

What will happen to the Escalante River?
 Conditions in 2016 of the Escalante River (not grazed by cattle)
 vs.
 Conditions in 2016 in The Gulch (grazed by cattle)

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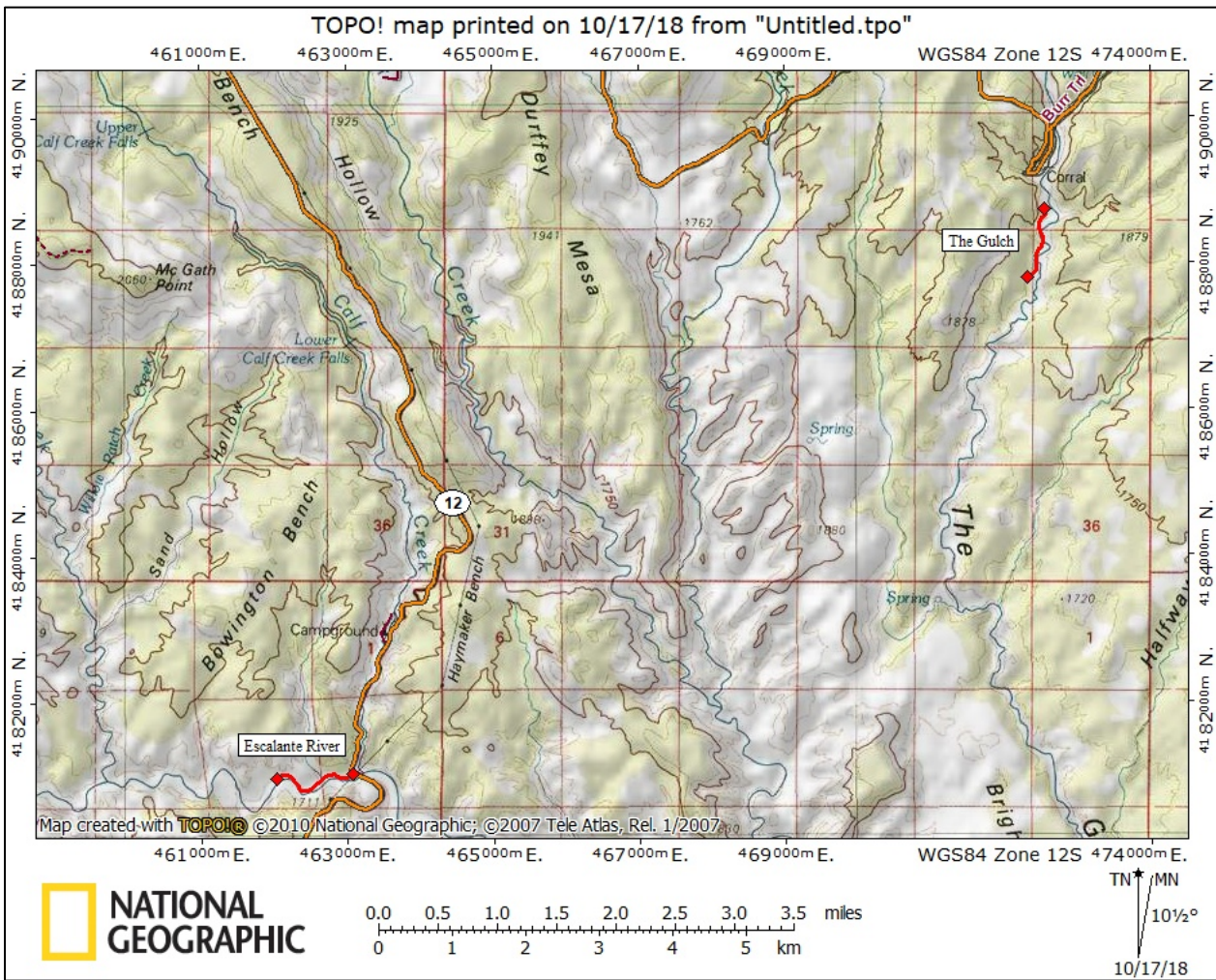
In the August 2018 Draft Environmental Impact Statement for a new management plan for (1) Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument that has been reduced by half by the Trump Administration; and (2) lands excised from the Monument, the Bureau of Land Management proposes to reintroduce cattle grazing into the Escalante River corridor. The corridor has not been grazed by cattle since 2000 when the BLM closed several voluntarily relinquished allotments along the corridor, citing conflicts with recreation. To understand what reintroducing cattle grazing, as proposed by the BLM in 2018, would do to the Escalante River, it is worthwhile observing what the nearby Gulch looks like, where cattle grazing has continued during the same 18 years the Escalante River corridor has been recovering from cattle grazing.

On October 3, 2016, at the request of a citizen concerned about the degraded condition of The Gulch due to cattle grazing, a brief tour of the area was conducted. Sean Stewart (Rangeland Management Specialist), Theresa Romasko (Acting Assistant Monument Manager for Renewable Resources, and Brandt Reese (Range Tech) of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument walked south from the Burr Trail into the Gulch with Mary O'Brien for 0.6 miles, both up on the bench above the riparian area and in the riparian area, and finally, walking the east side of the bench in a recently-fenced area near the Burr Trail (Map A). Georeferenced photographs of the conditions observed are found in Figures 67-111 (pp. 15-21). On this date in early October, cattle were soon going to be entering the Gulch for the season, and thus the conditions shown in the photos reflect vegetation about to be grazed again.

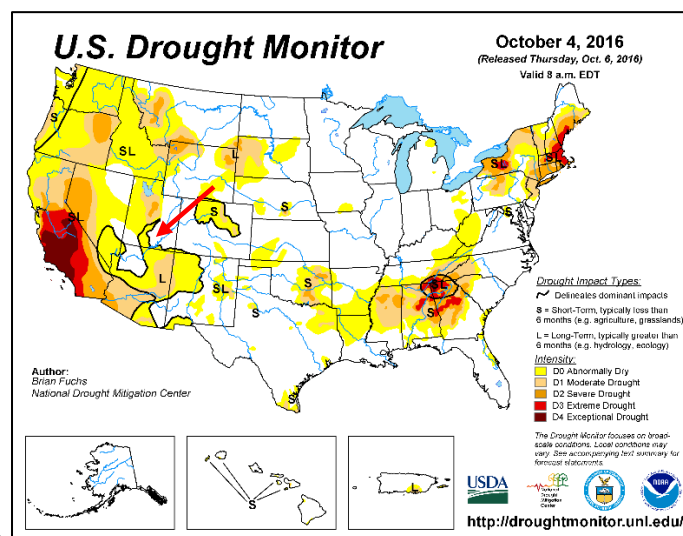
Three weeks later, on October 27, 2016, I and a volunteer took photos along the Escalante River, starting at Hwy 12 (Map A). This portion of the Escalante River has not been grazed by cattle since 2000. We took one photo looking forward and one looking down to the ground every 100 steps for 1,700 steps (about 0.7 mile) in the riparian area. We returned up on the bench, taking one photo looking forward and one looking down to the ground every 100 steps for 1,500 steps. The photos along the Escalante River are found in Figures 1-66 (pp. 3-14)

The conditions in The Gulch (grazed annually by cattle) compared to conditions along the Escalante River (not grazed by cattle for 16 years) are stark: much more non-native and invasive plant species; much smaller bunchgrasses; and much greater bare soil, both on the bench and in the riparian area. Biological soil crusts, common on the bench along the Escalante River, are virtually absent in The Gulch. At the time of The Gulch and Escalante tours, the immediate area was not experiencing abnormally dry conditions or drought (Map B)

As you browse through the Escalante River photos, notice how much variety of native vegetation there is; how much of the soil is covered by plants or litter or biological soil crust. And then look at the Gulch photos. Escalante River vegetation and soil conditions will revert to those observed in The Gulch if cattle once again graze the Escalante River corridor.



Map A: Routes of an October 3, 2016 tour in The Gulch and an October 27, 2016 photo documentation along the Escalante River.



Map: US Drought Monitor for October 11, 2018.

Escalante River Riparian Area of Escalante River



Fig. 1 100 foot riparian overview



Fig. 2 100 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 3 200 foot riparian overview

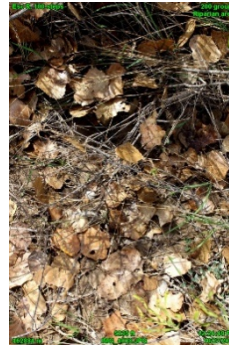


Fig. 4 200 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 5 300 foot riparian overview



Fig. 6 300 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 7 400 foot riparian overview



Fig. 8 400 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 9 500 foot riparian overview



Fig. 10 500 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 11 600 foot riparian overview



Fig. 12 600 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 13 700 foot riparian overview

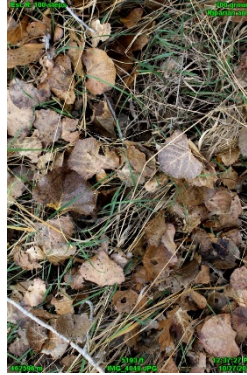


Fig. 14 700 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 15 800 foot riparian overview



Fig. 16 800 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 17 900 foot riparian overview



Fig. 18 900 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 19 1,000 foot riparian overview



Fig. 20 1,000 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 21 1,100 foot riparian overview



Fig. 22 1,100 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 23 1,200 foot riparian overview

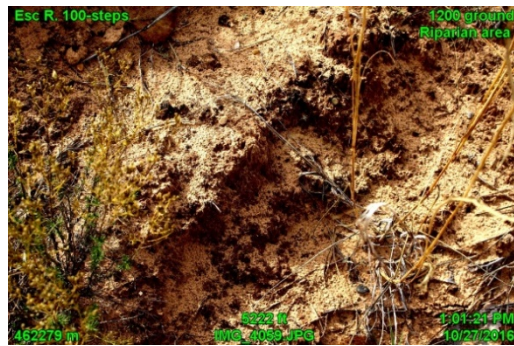


Fig. 24 1,200 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 25 1,300 foot riparian overview



Fig. 26 1,300 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 27 1,400 foot riparian overview



Fig. 28 1,400 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 29 1,500 foot riparian overview

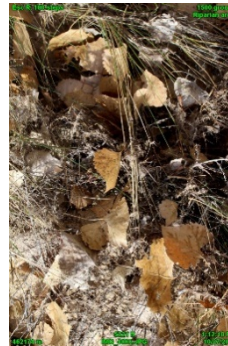


Fig. 30 1,500 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 31 1,600 foot riparian overview



Fig. 32 1,600 foot riparian ground cover



Fig. 33 1,700 foot riparian overview



Fig. 34 1,700 foot riparian ground cover

Upland Bench of Escalante River



Fig. 35 0 foot bench area overview



Fig. 36 0 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 37 100 foot bench area overview



Fig. 38 100 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 39 200 foot bench area overview



Fig. 40 200 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 41 300 foot bench area overview



Fig. 42 300 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 43 400 foot bench area overview



Fig. 44 400 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 45 500 foot bench area overview



Fig. 46 500 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 47 600 foot bench area overview



Fig. 48 600 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 49 700 foot bench area overview



Fig. 50 700 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 51 800 foot bench area overview



Fig. 52 800 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 53 900 foot bench area overview



Fig. 54 900 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 55 1,000 foot bench area overview

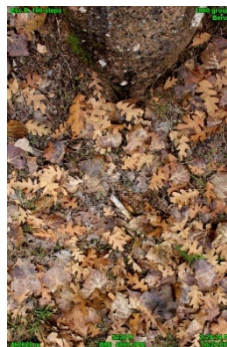


Fig. 56 1,000 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 57 1,100 foot bench area overview



Fig. 58 1,100 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 59 1,200 foot bench area overview



Fig. 60 1,200 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 61 1,300 foot bench area overview



Fig. 62 1,300 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 63 1,400 foot bench area overview



Fig. 64 1,400 foot bench area ground cover



Fig. 65 1,500 foot bench area overview



Fig. 66 1,500 foot bench area ground cover

The Gulch – Bench and riparian area



Fig. 67 Bench conditions



Fig. 68 Cheatgrass on the bench



Fig. 69 Blue grama reduced to small bases



Fig. 70 Slope down from bench to riparian area



Fig. 71 Slope down to riparian area



Fig. 72 slope down to riparian area



Fig. 73 Tamarisk and rabbitbrush in riparian area



Fig. 74 Tamarisk, rabbitbrush, and mature cottonwood in riparian area



Fig. 75 Denuded riparian understory



Fig. 76 Bare soil in riparian understory



Fig. 77 Grass only in the background



Fig. 78 Small stature of ricegrass prior to cattle entry



Fig. 79 Cheatgrass on bench



Fig. 80 Small stature sand dropseed grass



Fig. 81 Sand dropseed stubble prior to cattle entry



Fig. 82 Active headcut



Fig. 83 Cow patties near juniper



Fig. 84 View down into riparian area



Fig. 85 Riparian area



Fig. 86 One milkweed seen



Fig. 87 Depleted understory riparian area



Fig. 88 Depleted riparian area



Fig. 88 Condition of bench



Fig. 90 Bench condition prior to seasonal cattle entry



Fig. 91 Russian thistle on bench



Fig. 92 Active bank sloughing



Fig. 93 Bench conditions prior to entry



Fig. 94 Trail down to water



Fig.95 View of bench down to riparian area prior to cattle entry



Fig. 96 Riparian area - depleted understory

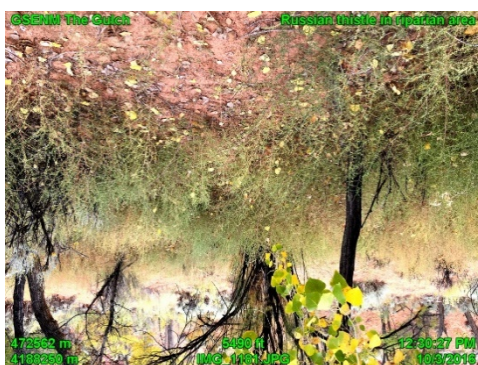


Fig. 97 Russian thistle in riparian area



Fig. 98 Denuded riparian area



Fig. 99 Dead sagebrush; depleted understory



Fig. 100 Old cottonwood; lack of recruiting young cottonwood



Fig. 101 Bench on east side of creek



Fig. 102 Lone ricegrass; sparse stature



Fig. 103 Smashed culvert; in a flood?



Fig. 104 Tamarisk in riparian area



Fig. 105 Riparian clover and rabbitbrush



Fig. 106 Ragweed in riparian area



Fig. 107 Riparian depleted understory



Fig. 108 Portion of the Gulch fenced to road



Fig. 109 Portion of The Gulch fenced to road



Fig. 110 Portion of the Gulch fenced to road



Fig. 111 Portion of The Gulch fenced to road