Letter from the Executive Director

Amid Continual Challenges, the Grand Canyon Trust Persists

OUR MISSION  To safeguard the wonders of the Grand Canyon and the Colorado Plateau, while supporting the rights of its Native peoples.
It is impossible to reflect on the Grand Canyon Trust’s hard work and accomplishments over the past year without also reflecting on the profound challenges we see nationally and globally. The demand for fossil fuels has increased at a time when we should be reducing our reliance on them. The Supreme Court’s ruling limiting the EPA’s power to regulate carbon emissions undermines efforts to mitigate climate change when the stakes are higher than ever. And the burden of inflation, at its current 40-year high, is disproportionately impacting lower-income households, and is amplified within many tribal communities. These and other challenges augment the need for our work to safeguard the Colorado Plateau while supporting the rights of its Native peoples.

Nevertheless, I remain as hopeful and determined as ever to see the Trust’s mission forward, working with our extraordinary team. I have seen this organization persevere through difficult political and social climates in the past, and believe it’s one of the things the Trust does best. We will persist and move ever forward, as we have done for the past 37 years.

During an unexpectedly turbulent year, we still saw substantial progress. We continued to help gather momentum in the effort to permanently protect the Grand Canyon region from uranium mining. A long-awaited Senate subcommittee hearing for the Grand Canyon Protection Act in July was one more step toward seeing permanent protection become reality. We also co-hosted Emergence 2022 this summer at the Grand Canyon—the first annual economic summit designed to initiate greater inclusivity and opportunities for Native peoples in the economy of the national park, where they have been historically overlooked, disenfranchised, and dislocated.

Earlier this year, we publicized a far-reaching account of how the White Mesa uranium mill’s owner has earned millions burying radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project and other contaminated sites next to Bears Ears National Monument and the Ute Mountain Ute community of White Mesa in southern Utah. And with a new spotlight on this problem, we are laying the groundwork to reform the law and halt this practice.

These are just a few of the highlights from key initiatives in which the Trust saw success over the past year. You will find greater detail on these efforts in the following pages, as well as other updates, achievements, and plans for the near future.

Along with perseverance, the Trust’s strength has long been to translate place-based relationships, collaborations, expertise, and vision into change. Now more than ever this approach is critical. In the face of a future that is at once uncertain and daunting, and also primed for change in so many exciting ways, we deeply appreciate your support and continued dedication to our common cause.

Ethan Aumack
Executive Director
Safeguarding the Grand Canyon

The Trust’s work in and around the Grand Canyon—often in close collaboration with tribes—ranges from delivering petitions to legislators, to publishing research reports, to testifying before Congress to keep threats to this unparalleled landscape at bay. We celebrated in March when, thanks in part to our advocacy, uranium was removed from the U.S. Geological Survey’s list of critical minerals—a list that prioritizes mining and processing of certain minerals, and on which uranium does not belong.

The Grand Canyon region only holds a small portion of the mineable deposits found in the U.S., and uranium extraction in the area has left a toxic legacy that disproportionately impacts Native communities. Although we helped secure a 20-year ban against new uranium claims in 2012, along with tribal leaders and advocates, we continue to push for a permanent mining ban in the region.

5,000+ actions taken by Trust advocates (emails sent; comments submitted; petition signatures given) in support of a permanent uranium mining ban around the Grand Canyon
Permanent Mining Ban Momentum

The Grand Canyon Protection Act (GCPA) would make the temporary ban on uranium mining permanent, preventing new mining claims or mines for good on approximately one million acres of public lands adjacent to Grand Canyon National Park. We reached a critical milestone over the summer when this important legislation finally received a hearing and a vote before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thanks in part to our ongoing partnership with Arizona Senator (and committee member) Mark Kelly. Although the hearing culminated in a tie vote, meaning the GCPA wasn’t automatically discharged to the full Senate, opportunities remain for success in this Congress. To further impel lawmakers, the Trust arranged for an independent polling firm to measure public opinion on a permanent uranium mining ban around the Grand Canyon, which demonstrated broad bipartisan voter support across Arizona.

Arizona voters support a permanent ban on uranium mining by a 4-to-1 margin

Q. 38 Do you support or oppose the proposed legislation called the Grand Canyon Protection Act, which would make permanent the temporary ban on new uranium mining around Grand Canyon?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly support</th>
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<th>Strongly oppose</th>
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<td>Support</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<td>Oppose</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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Source: GQR

600 Arizona voters surveyed through a poll commissioned by the Trust
Higher Standards for Canyon Mine
The importance of preventing new uranium mines through legislation like the GCPA was underscored this year when a decade-long legal effort to shut down Canyon Mine not far from the Grand Canyon’s south rim failed. Canyon Mine, renamed Pinyon Plain Mine, is the only uranium mine that is currently exempt from the temporary mining ban. The mine is fully built but has yet to operate in its more than 30-year existence, and is already posing a contamination threat to groundwater. Despite the efforts of the Havasupai Tribe, the Trust, and other allies, Canyon Mine was issued a new permit by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality earlier this year. While this permit imposes stricter requirements for protecting groundwater than the previous permit, it still doesn’t offer sufficient protection for the Grand Canyon. As a result, we continue working to identify opportunities to close and clean up Canyon Mine.

No Federal Support for New Uranium Production
Thanks to the staunch advocacy of tribes, including the Havasupai and Ute Mountain Ute, and the Trust, the federal government will not be subsidizing any new uranium production at this time. In June, the Biden administration announced that it would proceed with a Trump-era uranium reserve program—but it would only purchase uranium that is already held in storage in Metropolis, Illinois rather than purchase newly produced uranium. The federal government has not yet announced long-term plans for the uranium reserve program, and the Trust will continue to monitor the situation closely.

2,000+
actions taken by Trust advocates in support of uranium-specific issues affecting the entire Colorado Plateau
Emergence Intertribal Economic Summit

In August, we co-hosted Emergence 2022 at Grand Canyon National Park—the first intertribal economic summit designed to initiate greater inclusivity and opportunities for Native peoples within the park’s economy. Despite being the original stewards of this land, they have historically been overlooked and excluded from the near $1 billion annual tourism industry. With the support of National Park Service (NPS) leadership, this inaugural multi-day event explored new ways for tribal community members and entrepreneurs to participate in and build a more sustainable tourism economy while preserving the region’s cultural heritage. One noteworthy outcome of this historic summit, which we intend to hold again in 2023, is a forthcoming Grand Canyon intertribal economic network designed to facilitate information exchange between Native-owned businesses and other stakeholders.

94
attendees from 14 different tribes
participated in the Emergence Intertribal Economic Summit

Hiring Reform: A Model for National Change

In a similar effort to foster inclusivity, the Trust facilitated groundbreaking discussions this year between the NPS and the Intertribal Centennial Conversations Group—a regional group of tribal cultural leaders—to increase opportunities for Indigenous representation by reforming the park’s hiring procedures. The current NPS policy streamlines hiring from only six Native American tribes, excluding five other Grand Canyon-associated tribes. The existing policy also presents barriers to Indigenous job-seekers related to housing and upward mobility and is focused on hiring Native staff for lower-paying jobs. We are working toward reforms that will encourage the park to hire from all 11 Grand Canyon-associated tribes for jobs at all levels of park management. This will likely require federal legislation, but reform of this nature could be replicated across the Colorado Plateau and country, if successful.
When President Biden restored the boundaries of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments last fall—four years after they were slashed by the Trump administration—they became protected once again from threats like new mining claims and fossil fuel development. Our efforts since have focused on adding protections for lands within and around Bears Ears, supporting federal-intertribal collaborative management planning, monitoring for potentially harmful activities within the monuments’ boundaries, and addressing threats to the lands surrounding both monuments. While the state of Utah and others have recently filed a lawsuit challenging the restoration proclamations, we stand ready—with our many allies—to help defend those proclamations in court.

**1,000+**

Trust advocates took action in support of reform of the White Mesa Mill’s practices

**Bears Ears National Monument**

Because national monument designations can only apply to federal public lands, more than 200 scattered square-mile parcels owned by the state of Utah and managed by the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) inside the monument’s boundaries did not receive protections when Bears Ears was restored. State ownership means that lands within (but not technically part of) Bears Ears National Monument could be subject to mining, fossil fuel development, or even being sold.

The solution to this problem is a congressional land exchange that would trade state lands inside and near the monument for federal lands elsewhere. This exchange would make state lands within Bears Ears federal public lands, adding approximately 131,000 acres to the monument, while making more than 30,000 additional acres near the monument federal public lands as well.

This year, the Trust and our partners negotiated with SITLA to ensure that an exchange will protect culturally and ecologically important lands in and around Bears Ears, while preventing SITLA from acquiring and potentially mismanaging or selling other important public lands. At the time of this writing, the land exchange still needs the approval of Congress—which we are working to secure by the end of the year.
We have also focused on threats posed by the White Mesa uranium mill, which lies just outside Bears Ears and near the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's White Mesa community. Over the past several decades, an important source of revenue for the mill has come from processing radioactive waste imported from other industrial facilities or contaminated sites—known as “alternate feeds”—rather than from milling uranium ore, for which the mill was originally built and licensed. As a result, the mill operates like a commercial landfill for radioactive wastes without being licensed as such, thereby threatening Utah's environment while perpetuating injustices against the White Mesa Ute community.

This spring, we released a detailed report and story map collection examining the more than 15 different radioactive waste streams approved for shipment to the mill from across the U.S. and Canada, and as far away as Europe and Japan. We also launched an advocacy campaign to illuminate these harmful activities, in close collaboration with White Mesa community members and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, which received extensive local, regional, and national media coverage. We are currently devising a legislative strategy to close the legal loophole that allows the mill to function in this manner.
100+
Tribal members, land managers, academics, and members of conservation groups with strong connections to the land participated in the first annual Grand Staircase-Escalante Symposium.

30+
days of field visits to Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by Trust staff, including 3 with tribal decision-makers to inform management planning.
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, designated in 1996, has historically been acclaimed for its scientific significance. However, the deep cultural connections tribes hold to this landscape have often been overlooked. In response to President Biden’s restoration proclamation, the Bureau of Land Management is preparing a new management plan for the monument—and the Trust is assuming a lead role by coordinating a coalition to provide feedback and proposals that will shape the monument’s future management, including an emphasis on the perspectives of affiliated tribes. We will continue supporting the development of a durable management plan that is inclusive of traditional Indigenous knowledge as opportunities emerge.

As part of our work to raise awareness on threats to this culturally significant landscape, this spring, the Trust took the lead in organizing the symposium, *Ways of Understanding and Protecting Land and Water Resources in the Grand Staircase-Escalante Region*. The event featured Indigenous speakers from four regional tribes who shared their perspectives on topics from native plant use to climate change. The symposium was designed to establish connections and facilitate dialogue between tribes, land managers, academics, and conservation groups—and we have already witnessed increased collaboration as a result.
Preserving Water Resources

Water is a precious resource in the drought-ridden West and a source of life and livelihood for many across the Colorado Plateau. As of March, more than 20 percent of Western states were classified as experiencing extreme or exceptional drought by the U.S. Drought Monitor, and two of the seven states with the most severe drought lie within the plateau: New Mexico and Utah.

Much of the Trust’s work over the past three decades has centered on protecting water sources in the region from unsustainable development, damming, mining, and other activities that would exacerbate the burden of existing drought conditions. We are excited about several emerging opportunities that will enable us to make an even greater impact on safeguarding water in the region.
New Water Advocacy Program

This year, we created a new program dedicated exclusively to safeguarding the quantity and quality of surface and groundwater for the ecosystems and people of the Colorado Plateau—led by a new water advocacy director who comes to the Trust with two decades of regional experience. The program will prioritize protecting groundwater in Arizona due to the lack of any state regulation of groundwater withdrawals in rural areas, which threaten springs and streams—many of which are culturally significant to tribes. In addition to opposing immediate threats to groundwater, including a proposed mega-development in Tusayan and the Big Canyon Dam along the Little Colorado River, the Trust is working with an established coalition to explore statewide legislative opportunities to fill this regulatory gap.

Another near-term goal for the program is to address the decreasing flows and increasing demand in the San Juan River Basin, the second largest sub-basin within the Upper Colorado River Basin. Our focus will be on supporting four tribal nations—Navajo Nation, Jicarilla Apache Nation, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe—that rely on the river and its tributaries as their primary water source. To pilot this larger vision, the Trust is currently conducting outreach to tribal staff and partners in the Upper San Juan River Basin to explore the needs and opportunities for improved water management in the region, including building capacity within the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Indian tribes to ensure water security, ecosystem health, and climate resilience.
$54 million
per year earmarked by the federal government for 4FRI and other efforts over the next 5 years to address wildfire crises, thanks to advocacy by the Trust and others

4FRI Funding Boost for Arizona Forests and Watersheds
In a healthy forest watershed, rain and snow get absorbed, stored, and filtered in the soil, eventually yielding clean water to streams and groundwater. Although fire is a natural phenomenon in Western forests, larger and more severe forest fires can throw an entire watershed out of balance. More than a decade ago, the Trust helped launch the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI) to reduce the risk of unnaturally severe wildfires in Arizona through carefully planned forest thinning. This year, 4FRI received a major funding boost as part of the federal infrastructure bill passed last November. The nearly $3 billion national strategy to address wildfire crises invests in restoration efforts within priority “firesheds” across national forests and grasslands—and includes $54 million a year over the next five years for 4FRI and related efforts across the state.

This vital funding has augmented our work with 4FRI stakeholders and the U.S. Forest Service, effectively accelerating the pace of forest thinning efforts in the highest-priority acres in northern Arizona’s pine forests above the Mogollon Rim, as well as restoration activities for streams and wetlands to boost overall watershed health. We are extremely optimistic about the opportunity this important investment brings to protect against unnaturally severe and destructive wildfires while restoring millions of acres of forest lands in the coming years—and ultimately improve our forests’ ability to store, purify, and deliver much of Arizona’s water.
South Project’s Water Rights in Question

Given the importance of water in the West, any proposed development project on the plateau that would consume a great deal of water is of serious concern. Such is the case with the “South Project,” an oil shale facility proposed to be built in northeastern Utah by Estonian state-owned company Enefit American Oil. The South Project would be the nation’s first commercial-scale oil shale mine and processing plant, strip mining oil shale rock on up to 9,000 acres of scenic lands and processing it into about 50,000 barrels of synthetic crude oil every day—for more than 30 years. The facility would spew hazardous pollutants in the air, generate hundreds of millions of tons of toxic waste rock, and pollute groundwater and surface water—all while siphoning nearly 10 million gallons of water per day from the Green River, above its confluence with the Colorado River.

The Trust has been advocating for nearly a decade to prevent Enefit from building the South Project, and we recently uncovered something curious about the water right Enefit plans to use to supply this project’s water needs. Under Utah law, Enefit had 50 years—until 2015—to put the water to use or else forfeit that water right. To avoid forfeiting their rights from nonuse, Enefit transferred the water right to Deseret Power, the owner of a nearby coal-fired power plant. It appears Deseret Power is helping Enefit by taking advantage of a provision in Utah law allowing power plant owners to retain water rights beyond 50 years. In doing so, Enefit and Deseret Power are depriving Utah citizens of water that should be available to them—all for a project that could have catastrophic environmental and public health consequences.

Last November, the Trust filed a protest with the Utah Division of Water Rights seeking the forfeiture of the water right, and in July of this year we pressed our case at a hearing in Salt Lake City. At the hearing, the agency ordered the parties to submit additional briefing on the question of whether the Trust is a proper party to file a protest. If we prevail on that narrow issue, we anticipate another hearing in the coming months. Regardless of the outcome, the Trust will continue working to halt this disastrous oil shale project.
Volunteer and Rising Leader Program Snapshots

Volunteers: Protecting the Colorado Plateau from the Ground up

2022 marked another robust field season for our Volunteer Program, with more than 300 volunteers donating over 2,000 hours on projects designed to protect critical habitat and conserve native species across the Colorado Plateau. Specific projects this year included documenting the health of Arizona springs, restoring habitat for beavers in Utah, planting cottonwood trees around springs in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, and more. The pinyon jay community science project we launched in 2021 also gained momentum, with volunteers continuing to gather key data about this threatened bird species. The data—housed in the global bird-observation database eBird—allows us to advocate for the protection of vital pinyon and juniper habitat in areas actively used by these birds.

In addition to creating meaningful opportunities for volunteers across the Colorado Plateau, the Trust has focused on creating a more inclusive volunteer program. One major outcome from the past year was the creation of an online community for volunteers to connect and share information. We also removed barriers to participation by offering shorter single-day excursions, which led to a significant increase in new volunteers. Lastly, we continued refining our land acknowledgment curriculum to better recognize how project locations have been stewarded by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial.

Visit grandcanyontrust.org/volunteer for details.

Volunteer Hours

- Wetland Restoration: 180
- Wetland Protection: 200
- Pronghorn Fence Modification: 160
- Kane Ranch: 160
- Native Garden Maintenance: 130
- Monitoring Canyon Uranium Mine: 55
- Springs Monitoring: 40
- Springs Survey Trainings: 31
- Wetland Restoration: 23
- Pinyon Jay Outreach Event: 20
- Online Trainings and Webinars: 30
- Observing Pinyon Jays: 70
- 148 recorded observations of pinyon jays across the Colorado Plateau

- 10 visits to Canyon Mine to monitor ongoing activities and report violations

- 6 large beaver dam look-alikes built to help restore wetlands

- 43 springs surveyed across northern Arizona to prioritize future restoration sites

JOIN US IN THE FIELD!
Engaging Young Advocates through the Rising Leaders Program

Over the course of the year, the Trust’s Rising Leaders Program has continued engaging young people ages 15-30 in environmental justice and advocacy work across the Colorado Plateau. Since 2020, we have increasingly focused on working with Indigenous youth, and this year, our first entirely Indigenous cohort of summer interns worked on several key projects for Utah’s public lands and the Grand Canyon. One Indigenous youth-led project included a gathering and overflight of the Little Colorado River to engage youth participants in advocacy against inappropriate dams and development.

In addition to internships, we offered the fourth annual “LeaderShift” leadership training and co-hosted our first multi-generational, all-Indigenous Grand Canyon river trip called RIISE—the Regional Intertribal Intergenerational Stewardship Expedition. The goal of this trip was to facilitate the exchange of cultural knowledge and discussion about the meaningful inclusion of Native voices in the management of Grand Canyon National Park.

- 14 youth and 3 knowledge-holders from the associated tribes of the Grand Canyon boated down the length of the Grand Canyon
- 3 interns contributed over 12 weeks to the protection of the Colorado Plateau
- 8 young leaders attended the intensive month-long LeaderShift program
- 3 service-learning opportunities introduced Native youth to traditional farming, seed saving, harvesting, and meal preparation techniques
- 14 young people participated in a youth-only Little Colorado River advocacy event and overflight
I love the Colorado Plateau landscape; it is significant and uncommon, and I am sure many others feel the same. As I often do, I recently pitched a tent on a remote mesa in southeast Utah and watched the last colors of the day become an eternity of stars spread from horizon to horizon. Yet against this sublime beauty, like the warmth of the day and cold of night, I knew there remain persistent and unsound political and acquisitive threats that will not let up anytime soon.

While the prospects for unjustifiably ruining the lands and waters we love are menacing and time-sensitive, the Grand Canyon Trust has strategic conservation ideas guided by some of the most capable and wise people I know. The Trust’s successes come from putting into service brilliant conservation scientists and bringing into action first-rate environmental lawyering. But let me say more about what else the Trust gets right.

The Trust knows the Colorado Plateau. The team is grounded here, lives here, and listens. They know that landscape-level conservation work involves collaborations with public land managers, lawmakers, universities, rising leaders, and tribal nations. On the plateau and within the D.C. Beltway, the Trust continuously extends and cultivates relationships to become a powerful nexus and hub to leverage and safeguard the wonders of the Grand Canyon and the Colorado Plateau while supporting the rights of its Native peoples.

The core of this compelling work is an innovative staff. Let us be clear; this is a new generation of conservation-minded professionals. The Trust makes inclusion, parity, and transparency an inspiring and motivational part of the organization, creating a unified and highly collaborative team. Getting to and staying on the higher ground of efficient conservation work also requires an assessment-rich
environment. The Trust employs consistent, constructive, and practical feedback from staff, trustees, and stakeholders to enable this extraordinary team to reach its fullest expression.

When I am asked by peers, “How did the Trust rise to become so instrumental and up-to-date?” I always answer, “it’s the people and their power of a million new ideas.”

Watching the stars more attentively that night, it was apparent that they were not all white. They are, in fact, multiple colors. And I relaxed in my chair, feeling again that the Trust does get things right.

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