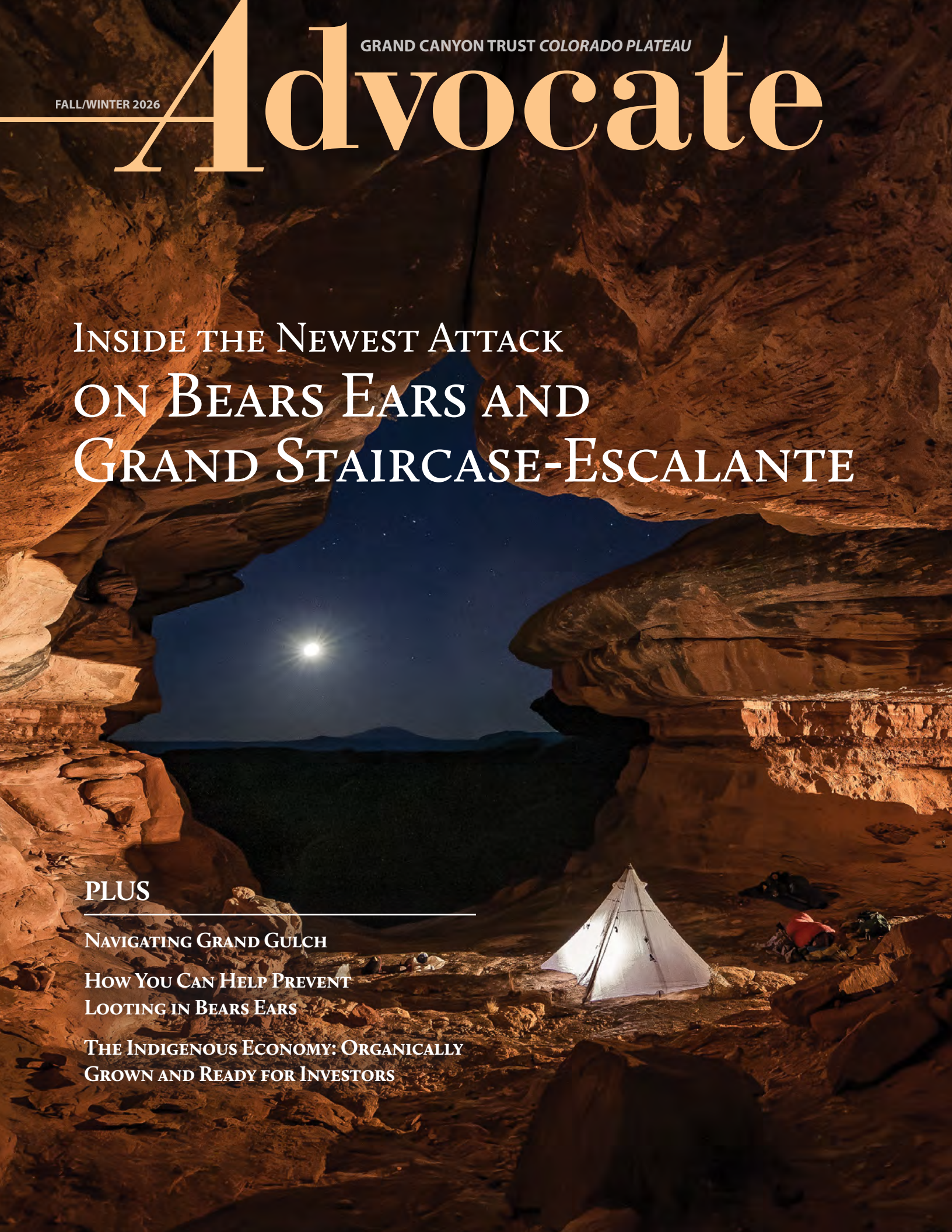
GRAND CANYON TRUST *COLORADO PLATEAU*

Advocate

FALL/WINTER 2026



Inside the Newest Attack on Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante

PLUS

Navigating Grand Gulch

How You Can Help Prevent Looting in Bears Ears

The Indigenous Economy: Organically Grown and Ready for Investors



TIM PETERSON

Letter from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ETHAN AUMACK

Dear Friends,

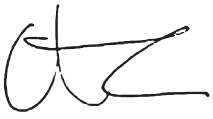
There are times — sometimes months, sometimes years — when change occurs incrementally, predictably, haltingly. These are not those times. Whether due to often retrograde law or policy emerging out of Washington, D.C., climate-induced drought or wildfire, or global geopolitics contorting the priorities governing public-lands management across the U.S., it is undeniable that we are living in a time of urgency, of consequence, of the possibility for transformation.

Especially during these times, it is critical that we remember what inspires us, grounds us, gives us license, and gives us clout. At the Grand Canyon Trust, we have long dedicated ourselves to the power of place. We work on behalf of places like the Grand Canyon and so many others equally sublime across the Colorado Plateau. We harness our members' love for these places and channel it into people-powered advocacy campaigns and muscle-powered volunteer projects. We bring our collective expertise about these places to the White House, accompanied by others whose voices and expertise must be given weight. We stand as advocates for these places in the halls of Congress and in the courtroom, if needed. The act of loving a place has been and will continue to be an incredibly powerful one.

In this issue of the Advocate, we take a closer look at some of the places that justify our mission and necessitate our advocacy. Tim Peterson, Lyle Balenquah, Tara Benally, Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk, and Curtis Quam remind us of the splendor and fragility of our national monuments. Stephen Eginoire tells the story through photos and words of Grand Gulch and the fine line between loving a place and loving it to death. Amber Reimondo shares an update on the decades-long battle surrounding uranium mining in the Southwest. Jen Pelz shares the latest data on dwindling snowpack amid ongoing Colorado River negotiations. And Jessica Stago embraces the Four Corners region through the story of her decades-long unflagging commitment to its communities and economies.

Our work in these times is neither easy, nor simple. Success in the short term is far from guaranteed. What keeps us going is the power and the imperative of place. We are honored to work on your behalf, and on behalf of the Grand Canyon and the Colorado Plateau.

Onward,



Ethan Aumack
Executive Director

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

Camping in the moonlight in Grand Gulch, on lands cut from Bears Ears National Monument by President Trump on July 13, 2026. STEPHEN EGINOIRE

EDITOR'S NOTE

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AMY S. MARTIN

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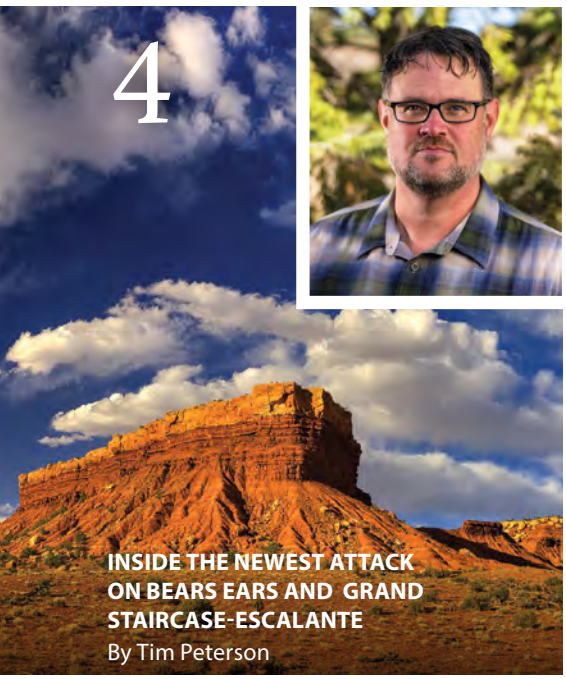
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TIM PETERSON

TIM PETERSON

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President Trump unlawfully slashed two Utah national monuments by more than 90%. A hard look at the road ahead.



TIM PETERSON

PREVENTING LOOTING AND THE LOSS OF CULTURAL HISTORY IN BEARS EARS

Hear from Native voices about the impact of looting and learn how visitors to Bears Ears National Monument can help prevent the loss of cultural history.



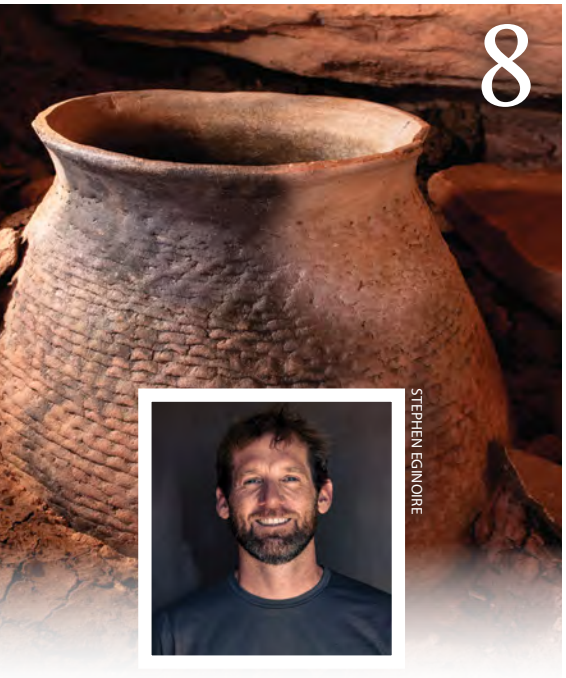
DANNY UPSHAW

RAYMOND CHEE

THE INDIGENOUS ECONOMY: ORGANICALLY GROWN AND READY FOR INVESTORS

By Jessica Stago

After years of helping Native founders build up their businesses, Jessica Stago turns her attention to the financial infrastructure and investment side of the Indigenous economy.



STEPHEN EGINOIRE

STEPHEN EGINOIRE

NAVIGATING GRAND GULCH

By Stephen Eginoire

Glimpse the heart of the Bears Ears cultural landscape with photojournalist Stephen Eginoire as he examines the thorny ethical question of how to responsibly visit and share information about cultural places and whether some places should be visited at all.

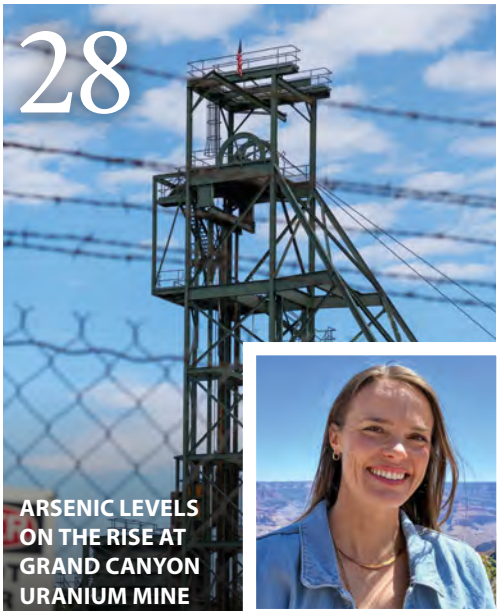


AMY S. MARTIN

COLORADO RIVER UPDATE: ONLY HARD CHOICES REMAIN

By Jen Pelz

Emergency releases from Flaming Gorge Dam have kept Glen Canyon Dam operating, for now. What happens next, and how will it affect the Grand Canyon?



BLAKE MCCORD

THALYA VERA MURILLO

ARSENIC LEVELS ON THE RISE AT GRAND CANYON URANIUM MINE

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Rising arsenic levels in water pumped out of the controversial Pinyon Plain Mine are raising red flags about possible risks to groundwater.

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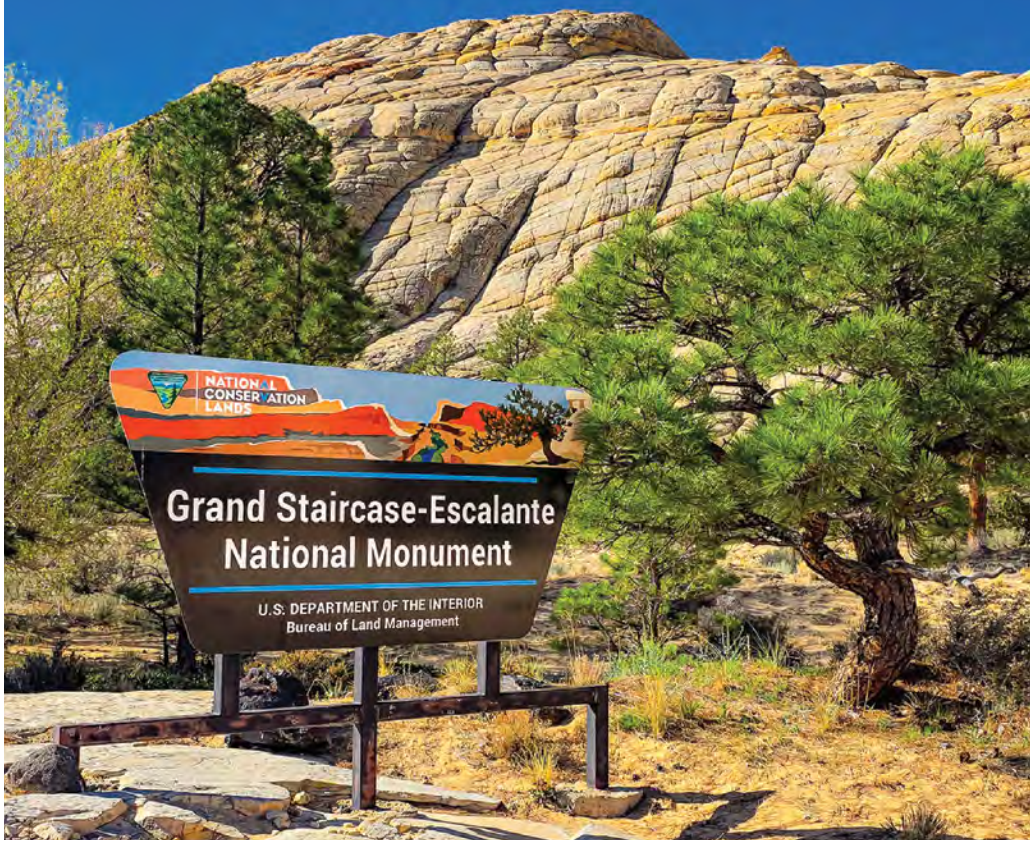
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BLAKE MCCORD

Inside the Newest Attack on Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante

By Tim Peterson

In July 2026, oppressive heat was bearing down on the Four Corners region and the 107,000-acre Babylon Fire in Bears Ears National Monument became the largest active wildfire in the United States. Soaking rains tamped the fire down, but another danger soon threatened the beloved national monument. On the afternoon of Friday, July 10, a reporter learned that Utah elected officials had been invited to the White House for a signing ceremony in the Oval Office on July 13. "President Trump expected to shrink Grand Staircase and Bears Ears National Monuments as soon as Monday, sources say," the headline read.



A Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument sign on lands President Trump cut from the monument on July 13, 2026. TIM PETERSON



A granary stripped of national monument protections by President Trump on July 13, 2026. JOSH EWING

We had expected this, but it still stung. Back in 2017, President Trump attempted to unlawfully cut Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments by 85% and 47%, respectively. President Biden fully restored both monuments in 2021, but a blueprint for executive action in Trump's second term promised that national monuments would again be on the chopping block. Before he took office, sources told the New York Times that the president would come after our national monuments again, perhaps even on inauguration day.

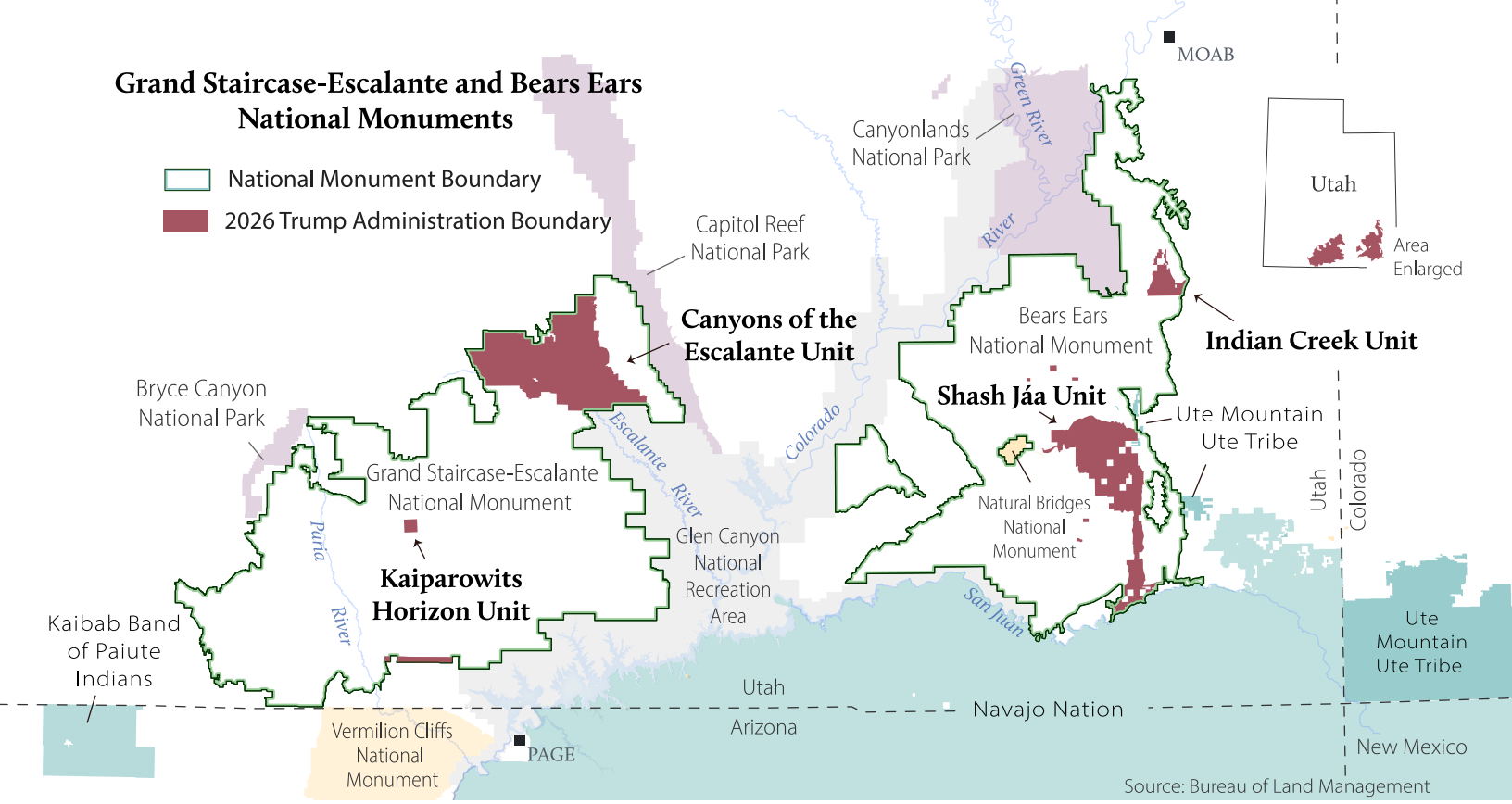
We prepared as much as we could, and when orders to shrink Bears Ears and Grand-Staircase were not among the massive stack the president signed on January 20, 2025, we breathed a sigh of relief. The new interior secretary, Doug Burgum, promised a review of monument designations in February 2025 under the guise of a purported "energy emergency." Rumors swirled, perversely, that the cuts would come on Earth Day. When April came and went without action, Burgum seemed to back away from the idea, telling an interviewer, "We'll go through a thorough review and whatever that timeline lays out, but this is not ... a top priority of the administration in terms of all the things we've got to face."

I began to hope that the risk to our national monuments had passed. Some 91% of Western voters polled in 2026 favored leaving the monuments intact. Opening a handful of beloved national monuments to mining and fossil fuel development wouldn't even be a drop in the bucket toward solving the administration's supposed energy emergency. The Utah monuments have never been a bonanza for energy. The last oil and gas well drilled in Grand Staircase in 1997 came up dry, as did the last well drilled in Bears Ears in 2013. Both monuments have uranium deposits, but much higher quality uranium in much larger quantities exists elsewhere.

Grand Staircase-Escalante does contain a very large and difficult-to-access coal deposit, but coal markets continue their steep decline despite the current administration's best efforts to prop them up. An October 2025 coal lease sale in Montana and Wyoming's Powder River Basin (America's largest coal deposit already under active development), attracted but one bid from a prospective miner — less than one tenth of a penny per ton. The federal government declined to accept the bid.

By late 2025, perhaps out of frustration with the lack of action from the executive branch, the Utah delegation stepped up instead. If the president wasn't going to shrink or eliminate the monuments, perhaps Congress would get rid of a good Biden-era management plan. Using an obscure law known as the Congressional Review Act, Representative Celeste Maloy, R-Utah, and Senator Mike Lee, R-Utah, introduced bills in March 2026 to eliminate the 2025 land management plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

The 2025 plan was important for many reasons, but it was particularly significant because it set up a co-stewardship framework to include Indigenous knowledge in future management at the request of the tribes of the Grand Staircase-Escalante Inter-Tribal Coalition (the Hopi Tribe, the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, the



Navajo Nation, the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Zuni Tribe). The plan had to be saved.

Native American tribes; conservation, outdoor recreation, and hunting and angling groups; business owners, faith leaders, scientists, and others mobilized to stop Lee and Maloy's bills by calling, writing, and wearing out shoe leather on Capitol Hill meeting with members of Congress and their staffs. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens registered their opposition to Lee and Maloy's bills as well. By June 11, 2026, the House had failed to advance the bill and a Senate deadline allowing passage by a simple majority vote came and went. After that day, 60 votes were necessary to pass the bill through the Senate, all but ensuring that Lee and Maloy's proposal has failed. We celebrated. It was a big win. But it would not last.

On July 13, 2026, flanked by Utah's congressional delegation, the governor, the Utah House speaker, and the deputy interior secretary, President Trump went much further than he had in 2017, slashing more than 90% from both monuments — nearly 3 million acres in total.

Misrepresenting what is allowed in national monuments during the signing ceremony, the president said: "You can't do anything. You can't go hunting. You can't go fishing. You can't do anything. You can virtually not even walk on it."

But hiking, hunting, fishing, and even grazing, firewood collecting, four-wheeling, mountain biking, and more are all allowed in national monuments. They always have been.

On September 11, 2026, the nearly 3 million acres cut from both monuments opened again to potential energy development, including coal, oil, gas, and geothermal leasing and the staking of new mining claims for uranium, copper, cobalt, and other minerals. We'll work hard to make sure these lands remain relatively undisturbed by extractive industries until protections are restored.

As if nearly eliminating these revered national monuments was not bad enough, President Trump also "terminated" the Bears Ears Commission, a first-of-its-kind collaborative management body composed of elected leaders from five Native American tribes (the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Zuni Tribe) established to co-manage Bears Ears National Monument with federal agencies. The president's unlawful proclamation for Grand Staircase-Escalante also puts at risk a landmark tribal co-stewardship framework for that monument. This despite the fact that nearly nine in 10 Utahns polled believe tribes should have a strong role in managing their ancestral lands that are now called public lands.

Worse still, the president took these actions without consulting tribes, a violation of the federal government's trust and treaty obligations. According to the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, "...the Department of the Interior stated in writing that, if it considered changes to the boundaries, management, or designation of Bears Ears National Monument, it would contact the Bears Ears Commission to schedule a meeting. While the commission expected meaningful



Along the Cockscomb Road, cut from Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by President Trump on July 13, 2026. TIM PETERSON

government-to-government consultation and the department's written commitment to be honored before decisions affecting Bears Ears National Monument were made, no such consultation occurred." The Grand Staircase-Escalante Inter-Tribal Coalition was similarly ignored. A week after the devastating cuts, people gathered for a monumental day of action across Utah. Autumn Gillard, coordinator for the Grand Staircase-Escalante Inter-Tribal Coalition, told the crowd assembled in St. George, "[Utah Representative Celeste] Maloy just put a video out on social media, and one of her notations was 'this is going to be in the best interest of the tribes.' No. I have a message for her: you don't get to talk about us when you don't talk to us."

This is much worse for tribes and for the monuments than when Trump acted in 2017, but the Grand Canyon Trust has worked to protect these monuments and to support tribes working to steward their ancestral lands for many years. You can count on us to support tribes and be there to help protect and defend these monuments for future generations.

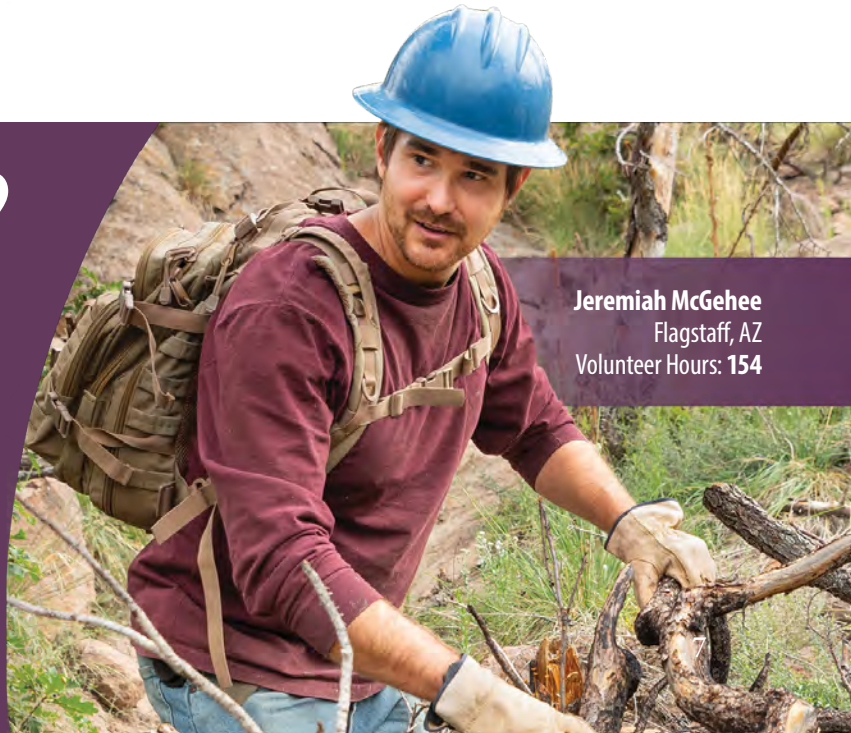
We believe that it is unlawful for any president to dismantle national monuments, and we'll do everything in our power — in Washington D.C., on the ground, and in the courts — to see that the monuments are once again restored.

Tim Peterson serves as the Grand Canyon Trust's cultural landscapes director.

Why volunteer?

"To be outside in beautiful places helping restore and protect the natural world with people who share my interests and passion. There is a lot we can accomplish together, and so much more that needs to be done."

Find the volunteer trip that's right for you.
Sign up today at grandcanyontrust.org/volunteer



Jeremiah McGehee
Flagstaff, AZ
Volunteer Hours: **154**

PHOTO BY BILL FERRIS

PREVENTING

Looting and the Loss of Cultural History in

BEARS EARS

Just outside Bears Ears National Monument on Navajo Nation land, a sweeping alcove shelters a multiroom cliff dwelling where Ancestral Puebloan families lived almost a thousand years ago. Now, graffiti covers the back wall, and the dwelling has been picked clean of most pottery pieces, projectile points, and other objects.

TIM PETERSON

"There's no sense of existence anymore, just the skeleton of the structures are there now," says Tara Benally, a Hopi and Diné woman who lives nearby and has watched her ancestors' belongings disappear and their handprints get scraped away in recent years.

"It's really hard to see what visitors erase when they come through here without really understanding what this place means," she says. "We've been displaced so many times in our lives, through the generations, that it's just a sense of being displaced one more time. It's a displacement of our soul."

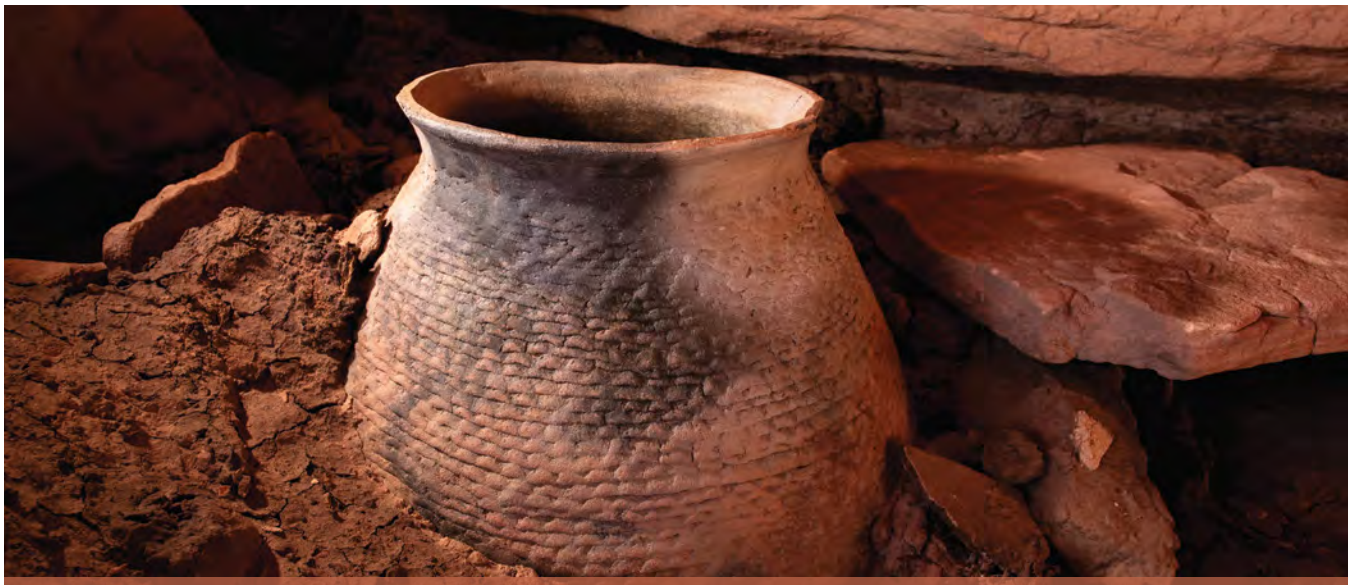
Looting and vandalism have been persistent threats in the Bears Ears region for over a century. And the loss of cultural history is one of the reasons the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Zuni Tribe, and Ute Indian Tribe came together in 2015 to advocate for the protection of their ancestral homelands as a national monument. Bears Ears National Monument stands today as a testament to their unending stewardship.

"The Bears Ears movement really helped to back up who we are and where we come from," Benally says. "But we're still fighting to keep these places, and our culture, and our heritage intact."



TIM PETERSON

> "We've been displaced so many times in our lives through the generations, that it's just a sense of being displaced one more time. It's a displacement of our soul.
>
> Tara **Benally**
> *Hopi and Diné (Navajo)*



STEPHEN EGINOIRE

Leave artifacts on **the landscape**

With 14,000 years of human history documented by Western scientists spread across the canyons and mesas of Bears Ears National Monument, Hopi archaeologist and outdoor guide Lyle Balenquah says it's inevitable that you'll encounter physical proof of Indigenous cultural history in the forms of petroglyphs, pictographs, cliff dwellings, pottery sherds, and more during your visit.

"My ancestors out on the Bears Ears landscape were creating dozens of types of artifacts," Balenquah says. "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."

Bears Ears is home to a wide variety of ceramics, Balenquah explains, and the wide range of colors and designs indicates a vast trade network through the region. For example, white pottery with black designs was made locally. Orange pottery called Tsegi Orange Ware was manufactured by people living south of the San Juan River, and Hopi Yellow Ware was made by potters 200 miles south of Bears Ears on the Hopi mesas in northern Arizona.

"From a Hopi perspective, it's ok to go over and pick that sherd up and look at it and admire it, but place it right back in the spot you got it from," says Balenquah.



STEPHEN EGINOIRE



NICK GEEB

> "From a Hopi perspective, it's ok to go over and pick that sherd up and look at it and admire it, but place it right back in the spot you got it from.
>
> Lyle **Balenquah**
> *Hopi*



TIM PETERSON

Bears Ears is a living library of **cultural history**



TIM PETERSON

> That is our library, our documentation, our recording of history of time. When visitors are disrespectful to that, it is really heartbreaking.
>
> Regina **Lopez-Whiteskunk**
> *Nuche (Ute Mountain Ute)*

Pocketing a piece of pottery might not seem harmful to you, says Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk, a member of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe with cultural and family ties to Bears Ears, but it is not a keepsake.

"That is our library, our documentation, our recording of history of time. When visitors are disrespectful to that, it is really heartbreaking," she says.

TIM PETERSON



Curtis Quam, who works on the Zuni cultural resource advisory team, says pottery sherds on the landscape should spark the idea that life existed and still exists in that area. "Know that a culture would value this and say, 'this is an important puzzle piece to my identity,'" he says. "These pottery sherds have residual energy. So if you collect or take it, you could be taking somebody with you."

When Quam visits Bears Ears today, he imagines what life was like for his ancestors living in and traveling through the Bears Ears region, and how practical they were.

"If we go into an ancestral site, we look and we appreciate," he says. "There's a lot of things that could help sustain our cultures...Visitors are also a part of it by respecting that area."

> "These pottery sherds have residual energy. So if you collect or take it, you could be taking somebody with you.
>
> Curtis **Quam**
> *A:shiwi (Zuni)*

TIM PETERSON

VISIT BEARS EARS NATL. MONUMENT WITH RESPECT

Respectful visitation of **Bears Ears**

The cliff dwellings, 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***

Colorado River Update:

Only Hard Choices Remain

BY JEN PELZ

Facing one of the driest years on record in 2026, federal regulators must decide on new rules for the future of the Colorado River. A quarter-century drought — really aridification of the region — has led to a stark imbalance of water supply and demand in the Colorado River Basin. This means some tough decisions that will shape the future of river flows, cultural resources, native fish and wildlife, and recreation in the Grand Canyon.



High-flow release at Glen Canyon Dam, 2018. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The 2026 water year ranks in the top 10 of all-time worst inflows into Lake Powell since the reservoir began filling in the 1960s, joining seven other extremely dry years since 2000.

2026 is a stark contrast to relatively wet 2023, which pulled us out of a similar crisis after a very dry 2022. But May snowpack in 2023 was 163% of normal, as opposed to the meager 28% we saw this year. The peak runoff of the Colorado River below Glenwood Springs this year was merely a trickle, about one-sixth of the torrent of water flowing in 2023.

Poor inflows into Lake Powell and steady releases through the Grand Canyon to Lake Mead have led to a precipitous drop in water levels at Lake Powell. As a result, Lake Powell has entered free fall toward a water level of 3,490 feet. If the water level falls below this elevation, Glen Canyon Dam will no longer be able to generate power. Further, the dam's four remaining outlet tubes — the only way to pass water through the dam below 3,490 feet — are at high risk of structural damage if used continuously. In 2023, after a 78-hour high-flow experimental release, the tubes were damaged. They could likely only be used on a rotating basis, significantly limiting how much water passes through the dam if Lake Powell drops below 3,490 feet.

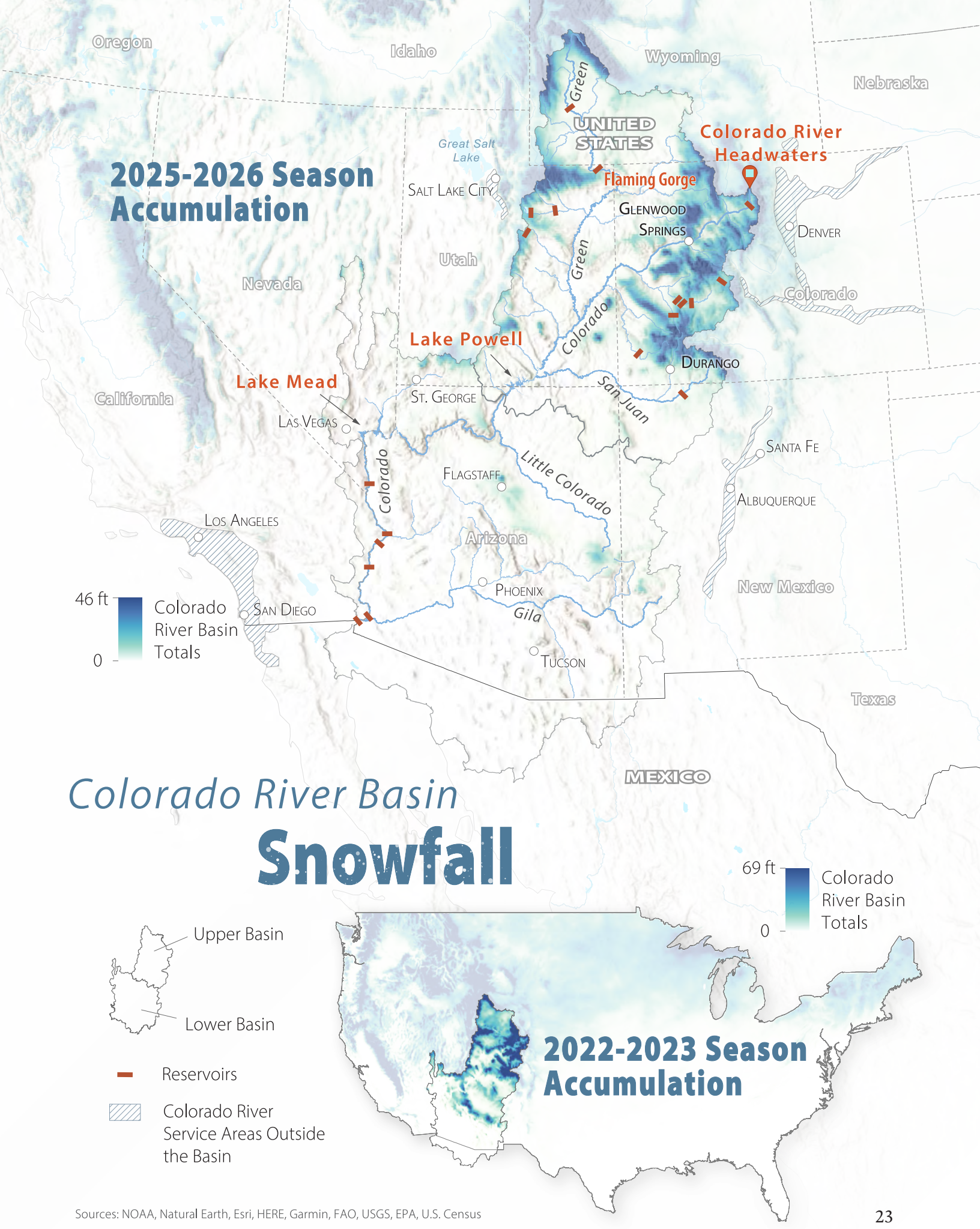
A new set of rules may help solve the imbalance of water supply and demand, but an agreement between the seven Colorado River Basin states to add needed flexibility to the system remains elusive. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is expected to step in with a framework for managing lakes Powell and Mead for the next decade or so. It's also implementing emergency measures, like releasing water from Flaming Gorge Dam upstream and limiting releases from Lake Powell in an effort to keep Lake Powell above 3,500 feet.

The implications for Colorado River flows and resources in the Grand Canyon are significant. Low water levels at Lake Powell have put high-flow experiments out of Glen Canyon Dam — vital for moving sand and rebuilding beaches in the canyon — at risk. They've also increased the need for and cost of cool-mix releases to cool the river down and prevent an invasion of non-native predatory fish that threaten native species like the humpback chub. If Lake Powell stays low, these tools — essential for maintaining flows and protecting resources in the Grand Canyon below the dam — may be lost. It's time to plan for and adapt to this drier future.

Jen Pelz serves as the Grand Canyon Trust's water advocacy director.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Sources: NOAA, Natural Earth, Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, USGS, EPA, U.S. Census

The Indigenous Economy:

Organically Grown and Ready for Investors



Felix Earle at work on Red Earth Farms. DANNY UPSHAW



DANNY UPSHAW

By Jessica Stago

For the past five years I have had the absolute honor of creating a space that welcomed new ideas and nurtured the hopes and dreams of Indigenous entrepreneurs on the Colorado Plateau. This journey began at the Grand Canyon Trust, with early discussions of what a just transition would look like after the closing of Navajo Generating Station and Four Corners Power Plant. Roundtable discussions brought entrepreneurs together in areas such as farming, art, renewable energy, and services that make our homes, cornfields, and infrastructure safer in the face of climate change. Together, they defined a green economy as led by the community and offering fair wages, good working conditions, and opportunities for training and growth.

"Their vision was to build and support businesses that were in balance with Indigenous culture and values."

Their vision was to build and support businesses that were in balance with Indigenous culture and values. Change Labs grew from this vision. Now with two hubs for Indigenous entrepreneurs on the Navajo Nation, Change Labs offers coworking spaces, workshops, lending programs, and business support services that are vital to local entrepreneurs, adding a tailored and unique value to their communities. I am a co-founder of Change Labs and directed its technical assistance programs for the last five years.

At Change Labs, we worked with founders whose visions for their business matched these ideals, from clothing designer Moriah Arthur's contemporary handsewn Diné fashion under her label Masani's Beauty to Albert Haskie's recent launch of the Diné Bizaad Navajo language-learning app. The talent I witnessed in these entrepreneurs gives me hope for the coming years. Despite the challenges — from office space to infrastructure to capital — when resilience meets innovation and creativity, that's where Indigenous entrepreneurs thrive.



The author addresses the crowd at the grand opening of Change Labs' Tuba City location in June 2023. WENDY HOWELL, NAVAJO-HOPI OBSERVER



Felix Earle with tomato plants growing taller than he is in the hoop house at his farm. DANNY UPSHAW



Vacuum-sealed and ready for your favorite recipes. This USDA-certified lamb stew meat from KAE Ranch is 100% grass-fed and naturally raised for wholesome, rich flavor in every dish. PHOTO COURTESY OF CANDICE MENDEZ

The entrepreneurial ecosystem we set out to build is now a growing network of Indigenous entrepreneurs providing solutions to our most complex challenges and leading the way toward a just and equitable transition.

Over the years, the growth in the number of Indigenous businesses and in the capacity of these businesses to deliver effective solutions has been nothing short of astounding. This is true across sectors of Indigenous life. Artists set the stage for us to feel seen as Indigenous people in this world and agricultural producers hold on to generational knowledge to grow food for the community each season. Together these sectors celebrate the talent that has been passed on from one generation to the next and continue a legacy of creative thought and cultural knowledge that forms the cornerstone of an Indigenous economy.

Felix Earle of Red Earth Farms and Earle Couture is a clothing designer who also grows food that nourishes the local community while managing his family's sheep herd. He teaches community farming workshops to increase the capacity of growers while managing the gardens at the local hospital. He is able to support himself and his aging parents through these activities, and what he values most is that he can contribute food and resources to local cultural events, like the nidaa' (enemy way) ceremonies in the summer. Felix understands that the knowledge we have and the skills we develop together determine how we thrive as a community. Similarly, Candice Mendez with KAE Ranch and Yummy Mutton Meats understands her customers want meat raised in the local community; it's a value they can taste. She produces food for the local marketplace but the infrastructure for meat-processing is designed for markets outside of our communities. In addressing that challenge, she is creating pathways for other producers to follow.

These companies prioritize traditional land-management practices and cultural integrity. It's a strong and beautiful foundation for a modern economy, where cultural values support the growth of economic activity through the direct delivery of solutions the community wants.

I am thrilled to see companies and nonprofit organizations working together to deliver these solutions. Organizations like Native Renewables, founded by Suzanne Singer, who recently celebrated 10 years of delivering solar energy to rural homeowners on the Navajo and Hopi reservations. Their teams continue to find routes around many obstacles, including traveling hours on dirt roads hauling equipment to give families the experience of electricity in their homes for the first time. With these off-grid installations, residents receive education about solar energy and information about service and maintenance. Native Renewables is training a workforce, not just in solar energy but also in soft skills, like personal finance, creating a strong and sustainable renewable energy workforce.



Suzanne Singer holds one of the solar panels her organization, Native Renewables, installs at rural homes across the Navajo and Hopi reservations. COURTESY OF CHANGE LABS



Valerie Tsosie shares her story during a gathering of the Navajo Small Business Credit Initiative. WADE ADEKAI

Valerie Tsosie is another inspiring founder, of So' Tsoh Foundation (Big Star Foundation), a healthcare nonprofit. Four years ago, when I first met Valerie, she helped me understand what was on the horizon after the COVID-19 pandemic. She recognized while working for Navajo Nation social services that there would be a significant rise in the need for accessible, high-quality cross-generational care. Her concern was not just for the patients but for the family members who would be providing that care. She anticipated the hardships caused by the lack of a support system. So' Tsoh Foundation provides key services to support caregivers, offering trainings and support groups on topics like finding hope and meaning in caring for someone with dementia, as well as resources, including cultural teachings, in both Diné and English. So' Tsoh Foundation is leading the way in the care economy, delivering strong community-level support that is contributing to community resilience.



Change Labs supports Native entrepreneurs with free business coaching, workshops, meeting and coworking space, and other business resources through its e-ship hubs in Tuba City and Shiprock on the Navajo Nation. RAYMOND CHEE

"The next era is building the financial infrastructure to invest in these entrepreneurs."

Indigenous entrepreneurs are excelling in the tech industry too. They are creating software, apps, and digital tools to improve Indigenous language-learning and streamline business processes in the tourism industry. This skilled workforce is also driving our communities into a clean energy future and building the physical infrastructure needed for these industries to thrive. The impact of all this is that every family living on the reservation will one day have access to not just quality housing but all the benefits of a modern society.

In the long term, we're working toward an economy in balance with the people, that gives as much as it takes and where cultural connection and proximity to family do not have to be sacrificed for employment in urban areas.

For decades, tribal communities have relied on royalty revenue from the fossil fuel and energy industries to fund tribal budgets. This, and the temporary employment in these industries, acted as a faux economy. While revenue was filtering down to the tribal government, there was very little most people could do to create economic mobility for themselves or their families. The abrupt exit of the fossil fuel industry revealed that a true Indigenous economy is not built on resource-extractive activities where the financial benefits are concentrated in the hands of a few. Economic activity needs to be focused on what benefits all people, not just those who gain by direct employment or through tribal government programs.

An Indigenous economy is organically grown by the skills and talents of the local people in balance with ecological and cultural resources. The more entrepreneurs bring their talents to the business community the quicker a sustainable economy will come about. But there is a significant challenge when it comes to investment.

The lack of financial investment in community infrastructure and independent entrepreneurship makes it difficult for the sector to scale up, both in terms of the number of businesses and in the growth of each business. Tribal communities received less than one cent for each dollar loaned to small businesses in Arizona and New Mexico from 2018 to 2021, according to a recent study by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition. Currently, much of the direct investment is in the form of grants and philanthropic initiatives, but this type of capital is not going to finance the growth of entrepreneurs and businesses. What's needed is a wide-scale collaborative approach that provides investment in solutions that drive growth in areas where locally owned companies bring a unique value proposition and need access to the markets that will benefit.

I recently made the decision to step back from my work at Change Labs to focus on supporting the development of this new economy. I'm excited to watch Change Labs continue to drive innovation and creativity in Indigenous entrepreneurs building an economy based on the values of reciprocity, problem-solving, and caring for the community. The next era is building the financial infrastructure to invest in these entrepreneurs. I'm looking forward to devoting my energy to supporting this vital piece of the local economy, which is critical to a just and equitable transition.

Jessica Stago serves as Native America economic initiatives director at the Grand Canyon Trust.

Arsenic Levels on the Rise at Grand Canyon Uranium Mine

By Amber Reimondo

The Pinyon Plain uranium mine (formerly Canyon Mine) has a long and problematic history within what is now Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument. Since gaining its first regulatory approvals in the 1980s, the mine has drawn wide opposition, especially from the Havasupai Tribe. The mine sits within the tribe's ancestral homelands and above the deep Redwall-Muav Aquifer, a critical source of water for the Havasupai people, People of the Blue-Green Waters. The aquifer feeds springs throughout the Grand Canyon, including Havasu Spring and its world-renowned waterfalls.

For decades, the mine occupied national forest lands south of Grand Canyon National Park, awaiting a favorable uranium market. It only began mining commercially in December 2023, after geopolitical conflict and U.S. policies began to push uranium prices up.

The policy environment continues to improve for uranium mines like Pinyon Plain. Since the start of President Trump's second term, administrative actions have prioritized uranium and piqued the interest of investors. The president's energy emergency declaration named nuclear as a priority technology. Uranium was also controversially added to the federal list of "critical minerals," a priority list that gets special consideration in everything from permitting decisions to executive orders intended to "cut red tape." Today, Pinyon Plain Mine is operating at full force. And unfortunately, some of the concerns the Havasupai Tribe and others have raised about the mine's risks are playing out.

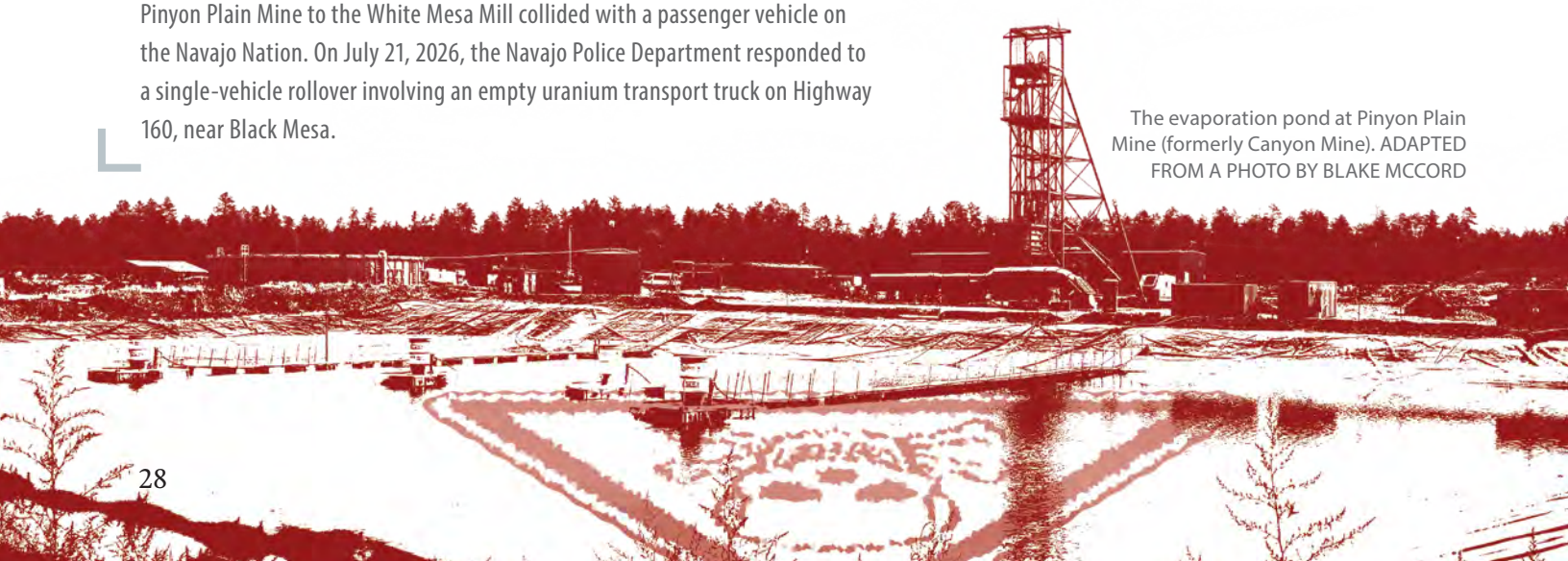
In January 2026, the Grand Canyon Trust learned that Energy Fuels Resources, the mine's operator, had detected elevated arsenic levels in one of the mine's monitoring wells a year prior. This information was not made available to the public or to the Havasupai Tribe, but it did trigger additional monitoring throughout 2025.

In November 2025, Energy Fuels applied for a so-called "minor amendment" to its aquifer protection permit with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. The requested change? An increase to the thresholds for arsenic in that monitoring well, which would have the effect of lowering regulatory red flags triggered by these higher arsenic levels. Arizona law does not require public notice for such an amendment.

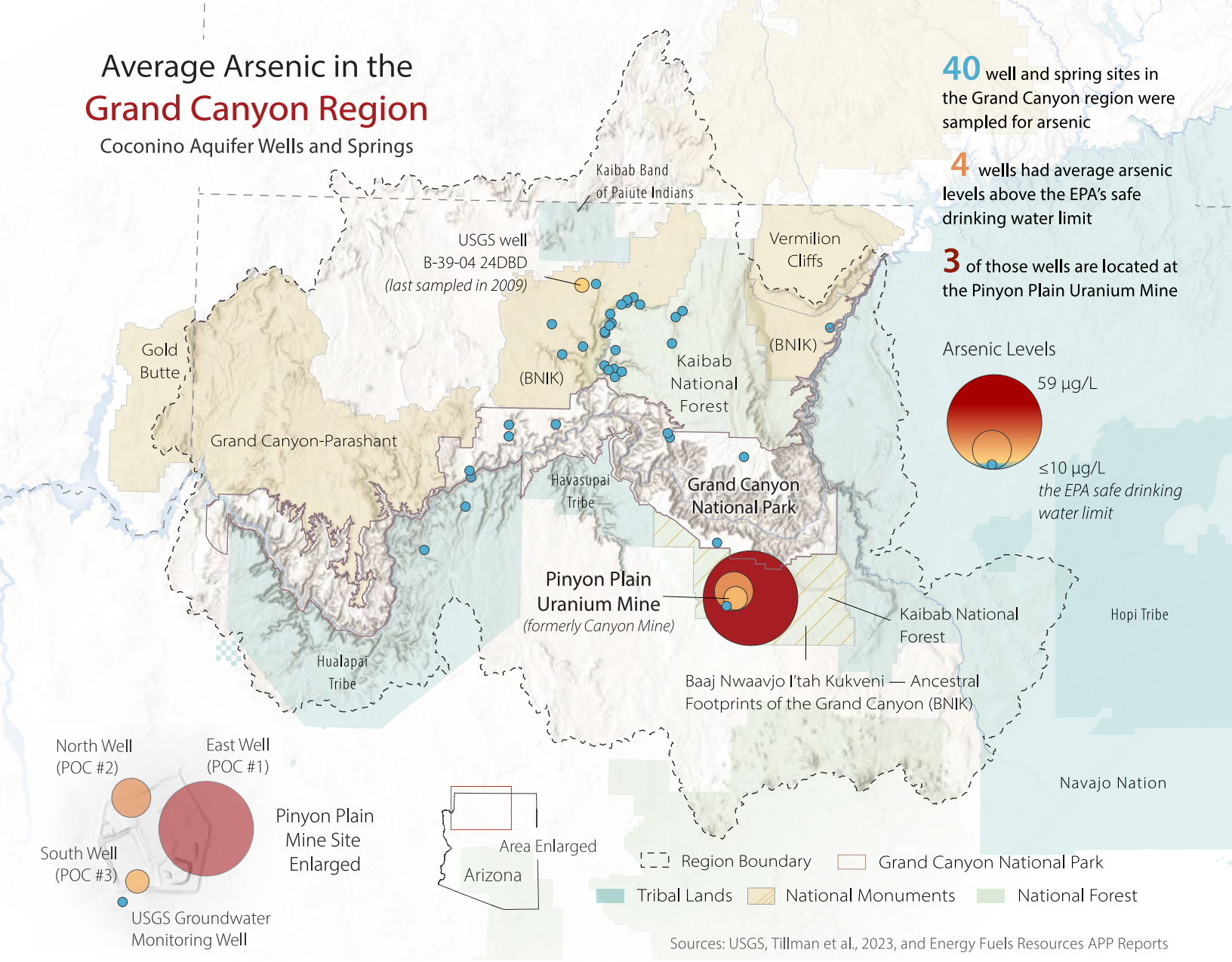
The company claims the arsenic increases showing up in the monitoring well are naturally occurring and thus the arsenic limit should be raised. You might recall that the mine pierced an aquifer in 2016. As of December 2025, 80 million gallons of groundwater have been pumped out of the mine. According to the company, because the mine is taking on so much groundwater and draining water from the rocks around it, water from all around the mine is now flowing toward the mine shaft from greater and greater distances. The company claims that because water is now being pulled in from beyond the mine's surface perimeter, the mine's operations are not the source of the rising arsenic levels.

Some groundwater experts believe upping the arsenic limit for this monitoring well would be unwise without further investigation into the origin of the arsenic. According to publicly available data, these high levels of arsenic appear to be atypical compared to other wells and springs fed by the aquifer. The Trust urged state regulators to deny the amendment request.

Two accidents. **On May 6, 2026,** a truck hauling uranium ore from the Pinyon Plain Mine to the White Mesa Mill collided with a passenger vehicle on the Navajo Nation. On July 21, 2026, the Navajo Police Department responded to a single-vehicle rollover involving an empty uranium transport truck on Highway 160, near Black Mesa.



The evaporation pond at Pinyon Plain Mine (formerly Canyon Mine). ADAPTED FROM A PHOTO BY BLAKE MCCORD



In July 2026, regulators nevertheless approved Energy Fuels' application, raising the arsenic limit in the monitoring well. Regulators declined to require the company to conduct appropriate tests to prove the arsenic is not caused by the mine's activities. Brad Esser, a retired scientist who spent nearly three decades of his career at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, told KNAU that such an action would be "setting a precedent whereby rising contamination levels lead to rising permit levels, [and] that defeats the purpose of monitoring."

The Trust and others pushed hard for more monitoring wells at the mine to detect changes like the rising arsenic levels. We continue to monitor groundwater data and permitting activities related to uranium mining in the Grand Canyon region closely.

On May 6, 2026, one of the trucks hauling uranium ore from the Pinyon Plain Mine to the White Mesa Mill collided with a passenger vehicle on the Navajo Nation, sending two people to the hospital, according to the Navajo Times. On July 21, 2026, the Navajo Police Department responded to a single-vehicle rollover involving an empty uranium transport truck on Highway 160, near Black Mesa. While thankfully no uranium ore appears to have spilled, the incidents illustrate concerns community members have voiced for years about ore hauling on a particularly dangerous route.

Amber Reimondo directs the Grand Canyon Trust's Energy Program.

HELP RESTORE

Kane Ranch





STEFAN AUMACK



STEFAN AUMACK





ETHAN AUMACK



NICK ZACHARY

Kane Ranch headquarters stands as a testament to resilience, community, and deep connection to place. Perched above the north rim of the Grand Canyon, this remote, historic cabin, built in 1877, is a refuge, a classroom, part of our working ranch, and a gathering place for those who love the Grand Canyon Trust and the landscapes we work every day to protect.

The Trust became the steward of Kane Ranch in 2005, and we have cared for this place the old-fashioned way ever since: with many hands, because Kane Ranch is worth preserving. Time, weather, and the threat of recent wildfires made a much-needed roof replacement an urgent priority, along with critical repairs to the historic masonry and chimney.

In April, Executive Director Ethan Aumack, along with an incredible team of staff and volunteers, installed Kane's new roof. They stripped off 150-year-old brittle wood shingles, cleaned out more than 20 years of pack rat detritus, and hoisted and affixed 5,000 pounds of sheet metal over just five long days. In October, volunteers from historic preservation nonprofit HistoriCorps will shore up the walls and chimney, ensuring that this remarkable place continues to stand strong on the Colorado Plateau, ready to welcome the next generation of hands and hearts.

With the support of generous donors, we're working to raise $200,000 for these critical repairs. Any additional donations will be deposited in a maintenance fund to preserve Kane Ranch for decades to come.



STEFAN AUMACK

HELP HONOR

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