America's Wilderness
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The Wilderness Society



Our Fight for America's Arctic

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska
Georgia and Edward Bennett

From the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the Western Arctic and the Brooks Range, policies that once safeguarded some of the wildest landscapes left on Earth are being dismantled to make way for drilling, mining and industrial development. The consequences for wildlife, Indigenous communities and the global climate could be profound.

Over the past two years, the administration and its allies in Congress have pushed policies that prioritize industry interests in Alaska's Far North. More than 1.5 million acres of the Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain have been opened to oil drilling. Plans for the Ambler Mining Road, a 200-mile industrial corridor through remote and roadless country, have advanced. New oil and gas exploration and leasing have occurred near Teshekpuk Lake, which provides nesting habitat for countless vulnerable birds, and recent legislation mandates multiple additional lease sales across both the Arctic Refuge and the Western Arctic.

The pace of these threats has accelerated in 2026. The Bureau of Land Management is not only ceding 1.3 million acres of national public lands to facilitate the proposed Ambler Road, it is also working to eliminate environmental reviews and deprive the public of input over oil and gas projects in the Western Arctic. In addition, ConocoPhillips is pursuing exploration activities that could pave the way for future expansion of the massive Willow project and other development across the landscape.

Yet, there is hope. Thanks to members like you, The Wilderness Society and our partners are fighting back on every front to protect the Arctic and its fragile ecosystems for generations to come.

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Helen Rolston-Clemmer

Dear Conservation Champion,

Over the summer, I had the unbelievable opportunity to visit one of our country's last wild places: the Western Arctic. Surrounded by the extraordinary beauty of this fragile ecosystem, I was reminded that the true value of America's public lands must not be measured by what can be extracted from them, but by what we choose to hand down within them to future generations.

The threats facing our public lands have only intensified this year. The pressure to drill in the Arctic is unprecedented. Three million acres of beloved national monument lands have been virtually eliminated. And a recent proposal to rescind the U.S. Forest Service's 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule puts 45 million acres of some of our healthiest and most intact national forests at grave risk.

The good news is we have donors like you who understand what is at stake. We carry your determination into every fight, putting your support to work for public lands and wildlife alongside Tribal partners, scientists, storytellers, legal advocates and public lands champions.

If we want future generations to know the freedom, wonder and connection that wild public lands make possible, we still have a lot of work to do, and it will continue to take all of us. Thank you for urging us forward with strength and purpose.



Tracy Stone-Manning
President

So many reasons to love public lands. So many ways to help save them.

Become an **Advocate for Wilderness** by making an annual gift of $1,000 or more. Visit **wilderness.org/advocates** to learn more.

Protect wild places year-round with a **monthly gift**. Sign up at **wilderness.org/monthly** today.

Maximize the giving power of your **Donor-Advised Fund.** Explore **wilderness.org/DAF** for details.

The results of our **2026 Wilderness Photo Contest** are in! View the amazing images at **photocontest.wilderness.org/2026/winners** and make plans to join the contest next year.

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For decades, America's Arctic has been recognized as too important and too fragile to be sacrificed to industrial development. That truth is as urgent today as ever.

Science remains one of our most powerful tools. Our researchers are documenting caribou migration routes, fish habitat and other critical features of Arctic ecosystems. This research helps reveal the true costs of industrial development and strengthens our advocacy, grassroots organizing and legal work.

We are also investing in long-term relationships with Arctic communities and Indigenous leaders. Through programs like our Imago Initiative, The Wilderness Society is elevating Indigenous conservation champions, strengthening local partnerships and building broader support across Alaska for protecting lands and waters that have sustained local communities for generations.

In the courts, we are challenging efforts to expand drilling and weaken protections. Working with allies, we have sued over Arctic Refuge leasing decisions and to prevent development in some of the Western Arctic's most ecologically sensitive landscapes.

At the same time, we continue to push for lasting Arctic protections in Congress. The Arctic Refuge Protection Act would permanently safeguard the sensitive Coastal Plain and repeal the federal leasing program that threatens this irreplaceable landscape. The bill now has more congressional support than ever before.

With your support, The Wilderness Society is standing up for wildlife, communities and wild places, and fighting to ensure this extraordinary landscape endures for generations to come.



Rough-legged Hawk, Western Arctic, Alaska
Gerrit Vyn



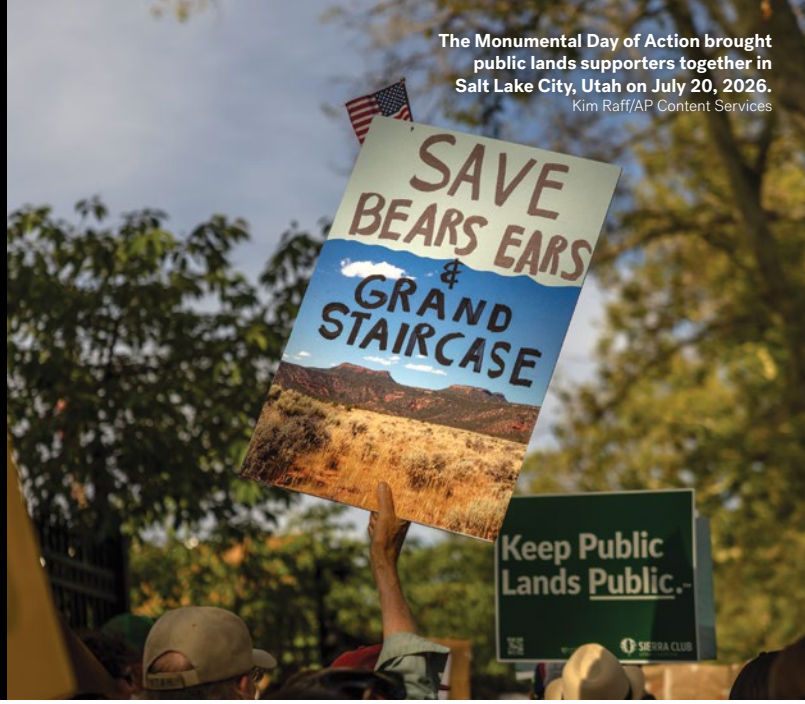
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska
Ryan Gasper



Caribou, Western Arctic, Alaska
Florian Schulz

Scan the QR code to watch president Tracy Stone-Manning and senior ecologist Tim Fullman discuss decades of research on the Teshekpuk caribou herd in Alaska's Western Arctic.

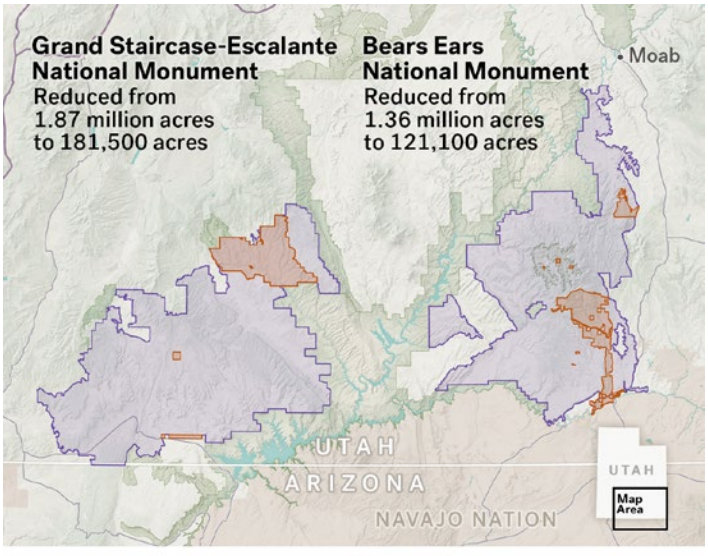
Fighting Back for Our National Monuments



The Monumental Day of Action brought public lands supporters together in Salt Lake City, Utah on July 20, 2026.
Kim Raff/AP Content Services

This summer, the administration—appeasing anti-public-lands politicians in Utah and ignoring the wishes of tens of millions of Americans—virtually eliminated two of our country's treasured national monuments, stripping protections from most of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante in southern Utah.

Proclamations signed by the president on July 13 reduced the monuments by more than 90 percent, or about three million acres. This represents one of the largest wholesale rollbacks of public land protection in history and leaves the excised landscape vulnerable to mining, oil and gas drilling, and looting and vandalism of fossils and archaeological sites.



Source: Bureau of Land Management, July 2026. Map by TWS.

If this sounds familiar, it is: in 2017, President Trump slashed both monuments by a combined two million acres. Millions of Americans rose up in protest, and we were successful in getting the protections re-instated in 2021 during the Biden administration.

The latest reductions are even more extreme, dealing a devastating blow to public lands that millions of people rely on for cultural, recreational, economic and health benefits and that wildlife need to roam and thrive. At risk are Grand Staircase-Escalante's internationally significant fossil beds, where scientists have identified dozens of dinosaur species new to science since the monument's 1996 designation. Also threatened: nearly 100,000 irreplaceable archaeological and cultural sites that Bears Ears protects.

Most egregiously, the president's action disregards the Tribal Nations who steward these lands and fought so hard for their protection. The effect is that the care of these ancestral homelands will no longer be guided by Tribal knowledge and leadership.

In response to the unlawful attempts to dismantle the monuments, The Wilderness Society and our partners have initiated legal challenges and will continue this fight in court. Vocal nationwide outcry against monument rollbacks has saved these special places before, and your support can help us save them again.

The Fate of America's Wild

Beyond eviscerating publicly-supported national monuments, the administration is mounting an attack that critically threatens 200 million acres of wilderness and wild public lands—the quiet places that Americans cherish for the freedom to explore the outdoors, in clean air and surrounded by stunning wildlife habitat.

In this latest attack, the Department of Interior announced a nationwide review of the management of wilderness areas, wilderness study areas and other lands managed for their wilderness character across its three agencies—the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. This ominous step could open beloved backcountry areas to development, resource extraction and unregulated motorized vehicle use, tarnishing them forever.

To illustrate just how much is at stake, The Wilderness Society has created an interactive map of the 200 million acres that could be affected by this new "review," including nine million acres within national monuments.

See the map:

The Interior Department's attack on protected wildlands came after reporting by *The New York Times* that the Department of Agriculture is expected to issue a memo directing the Forest Service to review its management of more than five million acres of recommended wilderness in national forests. On top of that, the administration has moved to eliminate the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, putting 45 million acres of America's last wild forests at risk.

Concurrently, through rule repeals, executive orders, secretarial memos, layoffs and budget cuts, the administration is decimating the capacity of agencies to effectively steward our shared lands. This not only tilts the scales so drilling, mining, logging and other forms of development are made king above all other uses—it also drastically decreases our ability to protect wildlife and prepare for disasters like wildfires.

Public lands belong to all of us, not the highest bidder.

With your support, The Wilderness Society will keep fighting to protect our shared wild heritage from the cumulative impacts of these attacks.



Centennial Mountains Wilderness Study Area, Montana
Bob Wick/BLM



Black Bear, Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina
RCKeller/iStock

Safer Wildlife Crossings in North Carolina

Wildlife face overwhelming obstacles in a warming and increasingly developed world, and that was true even before the latest spree of rollbacks to public lands protections.

As dwindling habitats leave wildlife less room to adapt, we must work together to help remove barriers to movement. The most important step is conserving connected lands and waters rather than dividing or selling them off. Wildlife underpasses, overpasses and similar structures are also vital: research shows they help animals cross roads safely, reduce genetic isolation and lower motorists' risks.

Signaling the rising importance of the latter strategy, North Carolina approved a historic $10.2 million in recurring funding every two years to help build wildlife crossing infrastructure and reduce dangerous wildlife-vehicle collisions across the state. The Wilderness Society's Southeastern team played a prominent role in this effort through the Safe Passage coalition, making multiple advocacy trips to Raleigh, meeting with lawmakers, and helping host events attended by members of the General Assembly and key transportation, public safety and conservation partners.



Bobcat in the Pigeon River Gorge section of I-40
National Parks Conservation Association and Wildlands Network

While other states have invested millions in wildlife crossings, only a handful have established dedicated, recurring state funding sources, and even fewer have done so without using fees or taxes to build an account. North Carolina will now have a permanent source of support for projects that reconnect habitat, improve public safety and help conserve wildlife for future generations. Even more encouraging, these monies may leverage federal funding for wildlife crossing infrastructure, expanding the return on this smart investment.

This achievement is a bright spot in the wake of Hurricane Helene's devastating impacts on Western North Carolina in 2024. It offers an opportunity to rebuild critical infrastructure while also restoring the landscapes and wildlife corridors that enrich the state's identity.

Going forward, there is more work to be done as we collaborate with state agencies to use this money to design and construct the structures that will benefit black bears, deer, bobcats and other species. Animals like these are routinely forced to navigate the grid of roadways, fences, walls and other obstacles we have forced atop their habitat, but this investment—which your support helped make possible—gives them a chance to roam with greater freedom and safety.

Meet the Southeast Team Behind the Work



Jill Gottesman and Kimberly Smith near the summit of Kuwohi in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, on the North Carolina-Tennessee state line.

In the Southeast, The Wilderness Society is focused on protecting and connecting wildlands across the Southern Appalachians and ensuring that all communities have access to and are involved in the management of their public lands. Our work here is led by **Jill Gottesman**, our Southeastern States Director based in Asheville, North Carolina, and **Kimberly Smith**, our Southeastern States Conservation Specialist based in her Ancestral homelands of Cherokee, North Carolina. Recently, they joined us to answer a few questions about North Carolina's historic investment in safer wildlife crossings.

Why is support for wildlife crossings so critical, particularly in the Southern Appalachians?

The Southern Appalachians support healthy wildlife populations that roam between multiple public lands to find food, mates and habitat. But their movement is fragmented by roads and other developments that serve a fast-growing human population. Reducing wildlife mortality is a major concern in the Pigeon River Gorge along Interstate 40—as many as 30,000 cars a day can pass through this rugged, 28-mile stretch of highway that divides the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Pisgah National Forest.

What role did The Wilderness Society play in North Carolina's historic decision?

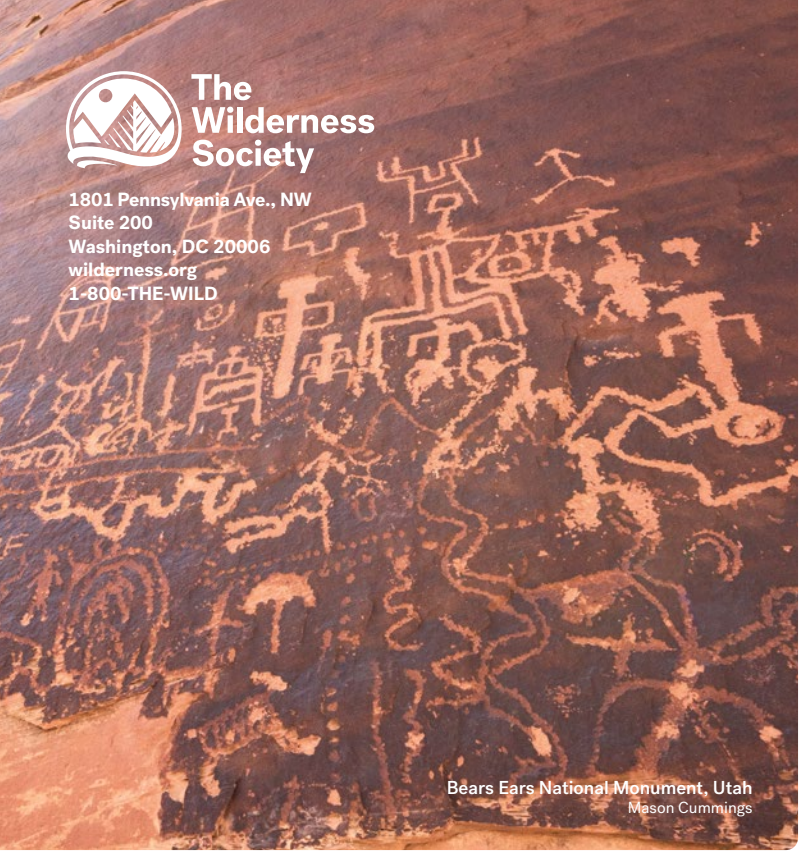
Since 2017, The Wilderness Society has served as a steering member of the Safe Passage coalition, a group of sportsmen, Tribes, conservationists, government agencies and community members working to balance the needs of wildlife and people in the region of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In this role, we advanced collaborative solutions to help make travel safer for drivers and wildlife alike.

What are some other projects we're working on in the Southeast region?

Here in the Southeast, our work to advance durable conservation solutions is rooted in long-term relationships with a wide range of community-based partners and coalitions. Since most of the federal lands here are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, we are largely focused on national forest defense efforts. We also advocate for legislative proposals to protect wilderness and other important wildlands, support Tribal co-stewardship on public lands, and collaborate with local and Tribal partners on place renaming campaigns.

Why is this region so special?

A global hotspot for biodiversity, the Southern Appalachians hold the largest complex of federal public lands in the Eastern U.S., cradle the headwaters for water sources throughout the region and attract tens of millions of annual visitors. The Ancestral homelands of several Indigenous Peoples, this region also connects to The Wilderness Society's origin story in the early 1930s and is considered the birthplace of American forestry.



The Wilderness Society

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Bears Ears National Monument, Utah
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Elk, Great Sand Dunes National Park, Colorado
Patrick Myers/NPS