

Wild Utah Podcast, Episode 30: What's Next for Monuments

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Dave Pacheco:

Welcome to Wild Utah, the podcast of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. I'm Dave Pacheco.

Immediately following President Biden's early October restoration of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments, the state of Utah threatened that it would file a lawsuit challenging the actions, possibly all the way to the Supreme Court. On December 4th, they kicked the process off by awarding a multi-million dollar contract for the legal work. Just two days prior to the state's contract announcement, on December 2nd, tribal and indigenous community leaders, and people from across Utah, protested at the state Capitol to discourage the irresponsible and misuse of state tax dollars, and they explained why in a series of thoughtful and passionate speeches. The event was coordinated by the Bears Ears Inter-tribal Coalition, Utah Dine' Bikeyah, the Utah Chapter of Sierra Club, and SUWA. In this episode, we'll bring you highlights from the people's protest and again explain why protection of these lands is important for a myriad of reasons, ranging from the ecological to the spiritual and cultural. You'll hear excerpts from Hopi Tribe Chairman Timothy Nuvangyama, Bears Ears Inter-tribal Coalition co-chair Malcolm Lehi, Utah Dine' Bikeyah board chair David Filfred, and Salt Lake grassroots activist and author Brooke Larsen.

At the Capitol rally on December 2nd, the stage was set by Olivia Juarez, SUWA's Latinx Community Organizer who served as the evening's emcee. As the event kicked off, Olivia reminded those gathered that, although we've been

here before, and the challenges ahead remain great, the continuing work to protect these lands must go on.

Olivia Juarez:

Tonight you'll hear me use the word again more times than I would like to, because we've been here before. We've been here at the Capitol, on the streets, time and time again, at any good rallying place, to show that Utahns truly care for these sacred landscapes. Exactly, four years ago today, to this date, more than 6,000 people rallied on the lawn on the south steps to protest the evisceration of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments. And you are here again. Thank you. As we've risen back then, and as we do right now, we have succeeded. In October, President Biden restored the national monument protection areas around Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears national monuments. Thanks to all of your support!

But, unfortunately and unsurprisingly, the state of Utah, namely Governor Cox and Attorney General Sean Reyes and Utah's members of Congress are unwilling to ride into the sunset with us and our protected monument areas. They are now soliciting bids from law firms and from attorneys to find the unlucky party willing to carry the state of Utah's torches and pitchforks towards these national monuments, undoing their protections and further denigrating the vast members of the public and community leaders who support our national monuments.

Dave Pacheco:

Our first guest speaker was the honorable Timothy Nuvangyama, Chairman of the Hopi Tribe, the highest elected official of his people. Chairman Nuvangyaoma was born and raised on the Hopi Reservation, Tobacco Clan, from the Village of Mis-hung-no-vi on Second Mesa. After 25 years in private business, he ran for office in 2017 and was elected to a four-year term as

Chairman of the Hopi Tribe. He was recently re-elected and was sworn into a second term the day before these remarks.

Timothy Nuvangyama:

I'm happy to be here, especially in reference to the lands that we're talking about this evening, how valuable it is, how precious it is not only to the Hopi tribe, but indigenous peoples, whose ancestors have put their footprints and left their mark on the many lands that is currently under attack, again. So, I'm happy and humbled to be here this evening with you all. I do want to start out by thanking President Biden, the Biden administration, Secretary Haaland, all the organizations that have stepped up to do the work in protecting the sacred lands. And all of you here, all of you here who have shown up to voice your concern and just be a part of telling Utah's political leaders that the attacks have to stop. They have to stop.

We are grateful that president Biden restored (Hunmuga) The Bears Ears monument, which is the birthplace of many Hopi and other native peoples in doing so. The president recognizes the deep and enduring ancestral and cultural connections that tribes have to this landscape. Restoring the Bears Ears sets the stage for healing for native people and for everyone. It ensures that the history of our people, our culture and religion will be preserved for future generations. Now is the time to work together for a comprehensive plan for the greater Bears Ears landscape, traditional knowledge, and place-based conservation strategies of tribal communities, which can help create a resilient future for this landscape that we all hold dear. We call on Utah's leaders and especially the governor to work with us to protect these lands. It would be a terrible mistake for the state of Utah to allow and to follow through on its threat, to challenge the very existence of the monument in court. A lawsuit against the monument will divide us and further deepen old wounds. Governor Cox, and those political leaders in your circle, there's better ways to use tax dollars. This is not a way to use that.

Governor Cox and those political leaders in your circle, there is better. There are better ways to use your energy, to do things for the wonderful citizens, citizens of Utah. Using tax dollars to again, wage war against the sacred lands, is not the right way to use that energy. I am humbled to be joined hand-in-hand, arm-in-arm, with other tribal leaders. We have other tribal leaders, indigenous people who are listening as well, who are not able to be a part of this, but I know they're out there. And this is where we come from. This is not a political football game to be punting this back and forth. Governor Cox. Political leaders in your circle. Stop. Stop the attacks. Thank you.

Dave Pacheco:

Our second guest speaker was Malcolm Lehi, the White Mesa Representative to the Ute Mountain Ute tribal council and co-chair of the Bears Ears Inter-tribal Coalition. To Malcolm, Bears Ears is significant in part because, today, he continues traditional hunting and herb gathering throughout the region, just as his ancestors did for thousands of years before. Malcolm was part of the inter-tribal group who put down their historical differences and collectively worked for establishment of the original Bears Ears national monument in 2016. Here's Malcolm Lehi:

Malcolm Lehi:

The Bears Ears National Monument was created to protect sacred and priceless cultural resources, historical sites, and more. It was the first monument created at the request of tribal nations after more than two decades of work at the grassroots level and was a historical collaboration of the Hopi, Navajo, Zuni, the Ute Mountain Ute tribe, and the Northern Utes.

Our ancestors have lived, hunted, gathered, prayed, conducted ceremonies by civilizations there since time immemorial. Our relatives, our ancestors, are buried there. It's always been, and still is our home. Our presence there is

enduring as our people continue to go to Bears Ears, families gathering, dancing, praying ceremonies are regularly held at special places within the region. People go to Bears Ears for subsistence hunting, grazing, and gathering wood, roots, berries, pinyon nuts, weaving materials and medicines. The Bears Ears region is not a series of isolated objects, but the landscape in itself entirely is an object itself worthy of federal and tribal protections. Bears Ears is connected living landscape, where the people, not a collection of items, must be protected.

For well over a year, the coalition has prepared a land management plan that includes indigenous perspective and approach to conservation and land management of the monument. Traditional ecological knowledge of the tribes must be fulfilled, considered in managing the monument and in preparing a land management plan.

The Bears Ears national monument was supported by tribal governments across the region, including the neighboring White Mesa Ute community, local Navajo, and the Ute Indian tribe and by the vast majority of citizens of Utah. During the initial public comment period, nearly 3 million Americans voiced support to Bears Ears and other national monuments. Over 99% of the comments submitted supported continued protection for the national monument. We're glad we're having the support of people. As the tribal leaders, I will heed that call and work to protect Bears Ears, for everyone, and for the future generation. Whether ensuring the land monument status through litigation, or continuing land management plan efforts, the Ute Mountain Ute tribe, and other regional tribes will always be there to protect it. Thank you. Towaoc.

Dave Pacheco:

Our next speaker was David Filfred, Utah Diné Bikéyah's Board Chairman. David is a "true Utahn" from San Juan County and two-term Navajo Nation delegate representing the Aneth Chapter, the only Navajo Chapter fully within Utah's borders. In his previous role as Navajo representative to the Bears Ears Inter-tribal Coalition, he shepherded the resolution supporting Bears Ears through the Navajo Nation Council and laid the groundwork for former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's visit to Bears Ears prior to President Obama's creation of the monument in 2016. David is currently working as Executive Staff Assistant to Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez. At the protest, he started by telling a story about how, recently, he and his medicine man father were sitting and praying near what used to be an infrequently used road in Bears Ears.

David Filfred:

My dad is the only medicine man on this side of the San Juan River. He does the five-night ceremony. We're sitting there, and we're supposed to be in total silence, being humble and saying our prayer. And we hear these vehicles going up and down that street, that dirt road, some of them are carrying the woods. We saw a lot of people that you never saw years ago, maybe 20, 30 years ago. You saw one before. Today, you'll see a hundred vehicles within an hour. So, we brought so many people and Bears Ears national monument has always been there. But, right now it's on the map. People know from all walks of life, from all over the world and we welcome them. But we tell these people, we want this place to be the same as it was since day one. We want it to be the same, generations, our grandkids, and their grandkids to see it. So, I'm all for wilderness.

And the Utah delegation, they want to cut down all the timber. They want to dig into it and find oil, potash, uranium, you name it. And I'm standing there one person saying, no, this is the habitat to many species: all the eagles, all the beautiful elks and the deers, they roam in that area, and I'm saying no. We

have petroglyphs that are left unprotected. People from all over, they shoot them. We have cattlemen that pour thousands of cattle and they roam all the ruins and it's just being trampled. And how are we going to protect all this? There's nobody out there policing it. So, we try to tell people, and I'm glad that President Biden and his administration, Secretary of Interior, and I want to echo what my leaders have said today. I want to thank them. Thank them. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for restoring our national monument, including the Grand Staircase. I think they deserve a round of applause.

And I heard governor Cox say, "we're not going to play the ping pong no more, no more ping pong ball." And that's exactly what we're doing. And I came here to say, knock it off, knock it off. We don't need to be playing this ping pong ball. As alluded by one of my Bears Ears Coalition, there are many things to be done. If you go down to Blanding, Utah today, probably the length of this capital, you're going to see some Navajos on the other side of that canyon, just a little canyon, two poles away for getting their houses lit up. They want to see their Christmas tree light up, but they don't have any electricity. They want to use their commodes, just like we all do. They don't have that luxury. All this money could go to good use, but no, we want to, they want to play this nonsense of going back into the court. So, I'm telling them what we need to do is help other people. So again, thank you. And I thank all of you for being here.

I'm for the people. I'm for you guys. This is public land. This public land belongs to all of us. So again, thank you for restoring the national monument and thanks to President Obama for using the Antiquities Act. You know, Grand Canyon is beautiful, where the very first Antiquities Act was used by President Roosevelt, and I stand for that. And Bears Ears national monument should be the same. It should be there again. I wish I had all night. Back home we say don't ever give a microphone to a politician. So again, thank you. Thank you so

much. We appreciate every one of you that are standing behind. Thank you again.”

Dave Pacheco:

The protest finished with the remarks of Salt Lake community organizer and author Brooke Larsen. Brooke has spent the past decade organizing with the climate justice movement. She co-founded Uplift, a youth-led organization for climate justice in the Southwest, and was a youth delegate to the UN Climate Change Conference in 2016 with SustainU.S. She grew up and resides in Salt Lake City, Utah, ancestral land of the Goshute, Paiute, Shoshone, and Ute people. As a descendent of Mormon settlers who colonized what we now call Utah, Brooke focuses much of her organizing on wealth redistribution, truth telling, and white accountability. She recently co-edited a book with Alastair Lee Bitsóí called *New World Coming: Frontline Voices on Pandemics, Uprisings, and Climate Crisis*. Here’s Brooke Larsen:

Brooke Larsen:

I have been supporting this indigenous-led movement to protect Bears Ears for the past five years or so, and it has been a great honor and a great teacher to have this effort shape much of my twenties. I learned that land protection is always an environmental justice issue, which means it's always a social justice issue and a racial justice issue because public and private land in this country is always unseeded territory of indigenous people.

When the Bears Ears Inter-tribal Coalition began advocating for the designation of the Bears Ears national monument, they presented an opportunity for this country to repair and heal from our violent history. And it is a disgrace that Utah's elected officials have rejected that invitation time and time again.

I am a descendant of the Mormon settlers who colonized this state and specifically people who settled and established trading posts in San Juan county near what is now the Bears Ears national monument. I have always been involved in this effort in an attempt at repair. And I have to acknowledge in my early twenties, my drive to support this effort was partially out of guilt and shame over the violence inflicted by my ancestors and the privilege I have. But as I developed friendships with indigenous people leading this effort and worked past a place of shame to a place of truth-telling, my involvement in this effort became about something deeper. Every action I took became an effort to be accountable and responsible to my friends. It became about love. Accountability and love are a much surer path to healing and repair than guilt will ever be. As my friend, Braidan Weeks, who is the director of the Ute Land Trust recently emphasized, acting out of guilt is a self-serving act. If you really want to help, do it with the intention of relationship-building.

I wonder what would happen if our state leaders, if Governor Cox, built accountable and trusting relationships with the leaders of the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni and Ute Indian Tribe. Would Utah's officials still be moving to spend millions of dollars on a lawsuit challenging these sovereign indigenous nations? I don't think so.

This legal battle the state intends to pursue is disrespectful to the sovereign indigenous nations that have been advocating for the protection of Bears Ears for years. And it wastes millions of Utah's taxpayer dollars. The data shows this is not how Utah taxpayers want their money spent. The 2021 Conservation in the West poll from the Colorado College State of the Rockies project showed that 73% of Utahns support creating new national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges, and tribal protected areas.

Our state officials are acting on behalf of a small minority of special interests and harmful ideologies. I want to say that state leaders should be ashamed. But as I mentioned earlier, shame is not a very productive emotion. So instead

I want to invite state leaders to choose a different path. I want to invite them to be curious, to be accountable, to be creative.

If they were curious, maybe they could listen to understand. I wonder if then they would finally hear what the Bears Ears Inter-tribal Coalition is advocating for. If they were accountable, I wonder if they would tell the truth about stolen land, genocide, boarding schools. I wonder how that \$10 million could be spent instead towards repair, reparations and healing. If they were a little bit creative, think of all the possibilities for how that money could be spent. Think of how far \$10 million could go to help incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into the management of the monument. (Applause) Imagine how that money could be used towards a just transition from fossil fuels to renewable and regenerative energy. So, that this push to open up the lands of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase for fossil fuel development could finally be put to an end.

When I heard the state intended to pursue another legal battle over this issue. I was not surprised by their intention. I was surprised at their continual lack of creativity. Sometimes it astounds me how uncreative our government is, how invested they are and upholding the status quo.

What makes Bears Ears national monument so significant is not just the large land area protected, but the emphasis on co-management with the tribes, the indigenous leadership and traditional ecological knowledge that will help us all survive and thrive in the face of increasing climate crisis. And on the note of climate change, I want to briefly bring in the importance of protecting Grand Staircase as well.

Scientists tell us that we need to protect 30% of lands and waters on earth by 2030 to prevent climate catastrophe and mass extinction. Another statistic from the Conservation in the West poll showed that 76% of Utahns support a national goal of protecting 30% of America's lands and oceans by 2030.

We know the state's interest in keeping these lands unprotected is for fossil fuel extraction. The cuts that Trump administration made to Grand Staircase directly correlated with lands that could be mined and extracted for coal, oil, gas, and tar sand development. But we can't afford to spend another second, another dollar on these projects. We are experiencing a climate crisis here and now, and we feel it here in Salt Lake City. Our summer air is filled with wildfire smoke. The Great Salt Lake is drying up, adding more pollution to our air. It is simply not an option to further invest in these fossil fuels. It's time to secure a livable future for my generation and the next.

At the end of the day, these monuments have always been about healing and it confounds me that the state continues to choose the path of harm. Because I actually don't want the last words you hear to be mine. I'm now going to read some lines from an OpEd that was in the New York times earlier this year, written by the founding members of the Women of Bears Ears Eloise Wilson, Mary Benally, Ajani Yepa, and Cynthia Wilson. They say “We are praying for Bears Ears national monument and our non-human relatives. It's not just for Bears Ears we are praying for. Every tribal nation relates to these sacred mountains and their own ancestral lands. We are praying for them to. Please pray with us. Please pray for us. The mountains are reaching out to us. The plants and animals are trying to reach us. We are here. It is not just for Bears Ears we pray. We are praying for Mother Earth. Indigenous peoples around the globe are praying. May we all join them in prayer?” Thank you.

Olivia Juarez:

Thank you Brooke. That was beautiful.

Dave Pacheco:

Wild Utah is recorded at SUWA's main office in Salt Lake City on equipment purchased through the generosity of our members. SUWA is primarily member funded. Over 90% of our revenue comes directly from people who care about protecting southern Utah's redrock country. We're proud of that because it

keeps our voice independent. If you'd like to help protect wild Utah today, please head to suwa.org and click the Donate button. We appreciate your support.

Wild Utah's theme music, "What's Worth?" is composed by Moab singer-songwriter Haley Noel Austin. Our interlude music, "Chuck's Guitar" is by Larry Pattis. Post-studio editing and production is by Laura Borichevsky.

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On behalf of SUWA, I'm Dave Pacheco. Thanks for taking the time to listen. We hope you can join us for the next episode of Wild Utah.