

America's Wilderness

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Visionary Defense

Chuckwalla National Monument, California
Mason Cummings

Since our founding, photography has connected people to America's public lands and inspired action to defend them.

Legendary landscape photographer and Wilderness Society Governing Council member Ansel Adams used striking black and white images of wild places to help people see the beauty, value and vulnerability of America's public lands. Today, that tradition continues.

The Wilderness Society uses audio-visual storytelling to elevate voices from communities who are often silenced as the administration fast-tracks an agenda that threatens public lands with oil and gas drilling, mining and logging. That agenda also includes attempts to wipe away protections that help keep public lands healthy, accessible and safeguarded for future generations. Administration allies in Congress are even pushing the use of the little-known Congressional Review Act (see page 4) to invalidate

decisions that guide balanced use and enjoyment of public lands, including national monuments, and were based on years of public input and science-based decision-making.

This spring, The Wilderness Society launched two new campaigns to increase awareness of these escalating threats and highlight the lands' natural beauty and community voices who are fighting back.

Our Common Ground tells the plight of nine national monuments across the West that the administration is targeting to weaken or remove protections under the Antiquities Act. This immersive project follows The Wilderness Society's Communications Manager Gaby Diaz across Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah as she meets with local community members to hear what makes these lands and their histories special—and what could be lost if the administration succeeds. To view this project, please visit wilderness.org/ourcommonground.

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Helen Rolston-Clemmer

Dear Conservation Champion,

Summer is in full swing. Millions of us are heading to our national parks, monuments, forests and other public lands and waters, seeking freedom from everyday pressures for ourselves and our families. Adventure and connection await.

These are the simple gifts we seek on the common ground that we share. But increasingly, we are left to wonder if these places will last thanks to coordinated efforts underway to redefine public lands not as a shared inheritance, but as assets to be sold, transferred or industrialized.

Because of members like you, we won't let that happen. You are our tireless champions in this fight to keep public lands protected, accessible and in public hands. You are also supporting our efforts to craft a new and proactive initiative called *Ground Shift* (see page 6) that will help public lands emerge stronger than before.

This month, as we celebrate that we are a republic of the people, by the people and for the people, I'm reminded that few things connect us like public lands. Safeguarding them is ongoing work, carried forward by communities who believe in America's unique and magnificent natural heritage.

Public lands will endure because of your unwavering commitment and for that, we thank you. May your summer be filled with the splendor of nature.

Tracy Stone-Manning
President



Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee
Mason Cummings

The Wilderness Society recognizes Native Americans and Indigenous peoples as the longest serving stewards of the land.

To learn more visit:
wilderness.org/whoware

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Please send an email to newsletter@tw.s.org

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“The goal of any photography project isn’t just to show beautiful places: it’s to immerse people in public lands, inspiring them to act and protect them.”

— Mason Cummings, Visual Production Manager for The Wilderness Society



Mason Cummings on a recent mission to capture the canyons and mountains of the proposed Northern Angeles National Monument in California.
Jahir Morris

Not for Sale: The Fight For Public Lands is a new report spotlighting 10 landscapes that are being targeted for aggressive oil and gas development or mining. Covering Minnesota’s Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Utah national monuments like Bears Ears, America’s Arctic, Wyoming’s Northern Red Desert and more, the report is a stunning reminder of all we will lose if these places are sold out, developed and destroyed. Public lands are critical refuges for wildlife; they protect clean air and water and provide us with the freedom to connect with the natural world. To discover what’s at risk from the administration’s energy assault, please visit wilderness.org/notforsale.

Bringing these fights to life is one of the many ways we drive support for public lands protection—as we have for more than 90 years. We are also fighting back in the courts, shoring up champions in Congress and organizing diverse partners on the ground to ensure these extraordinary landscapes stay in public hands for many years to come.

Wildlands don’t have a voice, but you do! Sign up for our WildAlerts to stand up for the places we treasure.



Osprey, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado
Mason Cummings

Another powerful way to give

Give through your donor-advised fund—a simple, tax-smart way to protect wild places. Ask your fund manager to recommend a grant to The Wilderness Society, or learn more at wilderness.org/DAF.



Hot Issues

Steve Pearce Confirmed as BLM Director

By a vote of 46-43, former Rep. Steve Pearce was confirmed as the next director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in May. The vote came after months of scrutiny of his record as a supporter of selling off public lands and expanding leasing wherever possible.

The Wilderness Society is preparing for what comes next. Already, we have seen the administration follow through with its plans to rescind the BLM Public Lands Rule, stripping away guidance meant to ensure balanced management of public lands. In addition, we will be closely tracking several issues that Pearce may attempt to exploit or pursue. Among them, there is the possibility that we will see more land sell-off and disposal efforts, targeted measures to weaken or remove protections for some national monuments, the rollback of limits on destructive mining in areas sacred to Tribal Nations like the Greater Chaco Region, and actions that continue to block sensible renewable energy permitting on BLM lands.

Whatever happens, we will hold BLM Director Steve Pearce and the administration accountable for their anti-public lands policies and fight any attempt to sell off, give away or privatize the public lands that belong to all of us.

Uncharted Territory in the Fight for Public Lands

Lately, Congress has been recklessly wielding a little-known law called the Congressional Review Act, or CRA, to wipe out protections for beloved places across the country. This use of the CRA is highly controversial, unprecedented and dangerous for the future of public lands.

Passed in 1996, the law was intended to enable Congress to review last-minute rules issued by outgoing administrations. Agencies must submit finalized rules to Congress, which then has 60 session days to review and potentially overturn them with a simple majority vote. If both chambers pass a resolution and the president signs it, the rule is struck and the agency is forbidden from issuing another that is “substantially the same.” That means protections lost through the CRA can be very hard to restore.

Congress is now abusing this law to attack established public lands protections and decisions, notably passing a CRA resolution in April that paves the way for mining in the headwaters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota. This radical move nullifies a well-considered and long-settled public lands decision, created in collaboration with local communities, which likely never would have been considered a reviewable “rule” previously.



Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Utah
Matt Payne

Now, our attention turns to tracking the destructive fallout of this and other CRA resolutions, including two that upend hard-fought protections in the Arctic, and vigilantly watching for further exploitation of the CRA. At the time of printing, a new CRA battle looms over the management plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, which, if undone, is likely to open the monument to drilling and mining.

These actions are deceptive maneuvers designed to erase popular, science-based and publicly-supported protections for public lands. As this fight unfolds, your support helps us build a counternarrative—that wildlife, clean water and the freedom to explore the outdoors must be protected for future generations.



Caribou, Western Arctic, Alaska
Gerrit Vyn



Iconic Lands Under Attack in America's Arctic

The Interior Department has been moving aggressively this spring to open America's Arctic to oil and gas drilling, putting corporate profits ahead of wildlife, Indigenous communities and future generations of Alaskans. Urgently threatened within this wild landscape are:

- 1.3 million acres that received lease bids in the **Western Arctic**, including in the fragile Teshekpuk Lake and Colville River Special Areas.
- The 1.6-million-acre coastal plain of the **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge**. Despite previous failed lease sales and widespread public opposition, the Interior Department is proceeding with a lease sale to auction off almost 700,000 acres.
- 2.1 million acres whose protections were revoked to further enable the widely opposed **Ambler Mining Road** through the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve.

These threats are unprecedented, but we are fighting back by challenging all three efforts in court. Your support puts critical resources directly behind our legal team on the front lines. Thank you—for the Arctic, and for all the wild places we protect together.

A Generational Opportunity

A new independent initiative aims to bring unlikely allies to the table and rebuild a public lands system for the 21st century.

The administration's fossil fuel and deregulatory agenda has destroyed decades of conservation and climate progress, jeopardized America's clean air, water and wildlife, and discarded thousands of agency staff who have dedicated their careers to careful stewardship of public lands that Americans love.

After a megafire, there is a moment of possibility. The forest canopy has opened; sunlight reaches the floor, and seeds long buried can germinate. We're in such a moment now.

—Tracy Stone-Manning

But the public lands system was straining to meet today's challenges even before the radical reprioritization of the past year because the system was built for a different era. Many of the laws guiding the federal land management agencies are more than 50 years old and showing their age. As a result, the public lands system has struggled to keep pace with the stressors threatening the health of natural systems: climate change, declining wildlife populations, catastrophic wildfire, an explosion in recreation demand and shifting energy needs.

Earlier this year, The Wilderness Society launched *Ground Shift*, a new cross-partisan initiative to surface and develop durable, transformative ideas to shape the next century of stewardship for public

lands and waters. Guided by an ideologically diverse advisory council and supported by partnerships with key academic institutions and a growing network of conservation leaders, Ground Shift (groundshift.us) is elevating new thought leadership for the future of public lands by:



Publishing and promoting essays from a broad range of political, ideological and professional perspectives;



Sponsoring events and convenings to encourage problem solving, dialog and collaboration; and



Helping build a coherent agenda to inform new political leadership in Congress and the White House in 2029 and beyond.

"We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a new future for America's public lands and waters and the people who steward them—one where more voices are heard, 21st century challenges are addressed and stewardship works for the future, not the past," said Chase Huntley, the initiative's Managing Director and Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at The Wilderness Society. "Ground Shift is bringing people and ideas together to rise above today's noise and build a future for America's cherished lands and waters that everyone can help shape, benefit from and proudly pass on to future generations."

How Law and Science Drive Conservation Wins

San Juan National Forest, Colorado
Mason Cummings



Ben Tettlebaum
Acting Senior Legal Director



Kathy Zeller
Senior Director of Science

Ben: The Wilderness Society vigilantly monitors emerging threats to America’s wild places and attacks on the laws and policies that protect public lands. Strategic legal defense is among our sharpest tools for defending the public lands system and the bedrock laws that support it.

Kathy: Science is just as essential. Understanding how public lands function and how threats affect them gives us the evidence we need to inform decision-makers, strengthen legal arguments and protect wildlife, clean water and healthy ecosystems. Our science team conducts new research, analyzes existing data and shares those findings across the organization and beyond.

Ben: Using that research, along with input from policy experts, campaign staff and partners, our legal team begins the intricate work of building a case, supported by a “record of

facts,” long before it reaches court. Scientific evidence is central to our efforts to protect places like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Western Arctic Reserve—magnificent landscapes that are at the center of the administration’s “energy dominance” assault on public lands.

Kathy: Science truly does go hand-in-hand with our defense of the Arctic Refuge. Our Alaska-based researchers track Arctic caribou, study fish habitat and behavior, and map energy leases to show how fragile tundra ecosystems would be affected if oil and gas projects move forward.

Ben: The same is true for the proposed repeal of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Research from our science team shows that humans are the biggest source of wildfire ignitions and that wildfires more often start near roads. Without the Roadless Rule,

more roadbuilding would likely result in more wildfire ignitions in remote forests—contrary to the administration’s claims.

Kathy: We’re very fortunate to work for an organization that has always valued science. Four of our eight founders—Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, Benton MacKaye and Bernard Frank—were accomplished field researchers. Ecologist Olaus Murie served as The Wilderness Society’s president from 1950-1957 and helped advanced the idea of protecting entire ecological systems, not just isolated parks. I am very proud that our team carries this legacy forward today.

Ben: That means when threats arise, we are ready with facts. Safeguarding public lands takes persistence, preparation and a long-term commitment to ensuring these lands remain protected, accessible and available for future generations.



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Society

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Ruby Mountains Wilderness, Nevada
Marc Adamus

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Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Minnesota
Mason Cummings