GRAND CANYON TRUST *COLORADO PLATEAU*

SPRING/SUMMER 2026

Advocate

After the Fires

Recovery and Rebuilding on the North Rim

PLUS

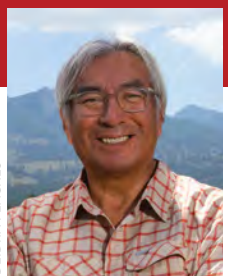
The Future of America's Roadless Forests

Defending the Colorado Plateau Through the Midterms

Archaeologist Lyle Balenquah on Visitor Impacts to Bears Ears National Monument

Included:

2025 IMPACT REPORT



DEIDRA PEACHES

Note from the BOARD CHAIR

JIM ENOTE

GRAND CANYON TRUST

Welcome to the spring 2026 issue of The Advocate. This edition conveys the gravity of this social, political, and environmental moment and some of what we need to know and do to protect the lands and waters and support the communities of the Colorado Plateau. Across these pages, you will find clear-sighted reporting, thoughtful analysis, and grounded perspectives that remind us of what is at stake and what is possible when we act with resolve and integrity.

Melissa Sevigny's report on the recent fires on the north rim of the Grand Canyon examines their impacts beyond the headlines and the complex, long-term work of recovery and rebuilding. As climate-driven fire seasons intensify, her report emphasizes the need for modern adaptive fire stewardship, public buy-in, and science-informed land management that honors place and people.

Tim Peterson's contribution on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule offers a timely and deeply relevant exploration of one of the most important conservation safeguards in the American West. His essay explains why this rule matters, what it protects, and how it continues to serve as a bulwark against fragmentation and industrial development across millions of acres of irreplaceable public lands on the Colorado Plateau.

Our executive director, Ethan Aumack, with policy support from Jerry Otero, provides a candid assessment of how the current Trump administration is shaping the operating environment for conservation organizations like the Trust. Ethan and Jerry outline the implications for our work, the legal and policy threats the region is confronting, and our legislative and advocacy priorities as we look toward the 2026 midterm elections. This is a clear articulation of how the Trust is positioning itself to remain both principled and effective in a shifting political environment.

And to deepen our grounding in the importance of listening to the land and people, Hopi archaeologist Lyle Balenquah offers his perspectives on recreation in Bears Ears National Monument, reminding us that these lands are not only destinations or scenery, but cultural landscapes that require sensible and respectful stewardship.

Altogether, these stories reflect the substance of the Trust's core mission and respond to your desire for responsible, well-timed information.

Thank you for standing with us in this important work.

Jim Enote
Board Chair, Grand Canyon Trust

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 remains of the Grand Canyon Lodge on the north rim of Grand Canyon National Park. The Dragon Bravo Fire passed through this location on July 12-13, 2025. MATT JENKINS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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.

JOIN US IN THE FIELD

BILL FERRIS

Roll up your sleeves and help restore the North Rim after the Dragon Bravo Fire. Sign up for a volunteer trip this season. **grandcanyontrust.org/volunteer**

ADVOCATE EDITORS:	Ashley Davidson Ellen Heyn
IMPACT REPORT EDITORS:	Melanie Seus Kimber Wukitsch
CARTOGRAPHY:	Stephanie Smith
DESIGN:	Brian Skeet
PRINTING:	Lithotech

HEADQUARTERS: 2601 N Fort Valley Road
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928-774-7488

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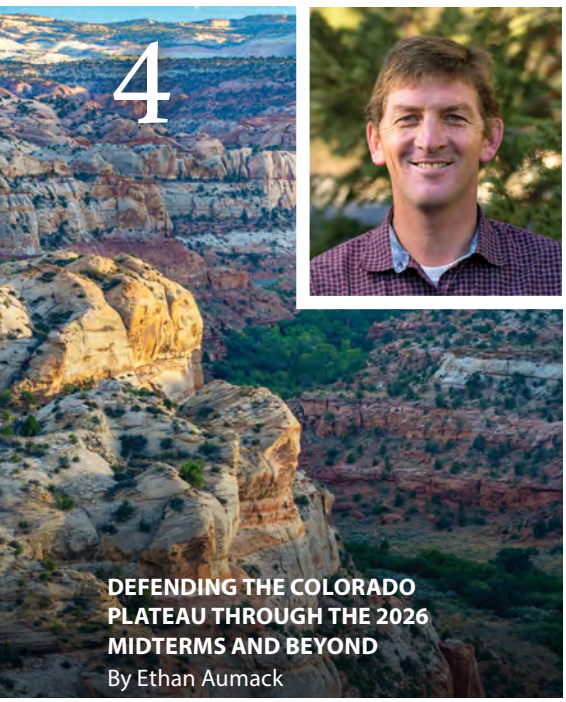


TIM PETERSON

BLAKE MCCORD

DEFENDING THE COLORADO PLATEAU THROUGH THE 2026 MIDTERMS AND BEYOND

By Ethan Aumack

From advancing legislation, to defending national monuments in Congress, to rolling up our sleeves to rebuild the North Rim and restore Grand Canyon National Park, here's what's on our to-do list between now and November.

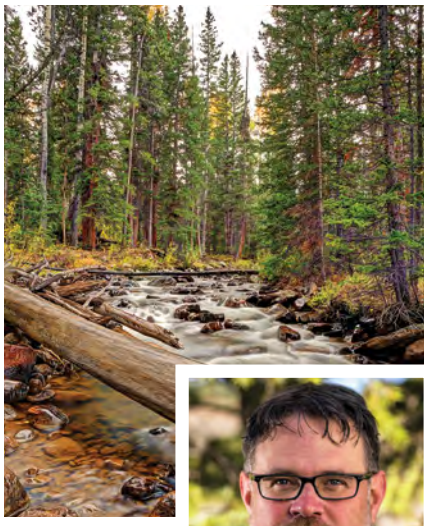
MATT JENKINS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ALEXIS KNAPP

AFTER THE FIRES: RECOVERY AND REBUILDING ON THE NORTH RIM

By Melissa L. Sevigny

In the summer of 2025, fires raged across the north rim of the Grand Canyon. Now that the smoke has lifted, what does the future hold for the national park and for the forests, people, and economies of the North Rim?



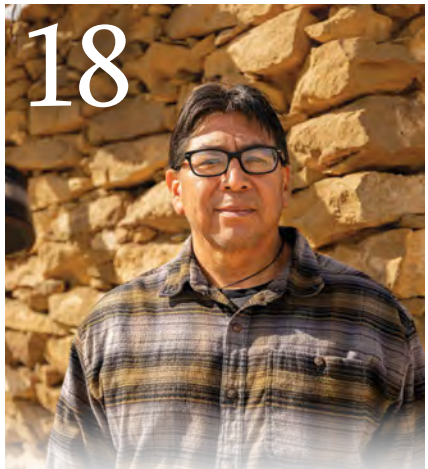
TIM PETERSON

TIM PETERSON

KEEPING ROADLESS FORESTS OFF THE CHOPPING BLOCK

By Tim Peterson

Forests without roads filter our air, purify our drinking water, provide refuges for wildlife and plants, and offer places for humans to hike, ski, hunt, fish, camp, and gather food and medicine. The administration's push to sell off these forests must be stopped.



NICK GEIB

THE CHALLENGES OF INCREASING VISITATION AT BEARS EARS

Visitors are flocking to Bears Ears National Monument, but they are not always treading lightly. Learn about recreation impacts in the Bears Ears cultural landscape from Hopi archaeologist and outdoor guide Lyle Balenquah and what you can do to visit respectfully.

RICK GOLDWASSER

MAJOR MILESTONES FROM 2025

From protecting public lands from being sold off, to keeping national monuments in place, to shaping the future with rising leaders, a look at a few of our big wins from last year in the 2025 Impact Report.

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Defending the Colorado Plateau

Through the 2026 Midterms and Beyond

By Ethan Aumack

ANDY FELICIOTTI

2026 is a year of action for the Grand Canyon Trust. The Trump administration is doing exactly what it promised. It has hollowed out and diluted foundational environmental laws and slashed funding and staffing at critical land management agencies. It has loosened the bolts of our democracy, threatening systems that are essential for citizen-guided public lands management. At the same time, Congress has moved aggressively to sell and expand industrial access to public lands.

In the face of these divisive actions, the Trust is finding common cause with likely and unlikely partners, including the timber industry, rural communities, and members of Congress from both red and blue districts. Together, we are advancing commonsense solutions, advocating for legislation, pushing back against short-sighted policies, and pressing ahead in our community and place-based work across the Colorado Plateau.

This is a time of great uncertainty and even danger for communities we work with across the plateau. Community members and partners are living in fear due to actions taken by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Administrative actions endorsed by Congress have eroded trust in critical institutions, and widely supported public lands protections are consistently under attack. National monuments are on the chopping block, coal and uranium extraction are being propped up under the umbrella of a "national energy emergency," and forest-management legislation working its way through Congress, including the Fix Our Forests Act, is sidelining science and prioritizing board feet over resilient, healthy forests that give us our best chance against catastrophic wildfire.

Over my more than two decades at the Trust, I have learned that even in the most difficult of circumstances, progress is possible. Faced with once-in-a-lifetime challenges, we are locking arms with everyone we can to defend the plateau. We are pushing back against attempts to roll back protections for national monuments and cultural landscapes, including backdoor attacks on monument management plans. And we are supporting intertribal coalitions leading efforts to protect their ancestral lands.

We are also working to ensure that a push to expand nuclear energy does not usher in another era of uranium extraction that contaminates air, land, and water and puts people at risk, as past uranium booms have. At the same time, we continue to push back against new mining endeavors around the Grand Canyon while advancing policies that center public health, tribal concerns, and long-term water security. And we are fully engaged in the public process to develop long-term guidelines for management of the Colorado River, which will determine whether the river lives or dies. These are existentially important times.

Playing defense, however, is not enough. In 2025 the Dragon Bravo and White Sage fires ripped through the north rim of Grand Canyon National Park and Kaibab National Forest, leaving behind a path of destruction. The fires caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damage and profoundly impacted land, water, plants, and wildlife. The fires also displaced and

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. BLAKE MCCORD

disrupted the lives and livelihoods of park staff, residents, communities, and businesses. We immediately began reaching out to business owners, tribal representatives, municipalities, and federal elected officials including Representative Eli Crane, R-AZ, Senator Ruben Gallego, D-AZ, and Senator Mark Kelly, D-AZ.

Representative Crane promptly introduced the North Rim Restoration Act, a legislative effort to fast-track rebuilding the North Rim. The bill would jumpstart recovery efforts by giving the U.S. National Park Service emergency contracting powers to speed up historic restoration, repairs, and infrastructure improvements. The Trust supported the effort, and in February 2026, the House Committee on Natural Resources voted unanimously to advance the bill.

Also in February, Senator Gallego and Senator Kelly introduced the Senate version of the North Rim recovery legislation. Collectively both bills aim to preserve historic structures, use salvaged materials, and ensure environmentally responsible rebuilding.

Our efforts at rebuilding and restoring the North Rim are both in Washington, D.C. and on the ground. We continue to be an influential voice in legislative efforts, including supporting tribal priorities and Native-owned businesses advocating to be meaningfully included in the process, and our Volunteer Program is organizing volunteer trips to assist with post-fire restoration in the park. We are working closely with local ranchers, foresters, and community leaders to help guide ecologically sound forest recovery across the burned areas. In short, the Trust is doing what it does best: bringing people together to restore enduring ecological and economic prosperity to the Grand Canyon, northern Arizona, and southern Utah.

We know this is a time of many conflagrations, pressing needs, and sometimes competing priorities. And we feel clear about ours. They are to advance the North Rim rebuild, block rollback policies that negatively impact the plateau, including attacks on national monuments and the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and build durable relationships with tribal leaders, businesses, scientists, local communities, and elected officials, regardless of party. Our goal is not to chase headlines, but to secure protections that last and policies rooted in science, accountability, and respect for the people who live with the consequences. The Trust's charge in the years ahead is to be relentless, strategic, and grounded, defending the plateau while advancing solutions equal to the challenges we face.

Ethan Aumack serves as the executive director of the Grand Canyon Trust. Legislative and Policy Director Jerry Otero also contributed to this article.

After *the* Fires

Recovery and Rebuilding on the *North Rim*

By Melissa L. Sevigny

The far side

The Grand Canyon is really two distinct national parks, whatever the lines on the map say. The better-known South Rim receives most of the park's nearly 5 million annual visitors; it's bustling with hotels and restaurants.

The North Rim is different. A thousand feet higher, it cuts through the Kaibab Plateau, which is covered in conifers and swallowed by snow each winter. The sense of solitude is enhanced by the short tourist season, only May to October, and the long drive from any city.

The views are no more spectacular than those on the South Rim — you can't improve on perfection — but those who prefer a quieter backcountry experience know the north side is worth the trip.

"To me," says Ethan Aumack, the Grand Canyon Trust's executive director, "it feels like a much more remote and wilder part of the park."

Last summer, the Dragon Bravo and White Sage fires together burned nearly 204,500 acres of North Rim country, primarily on National Park Service and U.S Forest Service lands. Hundreds of residents and visitors evacuated. More than 1,300 firefighters responded to Dragon Bravo at its peak. One, Hank Hester, died in the line of duty from a heart attack.

What remains is a changed landscape. "Fire is a natural process and actually necessary for the health of these forests," Aumack says. "The problem is that climate change and other factors have caused fires to be much larger and more destructive than they used to be. The North Rim fires fit this pattern exactly, unfortunately."

Among the destruction was the storied Grand Canyon Lodge, which burned to the ground for the second time in its 97-year history. The region's ecology and economy also suffered. What comes next?

On July 27, 2025, the pyrocumulus cloud rose 24,000 feet above the Dragon Bravo Fire on the North Rim, as the fire reached 44,429 acres; it was only 26% contained. For perspective, Mount Everest is 29,000 feet in elevation. These types of towering "fire clouds" form when intense heat pushes air and smoke high into the atmosphere, where it cools and condenses. Pyrocumulus clouds can trigger lightning, strong winds, and even tornados, intensify fire behavior, and create challenging conditions for firefighters on the ground. LAUREN CISNEROS

By the night of July 30, 2025, the Dragon Bravo Fire had spread to 94,228 acres and was only 4% contained. LAUREN CISNEROS

Two fires

A lightning strike ignited the Dragon Bravo Fire on July 4, 2025. Originally managed by the park service with a "confine and contain" strategy, it grew slowly at first, reaching 59 acres on July 9. That evening, another lightning strike started a fire about 50 miles northwest. Dubbed White Sage, the fire ignited on Bureau of Land Management land and spread eastward onto the Kaibab National Forest.

On July 11, dry, windy weather drove the Dragon Bravo Fire over containment lines. White Sage, threatening Highway 67, had already prompted the evacuation of North Rim tourists and residents. That evening, park service and concessionaire employees also received an alert to leave.

Longtime rancher Justun Jones was among the evacuees. His family homesteads Two-Mile Ranch. "We could sit right there on the front porch and watch the flames," Jones recalls. The family loaded horses, dogs, a cat, and valued possessions into trucks and "said goodbye to everything else," Jones says.

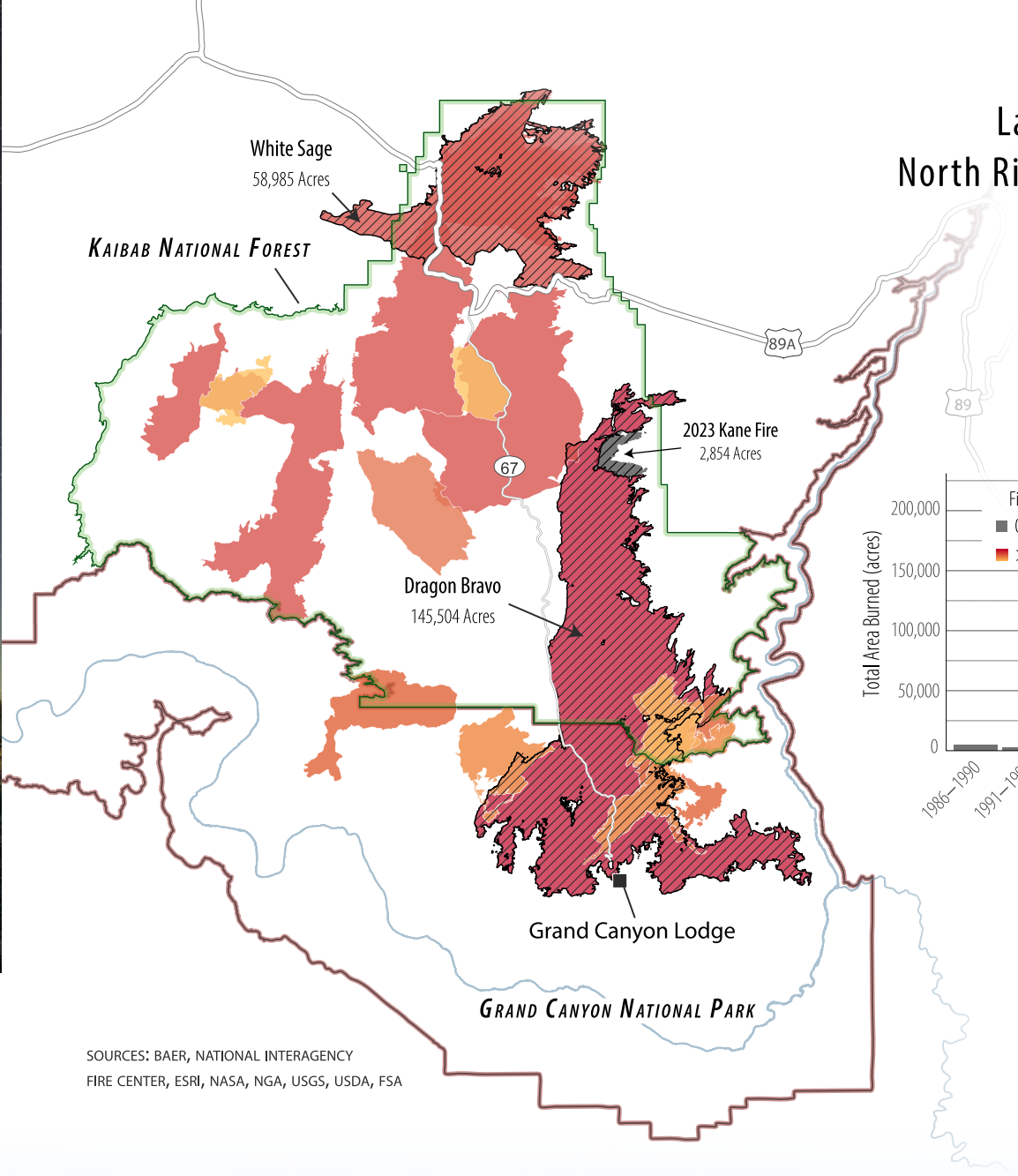
It was their second evacuation in five years; the first was during the 2020 Magnum Fire. "You don't sleep a lot at night," Jones says. "You don't know what the fire's going to do the next day. You're watching wind patterns you never dreamed you'd pay attention to."

The Jones' family home and ranch buildings were spared. But over the weekend of July 12-13, White Sage exploded from 1,000 acres to 40,000, and Dragon Bravo almost quadrupled in size. A chlorine gas leak at the park's water treatment plant forced the temporary evacuation of firefighters and inner-canyon hikers. A mile below the rim, under surreal red skies, Phantom Ranch closed to visitors.

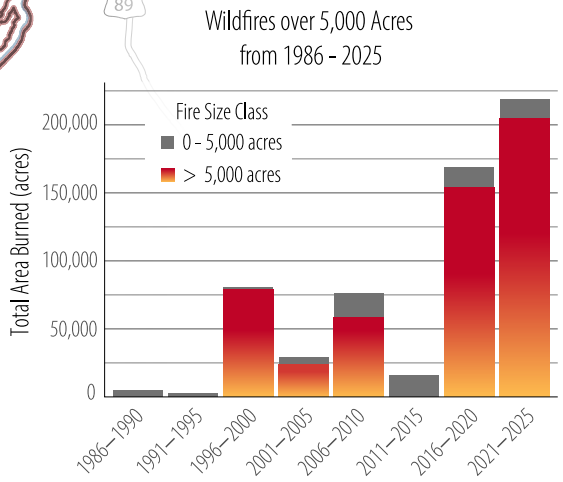
Ultimately 106 park structures burned, including the Grand Canyon Lodge, visitor center, employee housing, and dozens of historic cabins. By the end of July, Dragon Bravo had reached "megafire" status — over 100,000 acres — and was the largest wildfire in the continental U.S.

Firefighters contained White Sage in early August at 59,000 acres. Dragon Bravo continued to burn until the end of September.

Large Fires on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon



SOURCES: BAER, NATIONAL INTERAGENCY FIRE CENTER, ESRI, NASA, NGA, USGS, USDA, FSA



Wildfire Burn Perimeter

145,504 acres — nearly the size of Tucson, AZ

>5,000 acres — about the size of Bisbee, AZ

2025 Dragon Bravo and White Sage Fires

Kaibab National Forest

Grand Canyon National Park

0 5 mi

MATT JENKINS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The remains of a fireplace near the Grand Canyon Lodge. MATT JENKINS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

A fire alarm pull tab that survived the Dragon Bravo Fire when it destroyed the Grand Canyon Lodge on July 12-13, 2025. The remains of the western cabins are visible in the background.
MATT JENKINS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Ash and debris from the Dragon Bravo Fire carried by runoff into the canyon
AMANDA PODMORE

Mud black with runoff from the fires.
AMANDA PODMORE

Assessing the aftermath

Decades of scientific studies show wildfires are essential to forest health. Indigenous peoples have long managed landscapes with fire. Historically, the North Rim experienced light fires every three to five years, judging by scars left in tree rings.

Those fires began to disappear after 1880, in part because total suppression became the goal of land management agencies who sought to protect timber, grazing, and other resources. Today, a combination of historic land management practices and climate change has led to an era of megafires.

For Dragon Bravo and White Sage, agencies immediately mobilized a group of specialists known as the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team. Reba McCracken, BAER coordinator for the Kaibab National Forest, says it includes biologists, botanists, hydrologists, and soil scientists. "We'll look at the depth of the ash, the color of the ash, and also things like: how affected were the plants?" she says.

The resulting map shows roughly 70% of the soil in the two fire scars burned lightly or not at all. Two to 3% burned severely. That's a typical range, McCracken says. In low-severity burns, some plant cover remains on the ground and roots are intact. In high-severity burns, "you've lost soil structure almost entirely," McCracken says. "It feels like dust."

Another survey, RAVG (Rapid Assessment of Vegetation Condition after Wildfire), measures the surviving plant life about a month later. Much of the Dragon Bravo footprint burned under moderate or high severity using this metric. In other words, vegetation died even where soil remained intact.

The bleaker picture shown by this map isn't a surprise for a fast-moving wildfire, says Patrick Moore, deputy supervisor of the Kaibab National Forest. "A fire can sweep through an area pretty fast and kill all the trees," Moore explains. "But it went by so fast, it never really sat in one spot and cooked the soil."

Cerissa Hoglander, the Trust's Arizona public lands director, says the assessments offer clues to what might regrow after a fire, which depends on multiple factors, such as soil health, seed sources, weather, and what can thrive in the warming climate. She advises closely monitoring invasive plants, such as cheatgrass, and paying special attention to springs and wetlands that might be vulnerable to erosion.

"I'm hopeful," Hoglander says. "What I'm hopeful for is that in areas of low-to-moderate soil burn severity many of our native species will regenerate."

"You really have to redesign spaces to accommodate a modern version of who we are and that we're still here in this region"

*— **Jessica Stago,** Grand Canyon Trust Native America Economic Initiatives Director*

The assessment work is ongoing. Simultaneously, the park service and Forest Service are making plans for restoration and rebuilding.

Grand Canyon tourism dropped 10% in 2025. Park spokesperson Joëlle Baird says the government shutdown and decrease in international tourism were factors, but so were the wildfires, which closed the North Rim for months, halted rim-to-rim hiking, and even discouraged South Rim visitors. "People saw Grand Canyon was on fire, and they changed their travel plans," Baird says. "We went from 4.9 million visitors in 2024, and we had about 4.3 in 2025. That was a pretty big loss for us."

Park officials plan to reopen the North Rim to camping in May 2026. The campground and North Kaibab Trailhead are undamaged. Rebuilding infrastructure, including water and wastewater lines, will take longer.

Baird says the park is considering three scenarios. The first is to rebuild what was lost, "more or less identical buildings" designed for the May-to-October season. The second scenario would make the tourist season year-round, and the third would also enlarge the park's core footprint.

All of these scenarios will be open for public comment later this year. In the meantime, Baird says, "we're going to open what we can, when we can, and where we can."

Jessica Stago, the Trust's Native America economic initiatives director, says rebuilding opens up possibilities for tribal involvement. "One of the major drivers of people into the region is to experience authentic Native American culture," Stago says. But the South Rim largely offers outdated depictions of the 11 tribes who have cultural connections to the Grand Canyon.

"You really have to redesign spaces to accommodate a modern version of who we are and that we're still here in this region," Stago says. She envisions the revived North Rim could have places designed for ceremony and Native-owned businesses offering Indigenous food and art.

Flowers bloom in a burned area inside the Dragon Bravo Fire perimeter. AMY S. MARTIN

Restoring ecology

Visitors returning to the North Rim this summer will see a different landscape than they remember.

Jones, the rancher, recalls turning a corner and realizing a tree he'd known since childhood was gone. Post-fire floods also reshaped the land. "It changed the wildlife patterns, the cattle patterns, it changed everything," Jones says. "Not all of it was bad, just different."

The earliest signs of ecological recovery are often aspen trees. "Recovery is a process that happens naturally in a lot of these systems," Patrick Moore of the Kaibab National Forest says. "There was smoke still in the air, and aspens were popping up out of the ground."

Some active restoration projects are planned to assist natural regeneration. A conservation area on the Kaibab National Forest protects a rare, tiny cacti called Pediocactus. Forest Service staff will drop seed on the spot to boost native-plant recovery and keep invasive species at bay. They'll also repair burned sections of the popular Arizona National Scenic Trail.

On the park side, staff are arranging straw wattles — the natural equivalent of sandbags — in areas with exposed archaeological sites to alleviate flooding.

If seed banks aren't sufficient, land managers can replant trees. It's a slow process, Moore says. "We have to go out next fall, find trees that are pinecone bearing, climb those trees, get those pinecones, and send them up to our Lucky Peak Nursery in Idaho. Then they'll grow little baby trees by the millions."

Some restoration work is done in partnership with nonprofit organizations like the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps, Grand Canyon Conservancy, and the Grand Canyon Trust. Joëlle Baird says the decision of how and where to rebuild will be shaped by public input.

"We're listening to these communities," Baird says. "[They] include municipal governments, but also ranchers and timber industry folks, and folks like the Grand Canyon Trust. They're at the table with us to help us understand what's important to them so we can tailor the work we're doing."

AMY S. MARTIN

New growth sprouts in landscapes charred by the Dragon Bravo Fire. AMY S. MARTIN

"These landscapes are resilient. We humans, too, are resilient enough to recover from wildfires and see renewal in ways we couldn't have imagined."

— ***Ethan Aumack,*** *Grand Canyon Trust Executive Director*

The future

The irony of wildfire is, in the long run, the best prevention tool is to allow some fires to burn.

"Fires can be, and are in many cases, incredibly destructive," Ethan Aumack says. "In some cases what's lost in a fire is lost forever. But fires don't always create irreversible loss. They're a natural part of the system."

As the North Rim recovers, Aumack says it's worth looking to a future where managed, prescribed, and cultural fires are restored to national forest lands, paired with strategic thinning of trees, done sparingly. It's complex work that eventually can lessen the risk of catastrophic losses.

"These landscapes are resilient," Aumack says. "We humans, too, are resilient enough to recover from wildfires and see renewal in ways we couldn't have imagined."

Melissa L. Sevigny is a freelance science writer and author of three books, most recently Brave the Wild River.

For decades, visitors to the North Rim rubbed the statue of Brighty the Burro for good luck. The famous burro's nose shone from being touched by so many hands. The Brighty statue was damaged when the Dragon Bravo Fire destroyed Grand Canyon Lodge. According to the National Park Service, Brighty is currently being stored at the Grand Canyon Museum's collection facility while potential restoration options are explored. AMY S. MARTIN

DEBORAH LEE SOLTESZ, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST

Keeping ROADLESS FORESTS OFF THE Chopping Block

How the Roadless Area Conservation Rule protects wildlife, clean water, and more on the Colorado Plateau

By Tim Peterson

Atop the geologic grand staircase, above southern Utah's iconic red rock and Arizona's vast deserts, sprawl towering forests dotted with cool lakes and verdant meadows. Many of these are our public national forests. They are sky islands of rich wildlife habitat that catch, filter, and hold rain and snow from passing storms, recharging groundwater aquifers and feeding the clear streams that flow down to our Colorado Plateau communities.

Our mountains and high forested plateaus give us quiet singletrack trails brimming with wildflowers and astonishing views. Their trees filter fresh, clean air high above our bustling cities and towns. What would Flagstaff be without the San Francisco Peaks? Or Moab without the La Sal Mountains? Escalante without Boulder Mountain? All these places would be hotter, drier, and less populated. We need these sky islands not just for the scenery, but in order to survive out here — human, plant, and animal alike.

Many of these places in our national forests are roadless areas (about half of the national forest lands in Utah and over 1 million acres in Arizona). As roadless areas, they are protected from logging, new roadbuilding, and industrial development thanks to a popular quarter-century-old national conservation strategy called the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, often shortened to the "roadless rule."

Nearly 60 million acres of national forests across the United States are protected as roadless areas under the rule. These areas help local economies thrive as people flock to these places to hunt deer and elk, fish for trout, pick berries, birdwatch, hike, camp, mountain bike, and more. They are also the ancestral lands of numerous Native nations and protect important cultural places; preserve sites of pilgrimage; and provide food, fuel, and medicine as part of traditional Indigenous lifeways that span hundreds of generations. Who could disagree with preserving these important places?

In the summer of 2025, Trump administration political appointees driven by a pro-industry, anti-public lands agenda announced a push to rescind the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, reversing protections for more than 45 million acres of roadless areas (Colorado and Idaho are exempt because they have done additional work to make their own state-specific roadless rules).

In the fall of 2025, the Trump administration tested out the idea of repealing the rule. We expect the administration will release a draft proposal to gut the rule sometime in 2026 and attempt to undo it entirely as soon as the end of this year.

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule was necessary in 2001 because, after a century of roadbuilding and logging, the nation's forests were mostly stripped of high-quality timber that was cheap and easy to harvest. The lands that were spared from roadbuilding and logging were mostly steep and rocky, with unstable soils. If a road had not been built and timber logged by the year 2000, it was likely because it didn't make economic sense to do so. In the 1990s, most timber sales were actually losing taxpayer money because it cost more to plan the sales and build the roads than was realized in timber sale proceeds returned to the treasury. Something had to give. U.S. Forest Service leadership recognized at the time that it was in a hole and decided to stop digging.

The Forest Service already has over 371,000 miles of roads — more than double the entire U.S. National Highway System (161,188 miles). That's enough mileage to build a road to the moon and more than halfway back. Currently, we face a massive deferred-maintenance backlog of almost $5 billion for transportation, down from more than $8 billion when the roadless rule was enacted in 2001. In this era of shrinking budgets, mass layoffs, and staff reductions, our

Aspens aglow in the High Uintas Inventoried Roadless Area, Ashley National Forest. TIM PETERSON

tax dollars are best spent fixing and maintaining the vast road network we already have, not building more roads.

Trump political appointees say axing the rule will allow for new roadbuilding that will reduce wildfire risk while dramatically increasing logging on our public forests. Mining and oil and gas interests are hopeful too, since repealing the rule would make it easier to exploit millions of acres of public land.

But the administration's stated reasons just don't ring true. While more roads could make fighting wildfire more convenient, the reality is that more roads mean more people in the backcountry. Because the majority of wildfires are started by humans, and the vast majority of those fires are started by people near roads, wildfires are four times more likely to start in areas with roads than without.

Beyond that, the roadless conservation rule already allows for road construction to address fire risk and for thinning of young trees to reduce hazardous fuels. These projects can and have been carried out in Utah — on almost half a million acres and counting in areas protected by the roadless conservation rule.

Getting rid of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule isn't about stopping wildfires; it's a way to greenlight new roadbuilding and logging in the far-flung backcountry. The current administration has repeatedly prioritized privatizing public resources for private gain, and rescinding the roadless conservation rule amounts to yet another attempt to sell off our public lands and sell out our national forests for logging.

When the rule was adopted in 2001 after 600 public meetings were held across the country, 97% of the more than 1.6 million public comments favored the rule. So far, the Trump administration has held exactly zero public meetings on its plans to roll back the rule. As the administration weighed gutting the rule during a short public input period in fall 2025, more than 99% of the 600,000 comments opposed eliminating the rule. Later in 2025, 85% of Americans polled said they approve of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and support is strong across party lines.

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule is popular, it's conservative, it's responsive to local and national needs, and it's working. The value of these roadless forests is far higher for water filtration, intact fish and wildlife habitat, and remote backcountry recreation than for any marginal timber they might produce. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule is one of America's most popular and successful conservation strategies, and we will need your help to keep it.

Tim Peterson serves as the Trust's cultural landscapes director and has visited roadless areas across the Colorado Plateau as a photographer since 2000.

RECREATION IMPACTS

in Bears Ears National Monument

From social trails to finger smudges, tips on respectful visitation of cultural landscapes.

NICK GEIB

LYLE BALENQUAH, a Hopi tribal member, archaeologist, and outdoor guide, has spent several years monitoring recreation impacts in Bears Ears National Monument. In response to increasing visitation, he and his team set out to better understand where visitors travel in the monument, how they move in and around cultural sites, and what impacts they have on physical structures.

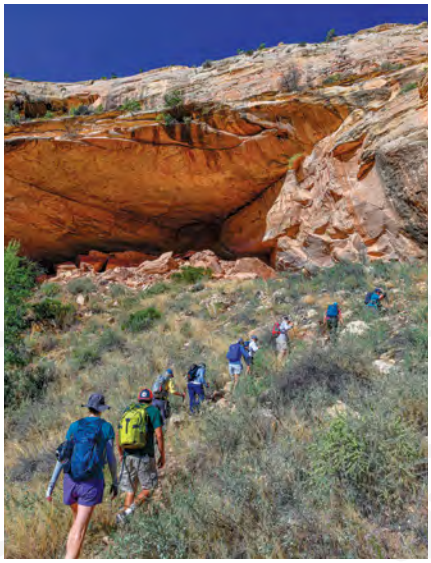
In this interview, you'll learn about Lyle Balenquah's work as an archaeologist in Bears Ears and find out what you can do to help protect cliff dwellings, petroglyphs, pictographs, pottery, and more.

TIM PETERSON

What kinds of cultural history will visitors see across Bears Ears National Monument?

All the different items that archaeologists call artifacts — pottery sherds, structures, lithics, projectile points. In Hopi, we view these as the metaphorical footprints of the ancestors. For us, that's the tangible, physical proof that our history is a part of that landscape.

In the Bears Ears landscape, you will inevitably encounter the footprints of Hopi ancestors out on the land. You'll see petroglyphs or pictographs left upon the canyon walls. You may see hundreds of pottery sherds, if you're lucky, still left on the landscape. If you travel into the backcountry, you'll encounter ancestral villages where people were living and making their day-to-day life. Those are tangible markers of our history that are left as proof of ancestral Hopi presence within the Bears Ears landscape.



TIM PETERSON

Through your fieldwork in Bears Ears, what types of recreation impacts have you observed at cultural sites?

One of the biggest impacts we see around sites is social trails that visitors develop. Sometimes there is not a formalized trail that leads to a site, and so people will create their own, which turns into multiple networks of trails that degrade the site and the landscape around it. So eliminating social trails and restricting them to an easier path for visitors to enter and exit has been one of the issues we've been dealing with.

Another part of our work is looking at the physical state of the sites themselves. We've seen that with thousands of visitors entering some of these sites, there's a lot of erosion and degradation of the floor surfaces. We see a lot of mortar stones that get rubbed. As people move through sites, they're looking for places to place their hands, to brace themselves or perhaps climb over a wall. You'll start to see places where thousands of hands have left an imprint on the mortar itself, usually in the form of dark oily spots on architecture.


TIM PETERSON

What challenges come with increasing visitation?

There's a misconception that when you encounter an intact structure, that it's sturdy, without realizing that many of these sites have been relatively undisturbed for decades or even centuries. They may look intact, but they're still very fragile.

It's a challenge for us to educate people about not only how they move within archaeological sites, but also how they traverse across the landscape so they're not damaging things like soil crust or vegetation.


EMILY THOMPSON

What does respectful visitation of Bears Ears look like to you?

From the Hopi perspective, sometimes respect means you just leave it alone. You don't always have to enter those spaces. You can stand back, and, many times, get a better view of what's going on at the site by looking at it from a distance.

If you do choose to go into a site, be mindful about your intentions. Recognize that you are entering a space that is still occupied. There's still a living presence in the areas you're entering. I encourage people to enter with good energy for yourself, and for those people — those energies — that may still be in that landscape. Pay attention to what's going on around you. Be mindful of how you're shuffling your feet so you're not eroding the surface. Keep your hands off the walls.

If you're fortunate to come across petroglyphs or pictographs, we would ask that you observe from a distance. It's okay to get up close to it, but we advise you not to touch it with your hands. There are oils on our hands that, when thousands of people go and touch something, leave a stain on the wall.

The advice I give to people when I'm out guiding is to feel free to pick up that pottery sherd or projectile point, but recognize that its home is there on the landscape. It doesn't belong to you as an individual. It belongs to those people that first made it, and now it belongs to the landscape. So that's where it should remain.

What types of experiences do you want people to have in Bears Ears?

When people come to the Bears Ears, I hope they gain an understanding of the longevity of Native culture here in America and an appreciation of the landscapes they encounter.

People and the landscapes go hand in hand. I hope when visitors come here, they are able to get out of the vehicle. I hope they're able to walk across some of the trails, visit some of the sites, and experience them firsthand, so that they are able to understand what our early Indigenous ancestors were doing back in the day.


TIM PETERSON

VISIT BEARS EARS NATL. MONUMENT WITH RESPECT

RESPECTFUL VISITATION OF BEARS EARS

The structures, petroglyphs, and pottery in Bears Ears have weathered thousands of years. Help ensure they survive thousands more by visiting with respect.

Learn from Native voices at ***grandcanyontrust.org/respect-bears-ears***

2025 IMPACT REPORT

Grand Canyon Trust members make our work possible

A look at major milestones from 2025

RICK GOLDWASSER

Welcome

MICHAEL QUINN, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

TIM PETERSON

These are times to hold the line where we must and advance where we can.

Holding the line is neither standing still nor silencing our opponents. It is an unwavering commitment to our mission and that which the lands, waters, and people of the Colorado Plateau cannot afford to lose. It is steady, strategic work in the field, in Congress, and, when necessary, in the courts.

At the same time, with your support, we must continue to move forward where opportunities exist while pursuing creative long-term solutions. We will keep working across lines of difference to advance conservation on the plateau that endures the test of time.

Thank you for making this work possible.

Ethan Aumack
Executive Director

Building Strength Together

For over 40 years, the Grand Canyon Trust's greatest successes have been accomplished in partnership, and collaboration is more important now than ever. This past year, we worked with local, regional, and national organizations to optimize resources, amplify our impact, and stand firm when needed.

From serving as joint plaintiffs in critical litigation, to collaborating in on-the-ground restoration efforts, to supporting community-led initiatives, some of the partners we worked most closely with in 2025 include:

Environmental partners

- Earthjustice
- The Wilderness Society
- American Rivers
- EcoFlight

Federal agency partners

- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. National Park Service
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- Arizona Game and Fish

Community partners

- Save the Confluence
- Change Labs
- Little Colorado River Agricultural Cooperative
- Black Mesa United-Dziłíjiin Bee Ahóta'

Educational partners

- Northern Arizona University
- Flagstaff High School
- Diné College

Partnership Highlight: EcoFlight

ECOFLIGHT

ECOFLIGHT

ECOFLIGHT

EcoFlight, a trusted collaborator for nearly two decades, provides aerial views to advance conservation goals using small aircraft. Our shared work has ranged from monitoring uranium operations to delivering supplies to tribal communities.

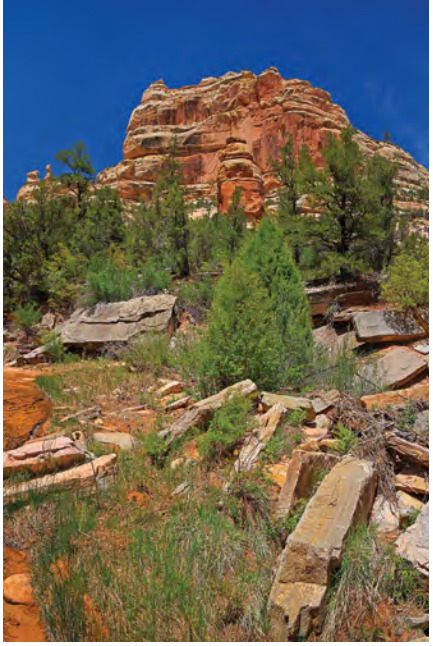
Over three days last April, we organized flights for congressional staff and tribal leaders over the Colorado Plateau's most targeted national monuments, providing a unique perspective of how policy decisions impact these culturally and ecologically significant landscapes.

We are deeply grateful for EcoFlight's unique partnership.

Standing Up for Public Lands

Western public lands faced more than one attempt to sell them off to private interests last year. The public response was both strong and swift — from hunters to hikers — and cut across the political spectrum. The Trust was one of many organizations nationwide working to keep public lands in public hands.

While some of the more overt attempts by lawmakers to diminish public lands failed, other tactics remain in play, such as fast-tracking energy extraction projects. A uranium mine expansion in the La Sal Mountains was approved in just 11 days without any opportunity for the public to weigh in, for example. We remain vigilant in monitoring such proposals and acting whenever possible.



TIM PETERSON

TIM PETERSON

TIM PETERSON

TIM PETERSON

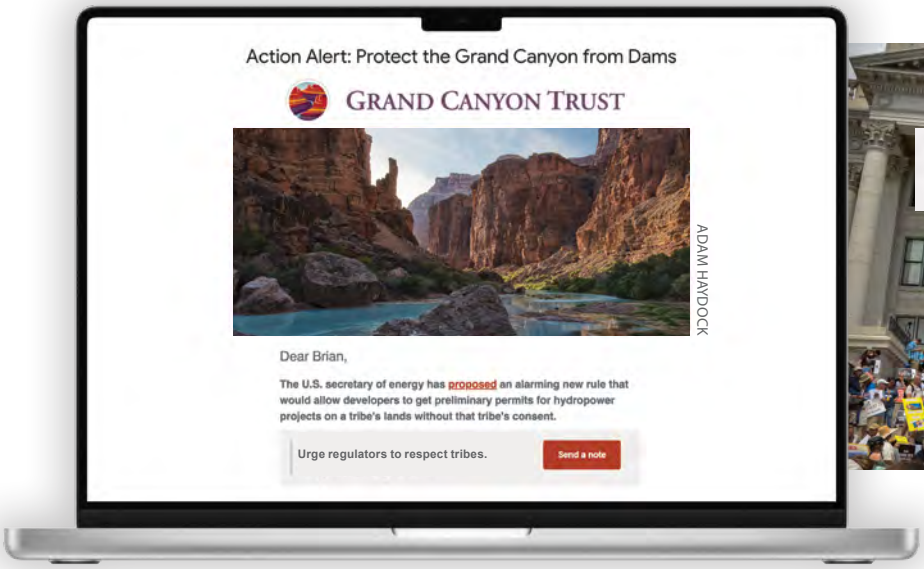
Mobilizing for Impact

Action Alerts are one of the Trust's most effective tools to respond quickly when threats to the Colorado Plateau arise.

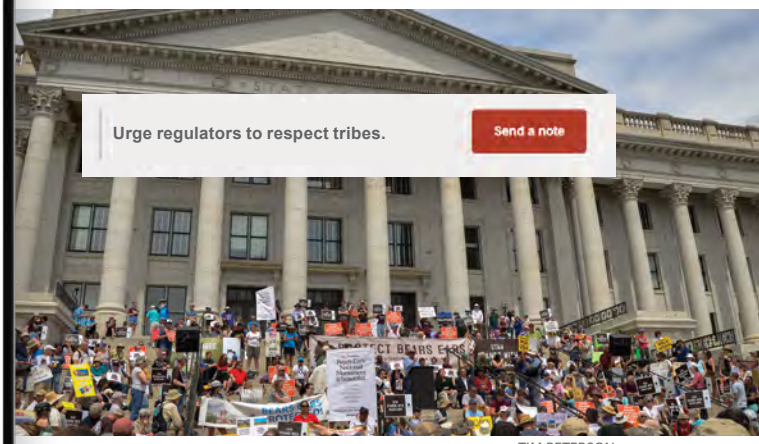
They help mobilize thousands of voices, demonstrate measurable public opposition, and apply immediate pressure on decision-makers through petitions and public comment campaigns. Noteworthy examples from 2025 include:

- **Petition:**
  In February, the U.S. Department of the Interior issued Secretarial Order 3418: Unleashing American Energy to prioritize oil, gas, and mineral development on public lands. Over 1,850 Trust advocates signed our petition opposing the move, and the monument protections remained in place throughout the year.

- **Public Comment:**
  In November, we mobilized supporters to demand that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) reject a proposal that would allow developers to obtain preliminary permits for hydropower projects on tribal lands — even if the tribe objects. More than 1,200 Trust advocates sent comments to FERC, and to date, the requirement to respect tribal opposition still stands.



ADAM HAYDOCK



TIM PETERSON

National Forests and Monuments: At the Center of the Public Lands Debate

Early warnings from the Trump administration last year suggested that Colorado Plateau monuments would be targeted for reduction once again. Backed by our 2024 voter poll results showing overwhelming bipartisan support for keeping Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante, and Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni national monuments whole, the Trust has been steadfast in our advocacy.

TIM PETERSON

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. BLAKE MCCORD

In tandem with our defensive efforts, we continued building the foundation for the monuments' long-term resilience.

BLAKE MCCORD

➔ The Trust contributed to the protection of old-growth trees across nearly 92,000 acres of roadless areas and helped prevent the post-fire seeding of non-native species across more than 30,000 acres.

We also collected data at more than 100 key locations in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument as part of a large-scale effort to assess land health in cattle grazing areas.

Autumn Gillard (left) and Georgie Pongyesva (right). RAYMOND CHEE

➔ The Grand Staircase-Escalante Inter-Tribal Coalition was formally announced in March, marking a significant milestone in the movement to center Indigenous voices in national monument stewardship. The coalition includes representatives from the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Southern Paiute, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni Tribe who are dedicated to protecting the monument's cultural and ecological resources.

At the coalition's request, the Trust continues to provide key administrative support, as it has for the last several years.

➔ The Trust convened a historic gathering of more than 60 tribal leaders, elders, and youth from five major intertribal organizations working to safeguard Colorado Plateau national monuments — along with conservation partners.

Over two days, tribal representatives shared knowledge and strategies to build capacity and strengthen relationships with federal land managers — charting a collective path forward.

JAMIE ARVISO

This is a rapidly evolving body of work.

Scan the QR Code

for the latest

BLAKE MCCORD

Shaping the Future with Rising Leaders

201 *rising leaders* completed **738** hours of service across **15** projects

While conservation work can be grueling in the current political climate, it is young people who bring us hope. In 2025, the Trust continued offering programs designed to educate and equip emerging leaders with the tools to successfully advocate for the Colorado Plateau.

2025 LeaderShift workshop participants. BRIAN SKEET

In their own words:

ADAIR KLOPFENSTEIN

Hearing voices from the community — from activists, knowledge holders, and youth leaders — was powerful. That level of connection made the threat of uranium mining feel especially cruel ... If I could speak to state legislators, I'd ask them to stop thinking of the Grand Canyon as a resource and start seeing it as a relative.

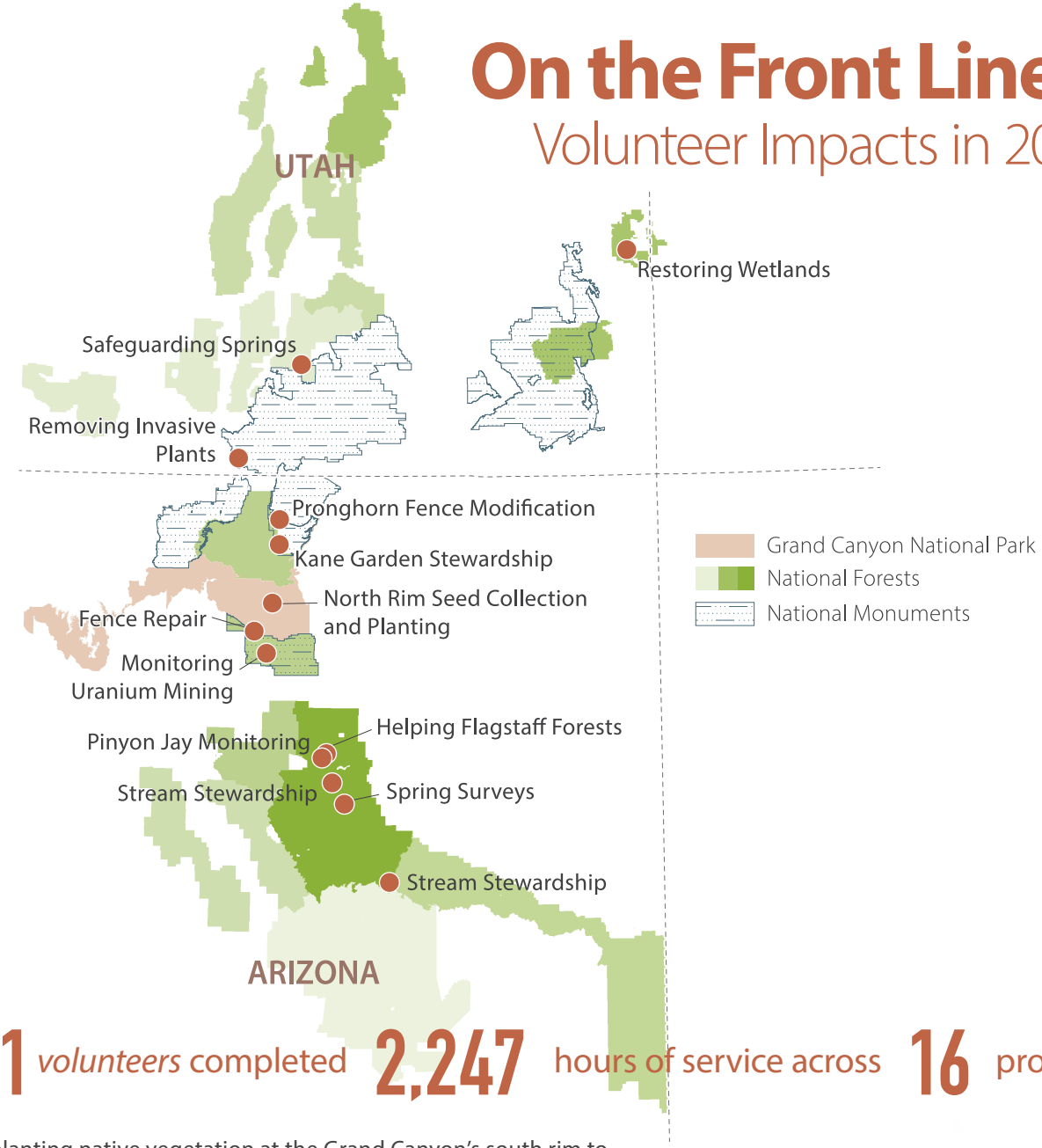
— 2025 Rising Leader
Samira O.

STEVE TOYA

Mining, tourism, climate change, and development continue to scar the places we hold dear ... My roots here are strong, and I carry forward my connection with pride, responsibility, and the hope of restoration for future generations."

— 2025 Rising Leader
Atrisha (Memi) C.

On the Front Lines:
Volunteer Impacts in 2025



201 *volunteers* completed **2,247** hours of service across **16** projects

From planting native vegetation at the Grand Canyon's south rim to restoring pinyon and juniper forests after wildfire in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, there was no shortage of work for our dedicated volunteers last year.

Between April and October, we advanced projects spanning the region, including the Abajo Mountains in Utah and the far reaches of Arizona's Coconino National Forest.

Thank you to all our new and long-time volunteers for making these efforts possible year after year!

Scan to view

Interactive Map

LENA BAIN

The Road Ahead

Moving forward, we are prepared to hold our ground on existing protections while advancing long-range, solutions-oriented work for the Colorado Plateau.

Inventoried roadless area, Manti-La Sal National Forest. TIM PETERSON

A few of our 2026 priorities include:

- ➔ Supporting **North Rim fire recovery efforts** on the ground while working with decision-makers and local communities to strengthen science-based fire management practices.
- ➔ Advancing Arizona groundwater management reform and shaping post-2026 Colorado River operational guidelines to **protect river health and sustain flows through the Grand Canyon.**
- ➔ **Defending the Roadless Area Conservation Rule,** which prevents roadbuilding and logging on more than 58 million acres of national forest lands — including some of the plateau's most pristine backcountry.

Over

99%

of comments submitted during the 2025 public comment period — including from Grand Canyon Trust advocates — opposed the repeal of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, according to an analysis by the Center for Western Priorities.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

These are challenging times, and they demand our best work.

The lands and peoples of the Colorado Plateau deserve bold action, and we remain fully committed to both defending hard-won gains and advancing durable solutions.

This work — our shared work — has never been more important. Thank you for standing with the Trust and helping protect this remarkable region for generations to come.

Onward, together,

Ethan Aumack,
Executive Director

STAFF
Adrianne Allen, Finance Manager
Darcy Allen, Executive Support Director
Ethan Aumack, Executive Director
Lena Bain, Volunteer Manager
Deon Ben, Native America Director
Amber Benally, Just Transition Manager
Michellsey Benally, Water Advocacy Manager
Christina Brown, Finance Director
Michael Chizhov, Salesforce Administrator
Ashley Davidson, Communications Director
Kathleen Dudine, Administrative Manager
Chris Glick, Development Director
Danya Gorel, Rising Leaders Manager
Ellen Heyn, Digital Media Director
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Audrey Kruse, Community Engagement Director
Wilda Lake, Legislative and Policy Project Manager
Kaya McAlister, Land Conservation Manager
Daryn Akei Melvin, Grand Canyon Manager
Josh O'Brien, Senior GIS Analyst
Jerry Otero, Legislative and Policy Director
Aaron Paul, Staff Attorney
Jen Pelz, Water Advocacy Director
Tim Peterson, Cultural Landscapes Director
Amanda Podmore, Conservation Codirector
Jack Pongyesva, Grand Canyon Manager
Mike Popejoy, Land Conservation Director
Amber Reimondo, Energy Director
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Melanie Seus, Development Manager
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Steph Wacha, Tribal Support Specialist
Kimber Wukitsch, Membership Director
...
Tom Sisk, PhD, Senior Science Advisor

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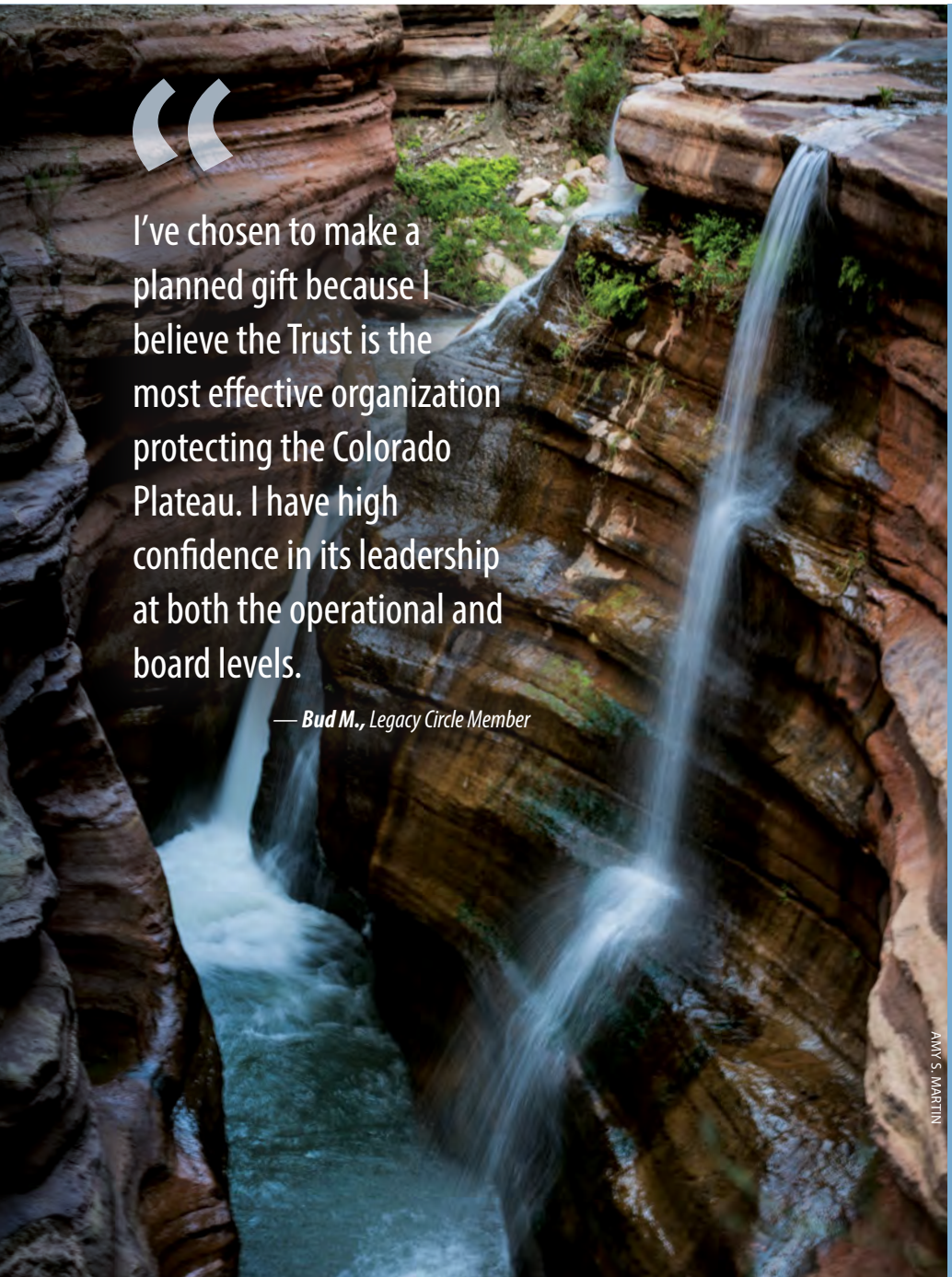

"I've chosen to make a planned gift because I believe the Trust is the most effective organization protecting the Colorado Plateau. I have high confidence in its leadership at both the operational and board levels.

— ***Bud M.,*** *Legacy Circle Member*

AMY S. MARTIN

GRAND CANYON TRUST LEGACY CIRCLE

Leave a **Lasting Legacy**

Including the Grand Canyon Trust in your will or estate plan is a powerful way to ensure that the landscapes you love endure for generations to come. If you have already done so, please let us know so we can welcome you to our Legacy Circle. For information about planned gift opportunities, please contact **Melanie Seus** at **928-286-3392** or **mseus@grandcanyontrust.org**

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grandcanyontrust.org/estate