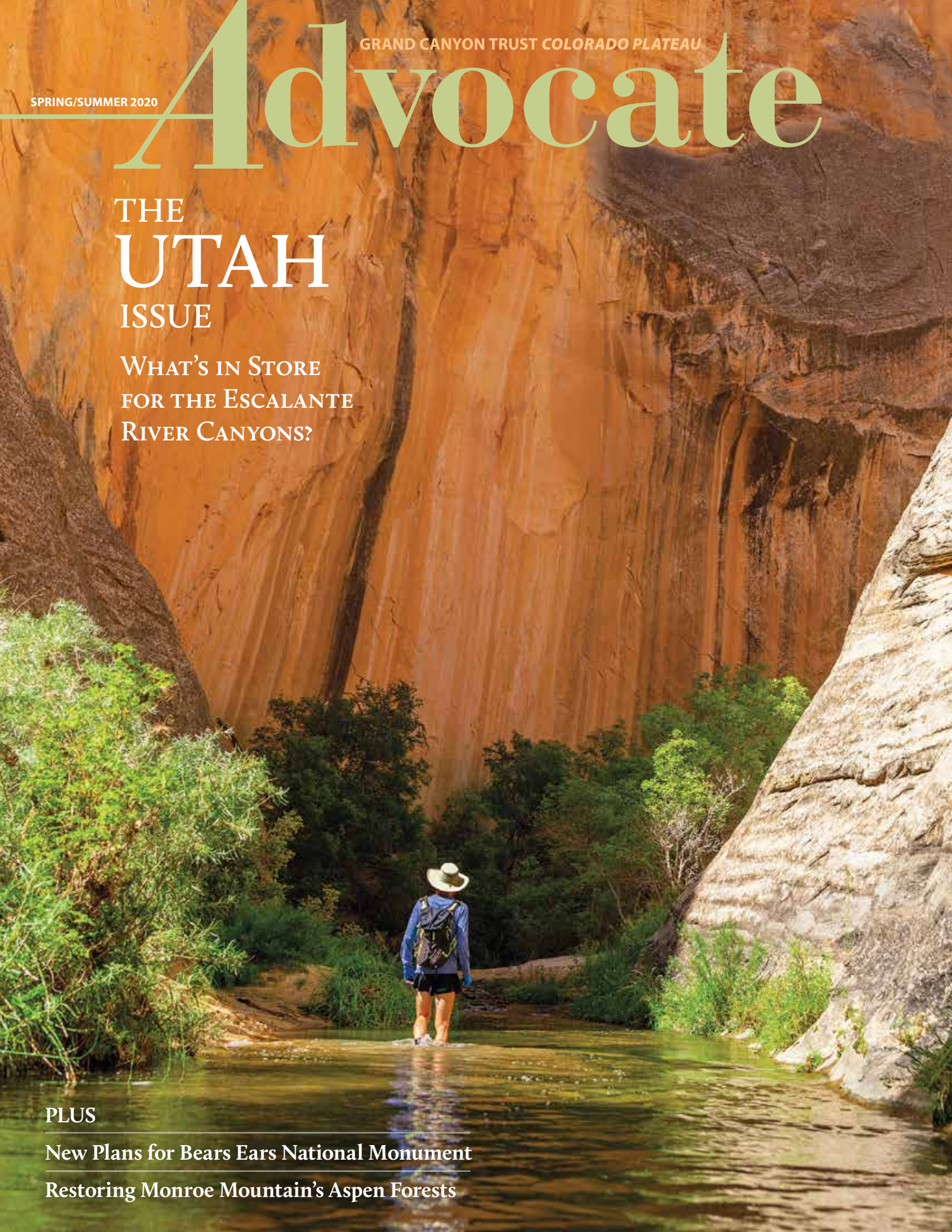
GRAND CANYON TRUST *COLORADO PLATEAU*

SPRING/SUMMER 2020

Advocate



THE UTAH ISSUE

What's in Store for the Escalante River Canyons?

PLUS

New Plans for Bears Ears National Monument

Restoring Monroe Mountain's Aspen Forests

TIM PETERSON

LETTER from the Executive Director

ETHAN AUMACK

In the spring of 2019, my family and I floated the Escalante River through Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. After nearly a week passing under glorious ochre cliffs, soaring arches, and reawakened cottonwood trees, we reluctantly hoisted our boats onto our backs and stepped away from what truly felt like another world. We had been stunned, transfixed, and overcome. Like so many others who have floated, walked, or simply driven through southern Utah, we were reminded spectacularly that this place is like no other.

One might assume that Utah's embarrassment of natural and cultural riches would translate into a common, ambitious vision about how to conserve them. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. For decades, debates about proposed national monuments and wilderness areas, oil and gas (and oil shale, uranium, and potash) development, and overall disposition of state and federal lands have been supercharged. The chasm between conservation proponents and those advocating for development of and extraction from Utah's land and waters yawns wide.

In this space, the Grand Canyon Trust has worked in Utah for nearly three decades. We have, with supporters and partners, devoted our heart and soul, intellect and muscle to the stewarding and protecting of cherished landscapes—and the spaces between—in a part of the world where the stakes couldn't be higher. We have done so holding firm when needed, and extending a hand toward collaboration when possible.

In this issue of the Advocate, we tell just a few stories of our work. John Leshy describes an innovative collaboration spearheaded by the Trust that has protected the heart of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument from livestock overgrazing for 20 years—and that is now at risk of being undone in the next year. Tim Peterson tells the story of holding the line at Bears Ears National Monument, while collaborating with the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition to see the original vision of the monument realized. Mike Popejoy, Lisa Winters, and Mary O'Brien tell the stories of "in-between" places like Johnson Lakes Canyon and Monroe Mountain, that are worthy of our deepest care and concern, and the attorneys, acre-by-acre diehard restoration practitioners, Forest Service district rangers, community organizers, and others—who make conservation their life's work.

If, as it seems, conservation in Utah exists at the intersection of beauty, conflict, and hope, long-time trustee and Utah resident Steve Snow's interview encourages us to stand tall in this vital space, while striving to translate a common love for this place into broadly supported conservation.

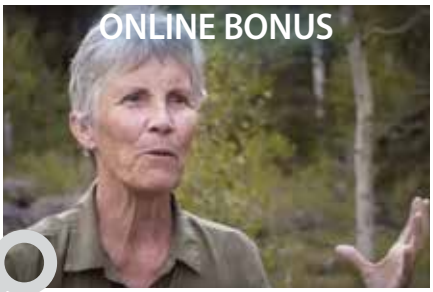
Thank you for your steadfast support as we do just that.

Ethan Aumack
Executive Director

OUR MISSION
To safeguard the wonders of the Grand Canyon and the Colorado Plateau, while supporting the rights of its Native peoples.

ON THE COVER
The Escalante River, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. BLAKE MCCORD

EDITOR'S NOTE
The views expressed by the contributors in this issue are solely their own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Grand Canyon Trust.



MONROE MOUNTAIN: AN ASPEN SUCCESS STORY
The unlikely story of collaboration on Monroe Mountain, a sky island in south-central Utah that rises more than a vertical mile above the surrounding valleys, reaching a height of 11,227 feet.

grandcanyontrust.org/monroe-mountain

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contents


TIM PETERSON

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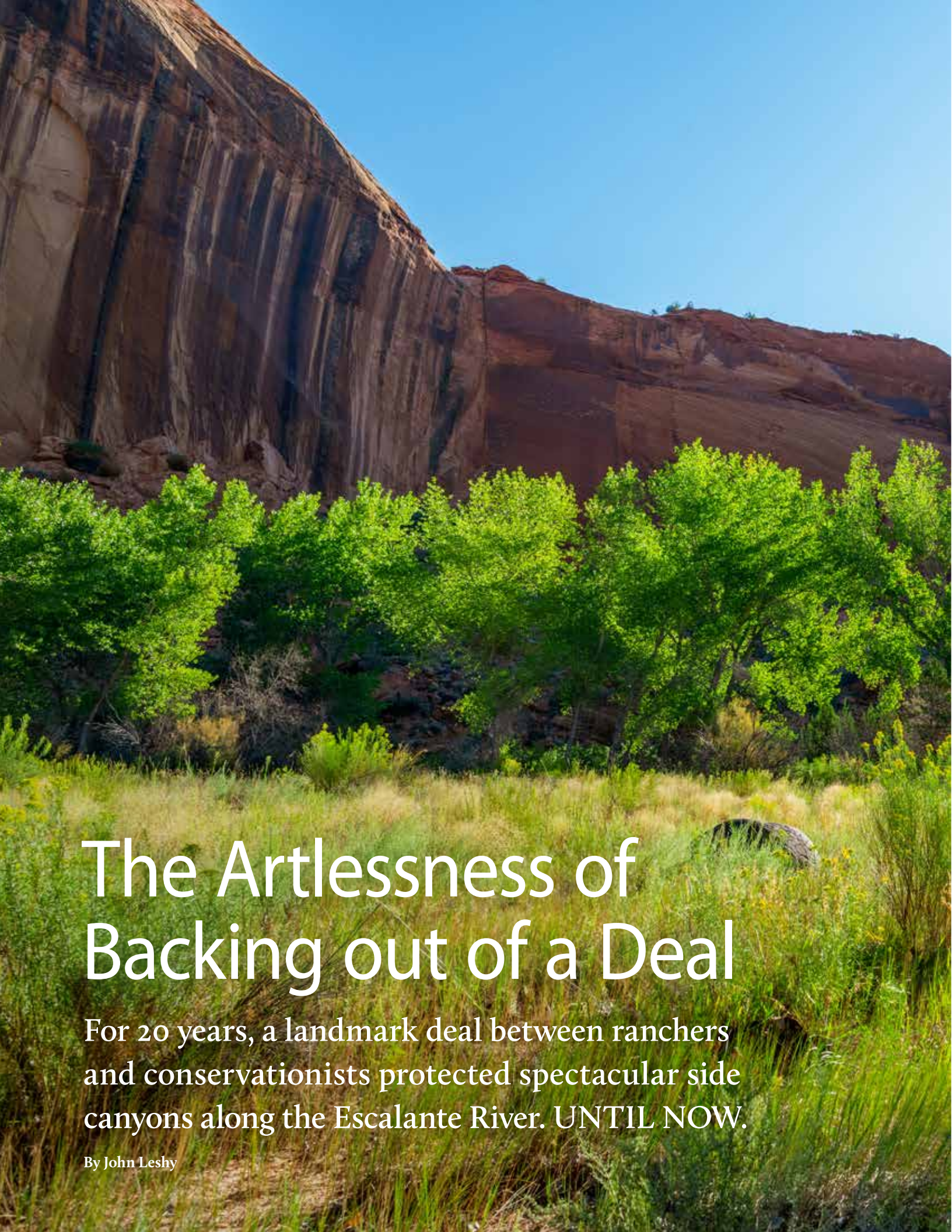


The Artlessness of Backing out of a Deal

For 20 years, a landmark deal between ranchers and conservationists protected spectacular side canyons along the Escalante River. UNTIL NOW.

By John Leshy

BLAKE MCCORD

THE ESCALANTE RIVER CANYONS—a network of serpentine redrock tributary canyons that feed into the river—are some of the most scenic and fragile lands on the Colorado Plateau—indeed, in the entire West. Previously little-known except to dedicated backcountry-desert enthusiasts, they began to attract considerable attention in 1996 when President Bill Clinton included them in the nearly 2 million acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument he established. Over the years since, they have become the most sought-out destination in the monument, drawing nearly 300,000 visits annually.

This did not happen without a lot of hard work and financial investment by the Grand Canyon Trust and other conservation advocates.

The Trump administration has now put all that in jeopardy. At stake is not just the future of this lovely canyon region. Also on the line is one of the most hopeful solutions to longstanding conflicts between livestock operators and conservationists on some special places on public lands.

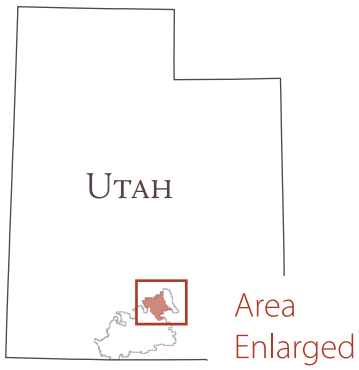
The 1996 monument proclamation, which extolled the "spectacular array" of natural and cultural resources of the region, allowed livestock grazing to continue when consistent with existing laws and regulations. The Escalante canyons area was, however, a tough place to make a profit from cattle.

Not long after the national monument was established, ranchers holding permits to graze their livestock in that area decided they had had enough. One wanted to retire and needed money for medical expenses, another wanted to run his stock in less difficult terrain, and a third wanted to relocate his operation to another state.

Eventually, after negotiation with Bill Hedden of the Grand Canyon Trust, a deal was struck. In return for several hundred thousand dollars of cash provided by the Trust, these willing sellers relinquished their grazing privileges.

The term "privileges" is accurate. Permits to graze livestock on public lands are not property rights. The applicable law—the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act—explicitly provides that a grazing permit "shall not create any right, title, interest, or estate in or to the lands." The U.S. government could, in other words, decide not to renew these grazing permits and instead to devote the public lands to non-grazing uses without having any obligation to compensate the permit holders. But instead of pursuing that more confrontational path, the Trust decided that a better resolution was to facilitate rancher cooperation with dollars.

Once the money was paid and the permits were relinquished, the U.S. government, with the support of state officials, formally retired those public lands from further grazing. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources endorsed the idea, Utah Republican Governor Michael Leavitt signed off on it, and in 1999 the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) agreed, finding that removing cattle from the public lands in this area would restore a fragile and treasured gem to ecological health.

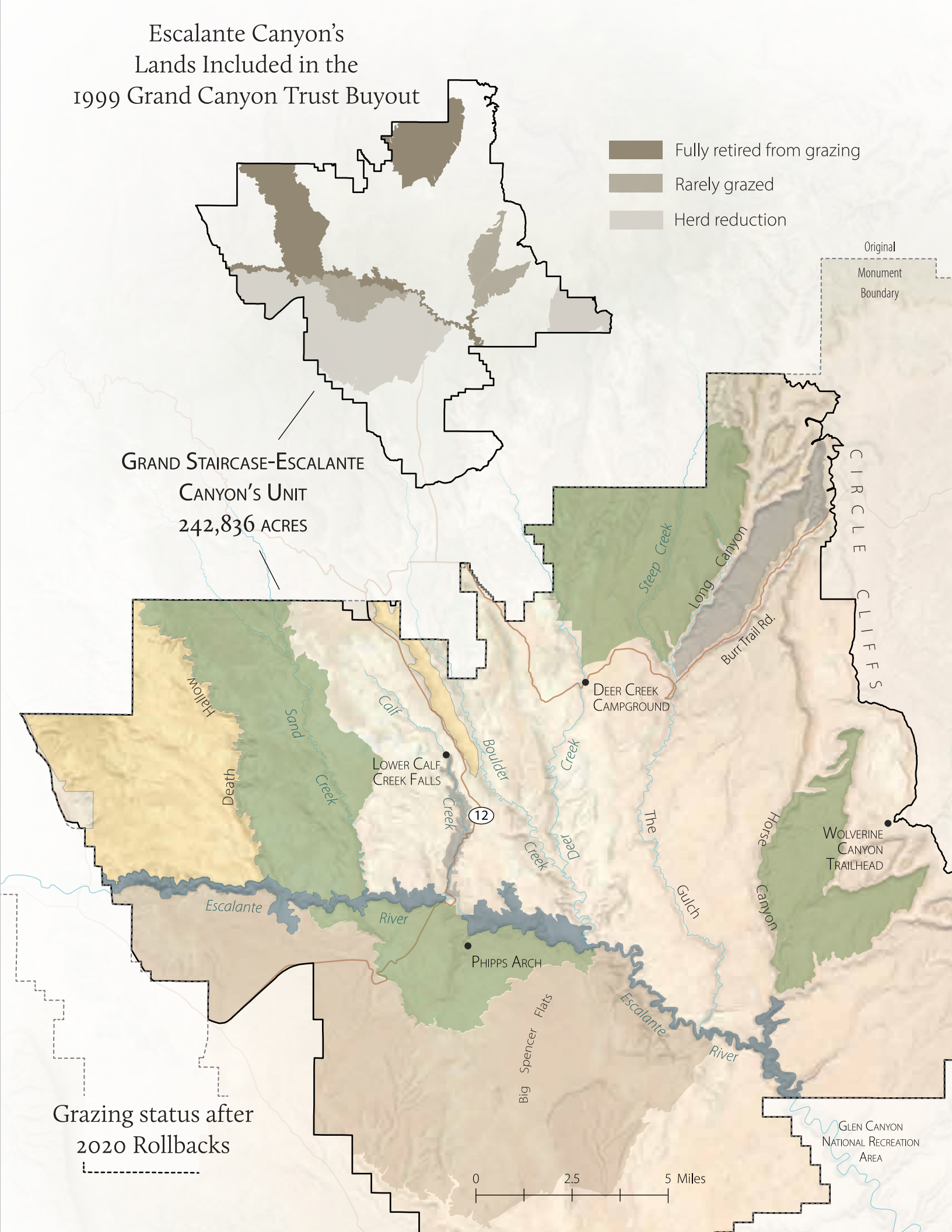


Buyout Lands

- Remain retired from grazing
- Fully reopened to grazing
- Herd reductions remain

Non-buyout Lands

- Retired from grazing
- Fully reopened to grazing


Escalante Canyon's
Lands Included in the
1999 Grand Canyon Trust Buyout
Fully retired from grazing
Rarely grazed
Herd reduction
Original
Monument
Boundary
Grand Staircase-Escalante
Canyon's Unit
242,836 acres
Circle Cliffs
Steep Creek
Long Canyon
Burr Trail Rd.
Deer Creek
Campground
Hallow
Death
Sand
Creek
Calf
Creek
Lower Calf
Creek Falls
Boulder
Creek
12
Deer
Creek
The
Gulch
Horse
Canyon
Wolverine
Canyon
Trailhead
Escalante
River
Phipps Arch
Big Spencer Flats
Escalante
River
Glen Canyon
National Recreation
Area
Grazing status after
2020 Rollbacks
0
2.5
5 Miles

The purchase and retirement had no meaningful effect on the local economy that was tied to grazing; over 96 percent of the original national monument remained open to grazing at the same level as before.

Removal of domestic livestock worked wonders on the landscape, helped along by additional considerable philanthropic investment in on-the-ground restoration work. Cows have now been absent from the area for two decades, and the results are dramatic. Wildflowers, willows, fish, and wildlife, including beaver and otters, now flourish where there was once only fouled water and clouds of biting cow flies tormenting hikers.

What happened at Escalante was not unprecedented. Similar deals have taken place in several other parts of the West over the past few decades. They almost always involve places like the Escalante canyons region, where public lands are of marginal value for grazing yet highly valued for recreation and conservation. For these reasons the deals have, at most, a tiny impact on local grazing-related economic activity, especially compared to the positive effects they bring to the recreation, tourism, and service sectors. Altogether, such negotiated grazing retirements affect only a very small slice of public lands—at most a few million acres. This leaves well over a quarter of a billion acres of federal lands open to livestock grazing.

For all these reasons, it's not surprising that such a good idea has attracted support all across the political spectrum. In 2001, for example, George W. Bush's libertarian-minded Interior Secretary, Gale Norton, celebrated it as a "marketplace-oriented resolution for public land conflicts."

Sometimes these win-win buyouts and retirements have been approved by Congress, usually in a package that protects public lands over a wider area, such as Oregon's Steens Mountain and Idaho's Boulder-White Clouds and Owyhee River canyons.

In the future, it will take a very brave, or very foolish, conservation buyer to want to invest in such arrangements that are so easily undone by executive caprice.

But not always. In the Escalante canyons area and elsewhere, the BLM (and, in some places, the Forest Service) put the deals in effect by amending their land-use plans to retire the land from further grazing. Often, as at Escalante, they have the support of state agencies as well.

Until now, because the idea made so much sense and was so widely supported, those putting up the money to buy and retire the grazing privileges have generally been willing to trust that the federal land managers would honor the retirements as provided for in their management plans.

No longer. In a move that is anti-rancher as well as anti-environment, the Trump administration has just dramatically increased the risk of entering such deals. In February 2020, without bothering to offer reasons for its reversal, the Interior Department issued a new monument management plan that will reopen to livestock 87 percent of the lands protected by the original deal in the Escalante canyons region. This will doom the fragile flora and fauna in these magnificent canyonlands once again to be trampled and fouled by livestock, except for the narrow main river corridor itself. (Although President Trump shrank Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by half in December 2017, he kept the Escalante canyons region inside the monument, and left the grazing retirements intact at the time.)

The effect of the administration's abrupt U-turn will ripple way beyond these magnificent canyonlands. In the future, it will take a very brave, or very foolish, conservation buyer to want to invest in such arrangements that are so easily undone by executive caprice.

This means ranchers—particularly those struggling to scratch out a living on hardscrabble desert lands where conservation buyers are often the only willing buyers of grazing privileges—will suffer alongside recreationists, wildlife advocates, and the environment.

It now falls to Congress to fix the problem. Legislation introduced by Adam Smith, D-WA, and several co-sponsors, the Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement Act, would protect negotiated buyouts and retirements from the executive branch's political whims.

Unfortunately, even though Smith's bill directly benefits individual ranchers by enlarging the pool of grazing-privilege buyers, it faces an uphill battle. The national trade association of public-land livestock grazers, the Public Lands Council—narrowly focused on preserving its membership and its influence—fiercely resists retiring even a single acre of public land from livestock grazing.

Blind ideology and trade association self-interest should not be allowed to thwart such win-win solutions. One can only hope that the recklessness of the Interior Department's latest decision will spur more members of Congress to support this common-sense legislation that benefits individual ranchers while restoring public lands to health.

Read John Leshy's March 3, 2020 New York Times op-ed, "A Trump Plan Breaks a Great Deal for Ranchers and Park Lovers" at nytimes.com/opinion ©

John Leshy, emeritus professor at U.C. Hastings College of the Law, was general counsel of the Interior Department from 1993 to 2001, and has been on the board of the Grand Canyon Trust since 2002, but was not involved in the transactions described here. His history of America's public lands, "Our Common Ground," is forthcoming from Yale University Press.

BLAKE MCCORD

BLAKE MCCORD

Turning Forests into Feedlots

By Mike Popejoy

MIKE POPEJOY

Junipers berries. REUBEN JOLLEY

Pinyon pine nuts. TIM PETERSON

Imagine standing at the edge of a forest, looking out across an opening of sagebrush, wildflowers, and grasses. Suddenly a strange quavering caw cuts through the weighty silence and you see a blue-grey bird descending from the treetops to the ground. It begins poking around in the soil, seemingly in search of something. The sleek bird jumps to another spot, again investigating the soil. This time it comes up with a few seeds in its mouth, and alights on the wind back to the forest.

This is the pinyon jay, and the fruits of its labor the nuts of the pinyon pine tree. The jay had hidden the nuts underground for safekeeping, having harvested them from the pine when its branches were thick with pine-cones. In a surprising way, by taking the pine's nuts the jay also gives back. The jay finds the nuts it hid about 95 percent of the time, but the ones it misses now have the chance to grow into new trees. The pinyon jay depends on the pinyon pine for its survival, and the pine depends on the jay to plant its offspring.

The pinyon jay makes its home in forests of pinyon pine and juniper trees. Pinyon and juniper forests ("PJ" for short) blanket much of southern Utah, including Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears national monuments. Often called a "pygmy forest," these stout trees are able to grow and survive lower in elevation than any other trees on the Colorado Plateau, in the absence of abundant water. This means that they must be hardy, able to withstand both hot, dry summers and cold, snowy winters. Pinyon and juniper trees have learned not only to survive, but to thrive in the harsh climate of the Colorado Plateau, living for upwards of 500 years.

In addition to being adept at scratching out a living amongst harsh conditions, pinyon and juniper form the backbone of a fascinating eco-system. The pinyon pine is a pillar of biodiversity in these woodlands, supporting around 1,000 different species. In addition to the pinyon jay, the Clark's nutcracker also helps to disperse the next generation of trees, and can carry up to 95 pinyon nuts in a special pouch beneath its tongue

DAVID MENKE, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

as far as 13 miles away. There is a bee that builds its nest out of pinyon pine sap, called pitch. And there is a wasp that places her eggs inside the eggs of an insect called the pinyon midge; the wasp grows within the midge egg as it develops, and then chews its way out of its dead host.

These trees have also supported human life for thousands of years, long before the arrival of European colonizers. Pinyon pine nuts are famously one of the best sources of plant protein in the Southwest, and have served as a staple food source for Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. Indigenous peoples used pinyon pine pitch in the waterproofing of vessels, and in a study of cultural uses of plants in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, juniper was found to have 113 different uses, more than any other genus of plants. These uses range from various forms of medicine to combat ailments to making sandals to using the seeds in musical rattles. Moreover, approximately 85 percent of archaeological sites in Utah are found in pinyon and juniper forests.

This web of life in pinyon and juniper forests is currently threatened with eradication across large swaths of the Utah landscape, including in your national monuments. Federal agencies are proposing the large-scale removal of these trees from public lands by means of mechanical obliteration, often in the service of private cattle-grazing operations. Once the trees are gone, exotic grass species are often planted, further degrading the delicate natural balance of these forests. The sensitive biological soil crusts that hold the desert soil together are pulverized, and the native vegetation that supports resident wildlife populations—from native bees to rabbits and coyotes to the seed-collecting birds—is replaced with plant species from across the globe whose primary purpose is to feed cattle. Replacing native vegetation with exotic species for exotic domestic animals (cows) is more akin to farming for private benefit than stewarding these spectacular public lands for the benefit of all Americans.

Pinyon and juniper trees have faced this threat before. Between 1950 and 2003, pinyon and juniper forests were razed across an area of public lands significantly larger than Capitol Reef, Zion, Arches, and Bryce Canyon national parks combined. And that's just on lands managed by the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This generally involves the uprooting and toppling of the trees, or shredding them to bits with heavy machinery.

When federal agencies began eliminating significant stretches of pinyon and juniper after World War II, it was done unabashedly for cattle. After destroying the forest, they planted exotic species for cows to eat, with little to no public input or awareness. A favorite method of the federal agencies was chaining—dragging a ship anchor chain between two bulldozers, ripping out trees in its path. One might think that such a coarse and brutish approach would have been

abandoned long ago for something more ecologically sensitive, but not so. Chaining is cheap and efficient, ecological costs be damned. To chaining has been added mastication, using heavy equipment to shred trees from the top down, reducing them to a pile of woodchips in a matter of seconds.

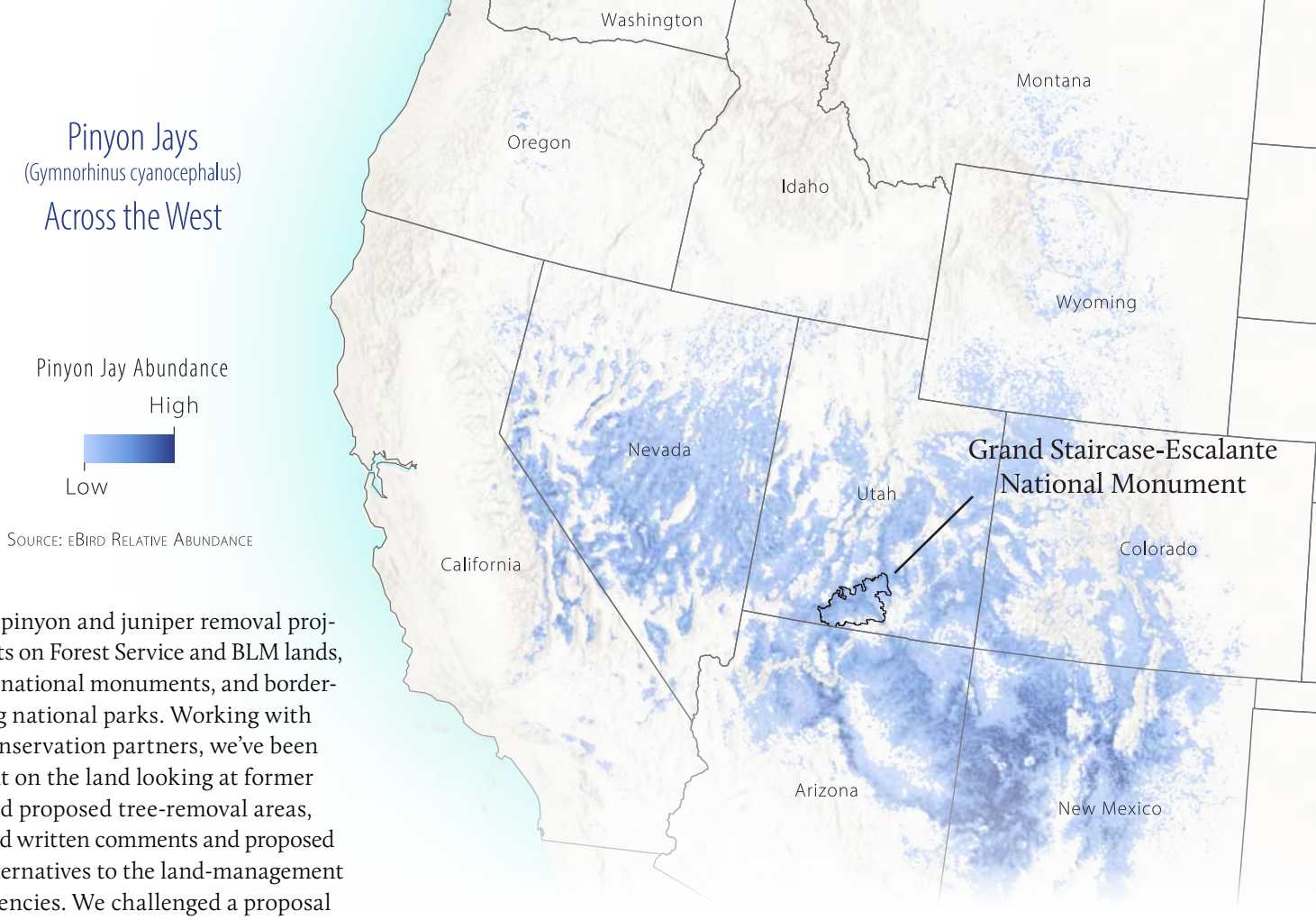
Nowadays all kinds of reasons are given for pinyon and juniper removal, from reducing the threat of fire to improving wildlife habitat. It is often difficult to tell if a project is a front for cattle grazing or is being undertaken for more legitimate reasons. And we do think there are justifiable reasons for removing some trees, such as reducing fire risk in the vicinity of homes, or from areas historically occupied by the greater sage grouse, which is under threat across the West. And pinyon and juniper trees have increased in number over the last 150 years, in some areas becoming more dense, and in others expanding into areas where they were previously absent. But when a forest is leveled and then seeded with exotic species for cattle, as we have witnessed in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, the intention behind the removal is clear: transform native vegetation on public lands into a feedlot for cows.

Such efforts to remove the natural plants from a landscape have far-reaching effects. Establishing a feedlot of exotic species has long-lasting implications, displacing native plants and animals. After tree removal, pinyon pines may not grow back, or may only do so in very small numbers. Pinyon is particularly vulnerable to increasing temperatures and decreasing moisture, both of which are likely to continue under a changing climate. Thus pinyon's support of a diverse array of wildlife is also under threat. For instance, the pinyon jay population has dropped by an estimated 85 percent since 1970, possibly the largest and most sustained decline of any bird distributed through the intermountain West.

Furthermore, eradicating trees from thousands of acres is expensive, and it's being financed by you, the taxpayer. Recent removal of pinyon and juniper across 1,600 acres near Cedar City, Utah purportedly cost almost $900,000. When you consider that, in some areas, trees are removed from hundreds of thousands of acres, the public has a right to demand accountability for how our tax dollars are being used. And when a project amounts to just another subsidy for a private cattle business, we have a right to demand better.

Over the past two years, the Trust has worked to improve or stop a myriad

TOP: Pinyon and juniper trees laid to waste by chaining. TIM PETERSON
BOTTOM: A bullhog grinds pinyon and juniper trees into mulch. UTAH DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES



of pinyon and juniper removal projects on Forest Service and BLM lands, in national monuments, and bordering national parks. Working with conservation partners, we've been out on the land looking at former and proposed tree-removal areas, and written comments and proposed alternatives to the land-management agencies. We challenged a proposal in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument before the Interior Department's Board of Land Appeals, and, in September 2019, we won, at least temporarily halting pinyon and juniper removal on over 30,000 acres. Since then, the BLM has withdrawn two other proposals to remove pinyon and juniper across large stretches of the monument.

We believe that in select instances it is reasonable to remove pinyon and juniper trees to restore the overall health of the land, but that such removal must be undertaken judiciously, and for the right reasons. Some of the areas proposed for tree removal are in need of such restoration, and we seek to work with federal land managers, both in the BLM and in the Forest Service, in pursuit of that goal. We also advocate for tree-removal methods that are less damaging, such as thinning trees by hand rather than with heavy machinery, and utilizing prescribed fire, where appropriate. Regrettably, the Interior Department seems to be more interested in allowing a select few to profit off our public lands at the expense of native plants and animals and against the wishes of the vast majority of Americans.

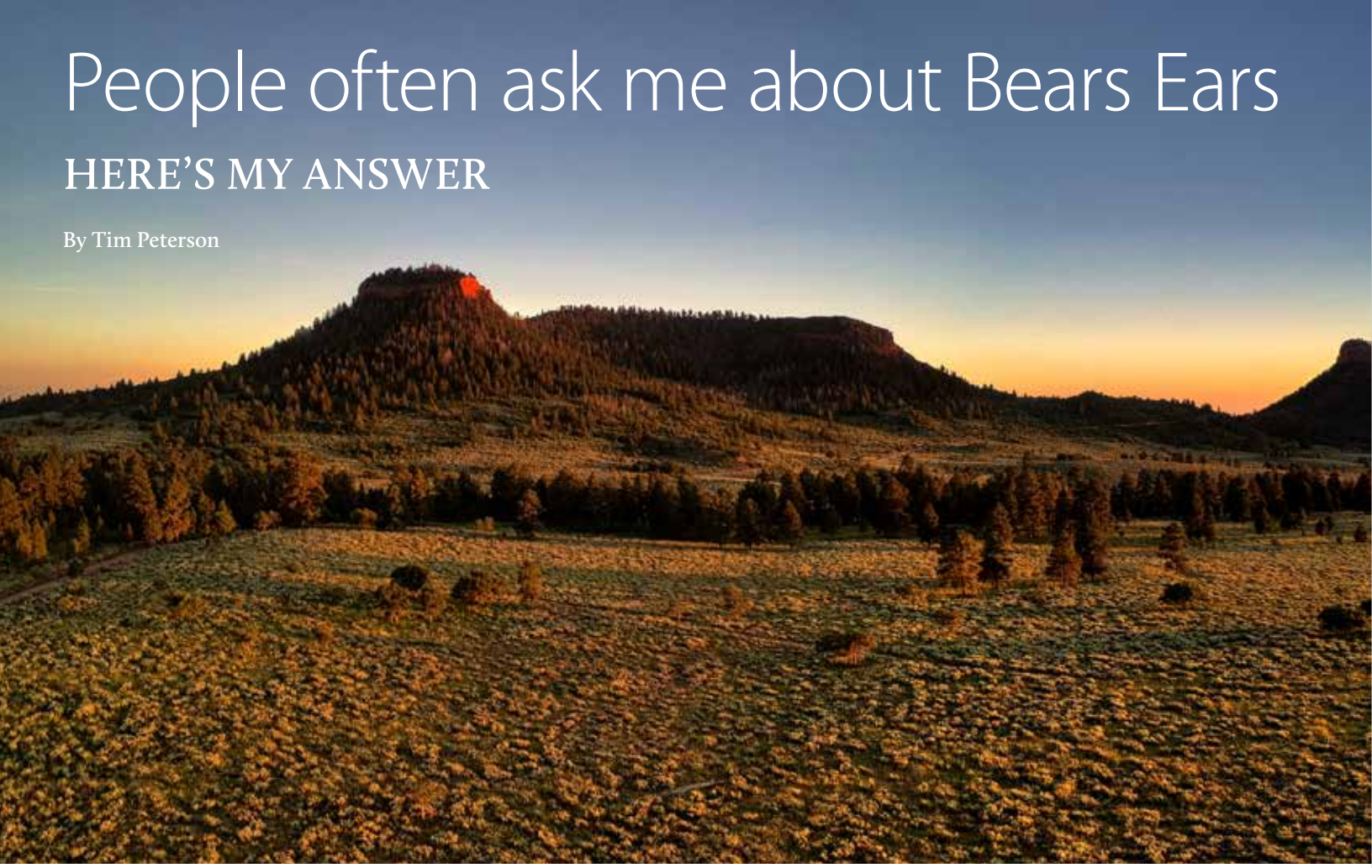
The recently approved management plans for Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears national monuments permit the worst of the worst when it comes to pinyon and juniper: chaining forests into oblivion and planting exotic species for cattle. The Trust and our partners filed lawsuits challenging President Trump's unlawful decision to shrink these national monuments, which are moving through the courts. Because the new management plans for the monuments flow from President Trump's unlawful decision, we are seeking court orders that would overturn not only the decision shrinking the monuments, but also the new management plans. We'll continue to resist pinyon and juniper projects that sacrifice native plants and animals on the altar of the cow, both in our national monuments and elsewhere. There are federal land managers out there who care about conserving the diverse and fascinating array of native species on the landscape, rather than transforming our public lands into a factory for beef production. They need to hear from you, and we hope you'll join us in our efforts to stand up for these magnificent trees. ©

Mike Popejoy is a research associate with the Grand Canyon Trust. He has experienced many fulfilling days amidst the pinyon and juniper trees of the Colorado Plateau, and some somber ones where the trees are now gone.

People often ask me about Bears Ears

HERE'S MY ANSWER

By Tim Peterson



In my day-to-day life, scarcely a week goes by without someone asking me a version of one of these questions:

What's going on with Bears Ears?

What about the lawsuits?

What can be done?

I get these questions over email, on social media, even in person at the grocery store.

So what's new? In February, the Interior Department released a new management plan for the shrunken monument. Sadly, the plan fails to meet even the minimum legal standard for how national monuments must be managed. The plan practically throws open the gates for increased off-road vehicle use and new clear-cutting of ancient pinyon and juniper forests. It also invites more visitors to cultural areas that are currently little-known and mostly left alone.

And for now, the lands cut from Bears Ears National Monument are open to uranium mining and oil and gas drilling, but it's not as if a fleet of bulldozers is revving to tear up the scenery just yet. It is good news that we have yet to see any of these lands nominated for oil and gas leasing. Low global prices for oil, gas, and uranium, as well as high costs associated with getting the goods to market, are keeping the dozers at bay. There's one exception, however. A partially reclaimed uranium and vanadium mine (called the Easy Peasy) was dug out last year based on new mining claims filed by a Moab prospector. The mine is unlikely to become a real concern any time soon, but it represents real damage done that would not have been possible without the president's destructive 85-percent reduction of Bears Ears.

Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe continues to advocate for strong intertribal co-management of the monument, including integrating Indigenous traditional knowledge honed over hundreds of generations. TIM PETERSON

TIM PETERSON

Catching the wave of the mountain-bike craze 30 years late, the Interior Department is floating a proposal to build new bike trails, parking areas, and yurts above the Goosenecks of the San Juan River to increase user fees at the postage-stamp-sized Goosenecks State Park. The Interior Department lands adjacent to the state park on which the spiderweb of trails would be built were cut from the monument in 2017. A mountain-bike playground couldn't be more at odds with the wild character of the area, not to mention more out of sync with the original proclamation for Bears Ears which mandates that new trails be built only when they would help preserve and protect the area.

The news does get better. This winter, a group of 40 investment managers representing $113 billion in assets sent fossil fuel and mining companies a letter urging them not to take advantage of the Trump administration's unlawful gutting of national monument protections. The heavy-hitter investors warned that logging, drilling, and mining would put companies and their investors "...at significant risk of public backlash and stranded assets, should ...protections be restored by the courts or by future administrations."

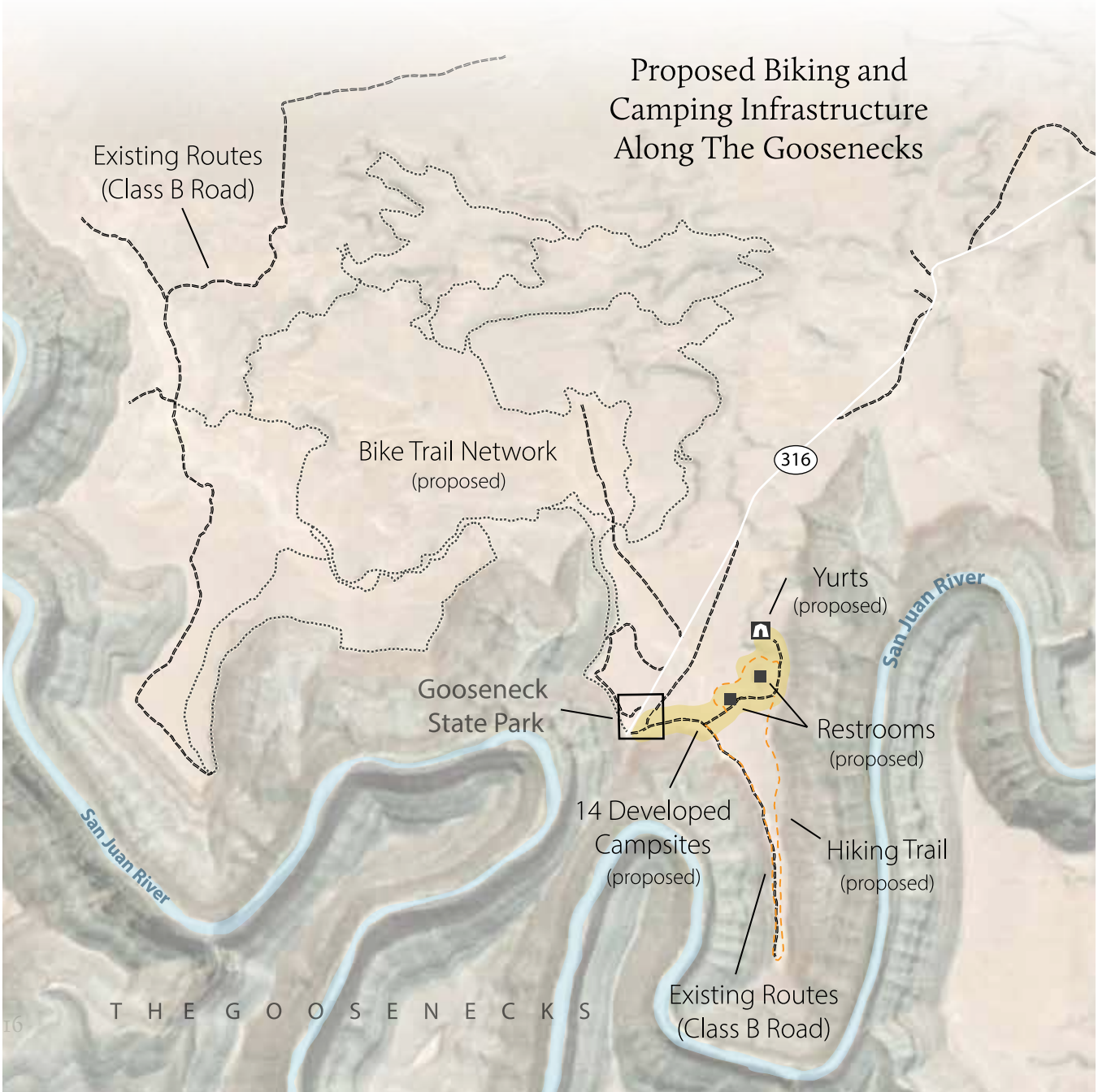
Bears Ears is a place that challenges our perception of time, laying bare the bones of the Earth, holding the fossils of life long before humans, and bearing the crucible of cultures infinitely older than America.

Bears Ears is just too important to turn over to industry. The Grand Canyon Trust will be fighting hard against any new earth-moving projects that the new monument management plan allows or that arise on lands illegally cut from the monument. You can lend your voice in the coming months if new proposals to drill and mine and log at Bears Ears surface. Meet them with the public outcry that they deserve.

In still more good news, the lawsuits the tribes, the Trust, and our partners filed in 2017 are moving. We and the other parties to the lawsuit recently filed motions for summary judgment, which

ask the court to rule on whether the president acted unlawfully when he revoked and replaced Bears Ears, as well as to reverse the atrocious new management plan. We expect a ruling on these motions perhaps as early as later this year.

In a counterpoint to the Interior Department's loathsome plan, the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition is preparing to share its luminous vision for how to manage Bears Ears into a much more sanguine future. The coalition (a historic consortium of the sovereign tribal governments of the Navajo Nation, the Hopi Tribe, the Ute Indian Tribe, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Pueblo of Zuni) has formally embarked on writing its own plan for the full 1.9 million acre footprint it proposed for protection in 2015. This vision will include everything that the Interior Department missed and more, integrating Indigenous traditional knowledge with Western science while hewing far more closely to the original Bears Ears National Monument proclamation.



...many who live in the towns around Bears Ears believe you're not a local unless you can claim six or seven generations there. But imagine familial and cultural ties that stretch back some 600 generations or more.

Utah Diné Bikéyah Board Chair David Filfred addresses the crowd at the 2019 Bears Ears Summer Gathering. TIM PETERSON

This real plan for the real Bears Ears should be finished by early next year, if not a little sooner.

For me, Bears Ears is a place that I've studied, explored, and worked to protect for more than 22 years—my entire career. Utah has been home to most branches of my family tree for seven generations. For settlers like me, "seven generations" is spoken as if it's a badge of honor, showing stick-to-itness, industriousness, and staying power. In seven generations, most Utahns see you as a "local," and many who live in the towns around Bears Ears believe you're not a local unless you can claim six or seven generations there. But imagine familial and cultural ties that stretch back some 600 generations or more. In this context, seven seems a mighty paltry comparison.

Consider then that tens of thousands of Indigenous people alive today have ancestors who have known this place for hundreds of generations, but they each know them a bit differently based on their own cosmologies, languages, and prayers formed and honed and polished here. This represents something awesome culturally: Bears Ears is human diversity as glorious as the landscape.

Some traditions rhyme, others are totally divergent. This includes things like how to pray correctly or to conduct a ceremony, how to take the plants found here and fashion a cradleboard, prepare medicines, or weave baskets to winnow beans that have evolved here over centuries, and how to make nutritious meals without visiting a grocery store or opening a can. All these things and more represent Indigenous traditional knowledge, not necessarily written for most of the hundreds of generations past, but passed down father to son and mother to daughter, uncle to nephew and grandmother to granddaughter. The instructions are often more reliable in the oral tradition, because speaking from one knowledge-keeper to the next allows for questions and clarifications that a static page of text can't offer.

This is the real vision of Bears Ears—to use and share this Indigenous traditional knowledge, along with the incomplete framework of Western science, to return Bears Ears to vibrancy, and that's what the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition is doing. We're all lucky to be offered these gifts.

Bears Ears is a place that challenges our perception of time, laying bare the bones of the Earth, holding the fossils of life long before humans, and bearing the crucible of cultures infinitely older than America. As the battle to restore the monument stretches into its third year, it helps to remember the 600 generations. We are well reminded of that sense of constancy to stay our ephemeral fears over the monument's fate. I am often asked about Bears Ears, and I answer that it must and will be restored, and the true gifts that it has to give are not even yet known.

Tim Peterson directs the Grand Canyon Trust's Cultural Landscapes Program. In this role, he focuses not only on preserving and defending cultural landscapes, but also on returning authority to Indigenous people in the management of their ancestral lands.

KREIG
RASMUSSEN

In Good Faith

Consensus, Aspen, and Time

By Mary O'Brien

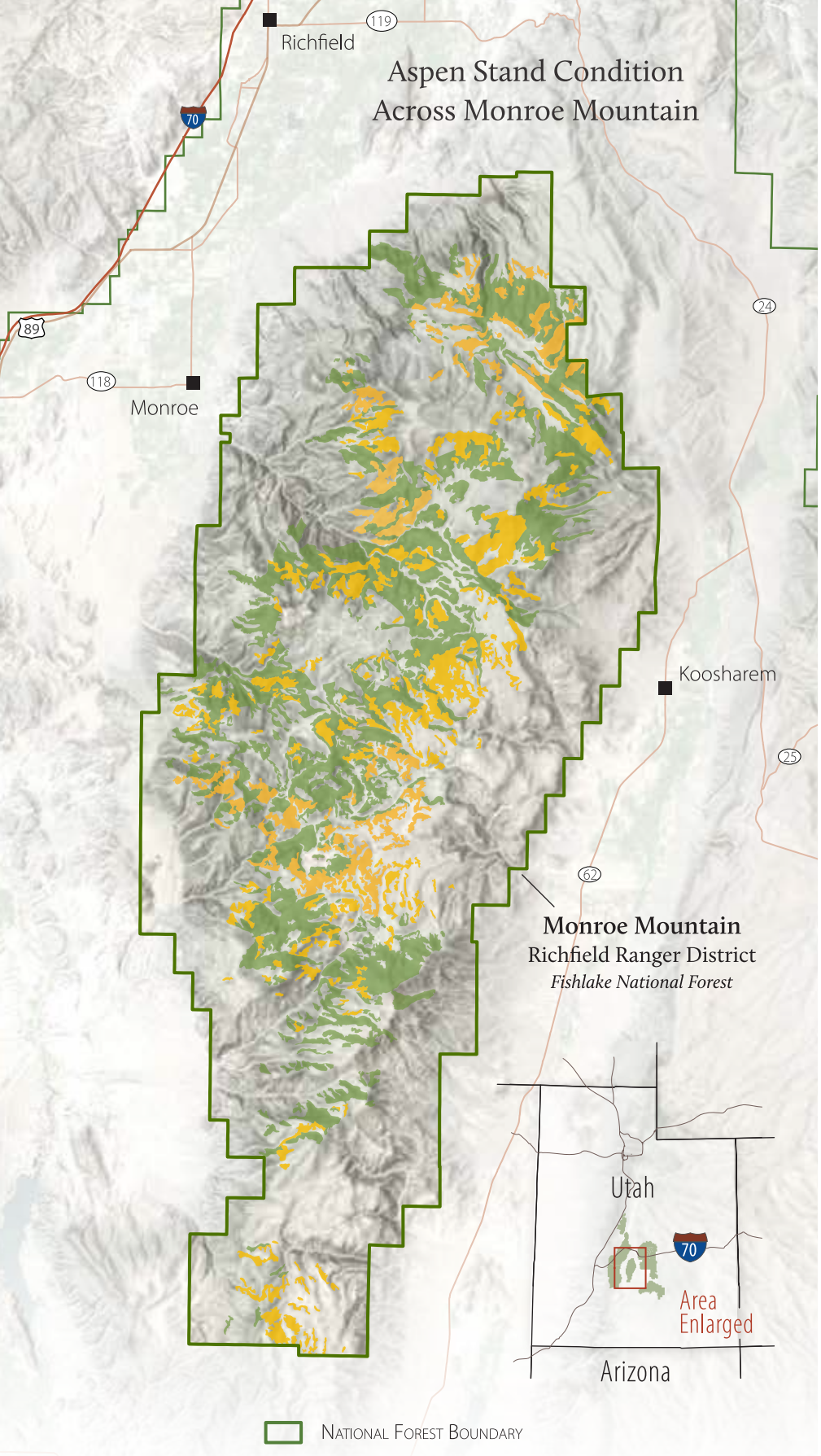
IT ALL STARTED IN 2010. I was cold-calling Richfield District Ranger Jason Kling about what I'd just seen after visiting a site on the south end of Utah's Monroe Mountain. The Fishlake National Forest had opened a public comment period on proposed vegetation treatments there aimed at increasing aspen. But some aspen that appeared on the map for burning because they were overtopped by conifers like fir and spruce didn't have conifer and looked healthy. The nearby sagebrush community, which was slated to be seeded with non-native grasses, seemed in most locations to have an unusually good native understory of grasses and wildflower plants.

Jason's response was surprising. He indicated that the map the district had published mistakenly included some aspen that didn't have spruce and fir overtopping them, depriving them of sunlight, and so would not need to be burned. He agreed that seeding of the nearby sagebrush community would only be done where invasive cheatgrass was present, and the seeding would be with native species. That seemed to solve the problems I had phoned about. "But I've got a bigger problem," Jason added. He had a whole mountain of aspen and some of it was in trouble, he explained, because of too much browsing by elk and cattle. The state, not the Forest Service, manages elk.

I told him that a consensus-based group that included local, state, and federal agencies, academics, and representatives of hunting and conservation groups (including the Grand Canyon Trust), had just published a report called "Guidelines for Aspen Restoration on the National Forests in Utah." Maybe he'd like to test out the guidelines on Monroe Mountain with a similar, consensus-based group focused on the problems of aspen on this one mountain. Perhaps the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources would join the group so that elk management would be part of the effort to restore aspen, a favored elk habitat on this hunter-friendly mountain. Thus began the Monroe Mountain Working Group and an ambitious, decade-plus restoration, monitoring, and research project that is ongoing today.

Jason and initial interested entities succeeded in convincing 19 representatives of every interested stakeholder group and local and state agency to join the working group. The group is co-convened by the Grand Canyon Trust and the Grazing Improvement

TOP: Golden eagle on Monroe Mountain. KREIG RASMUSSEN MIDDLE: A dense thicket of aspen sprouts. KREIG RASMUSSEN BOTTOM: A young aspen that has had its top bitten off, preventing it from growing taller. FAITH BERNSTEIN



Source: U.S. Forest Service

Program of the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, and expertly facilitated by Steven Daniels of Utah State University. For 10 years now, all decisions and recommendations have been made by consensus—not majority-minority vote.

Consensus is a considerable accomplishment because Monroe Mountain aspen restoration faces just about every challenge possible. Suppressing wildfires has allowed spruce, fir, and other conifers to eventually overtop and shade out the aspen in mixed forests known as "seral aspen." For decades, cattle, elk, deer, and sheep have relentlessly devoured the sprouts in aspen-only stands, called "persistent aspen," preventing young trees from growing. Without new recruits, stands of aspen age and die. The Forest Service has been avoiding setting prescribed fires around private inholdings—parcels of private land surrounded by national forest—for fear the fires would spread into the private forests. But the Forest Service has also avoided cutting conifers around these inholdings, because it might disqualify adjacent wilderness study areas from wilderness consideration. Populations of boreal toads—a potential candidate for federal listing as a threatened species that depends on ponds and forests—have declined. And, complicating matters, goshawk, protected under a conservation plan, require mature and old-growth forests in which to nest.

To cut to the chase: the Monroe Mountain Working Group met regularly for four years to come up with proposed recommendations. We did field tours together, with research showing that elk, deer, cattle, and sheep all graze on aspen and that most persistent aspen stands had not been able to recruit any sprouts above browse height (six feet) for between

Peregrine falcon. KREIG RASMUSSEN

Persistent aspen in trouble on Monroe Mountain. FAITH BERNSTEIN

The Monroe Mountain Working Group met regularly for four years to come up with proposed recommendations.

30 and 140 years. Then, within the next two years, Jason and the Richfield Ranger District completed the public review process for the Monroe Mountain Aspen Ecosystems Restoration Project Environmental Impact Statement. No one challenged its plan to spend the next decade burning conifer and aspen, mechanically removing conifer from some aspen, and undertaking key monitoring, a remarkable accomplishment amid diverse stakeholder interests.

Volunteer time and extensive funding by the Forest Service, state agencies, and individual member groups have allowed monitoring to proceed to better understand aspen on Monroe Mountain. We've worked to determine the role of elk in eating aspen sprouts and whether very old, dying aspen stands can recover if protected from animals that might eat their sprouts. We've also studied how elk, deer, cows, and sheep use post-burn aspen sprouts in mixed aspen and conifer stands and whether extensive burning of these stands will draw these browsers away from aspen-only forests. We've studied how the understory plants are doing. Much of the monitoring and research has been done by graduate students with forest ecologist Dr. Sam St. Clair of Brigham Young University. In 2019, a national team undertook extensive fire-behavior research while prescribed fires burned on Monroe Mountain.

The results? Fire is succeeding in regenerating aspen in aspen and conifer forests, mechanical removal is having mixed results, and some, but not all, aspen-only stands are starting to successfully grow young trees. Increased state-issued hunting permits are reducing the number of elk eating aspen sprouts, and no stand appears to be too old or decrepit to recover once it is protected from hoofed animals. Less is understood about progress for native understory plants.

The lessons for other public lands issues? Consensus works, but expert facilitation and a diversity of dedicated group members are essential. Undertaking public environmental reviews encourages diverse stakeholders to weigh in. It's key to be open to alternative approaches to problems, care for the habitat of multiple species, and face scientific evidence. Restoration is worth it. ◎

Mary O'Brien directs the Grand Canyon Trust's Utah Forests Program and is a member of the Monroe Mountain Working Group.

FORCE OF NATURE

A preacher's daughter from East Los Angeles, botanist **Mary O'Brien** is a fierce, passionate, and tireless advocate. From defending the fragile biological soil crusts that hold the desert together to protecting a whole mountain of aspen, Mary is a voice for the natural world and her fellow travelers, large and small. As she prepares to hand over the reins of the Grand Canyon Trust's Utah Forests Program at the end of 2020, she reflects on the last 17 years and shares advice for the next generation of advocates.

Tell us your life story in one minute.

I was born in East Los Angeles to a mom who worked with street people on Skid Row and a dad who was a minister in a small church. The best two weeks of each year were the trip to Kings Canyon National Park where we got to stay free in a tent cabin for two weeks if Dad preached at the outdoor non-denominational church in the park two Sunday mornings. So a little East Los Angeles girl with little money and no land had a whole national park for two weeks a year. I first thought of being a social worker, became a third grade teacher, and then went back to school to get a master's and doctorate in botany. Both involved studying some plants and their pollinators in one special habitat on the San Bernardino National Forest of southern California.

You had several professional lives before coming to the Trust. What were they?

After getting my doctorate, I worked eight years for Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, working a lot on alternatives to aerial herbicide spraying of the forests but also alternatives to uses of pesticides. I co-founded and worked with Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide, which is a network of public interest environmental lawyers, including those living and working in some of the poorest, most autocratic countries in the world. I taught public interest science and environmental advocacy at the University of Montana graduate Environmental Studies Program for two years and then worked 10 years with Hells Canyon Preservation Council in eastern Oregon and western Idaho; and then came to Grand Canyon Trust!

What kind of work did you start off doing for the Trust in Utah, and how has that evolved?

Well, that's kind of funny, in a way. I was hired to organize a multi-organization effort to develop a comprehensive alternative for three new forest plan revisions, including Manti-La Sal National Forest, whose plan was then 17 years old. But just after we completed the alternative, the Bush administration ended the forest planning process. And now, in my last year of working with the Trust, I'm working with most of the same organizations to again develop a comprehensive alternative for the revision of Manti-La Sal National Forest's forest plan which is now 34 years old! Fortunately, I've been able to work on alternatives for a lot of other projects along the way.

It's also interesting that just before I started conservation work, I studied native plants and their pollinators.

I remember one particular native onion species that was pollinated by one small native bee species that had never been named. And here, at the end of my work with Grand Canyon Trust, I've started an effort to halt and prevent the placement of commercial honeybee hives on Colorado Plateau public lands because honeybees, by the millions, outcompete native bees and they transmit diseases to them. The disappearance of native bee species will be quiet, and for some species, forever.

As you look back, what are you most proud?
I'm not good at thinking in those terms. I only try to take care of the environment and the processes of democracy. That's all I focus on.

What are the most pressing conservation issues facing Utah forests today?
What am I most concerned about? The climate crisis. It threatens everything in our world and it threatens civilization itself.

What do I think are the most pressing conservation issues facing Utah public lands? The need to really know about and take care of other species—little alpine plants, unique species of native bees, beavers, aspen, whomever. The consequences of not acknowledging that we are only one member of the entire environment is that we're committing collective suicide through destruction of those we don't even think we need to know.

What advice would you offer young people starting out in public lands advocacy now?
Have courage and heart for the long haul.

What's the best piece of advice you've received?
A line from one of W.S. Merwin's poems: "On the last day of the world / I would want to plant a tree."

I think that captures the best of conservation work in one sentence: that we are fellow travelers in this world with other species, that we always need to be working for the long-term, and that losses must not stop us from doing that.

What's on the docket for retirement?
Helping with any great campaigns or partners on democracy, climate, and/or ending public lands livestock grazing. And having a little more time to walk around outdoors.

BLAKE MCCORD

Restoring an Oasis in the Desert

Transforming overgrazed pastures into a wildlife paradise

By Lisa Winters

BACK IN 2003, Susie and Rick Knezevich were searching for a refuge of peace and solitude away from their busy lives. They were particularly interested in finding someplace warmer than their home in the snowy mountains of Colorado. But instead of settling on a tropical beach location, they stumbled upon Johnson Lakes Canyon, 800 acres of well-worn desert in southeastern Utah.

Drawn to the red sandstone cliffs, narrow winding canyons, and cerulean waters, they viewed the property as "paradise found" and decided to take a chance. As an interior designer, Susie saw past the severely eroded stream channel, expanses of cheatgrass, and overgrazed canyon bottom. There was a perennial spring flowing from one end of the property, spilling into a series of wetlands packed full of cattails and bullrush, and eventually into a 10-acre lake. And there were side canyons, snaking from the stream bottom to the cliffs and mesa-tops, concealing old middens—small mountains of fossilized plant materials collected by packrats that can date back millennia—and piles of tiny femurs, skulls, and teeth of small mammals and fish vertebrae left behind by owls.

Although extraordinarily beautiful, there was trouble in paradise. Johnson Lakes Canyon is private land. Since 1996 it has been completely surrounded by Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, which is grazed across more than +96 percent of its desert landscape. Today, the Knezeviches don't allow cows on their property, but that

wasn't always the case; the canyon had been grazed by goats and cattle for over a century. Weathered old corrals, a dilapidated wooden shack tucked up against a cliff wall, and an extensive span of barbed wire fences all provided signs of a time when cattle took priority. Even after Rick and Susie acquired Johnson Lakes Canyon, the property was being grazed by a local rancher. The rancher explained that grazing was actually beneficial to the land, so they let the cattle stay.

Unfortunately, over the next six years, Rick and Susie realized that if they wanted to leave the land better than they found it, the cattle had to go. They wanted native grasses throughout the canyon bottom and tall, native vegetation along the water's edge, not the bull thistles and purple-hued sea of invasive cheatgrass that can survive the onslaught of cattle and trammeled stream banks. In 2009, they terminated the cattle-grazing license. Venturing out a couple times a year to remove as many of those pesky weeds as possible by hand was a tough task for Rick and Susie, who wanted to avoid using heavy machinery or herbicides. After five years of hand-weeding, they felt overwhelmed.

The future brightened dramatically in 2014, when the Knezeviches were introduced to Mary O'Brien of the Grand Canyon Trust's Utah Forests Program. Mary was excited by the restoration efforts and the progress, and saw the potential for using Johnson Lakes Canyon as a "reference area," where the results of removing cattle and restoring native vegetation could be compared with the results of how the federal government was managing the surrounding national monument lands. To begin documenting progress, Mary brought scientists together to conduct "bioblitzes," cataloguing

PHOTOS BY MARRA CLAY

the birds, plants, and animals flourishing at Johnson Lakes Canyon.

Wanting to protect the property in the future, Rick and Susie also teamed up with the Trust to place a conservation easement on the land. Making a promise to never pave roads, graze cattle, extract minerals, oil, or gas, or introduce non-native species, they essentially made a pact with the land: We'll take care of you. Since 2015, Trust volunteers have done the same.

Last May, we arrived for a week of fieldwork, bumping along six miles of sandy road.

"Oh my gosh, remember the fields of thistle?" dedicated volunteer Mimi Trudeau said with a groan.

Spoiler alert: if you come out to Johnson Lakes Canyon once, you're going to want to come back. In past years, we have pulled fields of invasive cheatgrass, tumbleweed, tamarisk, bull thistle, Russian olive, sticktight, and reed canary grass. We've installed small rock and log dams, built to slow erosion in the stream channel and raise the water table, hauled loads of sand to repair the dirt road, installed a weather station, and planted native oaks. We've huddled together, shivering in the rain to trade memories of wildlife sightings on the property, such as osprey fishing in the lake, mule deer grazing in the canyon bottom, or those tracks along the road that looked an awful lot like a bobcat. We've jumped in the lake for a quick dip on days when the sweating starts by 9am. We've stayed up late into the night, entering data by headlamp from the 25 plant transects, specific locations where we are documenting every single plant species, so we can see if our restoration is working.

Stepping out of a decades-old RV, Susie greeted me in the morning with a big smile on her face and two mugs in hand, one for her, and one for Rick,

who was already throwing tools into the back of the ATV. The two are relentless in their desire to make this property a refuge.

Covered in dirt and sweat, on our hands and knees, dodging red-ant nests as we pulled invasive plants, we chatted. A red-tailed hawk let out its high-pitched screech right above us and we all stopped, admiring its flight. When we got back to our basecamp in the late afternoon, a few folks grabbed their binoculars and went off in search of the red-tailed hawk's nest. Another group strolled along the dirt road, following the tracks of a wild turkey we'd spotted at sunrise. After a hearty dinner of green-chili stew (with dutch-oven peach cobbler for dessert), we all set off together to admire the sandstone walls now glowing red in the sunset, covered in tiny pockets where rare solitary sandstone bees have each dug out their own nest cavity.

Today, native cottonwoods once chewed to the ground by cattle now tower 30 feet high. Willows are thriving in dense thickets, spreading out far away from the creek, a sure sign that the water table is rising. Biological soil crusts, undisturbed places where tiny living organisms hold the soil together, giving it that characteristic blackened and bumpy look, cover entire hillsides. Great blue herons stalk fish in the lake and songbirds flit from the tall grasses, snapping up an abundance of spiders and bugs. The creek, once at the bottom of a deep ravine because heavy-footed cattle had continually sheared off the banks, is now trickling along at the surface, accessible to small wildlife and wetland plants. A field once overrun with thistle is now full of native grasses and bee flower, aptly named as it buzzes vibrantly on a late August afternoon, playing host to some of the hundreds of pollinators found in southern Utah. In 2016, 18 scientists conducted the third Johnson Lakes bioblitz, cataloguing hundreds of species in a 3-day science marathon, including peregrine falcons, sego lilies, and collecting over 2,600 insects and spiders. The vibrancy of life is unmistakable.

Johnson Lakes Canyon, cattle-free for over 10 years, is a case study in what can happen when we make a commitment to care for the land. Water flows through the property like a ribbon of life, supporting a diversity of plants and wildlife. It is an oasis in the desert, and Rick and Susie are continually learning from experience. A few extra sets of hands help, too. ©

Lisa Winters manages the Grand Canyon Trust's citizen science and stewardship efforts and has been bringing volunteers to Johnson Lakes Canyon since 2016.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Lisa Neiro

Hometown: Eagle, CO

Volunteer and member since: 2007

14 volunteer trips

458 hours contributed

WHY VOLUNTEER?

I enjoy helping those who don't have a voice, particularly animals and the land. In 2014, I did a restoration trip at the Vermilion Cliffs area, and we dug a new watering hole around a spring so that animals could access pooled surface water. Later, the Trust shared camera-trap photos from the site, and it was so rewarding to see a cougar sipping water from the pool! Johnson Lakes Canyon trips are always a blast—I've been on two to this beautiful oasis within Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THE GRAND CANYON TRUST?

I've backpacked over 1000 solo miles through the Grand Canyon and along the way, I would always pick up trash. But I wanted to do more. Volunteering with the Trust means I get to meet great people, learn new skills, engage directly with conservation, and see beautiful places I never knew about, all while helping restore the Colorado Plateau.

I heard the saying, "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children." Because of my volunteering with the Trust, I've been able to apply conservation practices to the three acres I have in Colorado; I'm going to leave my land better than I found it. All my electric needs are met through solar power. It's the best feeling! On my property, I've been pulling invasives and fostering native plants, and I put up deer fencing to give the aspen trees a chance, just like the Trust does around Utah's Pando aspen stand. I consciously minimize consumption of animal products, recycle, and compost. If everyone makes simple changes, together I believe we can make a difference.

Thank you, Lisa!

JONATHAN BARTH

PROGRESS REPORT

Johnson Lakes Canyon is at once a restoration site and a story of what our public lands, including the beleaguered Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, could be, once the goal shifts from commercial extraction to support for native plants and wildlife, health, and hope. With their own labor and the help of youth crews and annual Grand Canyon Trust volunteer trips, Susie and Rick Knezevich have fenced out cattle, cut Russian olive trees that choked out native plants, dragged dead sagebrush from beneath live sagebrush, seeded and planted native grasses, flowers, and trees, and weeded prickly and ambitious invasive plants.

Cottonwoods now tower above the waters and wetlands, and Gambel oak saplings are flourishing. We have 25 photopoints that are re-photographed annually to document how the landscape is changing.

But what about the grasses, shrubs, and woody plants and wildflowers (what botanists call "forbs") that cover the canyon floor? In 2015, the Trust installed 25 transects of differing lengths—each one marked with a T-post at either end. A transect tape (similar to a tape measure) is laid down and a slender wire is pointed down at predetermined distances, and a pole set down. The species name of every plant that is physically touching the pole is recorded (by plant-savvy Trust volunteers), along with what is found at the soil level (rock, plant litter, light or dark biocrust). Three transects have a paired transect on public land that is grazed, for comparison. Species found on the site, but not touched by the transect pole, are also recorded.

The result is an annual record of what is changing beneath the trees and canyon walls, and what is not. The most consistently marvelous change is the increase at most sites in biological soil crust, which encourages water infiltration, resists cheatgrass, and prevents soil erosion. Native grasses have responded spectacularly where dead sagebrush was dragged out. Native species are almost always at least holding their own, and are increasing significantly on sites where specific invasive species have been pulled. Seeding and planting of native species are having some success, but cheatgrass, the bane of the West, is giving its best shot at claiming permanent residency. While a lot of work has gone into recording and assembling data over the last five years, the value (and number) of transects will only grow in coming years.

Johnson Lakes Canyon is a busy, hopeful landscape of both passive restoration (removing cattle) and active restoration (cutting, weeding, planting, seeding). Our national public lands could be Johnson Lakes Canyon repeated over and over, for generations. ◎

Mary O'Brien, Utah Forests Program Director

EXPOSED

The nation's last uranium mill threatens our Indigenous communities, and we're doing something about it.

By Talia Boyd

TIM PETERSON

On a beautiful Saturday afternoon last May, as mesmerizing mesas blanketed by shadows of clouds passed me by, I began to feel anxious. I was going to the last and only operating conventional uranium mill in the United States.

For years while organizing around uranium legacy issues in northwestern New Mexico, I had heard of this place—the White Mesa Mill in southeastern Utah. I had heard how close it is to the Ute Mountain Ute community of White Mesa.

When I arrived at the third annual White Mesa Ute Community Protest and Spiritual Walk, my heart sank. It is true: the White Mesa Ute people are less than four miles from the mill. It really hit home for me. I grew up being unknowingly exposed to uranium tailings from the Tuba City, Arizona Disposal Site, a former uranium mill, also known as "Rare Metals," located within the Navajo Nation and close to the Hopi reservation. My family then moved to Church Rock, New Mexico—ground zero for the largest radioactive spill in U.S. history. I know the fight for survival against the nuclear fuel chain—I'm living it. Did you know that over 90 percent of uranium milling in the U.S. has happened on or near tribal lands? All too often, for Indigenous peoples, our homelands are considered sacrifice zones for the nuclear beast, and we, the Indigenous peoples, are seen as expendable.

On the Ute Mountain Ute reservation just north of Bluff, Utah, the White Mesa Ute Concerned Community group has been organizing for years for the closure and cleanup of the mill. The protest walk has been gaining momentum and participation each year and amplifies tribal voices and concerns. We gathered together at the end of the walk near the turnoff to the mill, as community members shared stories of how they don't go outside anymore because of the toxic smell, the increasing fears of water contamination, and the huge trucks that incessantly haul in loads of radioactive material at night.

"When the mill's running, it smells like chemicals at my house. We take in radiation from the mill, me, my kids, my mom, my family, my people," community organizer Yolanda Badback told the crowd.

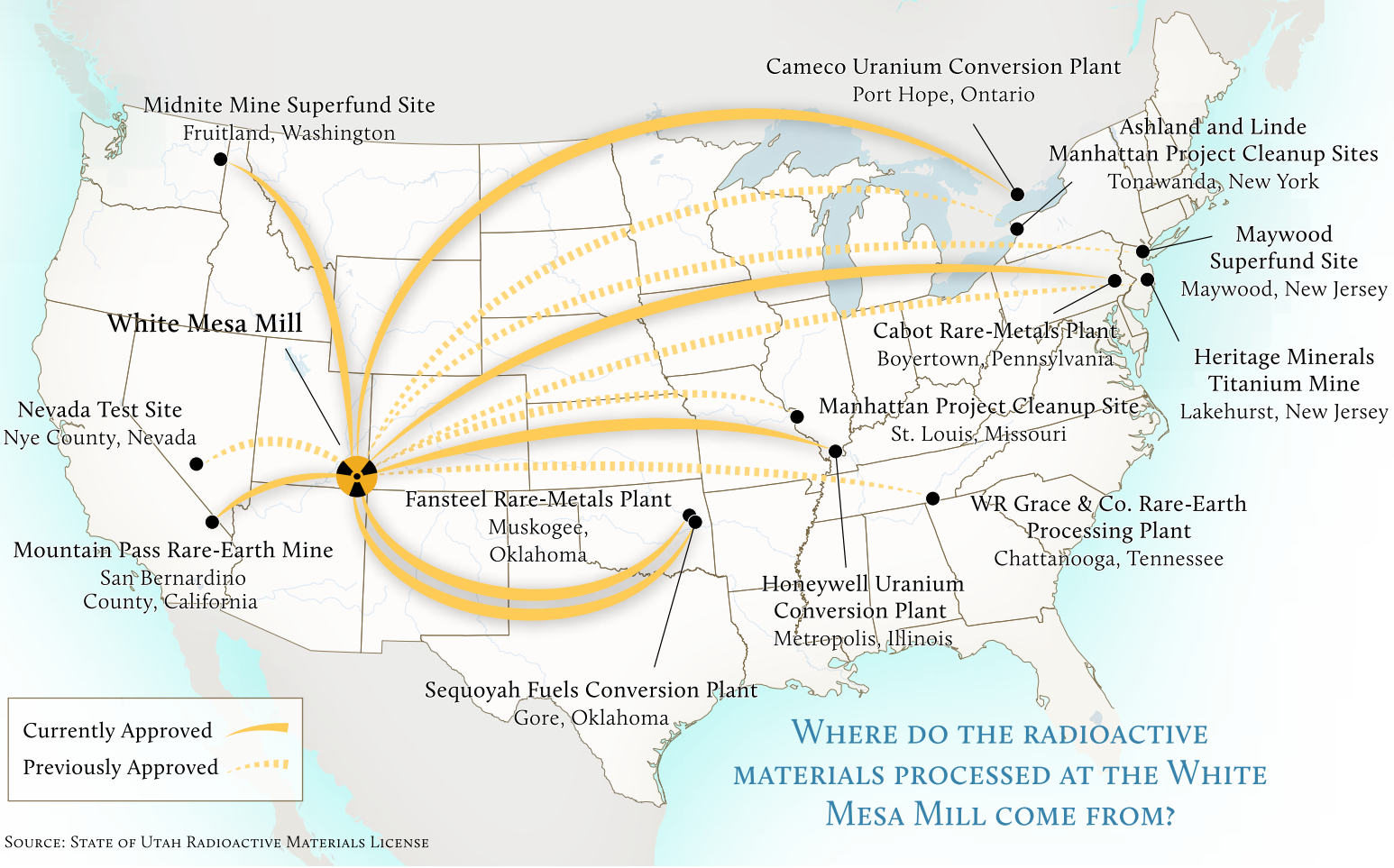
The mill was built in 1979 to process uranium ore from nearby mines on the Colorado Plateau. But around the early 1990s, the mill's owner began trying to make additional money by processing "alternate feed material" and discarding the resulting waste at the mill, a practice that continues today. These "alternate feeds" include uranium-laden waste from distant sites contaminated by federal atomic testing programs and highly polluted industrial sites. The alternate feed is run through the mill, uranium is extracted, and the resulting waste is discarded in pits at the mill site. Though the mill was not intended for disposal of these materials, it is now licensed to receive them. The cost to clean up, remediate, and reclaim the mill could be astronomical, and there's an immense financial incentive for the company not to set aside enough of its current revenues to pay for the mill's final cleanup. When other uranium mills have closed, companies have declared bankruptcy and walked away.

Now, contaminants in the groundwater beneath the mill site are migrating toward springs that are used by and spiritually important to members of the White Mesa Ute community. The mill belches radioactive and toxic air pollutants that travel with the wind, including radon, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxide. Stockpiled ore and alternate feeds that are not adequately covered also blow off-site.

As I stood there listening to the speakers, waves of memories came racing into my mind: of having that lived experience of being unknowingly and unwillingly exposed, of the small trailer-park community located

TOP: White Mesa community members, including elder Thelma Whiskers participate in the 2019 spiritual walk. TIM PETERSON ABOVE: Community advocates Yolanda Badback (left) and Michael Badback (right) address the crowd. TIM PETERSON

"When the mill's running, it smells like chemicals at my house. We take in radiation from the mill, me, my kids, my mom, my family, my people."



Source: State of Utah Radioactive Materials License

right next to the Tuba City Disposal Site, where some of my elementary-school friends lived and whom we picked up each day on our bus route to school. These children used to play on top of the unfenced uranium-tailings pile—there were no warning signs—especially after it rained and water would gather in puddles at the bottom. They were later forced to relocate after decades of being exposed and after losing family to different cancers. My heart began pounding faster and faster with the beat of the drum. As my Ute relatives shared stories and sang traditional songs, I felt a loss of breath, a deep hurt within my heart and a lump in my throat… we are still fighting to survive. What does long-term exposure to radioactive contaminants do to the human body, the environment, our economy, and our social structures? Impacted communities have been requesting long-term studies to assess the cumulative impacts to begin establishing baselines and gathering data, to little or no avail.

The mill is located right beside the original Bears Ears National Monument, and the mill's owner has a permitted uranium mine just outside Bears Ears, whose expansion the Grand Canyon Trust has challenged. The matter is currently on appeal. Recently, a Moab miner reopened a uranium and vanadium mine on lands cut from the monument in 2017. If not reversed by the courts, the president's unlawful cuts to Bears Ears National Monument mean the mill could process uranium and vanadium that has been mined in and near the original Bears Ears.

This shows a gross and blatant disregard for tribal communities who have been confronting the intentional pollution of our homelands and the desecration of our cultural landscapes. Indigenous peoples and communities of color experience the worst pollution because of institutional racism used to separate us and suppress the voices of those most impacted.

While we wait for the courts to rule on our national monuments lawsuits and restore the original boundaries of Bears Ears, we've also filed an administrative appeal before the Utah Department of Environmental Quality to contest the state's decision to renew two major permits the mill needs to operate: a radioactive materials license and a groundwater discharge permit.

The Grand Canyon Trust's primary goal is to ensure that the mill's reclamation plan is as robust as possible, is carried out promptly, and that we have as much information as possible about how well the cleanup is protecting the environment and the health of the residents of the White Mesa Ute community. We've been working side by side with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, who has filed a similar appeal.

In 2018, the mill's owner submitted an application to build two new

The mill's owner has also filed an application to accept radioactive waste from a metals processing facility in Estonia, raising the prospect of hazardous materials traveling over land and sea from all over the planet bound for the doorstep of the White Mesa Ute community.

40-acre waste pits at the mill site. The mill lies within the White Mesa Archaeological District, home to countless Ancestral Puebloan and Ute sacred sites. Digging new waste pits would inevitably damage or destroy them. "The mill was built on top of burial grounds and contaminates the bones of my ancestors," Yolanda Badback wrote in an opinion piece in the Salt Lake Tribune back in 2017.

The mill's owner has also filed an application to accept radioactive waste from a metals processing facility in Estonia, raising the prospect of hazardous materials traveling over land and sea from all over the planet bound for the doorstep of the White Mesa Ute community.

Closer to home, the mill's owner has expressed an interest in accepting uranium mine wastes that would come from Superfund cleanup of abandoned uranium mines on the nearby Navajo Nation. This goes back to the old model of industry—pitting tribal communities against each other after exploiting our homelands and our natural resources. They seek to divide us by moving radioactive waste between our communities. In 2018, the Cherokee Nation celebrated the removal of tons of radioactive waste from the Sequoyah Fuels uranium conversion plant, however that radioactive sludge was then hauled to the White Mesa Mill where the White Mesa Ute people could be exposed to the resulting radioactive pollution.

Because the uranium industry is beset by high production costs and low prices, a third of the mill's workforce was laid off in January. In financial trouble, the mill's owner and another uranium producer petitioned the Trump administration in 2018 to impose "buy American" quotas for uranium. That effort failed, but the president created a Nuclear Fuel Working Group to make recommendations to prop up the industry.

The president's proposed budget released in February called for $150 million to create a strategic uranium reserve composed of American uranium, never mind that the Department of Energy already manages a sizable strategic stockpile of uranium. We're not sure exactly where the newly mined uranium would come from, but any ore dug up in the United States would be milled at White Mesa if Congress accepts that portion of the president's budget. The working group also promised further steps to boost the industry, though it remains a mystery what those measures might be.

After the gathering and during our farewells, I had a huge headache and my eyes were slightly stinging. The toxic smell increased the closer we got to the mill and we protested at the mill turnoff for a couple hours. Some other attendees also mentioned having headaches and not feeling well afterwards. In that moment, we all truly understood what our White Mesa Ute relatives live with every day.

The Grand Canyon Trust's Cultural Landscapes Program is working with White Mesa Concerned Community and partners to support a community-led environmental justice conference in the run-up to the fourth annual spiritual walk on May 16, 2020. Our goal is to mobilize support to clean up the White Mesa Mill that continually pollutes the air, land, and water, and desecrates significant cultural landscapes.

TIM PETERSON

The nuclear fuel chain is rooted in placing the brunt of its pollution on poor, Indigenous, and other minority communities. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples throughout the Colorado Plateau know the true cost and the permanent damage from the nuclear fuel chain. Everything from the mining, milling, and waste are burdens we will all carry for generations. As our communities work to heal, we continue to face nuclear colonialism. We invite you to join us in the fight as we move forward for justice and a healthy future for the coming generations. In the words of White Mesa community organizer Michael Badback: "We're not going to stop until we get something done with this, because it's important to us, to our future, to our young ones that are growing up." ©

Talia Boyd is Diné. Her clans are Todích'íí'nii (Bitter Water), born for Tó'aheedlíinii (Water Flowing Together); maternal grandfather is Tl'aashchi'I (Red Bottom) and paternal grandfather is Tábą ą há (Water's Edge). She has spent years as a grassroots organizer in rural and Indigenous communities on environmental and social justice issues.


JACK DYKINGA

POSTCARDS from the FIELD

GRAND CANYON
Dam Proposals Threaten Little Colorado River

Greetings friends. We are sitting here at the edge of the Little Colorado River, mere miles from the Colorado River, which runs through the Grand Canyon. We can't help but be in awe and humbled by the vast beauty of this rugged desert landscape that surrounds us. If you listen closely, you can hear the water carve its way through layers of geologic time. In the most recent layers of time, this beautiful landscape has faced many threats of proposed developments, from the Escalade resort to two hydroelectric dams, which would alter and erase our historical and religious ties not only to the Little Colorado River, but the Grand Canyon as a whole. Currently our continued long-term goal is to establish permanent protections for this rich cultural landscape and we seek your continued support in this endeavor.

Sarana Riggs
Grand Canyon Program Manager

GRAND CANYON
Legislation to Ban New Uranium Mines Moving

The Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act passed in the House with bipartisan support in October 2019. In December, Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema introduced a version of the bill in the Senate where it now awaits the chance for committee hearing. Arizona's other senator, Martha McSally, has remained silent about the bill, which would ban new uranium mines on about 1 million acres of public land around the Grand Canyon. The Trust and our partners have asked her to co-sponsor the legislation. And while the recommendations of President Trump's Nuclear Fuel Working Group—established to examine options for aiding the U.S. uranium industry—have yet to be made public, the president has asked Congress for $1.5 billion over 10 years to create a new national stockpile of U.S.-mined uranium. Such a move would increase business for U.S. uranium mines, and could jumpstart mining on the Colorado Plateau.

Amber Reimondo
Energy Program Director

THOMAS MEINZEN

SALLY HENKEL

DEIDRA PEACHES

UTAH FORESTS

A Campaign to Save 1,100 Species

Over 1,100 native bee species call the Colorado Plateau home. Today, these remarkable pollinators are threatened by their European cousin, the honeybee, which transmits diseases to native bees and outcompetes them for pollen and nectar. Millions of honeybees are parked each summer on Utah and Arizona's national forests and other public lands for the profit of a few commercial beekeeping operations. We are helping protect native bees from this threat by informing land managers about honeybee impacts and working to ensure honeybee operations do not receive permits by "categorical exclusion," which relieves agencies of considering their dire consequences. Protecting native bees also helps save rare plants, which often depend on particular native bees for pollination. In today's climate, our native bees face increasing challenges—taking honeybee hives off public lands is a big way to help them out.

Thomas Meinzen
Utah Forests Program Fellow

VOLUNTEER

Rock Mosaics Keep Streams Healthy

For the last two years, the Trust has worked closely with volunteers and national forest managers in Arizona to restore precious freshwater streams and springs. In June 2019, a group of volunteers spent three days hefting rocks to build structures in streambeds to slow runoff from snowmelt. These rocks help to slow erosion, spread out the surface water, and keep stream systems healthy. Fast-forward to January 2020: after some wintery precipitation, one of our Forest Service partners photographed these large rock mosaics at work, each stone set in place by a volunteer. The rocks were already helping to prevent the stream banks from eroding away. The pools formed by the rocks also help back up water above the rock structure so that a section of the meadow floods, leaving a marshy area that will be vital to insects, amphibians, and birds all spring.

Audrey Kruse
Community Engagement Director

RISING LEADERS

Environmental Day at the Arizona Capitol

Before the sun had risen on a chilly February morning, 30 young climate activists equipped with powerful words and a deep passion for climate justice, journeyed to the Arizona State Capitol to deliver a message to their representatives. When legislators failed to attend these scheduled meetings, however, students did not give up. At an afternoon press conference, they took the floor and delivered their message anyway: "We respectfully demand that all government officials here today listen to the voices of the youth and implement a meaningful climate action plan in the state of Arizona... We, as future and current voters, will be watching," they called into the microphone. "Give the future generations a fighting chance!"

Maria Archibald
Rising Leaders Program Manager

There is common ground

SOMETIMES IT'S REALLY HARD TO GET THERE

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. BLAKE MCCORD

Attorney STEVE SNOW has a reputation for bridging divides and getting conservation results, including a 60,000-acre plan to protect the desert tortoise in southern Utah. Born and raised in St. George, Utah, Snow married his high school sweetheart, opened a law practice, raised four sons, and served his church in the U.S. and abroad. His passion for the environment led him to join the board of the then fledgling Grand Canyon Trust in 1990. Now retired, Snow is back on the board after a pause of nearly two decades. We asked him to take stock of the Utah conservation landscape and for tips on getting things done in a time of political polarization.

What first got you thinking about the environment?

I've always liked being out and I've always loved southern Utah. I guess I became more aware in the mid-1970s, when they were proposing a large power plant on the Kaiparowits Plateau near large reserves of coal. It received a lot of publicity because Robert Redford came out against it. Growing up in southern Utah, I knew cowboys, ranchers, and others opposed to environmentalists. They didn't always have a lot of good feelings toward environmentalism, but the message of conservation resonated with me. I thought: this is worth protecting. We shouldn't be fouling the Earth. That's against my faith. This is something God gave us, we need to treat it with respect and save it for the coming future generations.

What conservation issues in Utah are most on your mind?

Public lands is my biggest worry for Utah—it's evident with the shrinkage of the national monuments. Revoking the Staircase has hurt and will continue to hurt business in small places like Boulder and Escalante, Utah, places where tourists were coming to see the monument. I was thrilled when the Staircase was created, and many people in southern Utah who initially opposed it learned to appreciate it.

Another big worry is the drive to privatize. Utah thinks we could govern these lands better than the federal government, and that is just not true. State management would encourage privatization. The federal government does need to step up and do a better job. They need more resources allocated to the management of public lands.

Off-road vehicles are a huge threat to our public lands in Utah. I go into an area I haven't seen for a few years and I'm just shocked at what damage off-road vehicles are doing. I think they're fine if they stay on designated trails and roads, but some leave these roads and create new trails, scarring the land. The problem is the desert doesn't restore itself quickly, it takes a lot of time.

And obviously water is another huge issue.

You've been described as a "bridge-builder" in environmental conflicts. What's your secret?

You have to listen to what is worrying people. When you really listen and you get down to the facts, much of what they're worried about is what we're worried about. Unsustainability. They want to be able to make a living. There is common ground. Sometimes it's really hard to get there. In my law practice, I learned that if you want people to settle their differences, you've got to get them talking about the things they've got in common. You have to listen to each other. All too often with environmental issues it's become so polarized that people just yell, they don't ever try to sit and listen and try to solve problems. There's a whole lot more in common on most issues than people think going into it.

You've spoken about the paradox of Utah's natural beauty bringing about its destruction. How do you balance growth and conservation?

For years we thought that tourism might be the answer to development on a much more aggressive scale, but we're beginning to love these areas to death. You can't keep promoting Moab on television and then complain that everybody is going to Moab. There's just too much promotion. You should have heard them complain when the shuttle went into Zion, but everyone who visits Zion from around Washington County now says, 'Oh, it's so much nicer to have those cars out of the canyon, and wildlife is coming back, it's like when we used to go when we were kids.' Because there were no cars when we were kids.

At the end of the day, it's just a few people making money off the development and it's driven by dollars. The unintended consequences on the environment are never factored in by the governing bodies when they make the decision whether or not to approve development. That ought to be talked about more.

What's it like to be an environmentalist in your community?

I have a lot of friends from a lot of different kinds of backgrounds. I think they just think 'What is wrong with Steve? He's an environmentalist and a Democrat,' but they tolerate me.

I sit down and talk to them and they talk to me. I think being labeled an environmentalist is probably not as bad as being labeled a Democrat in Washington County. But it's okay, I'm used to it. I used to get angry, but as you get older, you realize there's not that much good that comes out of that, is there? The people you need to work with, you just make them angry. That just makes it harder. I've been in these fights before. Creating the reserve for the desert tortoise in the middle of the growth of St. George was not popular either, but I love where I live. Once in a while, you see a little change.

GRAND CANYON TRUST

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TAKE A HIKE

Explore the Colorado Plateau

ELLEN HEYN

GOLDEN CATHEDRAL

Escape into hidden alcoves along the Escalante River

Golden Cathedral is sublime—sunlight streams through natural portals, casting a glow on the sandstone amphitheater. To get there, follow the trail as it drops off Egypt Bench, which was part of the original Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument before President Trump slashed the monument's boundaries in 2017. From there, you traverse rock domes and sand dunes, eventually dropping down to the Escalante River via Fence Canyon. A mile-long slog downstream puts you at Neon Canyon, a beautiful slot canyon that dead-ends at Golden Cathedral. Relax in the cool alcove before retracing your steps back to the trailhead.

DISTANCE: 10.2 miles roundtrip
DIFFICULTY: Moderate to strenuous

More info at
grandcanyontrust.org/golden-cathedral