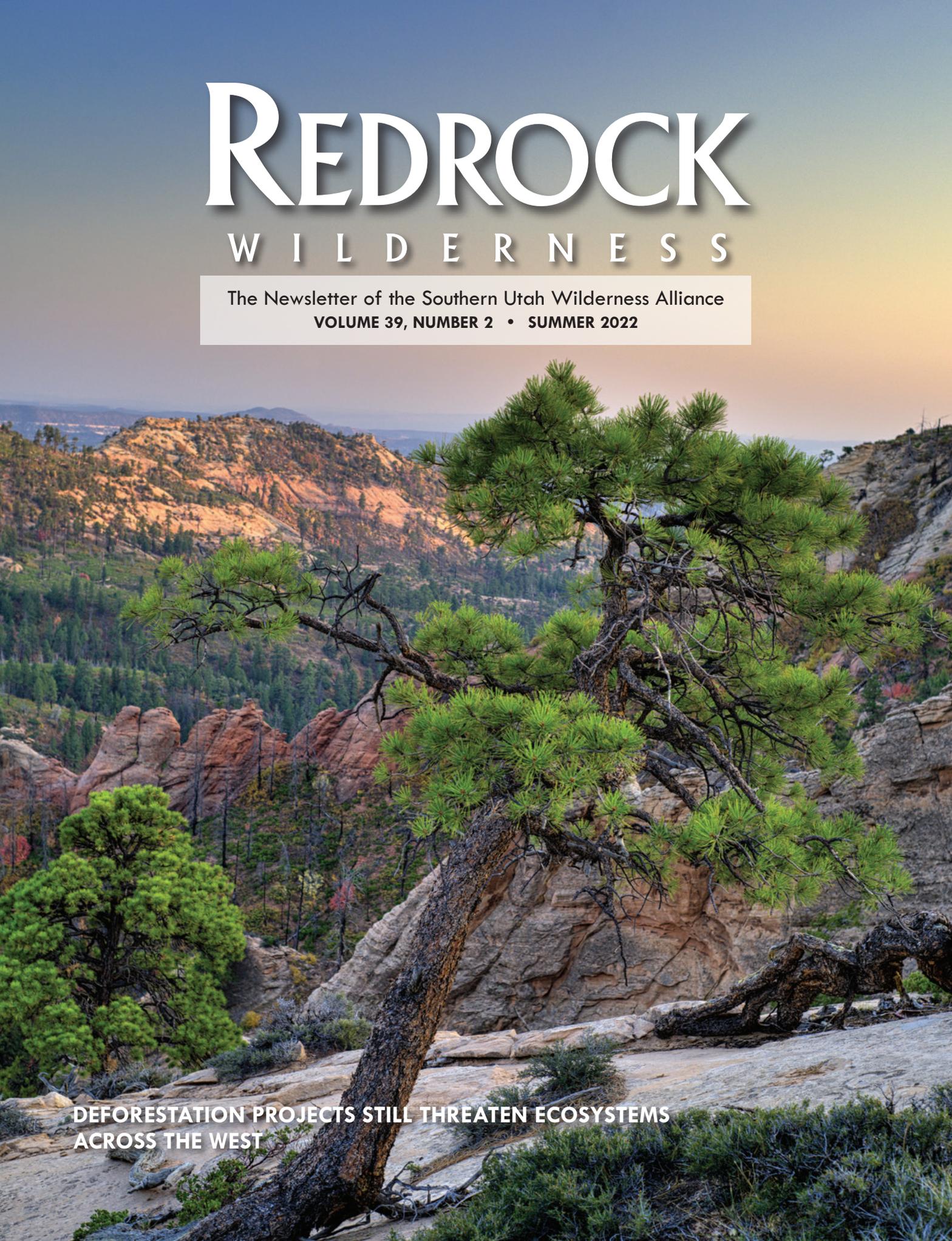


REDROCK

W I L D E R N E S S

The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
VOLUME 39, NUMBER 2 • SUMMER 2022



**DEFORESTATION PROJECTS STILL THREATEN ECOSYSTEMS
ACROSS THE WEST**



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

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

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

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This issue of *Redrock Wilderness* was written by the following staff and outside contributors: Ray Bloxham, Judi Brawer, Neal Clark, Kelsey Cruickshank, Scott Groene, Jeremy Lynch, Kya Marienfeld, Heather Rose Martinez, Creed Murdock, Landon Newell, Dave Pacheco, Laura Peterson, Chris Richardson, and Michelle White. It was edited by Darrell Knuffke and laid out by Diane Kelly. Newsletter design by Amy Westberg.

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

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JUDGING OUR WORK

Eighteen months ago, our daily battles with the Trump administration ended and we were eagerly awaiting a new day—a new chance to make real progress under the Biden administration.

Today, in a historically familiar pattern, that enthusiasm dwindles, sapped by the political world's slowdown for the November midterm elections. This is a reminder, if we needed one, of how little time is available in a four-year presidential cycle to get critical work done before the demands of political survival intervene and dominate. We appreciate the fact that this administration has sought to rein in rogue Bureau of Land Management (BLM) offices, and that energy leasing has dropped significantly. But we'll surely see a similar lull in the run-up to the presidential election in 2024. That leaves little time in Biden's first term to make increasingly critical progress in land protection and climate resiliency.

Recent Supreme Court decisions undercut federal agencies' ability to regulate air quality and mitigate the climate crisis, removed long-held personal constitutional rights, and undermined both voter rights and tribal sovereignty. This effectively shifts our hope for action on climate change to Congress. Unfortunately, a narrowly divided Congress has struggled to address major policy issues, even the most basic ones.

GRIDLOCK

We now face mounting uncertainty with all three branches of government despite our optimism at the beginning of 2021. We're sailing into the doldrums.

Reflecting on SUWA's nearly 40 years, we do not see much new or different in all this. Our greatest asset in such times is hope.

That may sound trite, but over the past four decades activists have successfully pushed to protect the redrock country, even when the odds were longest against us. Friends and enemies alike have warned repeatedly that we would not—could not—succeed. But we have, despite hostile politicians, administrations, and judges, because we believed we could.

This past spring, after two and a half years of COVID isolation, the SUWA staff were finally able to come together for a retreat on the banks of the Dolores River near Moab. One evening I left folks playing music around a campfire and wandered out to the base of the cliffs of the proposed Beaver Creek Wilderness to view the stars in the pitch-black sky. As I stared up, it occurred to me that it's unlikely Congress will get around to designating these particular lands as wilderness during my time at SUWA. But I was gratified to know that some of the current staff and activists, and those yet to come, will finally make that happen.

SUWA is like an unstoppable desert river. Many different folks have floated the muddy waters over the years: staff, board, members, and activists. We are a movement. We share success, failure, and responsibility across generations.

For four decades, SUWA has stayed focused on our mission of protecting the redrock. The river never stops, even in uncertain times like now.

SMALL STEPS ADD UP TO SUCCESS

Bit by bit, we make progress to protect these landscapes. We may finally convince the BLM that a canyon qualifies as wilderness, our lawsuit may stop leases from being issued, a new management plan may close a canyon to off-road vehicles, or an area may be designated part of a national monument. Cumulatively, these steps move canyons and mesas closer to the long overdue protection they deserve as designated wilderness.

We at SUWA judge success against two standards: first, are we defending these lands in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act such that they remain natural and qualify as wilderness; and, second, are we gaining protection for them as opportunities arise, however slim?

For the first, consider that over the course of 50 years, from about 1935 to 1983, we lost more than half the BLM wilderness in Utah: 13 million acres dammed, chained, drilled, or roaded. In the almost 40 years since, we've lost less than 2 percent of the remaining wilderness. That's not because the BLM suddenly discovered stewardship or Utah politicians became more enlightened. It happened because of the rise of the Utah wilderness movement and SUWA.

To judge our work against the second standard, we reach back to 1989. That's when former Utah Congressman Wayne Owens introduced the first version of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act to protect 5.1 million acres of wilderness. It was seen as so audacious that the preeminent wilderness group in Utah at the time refused to endorse it because they thought it was too aggressive.

Today there are over 5.5 million acres of BLM land in Utah that have gained some form of protection. Not all is designated wilderness, but it all enjoys meaningful protection. This is about 500,000 acres more than Wayne's original proposal, and more than the wildest dreams of early wilderness advocates. And our goal now is to protect about 9.5 million acres of canyon country (which includes the original 5.1 million and about 1 million acres that have been since designated wilderness).

I am grateful to be part of SUWA and to work with the staff, the board, the activists, and supporters—those who have already taken their turn at the oars and those who will.

And I am grateful to all of you for being part of this great effort.

For the Redrock,



Scott Groene
Executive Director



THE AFTERMATH OF A LARGE VEGETATION REMOVAL PROJECT IN GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT. © TIM PETERSON/ECOFLIGHT

MISSING THE FOREST FOR THE TREES HOW THE BLM'S COSTLY PRACTICE OF VEGETATION REMOVAL STILL THREATENS ECOSYSTEMS ACROSS THE WEST

Some threats to public lands, such as energy development, mining, off-road-vehicle damage, and the ever-growing effects of unmanaged human-powered recreation tend to draw their share of national attention. But another threat to our public lands and wilderness remains largely ignored, yet ever-present, no matter who is president, what things look like in Congress, or how much focus is on public lands conservation: mechanical removal and clearcutting of piñon pine and juniper woodlands.

Every year, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) spends tens of millions of taxpayer dollars removing hundreds of thousands of acres of native piñon pine and juniper forests and sagebrush shrublands. These vegetation removal projects, commonly called “treatments,” take many forms. Different methods produce different results. At the most basic level, land managers use chainsaws to topple piñon pine and juniper trees, herbicides to kill sagebrush and woodland saplings, and prescribed fire to remove small

understory growth. SUWA very often supports these kinds of small-scale, conservation-based approaches. When based on science and with clear goals, these targeted methods also carry the lowest risks to overall ecosystem health, particularly when post-removal restoration utilizes native plants and seeds and when other stressors like grazing are removed to allow new native plant life to flourish.

Unfortunately, these methods are less common than the large-scale ones, which wield the metaphorical axe, not the scalpel. They rely on heavy machinery across a sizeable landscape and are by nature the most likely to cause collateral damage to ecosystems during and after implementation. Among these large-scale mechanical methods is mastication, where a “bull hog” masticator (essentially a large wood-chipper attached to an excavator) turns entire live trees and sagebrush into mulch in seconds. Another method is “chaining,” a crude option in which two bulldozers drag a large anchor chain to rip up trees.

A NEW SPIN ON AN OLD, FAILED PRACTICE

The best available science shows that, more often than not, large-scale mechanical vegetation removal has either non-significant (at best) or detrimental (at worst) effects on such things as wildlife, fire prevention, and watersheds. Nonetheless, such vegetation removal projects have plagued public lands for decades. For most of the 20th century, these projects were fairly unapologetically identified as meant to remove “undesirable” native vegetation and enhance forage for livestock.

But present-day proponents of large-scale mechanical vegetation manipulation have expanded their reasoning for removal of native woodlands and shrublands today, especially as public lands grazing has lost much of its charm. Advocates now tout large projects as necessary to ensure habitat for big game species and sage grouse, and for watershed health. Of course, these conditions are still a boon for public lands grazing; it just no longer gets star billing.

Perhaps the most pervasive reason for promoting large-scale removal projects today is that they are necessary to prevent wildfire. This reasoning not only brings in major funding for projects, but makes any opposition to them seem unreasonable. But the problem with “remove it soon

or it will burn” reasoning in piñon-juniper forests is that these kinds of woodlands don’t actually burn frequently at all, having fire return intervals of hundreds of years. But when trees in these ecosystems are removed through chaining, mastication, or other highly-disturbing methods, we see increases in invasive annual grasses like cheatgrass, which actually does make fires more frequent and more severe. In this way, mechanical vegetation removal can actually increase the risk of catastrophic fire.

EXACERBATING THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Crucially, large-scale vegetation removal is a backward step when it comes to mitigating the worst impacts of climate change. These practices decrease soil stability, reduce fire resiliency, hasten the spread of invasive species, and produce dust that accelerates snowmelt in the Colorado Rockies, worsening an already cataclysmic future of drought and desertification.

Piñon pine and juniper forests, the primary woodland type in western dryland ecosystems, bring other critical elements to bear on climate change mitigation—notably, their ability to reliably sequester a disproportionately large amount of carbon compared to other land cover types in

DUST ON SNOW CYCLE

Climate change is predicted to cause a 7-20% reduction in Colorado River runoff, exacerbating the cycle of loss.



the arid West, such as grass and sagebrush. Studies have found that the expansion of woody shrubs and trees (something land managers often portray as an “invasion” to justify large-scale removal projects) actually helps the ecosystem sequester more carbon, and that removing these woody vegetation types results in the release of stored carbon into the atmosphere.

The use of heavy machinery over tens of thousands of acres not only increases atmospheric dust and accelerates desertification (see graphic on page 7), it destroys fragile, late-successional cryptobiotic soil crusts, which themselves play a significant role in sequestering carbon beneath the soil surface. Carbon loss and leaching from these desert carbon sinks is lowest where soils and vegetative cover remain undisturbed.

A DIFFICULT END TO THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Our calls for science and oversight in ecosystem management produced fierce attacks from the Trump administration and its allies in industry, ranching, and development.



A BULL HOG MASTICATOR IN GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT.
© MATHEW GROSS/SUWA

In no small part because SUWA and our partners were effective over the last decade at increasing public and scientific scrutiny of these heavy-handed land management tactics—resulting in the BLM shelving or revamping many large mechanical vegetation removal proposals—the Trump administration actively sought new ways to gut procedural protections promised by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), removing public review mechanisms and stifling the role of science in planning and implementation of vegetation removal projects on public lands.

At the end of the Trump administration, the BLM approved:

- A rule allowing the BLM to avoid environmental analysis, scientific oversight, and public review on piñon-juniper removal projects of up to 10,000 acres.
- Another rule exempting deforestation projects of up to 4,500 acres in size from the scrutiny that NEPA would ordinarily require.
- A plan that authorizes the BLM to clear up to 11,000 miles of “fuel breaks” in forest, sagebrush, and grassland habitats in six western states.
- A corresponding but broader plan that would allow the BLM to plan and execute vegetation removal projects across a 223 million-acre area in the same six states with no accountability.

This 11th-hour flood of rule and policy changes could now result in the removal of native forests and sagebrush shrublands on massive acreages across the West without the benefit of scientific oversight or public accountability—the exact things that have consistently helped bad projects become better in our rapidly-changing natural world.

WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW

SUWA and our conservation partners have been working hard to educate our members and the general public about the broader implications of mechanical vegetation removal—an effort that is often complicated by the many “where, when, how, and why” questions that inevitably arise in regards to this lesser-known threat to public lands.

We have also continued to fight individual vegetation removal projects that directly threaten the wilderness values of lands in America’s Red Rock Wilderness Act. These projects seek to transform natural ecosystems into something they are not, focus myopically on managing habitat for one



A CHAINING PROJECT ON THE WESTERN SLOPE OF INDIAN PEAK IN UTAH'S WEST DESERT © SUWA/TWIG MEDIA LAB

single species, and/or have the primary intent of creating more non-native forage for cattle. In every instance, we encourage the BLM to rely less on specious land management practices that began when the American West was viewed as nothing more than “useless rangelands,” and move toward a modern, science-based approach to ecosystem health and longevity.

Through a combination of strategic legal action, engaging early with federal land managers, and using the public planning process to help make it easier for land managers to choose passive restoration techniques or design small-scale projects instead of defaulting to heavy mechanical means, we have made progress in influencing how the BLM approaches these projects.

We and our partners have advocated for the Biden administration to embrace its own consistently-stated goals of using the best available science, improving public health, and protecting the environment. At the top of the list of things this administration can do to keep faith with its rhetoric is to rescind the Trump-era rulemakings. The Biden administration should also review the BLM’s policies, especially those that target piñon-juniper forests, fire rehabilitation, and the sagebrush biome. Science and public scrutiny must also be restored as integral pieces of public land management.

There’s also plenty of room for a review of the agency’s structure, programs, and budget lines to make sure they work to enhance, rather than frustrate, native ecosystem survival.

We have made it clear that, while this examination occurs, the BLM should immediately halt large-scale mechanical removal of vegetation, especially within the National Landscape Conservation System where it is antithetical to the agency’s expressed framework for resource protection in wilderness, wilderness study areas, national monuments and conservation areas, and all lands with wilderness characteristics.

Citizen engagement, public oversight, and scientific research have long been the only things preventing the BLM from forever being an agency that “does what it does because that’s what it has always done.” If that approach was ever defensible, it is flatly deadly in the face of climate change.

We do not for a moment argue that degraded ecosystems can never benefit from human help. We do strenuously argue that the most draconian, highly mechanized approaches—and those with the very least scientific support—ought not to be slam-dunk first choices.

—*Kya Marienfeld*

GOOD
NEWS

RED ROCK BILL GAINS NEW SUPPORTERS

While much has changed in Washington, DC this year, advocacy for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act has remained constant and strong. Over the past three months, that dedicated work has gained us five new congressional cosponsors.

They include Representatives Joe Neguse (D-CO), Melanie Ann Stansbury (D-NM), Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM), Adam Schiff (D-CA) and Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT). We want to thank these legislators for rising above the louder-than-usual DC cacophony and taking time to endorse the Red Rock bill. The lands it would designate as wilderness are unique and irreplaceable, and the need for their protection is more urgent than ever (see sidebar at right).

On a sad note, we must say goodbye this year to Representative Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), our House red-rock champion since 2015. He is retiring after this term in Congress. We offer him heartfelt thanks for his leadership on this issue and our very best wishes for whatever comes next.

EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF UTAH PASSES RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF AMERICA'S RED ROCK WILDERNESS ACT

At their 117th annual convention in late April, lay and clergy delegates of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah passed a sweeping resolution in support of Utah land protection. The resolution stands, as its title proclaims, in support of "America's Red Rock Wilderness Act and for the Perpetual Protection and Management of Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments."

We at SUWA are both honored and heartened by the endorsement. We see it as breath of fresh air in bringing faith communities into the increasingly important conversation about the protection of wild public lands while building on earlier "Faith & the Land" efforts organized by faith groups in Utah.

Utah Episcopalians and the broader Anglican community have a legacy of environmental stewardship and an affinity for the natural world. The April action demonstrates the

WHY IS AMERICA'S RED ROCK WILDERNESS ACT IMPORTANT?

Sponsored by Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Representative Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), America's Red Rock Wilderness Act would designate more than 8 million acres of Bureau of Land Management land as federal wilderness while safeguarding the region's abundant Native American cultural and ancestral sites.

By protecting iconic Utah landscapes such as Cedar Mesa, Factory Butte, the Kaiparowits Plateau, and the Greater Canyonlands area, the bill would preserve 1.5 percent of the lands needed to reach the Biden administration's goal of protecting 30 percent of America's lands by the year 2030. It would also keep in the ground a meaningful amount of the carbon budget necessary to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Visit suwa.org/arrwa to learn more, view the list of current cosponsors, and ask your members of Congress to support the bill.

respect Episcopalians have for "the interdependent web of existence of which this fragile earth is a part."

Among several aspects of the Red Rock bill that resonate with Utah Episcopalians is the fact that these Utah wild lands contain some of the world's richest concentrations of sacred sites important to the spiritual wellbeing of Native American cultures, including the Ute Mountain Ute, Zuni, Hopi, Navajo, and Ute Tribes. Those cultural bonds endure today despite numerous challenges.

The resolution further calls for the passage of the Red Rock bill to help mitigate the climate crisis, protect habitat, animals, birds, and all creatures, and to help mitigate racial and environmental injustices.

The resolution would not have been possible without the determination of longtime activist and SUWA member Ron Barness. We thank Ron sincerely for helping make the endorsement a reality.

—Chris Richardson and Dave Pacheco

DEFORESTATION PROJECT THREATENS DEEP CREEKS' NATIVE STANDS

Once again, pushing gauzy claims of habitat restoration, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has targeted Utah's native forests. This time, the agency proposes an almost 10,000-acre vegetation removal project on the western and northern slopes of the Deep Creek Mountains (Goshute: Pi'a-roi-ya-bi). In some areas, the agency aims to masticate all piñon pine and juniper trees, claiming that it will restore sagebrush habitat for mule deer and sage grouse.

The Deep Creek Mountains stand west of Salt Lake City and just east of the Nevada border. Seventy thousand acres in the heart of the range are designated as the Deep Creek Mountains Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and are managed for their wilderness qualities. The BLM has identified additional acreage adjacent to the Deep Creek WSA as also having wilderness characteristics and SUWA has identified an even larger area, which includes Ochre Mountain directly to the north, as an essential part of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. The North Deep Creek Sagebrush Habitat Restoration project would remove vegetation directly adjacent to the WSA and in areas proposed for wilderness.

Piñon-juniper woodlands occur naturally throughout the Deep Creek mountains, including in the areas that the BLM

is proposing to convert to sagebrush. In the face of drought and climate change, attempted landscape manipulations such as these have a very low likelihood of success. But they harm native woodland species such as the pinyon jay, which is being proposed for listing as an endangered species.

SUWA submitted extensive comments on the BLM's proposal. We asked that the agency prepare an environmental assessment analyzing impacts of the project on lands with wilderness characteristics and important resources such as native vegetation, bird and wildlife habitat, and soils, including cryptobiotic soils. We further asked that the BLM demonstrate that the project will actually benefit both mule deer and sage grouse as it claims. The agency has refused, instead stating that it will approve the project using a categorical exclusion. That, as the name suggests, excludes the project from detailed environmental analysis and public participation.

We're keeping a close eye on this project, continuing to urge the BLM to make necessary changes and enable public participation, and will appeal if necessary. Stay tuned.

—*Judi Brawer*



WESTERN SLOPE OF THE DEEP CREEK MOUNTAINS. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD ON MONUMENTS' MANAGEMENT PLANS ANTICIPATED THIS SUMMER

Work is underway on the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments' management plans, and public comment opportunities are just around the corner. Here's a brief overview, and we will continue to keep you posted as planning progresses.

The proclamations that designated each monument established monument advisory committees (MACs) composed of up to 15 members representing monument values and local community interests. For the Bears Ears MAC, this includes three Tribal interest representatives, two recreation interest representatives, a representative of the conservation community, representatives with paleontological and archaeological expertise, and two public at-large representatives.

In addition, "to ensure that management decisions affecting the [Bears Ears] monument reflect the expertise and traditional and historical knowledge of interested Tribal Nations and people," the Bears Ears proclamation re-established the Bears Ears Commission, which consists of one elected officer from each of the five Tribal Nations of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition. The Commission and the land management agencies (Bureau of Land Management and forest Service) recently signed a Cooperative Management Agreement to further codify and delineate the collaborative management obligations for development

of the management plan and management of the monument in general.

Unfortunately, the Grand Staircase-Escalante MAC is a holdover from the previous administration and does not afford sufficient representation of Tribal, conservation, and other necessary interests. And while there is no similar commission or collaborative management requirement for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, there is, for both monuments, the mandate that the federal agencies "provide for the maximum public involvement . . . including consultation with federally recognized Tribes . . ." in development of the monument management plans.

Another good thing is that the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears MAC meetings with the federal agencies are public, and we encourage you to attend. Both MACs recently held public Zoom meetings to kick off the monument management planning process.

We expect the official public process (called scoping) for both monuments' management plans to start in mid-August. Scoping is the general public's first chance to help shape the monument management plans. We'll provide more detailed information when that process begins.

—*Judi Brawer and Michelle White*



COMB RIDGE, BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT. © TIM PETERSON/LIGHTHAWK



PARUNUWEAP WILDERNESS STUDY AREA AND PROPOSED WILDERNESS. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

VOLUNTEERS EXPLORE ROUTES, GATHER DATA AHEAD OF TRAVEL PLAN RELEASES

As SUWA staff prepare for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) release of travel management plans across Utah, SUWA members have also been getting ready. In Moab and Kanab, redrock advocates joined the staff in travel planning areas to explore routes, discuss issues, and prepare to comment on draft plans as they roll out throughout the year.

In Moab this April, volunteers walked routes in the Labyrinth Canyon/Gemini Bridges Travel Management Area along Highway 313 and Mineral Bottom Road. They experienced user conflicts on mountain bike trails, saw how widespread and unchecked dispersed camping leads to route proliferation, and attempted to locate several routes that, while designated open to motorized vehicle use, did not exist on the ground.

Other advocates gathered in Kanab in May to explore parts of the Red Knoll, Yellowjacket, and Barracks areas of the Trail Canyon Travel Management Area. They noted route density and redundancy, the lack of apparent purpose and need for many

routes, and the impact of motorized recreation on precious riparian and wilderness resources, particularly in the Parunuweap Wilderness Study Area. This area—one of Utah's driest corners—features a route with over 20 water crossings.

These field trips are meant to build a community of advocates equipped to participate in the public comment periods that follow the release of each draft travel management plan. These comment periods are an important opportunity for the public to speak up about how it wants the BLM to manage these areas.

Comments should be specific, informative, and offer a management solution. In exploring routes on the ground with SUWA staff, advocates learn what to look for, how to document impacts, and how to translate experience on the ground into effective comments. We hope to host more SUWA supporters interested in travel planning in other travel management areas soon.

—Kelsey Cruickshank

UTAH TRAVEL PLANS MOVE FORWARD . . . VERY SLOWLY

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is slated to complete nine more travel management plans covering more than five million acres of BLM-managed lands in southern and eastern Utah before June 2025. These critically important plans will determine where off-road vehicles are allowed to travel across some of Utah's most remarkable wild landscapes.

These travel plans were supposed to be completed on a specified schedule set out via a 2017 settlement agreement. Unfortunately, a number of them have been significantly delayed. The reasons for delay range from problems with cultural resource inventories and failure to conduct timely wildlife surveys to COVID-related delays and staffing issues within the agency.

Despite the delays, the BLM is moving forward and we continue to prod the agency to release plans that do justice to these incredible landscapes.

We expect the BLM to release a draft plan for the Labyrinth Canyon/Gemini Bridges area outside of Moab later this summer and a draft plan for the Trail Canyon area near Kanab by the end of the year. Follow us online and stay tuned for more opportunities to make your voice heard.

MOBILE MAPPING: SUWA'S FIELDWORK GOES HIGH TECH

A key component of SUWA's work is having an intimate knowledge of the landscapes we fight to protect. For decades, SUWA has made fieldwork a priority by regularly sending out staff to document impacts to redrock wilderness. In the past, this was a labor-intensive process. Staff took pictures and jotted down notes on paper maps only to head back to the office and have to spend hours organizing information.

Today, with the availability of advanced geographic information systems, or GIS, SUWA's fieldwork has never been more effective or efficient. Using mobile mapping software, SUWA's field crews can take pictures, capture custom data, perform inspections, take notes, and share information with the office all on a smart phone.

This method of fieldwork has improved SUWA's ability to provide accurate and useful information when submitting comments to the Bureau of Land Management or otherwise working with the agency to create better travel management plans. To date, SUWA has recorded over 40,000 photo points with accompanying data throughout the state. As this database grows, so does our ability to protect the redrock desert we all love.



PUBLIC STANDS TO LOSE IN HENRY MOUNTAINS LAND SWAP SCHEME

The South Dakota based corporation that owns the 7,000-acre Sandy Ranch on the eastern boundary of Capitol Reef National Park is pitching a plan to trade private inholdings in the Henry Mountains for public lands surrounding its ranch property.

The company, Sandy Ranch, LLC, also wants to buy high-value public lands near the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (NCA) in Washington County, Utah for future development. The deal would do three things: (1) transfer 880 acres of BLM lands adjacent to Sandy Ranch to expand the private ranch property, (2) transfer 2,680 acres of scattered private inholdings in the Henry Mountains to the BLM, and (3) transfer 2,033 acres of BLM lands in Washington County to the ranch company via cash purchase. The exchange will require federal legislation.

The deal is being promoted as good for bison and mule deer in the Henry Mountains because it will eliminate threats of future private property development. While proponents tout this reordering of the public landscape as a win-win, we view the proposal as bad policy that will

result in a net loss for conservation. The exchange would transfer public lands proposed for wilderness designation in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, many of which the BLM already manages for the protection of wilderness values.

SCARCE AND DWINDLING HABITAT

In addition, the 2,000+ acres of public land proposed for sale in Washington County border a portion of the Red Cliffs NCA that has been a highly successful relocation site for threatened Mojave desert tortoise. Development of the property will increase pressure on this critical habitat through new roads, power lines, substations, sewer plants, noise, and light disturbances.

Without a clear conservation gain, it is poor policy to transfer federal lands into private ownership, and the BLM's land management plans clearly call for retaining these lands in public ownership.

We agree wholeheartedly that public lands should remain in public hands, and will work with our partners to oppose this plan. We will also engage our congressional champions to fight any legislation that would enable this one-sided swap.

—Neal Clark

GOOD NEWS

BLM MOVES TO RECONCILE SOARING USE, RESOURCE DEGRADATION IN MOAB REGION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is developing new plans to better manage dispersed camping in three high-use areas near Moab, Utah.

The agency's goal is to better protect resources and improve visitor experiences in the 120,000-acre Labyrinth Rims/Gemini Bridges Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), the 9,000-acre Two Rivers SRMA, and the 17,000-acre Utah Rims SRMA.

Rapid growth of human-powered recreation across Utah's public lands—in the Moab region, especially—over the past decade has damaged everything from wilderness values, wildlife, and visitor experiences, to natural and cultural resources. The Moab area hosts more than three million visitors annually. Many camp on BLM-managed public lands and the damage is proportionate. Accordingly, the BLM is revisiting its rules regarding dispersed camping in these three highly popular areas near Moab.

THE GOAL IS SUSTAINABILITY

Most BLM-managed public lands are now open to “dispersed camping.” That means visitors may camp in areas

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Recreation ecology tells us that land managers must actively manage recreation on public lands—especially as they work to ensure balance between quality visitor experiences and protection of natural resources.”

without dedicated campgrounds and associated facilities. Chief among the BLM's new management options is a proposal to move the three heavily used areas from an open dispersed category to a “designated dispersed” category. Boiled down, that means free camping, with no amenities such as toilets, will still be available. But instead of camping anywhere, visitors would be required to occupy a clearly identified site.

This, the BLM hopes, will “make dispersed camping more sustainable in high-use areas while reducing user conflicts and protecting cultural and natural resources.” The agency



THE RAPID GROWTH OF HUMAN-POWERED RECREATION IN THE MOAB AREA IS HARMING THE LOCAL ECOLOGY AS WELL AS THE VERY EXPERIENCES PEOPLE GO THERE TO FIND.
© SUWA/TWIG MEDIA LAB

is considering requiring all campers in these areas to use a portable toilet system to pack out human waste (already a Grand County, Utah requirement) and to use a fire pan. Wood gathering and cutting would be prohibited.

Recreation ecology tells us that land managers must actively manage recreation on public lands—especially as they work to ensure balance between quality visitor experiences and protection of natural resources. We are heartened to see the BLM considering these sound practices. We'll keep you apprised of public comment opportunities as the proposal progresses.

—Neal Clark

**GOOD
NEWS**

BLM ELEVATES ORV MANAGEMENT AT CANE WASH

Cane Wash is one of the San Rafael River's biggest tributaries and has been one of the most significant locations of illegal off-road vehicle (ORV) use in the San Rafael Swell for decades. Frequent flash floods and the wide-open nature of the northern portion of the wash combine to

make it all too accessible. The same factors have frustrated previous management steps to prevent motorized users from traveling into the Sids Mountain Wilderness (formerly the Sids Mountain Wilderness Study Area), as designated in the 2019 Emery County Public Lands Act.

In a step long overdue, the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Price field office is now prioritizing extensive actions to protect the wilderness area from illegal motorized use. The agency proposes to reroute a portion of the designated Cane Wash motorized route and to install physical barricades and signage to prevent illegal use in the Sids Mountain Wilderness.

SUWA was initially skeptical of the proposal because of the extent of new physical disturbance, including within the wilderness area. But we were able to meet in the field with Price BLM and local governmental staff earlier this year to discuss our concerns and potential management actions, and to understand the perspectives of other stakeholders. As a result, several of SUWA's suggestions were incorporated into the BLM's planning document. We are now hopeful that this project can be successful.

This location has had a history of illegal off-road vehicle use and it is not alone. There are many other priority locations in dire need of similar management actions.



WE'RE ENCOURAGED BY THE BLM'S DECISION TO PRIORITIZE ORV MANAGEMENT IN CANE WASH TO PROTECT THE SIDS MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS AREA (PICTURED ABOVE) FROM ILLEGAL MOTORIZED USE. © RAY BLOXHAM/SUWA

We're much encouraged that the Price BLM field office now appears willing and ready to actively manage ORV use in the newly designated wilderness areas in Emery County. We look forward to helping them protect these matchless areas in any way possible.

—Ray Bloxham

SUWA CHALLENGES EXPANSION OF LILA CANYON COAL MINE

Earlier this summer, SUWA and the Sierra Club filed a federal lawsuit challenging a last-minute decision by the Trump-era Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to expand the Lila Canyon coal mine. The coal mine is located less than a quarter mile from the Turtle Canyon Wilderness and along the western slope of Utah's wild Book Cliffs region. The lawsuit is just the latest chapter in SUWA's decades-long fight to protect the air, water, and wildlife of this remarkable area from destructive coal mining activity.

The BLM's decision, if allowed to stand, will extend the life of the mine by a minimum of two to three years and allow for the extraction of an additional 7.2 million tons of coal. The anticipated mining activity will emit millions of tons of greenhouse gas pollutants, further exacerbating the ongoing climate crisis—and by association, the decades-long drought in this region.

SUWA's lawsuit aims to keep these unneeded dirty fossil fuels—and their carbon emissions—in the ground. The Western Environmental Law Center is helping to represent SUWA in this lawsuit. Stay tuned for updates as the case moves forward.

—Landon Newell

BALD KNOLL RS 2477 LAWSUIT SET FOR DECEMBER TRIAL

Passed in 1866 as part of the Mining Act, Revised Statute (RS) 2477 is an obscure law that granted "highway" rights-of-way across federal lands in certain circumstances. Congress repealed RS 2477 in 1976, but Utah's politicians seized on it in the 1990s and early 2000s as a means of preventing redrock wilderness designation and asserting local control over federal public lands.

Currently, the litigation known as either the "Kane 1" or "Bald Knoll" lawsuit is moving toward trial this December. The State of Utah and Kane County filed the suit in 2008 and the district court reached its original decision in 2013. Then, in 2014, the Tenth Circuit sent the case back to the district court to make a new decision regarding the width of three of the RS 2477 rights-of-way, each of which is either within or borders Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

The case lay dormant until the fall of 2021. Now, the parties, including SUWA, are moving steadily through the process of gathering evidence necessary to inform the district court's new decision. Notably, it seems that Kane County and

BLM GRANTS SUWA PROTEST, CANCELS UTAH LEASE SALE

Despite Biden administration campaign promises to halt all new onshore oil and gas leasing and development, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) held its first competitive sale in June offering parcels for development across the West.

The BLM was not legally required to hold these sales, and the sales will do little, if anything, to lower the price of oil and natural gas. Despite their relentless demands for lease sales, operators are currently sitting on thousands of unused (but approved) drilling permits and millions of acres of undeveloped leases. The recent sales will only exacerbate this problem.

But there is some good news: in Utah, no lease parcels were offered for development because the BLM granted SUWA's lease sale protest and subsequently cancelled the Utah sale. This is a victory for the public lands in Utah, including our water, wildlife, and climate.

While we are pleased that the BLM granted our protest, the agency unfortunately held other sales throughout the West at a time when we need to be reducing our use of fossil fuels if we are to have any hope of avoiding the worst impacts of the global climate crisis.

JUDGE DENIES SUWA'S REQUEST TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN RS 2477 LAWSUITS

On June 6 a federal district judge issued a decision on two related RS 2477 issues: (1) SUWA's renewed motion to intervene "as of right" in the RS 2477 lawsuit known as the Kane County "bellwether" trial; and, (2) SUWA's request that the court allow us to more fully participate in the depositions now being taken in related RS 2477 lawsuits around the state. The judge denied our requests on both points. We believe that the June 6 decision is inconsistent with 10th circuit precedent from 2019 and 2020—affirming that SUWA is entitled to intervene as of right in another RS 2477 lawsuit (known as Kane 1).

Shortly after the decision, the judge granted SUWA's request to file an appeal of the decision to deny our intervention as of right now—before final decision in the bellwether trial. The next step is to ask the Tenth Circuit to hear our appeal.

Utah are going to ask the judge to address in his decision whether one of their RS 2477 rights-of-way includes the right to pave a few miles of the southwestern end of the Skutumpah Road (near Johnson Canyon Road) and adjacent to Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

After trial, the district court is likely to reach its new decision in 2023 and an appeal is almost certain to follow. We'll keep you posted.

—Michelle White

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM EXPANDS AND ADAPTS AS NEEDS ARISE

Every stewardship season is uniquely its own, and each project is shaped by urgency, emergent issues, and on-the-ground priorities. We have built SUWA's Stewardship Program on the foundations of responsiveness and adaptability.

This year we expanded our standard two-day project model to include more comprehensive 4-5 day volunteer stewardship projects. These longer duration projects allow us to remediate upwards of 50 sites in locations where off-road vehicle use, mountain biking, dispersed camping, or other human activities lead to impairment of wilderness qualities.

As part of our effort to manage recently designated Emery County wilderness in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Price field office, we planned two

weeklong projects this season: one in the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness, completed this spring, and another scheduled for October in the Muddy Creek Wilderness.

266 HOURS IN THE LABYRINTH CANYON WILDERNESS

In April, with three SUWA stewardship staff and one BLM ranger on hand, our large crew of volunteers formed small teams, dispersed across the wilderness, and obliterated traces of human impacts on the wild landscape.

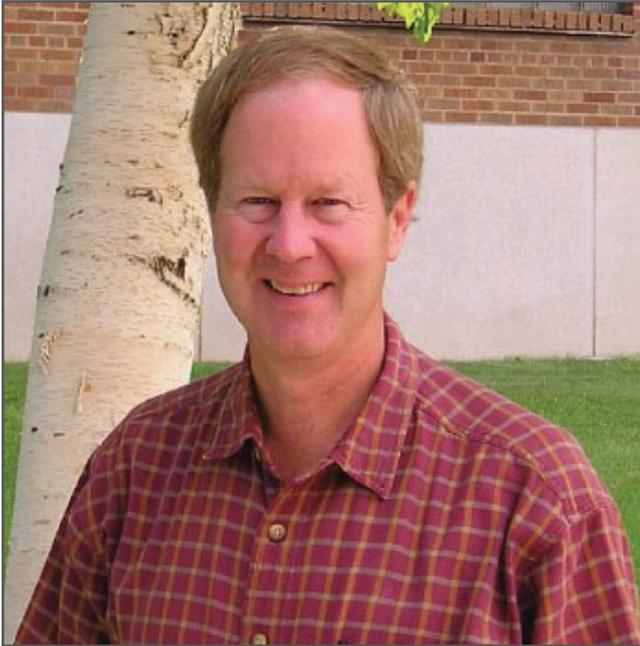
By the end of the project, our volunteers had installed 22 wilderness signs, built 500 feet of rock-lined wilderness boundary, reclaimed 4,100 feet of old vehicle routes in wilderness, closed 11 miles of illegal routes, and removed or remediated a number of makeshift fire rings. The work spanned an impressive 266 volunteer hours in the backcountry.

LOOKING AHEAD

We have scheduled 37 more project days in 13 separate project areas for the remainder of 2022. Please join us if you can. If not, be assured we will be out here in the deserts, on the rivers, and in the mountains of southern Utah over the long haul, grateful as always for your support.

To join a stewardship project, first view our upcoming calendar at suwa.org/project-calendar, then submit an application at suwa.org/apply. We hope to see you out in the field!

—Jeremy Lynch



SUWA IS GRATEFUL FOR RICH'S MANY YEARS OF SERVICE ON THE BOARD, AND WE HOPE HE'LL REJOIN US IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE.

DR. INGEBRETSON TAKES A WELL-EARNED REST FROM SUWA BOARD

After serving on the SUWA Board of Directors for over 15 years, Rich Ingebretsen is stepping down. Fortunately, he says his hiatus from the redrock fight is temporary while he focuses on another of his great loves: restoring the natural health and beauty of Glen Canyon and the Colorado River. We're treating this as a well-deserved sabbatical.

Rich is one of the kindest and most generous people we know. He founded the Glen Canyon Institute in 1996, driven by his first trip to Glen Canyon as a young Boy Scout. That's where he developed his great passion for the canyons that the rising waters of Lake Powell would soon submerge.

In addition to dedicating his life to Glen Canyon, Rich is a physician and faculty member at the University of Utah School of Medicine and Department of Physics, and the founder and president of Utah Wilderness Medicine.

While the demands of his medical practice sometimes left him rushing into or out of board meetings, we knew we could always count on him to step up when we needed something. And his connections in Utah were of a startling diversity, given all those he had treated, befriended, or both. He seemed endlessly willing to extend invitations to

float the rivers, or lately to see the ancient glories revealed anew as Glen Canyon reservoir inexorably shrinks. Or to offer expert advice on foreign travel as his love for medicine, people, and the environment has taken him around the world to places as varied as Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Guatemala, and Paraguay.

We're looking forward to having him back as soon as he's restored Glen Canyon.

SUMMER INTERNS DIVE BACK INTO COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

This summer brought a wealth of youthful energy to SUWA in the form of three wonderful interns: Catie Quigley, Keegan Galloro, and Andie Madsen.

University of Utah senior Catie Quigley stepped in to lead our efforts at several Salt Lake County events, now that fairs and other gatherings are returning from a two-year COVID pause. Catie's degrees in journalism and international studies, along with her skill in communicating with other interested, engaged people, make her a natural.

Fellow University of Utah student Keegan Galloro came to SUWA to guide our participation in Latino Conservation



LEFT TO RIGHT: INTERNS ANDIE MADSEN, KEEGAN GALLORO, AND CATIE QUIGLEY.

Week 2022. Keegan honed his Spanish communication skills as a sous chef in Salt Lake area restaurants and kitchens and conducted gentrification studies in Salt Lake City's westside neighborhoods for his degree in urban ecology. His internship focused on educating southwest Utah's Latino communities about their backyard redrock wilderness by organizing a hike to a nearby proposed wilderness area, and getting Latino youth involved in local events such as a desert plant workshop, a group bike ride along the Virgin River, and an introduction to the reptiles of Red Cliffs Desert Reserve.

Andie Madsen returned for her second SUWA internship this summer, building on the strong work she did for us last summer. Andie hails from Salt Lake City and is currently a junior at Columbia University in New York City. She led fellow Utah college students in organizing a meeting with Senator Mitt Romney's staff to explain the importance of protecting Utah's wild public lands as a climate solution. Mr. Romney sits on the Senate Bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus. More than most, he needs to understand the value of wilderness as a way to keep damaging fossil fuels in the ground and to sequester more carbon in the process.

These three outstanding students have only just begun to help shape the planet's future in a lasting, beneficial way. We thank Catie, Keegan and Andie for their valuable work and wish them all the best in their educations and careers.

SUWA's grassroots internship program is partially funded by a generous gift from the Weismann family in support of the Dr. Norman Weissman Internship for Preservation of Wild & Scenic Utah.

SUWA ADDS EYES ON THE GROUND FOR 2022

We are pleased to welcome Cedar Fisher, Sydney Ricketts, and Troy Anderson to SUWA's 2022 seasonal field team.

Starting earlier this year, Cedar, Sydney and Troy have been traveling throughout Utah conducting on-the-ground motorized route inventories to inform our work to help shape the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) continuing travel management plan revisions.

Our seasonal field team documents every existing route and linear feature that has the potential to impact America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, collecting GIS data such as use levels and purpose. This inventory work is critical as it provides SUWA with accurate and detailed information regarding potential route designations, and this forms the basis of SUWA's engagement in the travel plan revision process. As a result of these efforts, SUWA continues to have comprehensive and accurate inventory data that exceeds the BLM's cursory and often incomplete assessments.

This year's priorities for the team's work include the San Rafael Swell, Nine Mile Canyon, Book Cliffs, and Dolores Triangle travel management areas (TMAs), with additional work slated for the BLM's Dinosaur North and Henry Mountains TMAs.

We are delighted to add Cedar, Sydney, and Troy to our inventory team and appreciate their enthusiasm for protecting the redrock from off-road vehicle damage and ongoing agency mismanagement.



LEFT TO RIGHT: TROY ANDERSON, SYDNEY RICKETTS, AND CEDAR FISHER.

THANK YOU, SUWA BUSINESS MEMBERS!

SUWA's Business Membership Program is a great way for your small business or company to support the protection of Utah's redrock country. For an annual donation of \$150 or more, we'll print your company's name in our newsletter once a year and on our website at suwa.org/businessmembers. At higher levels of support we offer additional benefits, such as a featured spot in our monthly e-newsletter. For more information, please contact us at membership@suwa.org or (801) 486-3161. Listed below are businesses from Utah and across the country that currently support Utah wilderness through SUWA's Business Membership Program.

KAYENTA MEMBERS

(\$1,000+)

Caffe Ibis Coffee Roasting Co, UT
Chris Brown Photography, CO
Imlay Canyon Gear, UT

JSA Sustainable Wealth Management, NY
Mosaic Real Estate LLC, CO
Powderhound Marketing, CO

Shinemaker Marketing, CA
State 45, IN
Stone Forest Inc, NM
Tailwind Nutrition, CO

WINGATE MEMBERS

(\$500-\$999)

Action Photo Tours, UT
Charles Cramer Photography, CA
Glenn Randall Writing and
Photography, CO

Holiday River Expeditions, UT
Mountain West Hard Cider, UT
On The Trail Financial Planning LLC, CA
Salt Lake Mailing, UT

SLC Qi Community Acupuncture, UT
The Wildland Trekking Co, AZ
Tourmaline Capital Management LLC, CA
Yoga Del Mar, CA

MOENKOPI MEMBERS

(\$150-\$499)

Bret Webster Images, UT
Brown Bag Farms, CA
Carol Montgomery Drake CPA PLLC, NY
Clayhaus Photography, UT
Consulting Psychologists, AZ
Escape goats, UT
Four Crows Photography, MA
Githens Properties LLC, CO
Gospel Flat Farm, CA
Injoy Productions, CO

James Kay Photography, UT
Maria's Bookshop, CO
Maui Mountain Coffee Farm, HI
McGrath + McKenna Design Group, CO
Page Speiser LCSW, UT
Pinnacle Peak Eye Care, AZ
Rupestrian CyberServices, AZ
The Carpet Barn, UT
The Group Real Estate LLC, UT
Underwood Environmental Inc, UT

Wagenschmitt VW Service, WA
Waterwise Design & Landscapes LC, UT
William Stone Photography, RI
Words and Photographs by Stephen
Trimble, UT
Yourstory Photography, IN
ZAK Construction, OR

YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Your membership in SUWA provides both the political and financial strength needed to defend our redrock wild lands. If you're not a member already, please join today at suwa.org/donate.

One especially helpful way to support SUWA is our monthly giving program. You can protect the redrock year-round with a \$5 or \$10 gift every month. That adds up to \$60 or \$120 a year and goes a long way to helping keep your public lands wild. For more details on joining SUWA's monthly giving program, please visit our website at suwa.org/monthly.

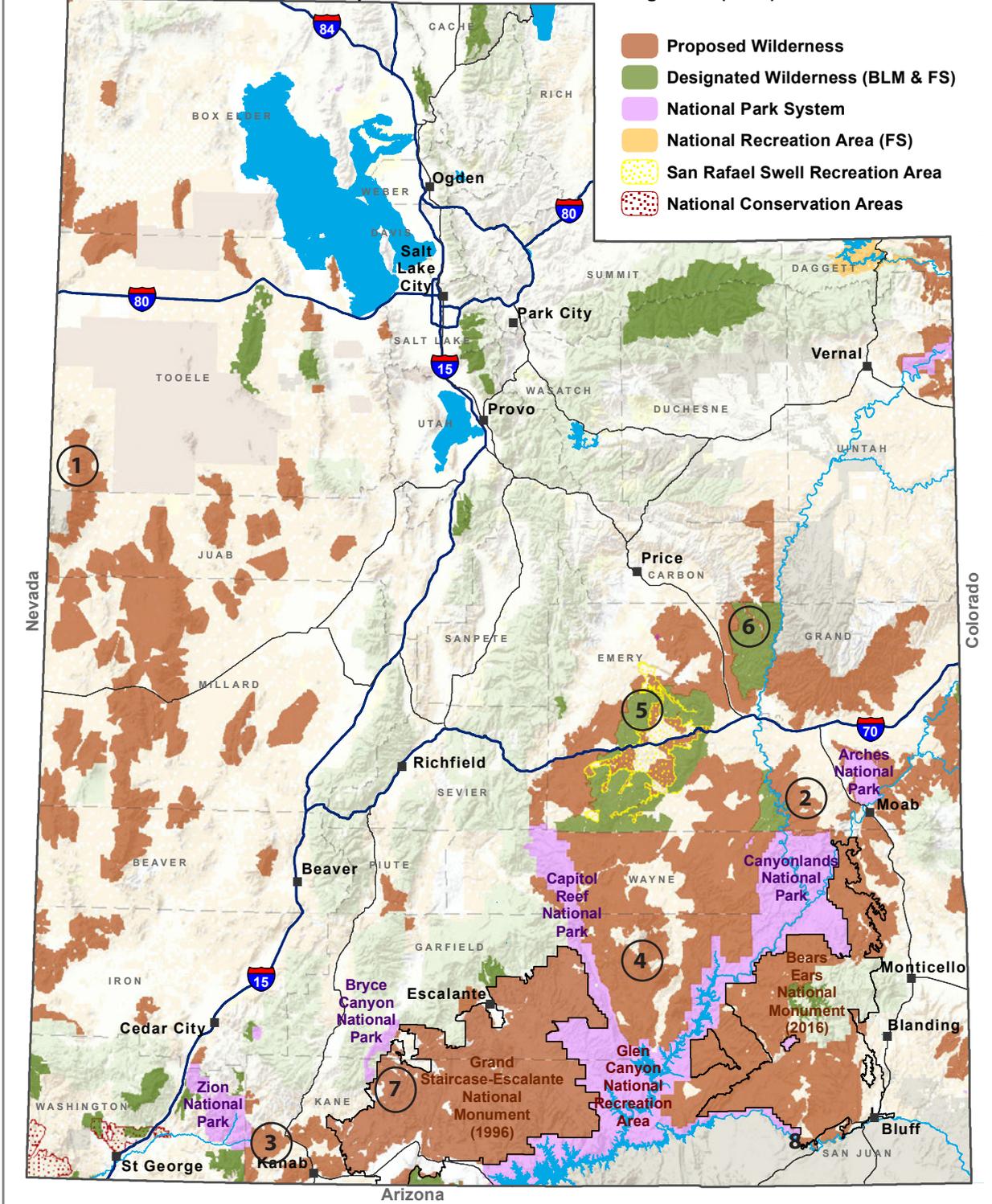
For a longer-term investment, please consider leaving a gift to SUWA in your will or trust. Bequests are a simple, effective way for those of us who love the redrock to ensure that when we're gone, the work to protect these amazing landscapes continues. If you'd like to make a gift to SUWA or have already included a gift to SUWA in your estate, please contact Michelle Martineau at (801) 236-3763 or visit suwa.org/plannedgiving.

Your support is what makes our work possible. Thank you!



America's Red Rock Wilderness Act

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



- 1** Deep Creek Mountains (p. 11)
- 4** Henry Mountains (p. 14)
- 7** Skutumpah Road (p. 18)
- 2** Labyrinth Canyon (p. 13)
- 5** Sids Mountain Wilderness (p. 16)
- 6** Turtle Canyon Wilderness (p. 17)
- 3** Parunuweap WSA (p. 13)



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SUNFLOWERS AGAINST A BACKDROP OF DESERT VARNISH IN GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT. © JACK DYKINGA