



# FOR SALE

THE FIGHT FOR PUBLIC LANDS





Public lands are more than just spots on a map. They afford us the freedom to do the things we love—to hike, camp, hunt and fish, to breathe in clean air, swim in pristine waters and find peaceful escapes from a busy and complicated world. They are a refuge, for both people and wildlife. To many, these lands are sacred, holding meaning for generations well before us, since time immemorial.

Our shared lands and waters are one of the country's best ideas: owned by all of us, for current and future generations. They are also one of the country's great equalizers, open to everyone, regardless of the size of our bank accounts.

But right now, leaders in Washington D.C. are rapidly advancing a dangerous agenda that prioritizes short-term, corporate profits over the health and well-being of these special places. They are not interested in balanced, responsible development of our natural resources. Instead, they are working to eliminate protections for millions of acres of pristine land and limit our access to public lands by letting oil, gas and mining companies exploit and damage them without safeguards. But some places are too wild or too sacred to sell out.

This isn't the first time some of our country's most special places have been under attack. Yet time and time again, we come together to stand up and defend these places, for our neighbors and for future generations. And we continue to win.

This report highlights 10 American landscapes threatened by a short-sighted energy agenda fueled by greed. They are also lands and waters beloved by communities and people that continue to speak out and defend them.

From the caribou pathways of the Arctic to the interconnected system of lakes, streams and rivers of the Boundary Waters to the deserts of the Southwest, these are lands that define us as Americans. They are lands that we continue to fight for. And they are simply not for sale.

Tracy Stone-Manning,  
President, The Wilderness Society





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# 10 landscapes at the center of the fight for public lands

This report features 10 landscapes currently threatened by oil and gas drilling and mining, and 11 unique leaders who are tirelessly standing up, advocating to protect these places.

Our nation's public lands are open and welcome to all.

But leaders in Washington D.C., driven by an all-out energy dominance agenda, are looking to hand them off to the highest bidder at the expense of communities' health, economic prosperity, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and cultural resources and values.

Public lands drive rural economies. They provide drinking water to millions of people. And they are home to some of the most productive wildlife habitat and best recreation opportunities on the planet.

The Wilderness Society, working with conservation partners and local leaders, is united around a simple principle:

**Our public lands belong in public hands.  
They are not for sale.  
And we must not let them be sold out.**

## By the Numbers

According to the [2026 Colorado College Conservation in the West Poll](#), Americans support keeping public lands protected.

**74%**

of Western voters oppose selling some national public lands for oil and gas development.

**91%**

of Western voters say existing national monument designations should be kept in place.

**70%**

of Western voters fast-tracking oil, gas and mining projects on national public lands by reducing environmental reviews and local public input.

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# Supporting people and wildlife, public lands are worth the fight



## Recreation

Public lands are renowned for the hunting, fishing, hiking and other outdoor recreation opportunities they provide, all of which drive local economies. [Outdoor recreation is a \\$1.3 trillion-dollar industry, supporting 5.2 million jobs.](#) These jobs depend on protected public lands.



## Economic Value

Public lands are key economic drivers. [Research shows](#) that counties in the Western U.S. with more protected federal lands experience significantly faster growth in population, employment and per capita income compared to similar counties with less protected land. This is driven by recreation, tourism and attracting entrepreneurs and retirees, which makes these lands economic assets for states, not liabilities.

## Wildlife & Plant Habitat

Public lands across the U.S. provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife species, like the caribou of the Arctic and the eastern collared lizards of the Southwest. They also provide important habitat for species federally listed as endangered or threatened, like the California condor and desert tortoise. Public lands also host iconic flora, like ironwood trees that can live hundreds of years. Threatened by a warming climate and fossil fuel development, these species' survival depends on healthy habitats.



## Migration Corridors & Migratory Bird Hotspots

Wildlife needs room to roam. Public lands throughout the U.S. provide crucial migratory corridors for hundreds of mammal and bird species. From the thousands of animals, like pronghorn and elk, that migrate to spend their winter in Wyoming's Red Desert, to the millions of migratory birds from all over the planet that rely on the Western Arctic as a place to breed each year, diverse animal species depend on the protected migration corridors and habitat that public lands provide.

## Clean Water

Public lands are main sources of clean water that communities and wildlife across the country depend on. Protected public lands keep streams and rivers clean and flowing through diverse ecosystems and into major headwaters. For example, 20% of the fresh water in the National Forest System is within the Superior National Forest, which encompasses the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.



## Upholding Indigenous Sovereignty

In recent years, landmark agreements between Tribal Nations and federal agencies have been put in place at some national monuments, reflecting a commitment to conservation and cultural connection. Co-stewardship and co-management agreements allow for collaboration and decision-making that importantly emphasize Indigenous and local resource user knowledge. These agreements represent a holistic approach to land management, uphold Indigenous sovereignty and are widely supported by voters in the West.



## Cultural Resources

Public lands are replete with invaluable cultural resources integral to the ongoing cultural connections and practices of Indigenous Peoples that are the original and longest-serving stewards of this country's land. These living landscapes hold ancestral dwellings, libraries of petroglyphs and geoglyphs, ceremonial sites, Great Houses, kivas and roads and more—a testament to ancestral connections and ongoing cultural practices.

# 10 Landscapes Under Attack



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America's Arctic, Alaska



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The Northern Red Desert and Big Sandy Foothills, Wyoming



ALASKA

# America's Arctic

Located in the northernmost part of Alaska above the Arctic Circle, America's Arctic contains two vast landscapes of deep ecological and cultural importance: the Western Arctic, also known as the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A), and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. These places sustain wildlife and Indigenous cultures, and they are among the last truly wild public lands in America.



© Florian Schulz

## Western Arctic

Fragile wetland habitat threatened by expansive oil drilling

Spanning more than 23 million acres of extraordinary rivers, lakes and wetlands, the Western Arctic comprises the largest single unit of wild public land in America, bigger than 10 Yellowstone National Parks and nearly the size of Indiana.

It is the homeland of Alaska Native Iñupiat communities and supports robust, wild ecosystems and resources that these communities have depended on for millennia, including three major caribou herds and more than 50 species of migratory fish, birds and marine mammals. Millions of birds from around the planet rely on this place each year to nest and raise their young. Protecting these lands safeguards cultural traditions, healthy habitat and the shared ability to hunt, fish and travel across intact landscapes. It may be one of North America's critical climate refugia for wildlife in the future, yet it is under constant threat from oil and gas development.

## The Western Arctic Under Threat

In 2023, ConocoPhillips broke ground on a massive new oil development project in the NPR-A. The \$8 billion Willow project is projected to release more than 280 million metric tons of greenhouse gases over the next 30 years.

Today, leaders in Washington D.C. and their oil and gas allies are stripping safeguards to drilling elsewhere in the NPR-A by mandating massive oil and gas lease sales there and nullifying a balanced, science-based plan that strengthened protections for the areas essential to wildlife and subsistence resources. Attacking these protections threatens conservation values, undermines the freedom of local communities to sustain their ways of life and jeopardizes the planet that future generations will inherit.

## Protecting The Western Arctic

Increased oil and gas drilling, and all the infrastructure, vehicle traffic and seismic testing that comes with it, would have devastating impacts on the Western Arctic. In response to recent attacks, environmental groups and grassroots and Indigenous-led organizations have pushed back, advocating to curtail oil and gas drilling and safeguard the Western Arctic's ecological and cultural resources.

The Iñupiaq community of Nuiqsut is on the frontline of increased oil and gas development, slowly being surrounded by drilling pads. But Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic, created and led by former Nuiqsut residents, has mounted a powerful resistance to development. Their leadership reflects a growing movement to protect both the land and the freedom of communities to determine their future.

“ [The Western Arctic is] immeasurable, unexplainable, it's home. It's special for so many different reasons and my experience and childhood are some of the biggest motivators for why I spend time, effort and energy into protecting this for future generations.

**Nauri Simmonds**  
Executive Director of Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic



ZOOMING IN

## Migratory Bird Hotspot



A remarkable diversity of birds breed, nest and raise their young in the Western Arctic, including the Steller's eider and yellow-billed loon. Road-building and drilling in the Western Arctic fragment habitat and threaten the long-term health of these species, jeopardizing a globally significant ecosystem.

SPECIES HIGHLIGHT

## Caribou



© Bob Wick, BLM

More than 40 rural villages depend on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd to sustain their way of life.



© Mason Cummings, TWS

# Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

America's wildest place on the edge of destruction

It's no wonder that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is called the crown jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

At more than 19 million acres, the Arctic Refuge in northeastern Alaska is America's largest wildlife refuge. It provides habitat and birthing grounds for birds that migrate across the globe, caribou and polar bears, as well as a diverse range of wilderness

lands. Its coastal plain, stretching from the snow-capped peaks of the Brooks Range north to the frigid waters of the Arctic Ocean, provides vital denning habitat for endangered polar bears and is the calving ground of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, one of the largest herds on Earth today at nearly 143,000 caribou.

For Gwich'in and Iñupiat communities, the Coastal Plain is a source of nourishment, cultural identity and connection. Their stewardship reflects a relationship to place that has endured since time immemorial and that must be protected for generations to come.

**“ We hunt and fish like we always did on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Sometimes we stayed up into the refuge the whole summer. Now, we have to be extra careful about the snow and the ice and the weather because of climate changes. So it's getting to where we can't hunt and fish and live off the land like we used to. It's just we're not being greedy. We're not being selfish. We're trying to educate the world in a good way about why we say no to oil and gas in the Coastal Plain of Arctic Refuge—to us it is lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit, the Sacred Place where the Life Begins and exactly where calving, birthing, nursery and training take place for the Porcupine Caribou Herd which is so critical for Gwich'in way of life. That's our direction from our Elders who told us not to compromise. This issue is not going away because our children love to be Caribou People, and to eat caribou and to sing caribou songs and dance.**



**Sarah James**  
Neets'aii Gwich'in Elder Spokesperson

## The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Under Threat

Oil and gas drilling would have devastating impacts on this pristine and fragile ecosystem, caused by the massive infrastructure and equipment needed to locate, extract and transport oil. Drilling in the Arctic is risky, with the potential for chronic spills of oil and other toxic substances onto the fragile tundra. Development would forever scar this unspoiled landscape, fragmenting vital habitat and harming its wildlife.

In October 2025, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum signed a decision repealing the protections in the prior administration's leasing program, putting back in place an aggressive

program that opens the refuge's entire 1.5 million-acre coastal plain to industrial development. New legislation will also force more oil and gas lease sales in the refuge. These attacks threaten the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd that supports the region's Indigenous communities, their cultures and their subsistence ways of life.

Drilling here would trade irreplaceable wildlife and cultural values for short-term corporate gain. It would permanently strip the ability of future generations to experience this remarkable place as people have had the freedom to do for thousands of years.

## Protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

The Arctic Defense Campaign, a coalition of Alaska Native peoples, other residents of Alaska, wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists from across the country, continues to advocate for permanent protections for the refuge from oil and gas development. This includes the Arctic Refuge Protection Act, which would designate the Coastal Plain as a wilderness area to permanently protect it from oil and gas

development. The bipartisan bill has the support of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic and more than 120 members of Congress in both the House and Senate. Until this wild landscape is permanently protected from oil and gas drilling, the coalition will defend it by challenging leasing, new seismic exploration and regulatory rollbacks.

### ZOOMING IN Imago Initiative



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In 2020, The Wilderness Society, alongside Indigenous partners, allied conservation groups and philanthropic organizations, collaboratively launched the IMAGO Initiative, an innovative process to create a new model for Indigenous-led conservation that recognizes and advances the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The process uplifts their inherent, inalienable rights as the occupants and stewards of the land since time immemorial.

### SPECIES HIGHLIGHT Polar Bears



© Florian Schulz

Machinery and infrastructure from oil and gas exploration and development threatens the fragile habitat of polar bears who birth and nurture their cubs in dens through the winter.

Baaj Nwaavjo translates to “where Indigenous Peoples roam” in Havasupai and I’tah Kukveni translates to “our ancestral footprints” in Hopi—thus the monument’s name translates to “where Indigenous Peoples roam, our ancestral footprints.”

The Arizona monument encompasses just over 917,000 acres of national public lands near the Grand Canyon. It protects an array of scientific and historical resources for future generations, including cultural heritage, incredible biodiversity and precious, clean waters. These public lands are a vital economic engine of the Grand Canyon region.

An essential wildlife corridor, the landscape also hosts more than 2,000 cultural resources, from petroglyphs to pictographs and rock shelters. These places are still used by Native people to hunt game and gather foods and medicine like pinyon pine nuts and sagebrush, respectively.

After decades of Tribes calling for permanent protection of their ancestral homelands from uranium mining and other harmful development, President Biden used the Antiquities Act in 2023 to designate the monument in northern Arizona. The proclamation honors the deep cultural connection that Indigenous Peoples have to the region and safeguards the heart of the Colorado River watershed—a vital source of drinking water in the drought-stricken West.

The national monument designation prevents new mining claims and maintains the public’s freedom to hike, hunt, fish, camp and enjoy the region’s spectacular natural formations. The proclamation was unique because it invited the involvement of 13 Tribal Nations, united as the Grand Canyon Tribal Coalition (GCTC), in the monument’s management.

“Come to the national monument, sit out in the environment among the trees, among the animals and experience the same thing that I’ve been experiencing, because it’ll change your life. It’ll make you think that it is worth protecting and it’s worth preserving for future generations and for all mankind.”

**Carletta Tilousi**

Grand Canyon Tribal Leaders’ Coalition  
Coordinator, Havasupai Tribe Uranium  
Committee Member



#### ZOOMING IN

### Tribal Co-stewardship



Tribal communities possess generations of wisdom and an intricate understanding of the land. The monument proclamation affirmed the importance of incorporating this knowledge to foster a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to conservation, with a richer decision-making process.

The presidential proclamation that created the monument emphasizes Tribal co-stewardship. The Grand Canyon Tribal Coalition, which leads protection efforts for the monument, is made up of representatives from 13 Tribes: the Havasupai Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, Las Vegas Tribe of Paiutes, Moapa Band of Paiute Indians, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, Shivwits Band of Paiutes, Navajo Nation, San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation, Zuni Tribe and Colorado River Indian Tribes. The coalition co-stewards the land alongside the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

#### SPECIES HIGHLIGHT

### California Condor



The monument protects the region’s unique ecosystems, which provide habitat for critically threatened species like the California condor.

#### ARIZONA

# Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument

Mining threatens one of America’s newest and most spectacular national monuments



ARIZONA

# Ironwood Forest National Monument

Desert habitat threatened by copper mining

© Mason Cummings, TWS

“ These are areas that are part of the identity of who we are as a county and who we are as southern Arizona. We value protecting lands, because we understand that land is a reflection of our community and a reflection of who we are as people, so we want to protect our health and protect our future.

**Jennifer Allen**

Vice Chair, District 3 Supervisor for Pima County, Arizona



## ZOOMING IN

### Diverse Wildlife and Plant Habitat



The habitats in the national monument range from the ironwood and saguaro cacti forests to desert washes and mountain slopes, supporting a wide variety of flora and fauna. The monument is home to a dense population of ironwood trees and bighorn sheep and provides important habitat for several species federally listed as endangered or threatened, in addition to other wildlife like the chuckwalla, desert iguana, javelina and nearly 150 bird species. These ecosystems reflect the monument’s enduring conservation values and its importance to future generations of wildlife and people.

## SPECIES HIGHLIGHT

### Ironwood Trees



Ironwood trees, named because their wood is so dense it does not float, live several hundred years and serve as “nurse trees” for other species such as the saguaro cactus.

© Bob Wick, BLM

Ironwood Forest was designated as a national monument with strong community support over 25 years ago.

Spanning 129,000 acres in the Sonoran Desert, this protected region provides habitat and connectivity for Arizona’s native species, protects countless historic and scientific resources and preserves the freedom of current and future generations to explore these public lands intact.

Thousands of ancient ironwood trees, which can live to over 800 years old, dot the landscape, supporting a diverse ecosystem that is home to bighorn sheep, desert tortoise and the lesser long-nosed bat. The national monument is in the homelands of the Tohono O’odham Nation. Humans have inhabited the area for millennia and more than 200 archaeological and cultural sites from the Hohokam period (600 A.D. to 1440 A.D.) are recorded in the area.

The monument includes the Los Robles Archaeological District and three areas listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These sites offer unique visitor experiences and capture the region’s distinct cultural identity and natural heritage.

### Ironwood Forest National Monument Under Threat

The threat of copper mining now looms over this special landscape. The monument is reportedly [under review by the Trump administration](#) and legislation introduced in Congress would, if passed, abolish its protections entirely. Opening Ironwood Forest to mining would jeopardize clean air and water, fragment wildlife habitat and limit the public’s ability to access and enjoy these lands.

### Protecting Ironwood Forest National Monument

Protections for the monument are broadly supported by the Tohono O’odham Nation, as well as local governments, businesses and grassroots groups. Local organizations such as Friends of Ironwood Forest and the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection have continuously advocated for maintaining protections for the monument, and local governments in the area have followed suit—Pima County, Tucson and Marana have all passed resolutions opposing any reductions in the monument’s boundaries or loosening of its protections. Their leadership underscores how deeply conservation, community health and long-term stewardship are valued across the region.

COLORADO

# Western Colorado Canyons and Mesas

Beloved high desert, recreation hub could soon be open to oil and gas



© Bob Wick, BLM

The traditional homelands for area Tribes, Western Colorado exists at the intersection of several prized ecosystems—mountains, rivers, canyons and the high desert—that offer abundant recreational opportunities, like fishing, hunting, rafting and hiking.

These are landscapes that sustain clean air and safe water, support rich wildlife and offer visitors the freedom to enjoy and connect with places that have shaped communities for generations.

The Colorado River, often called the lifeblood of the West, courses through the region’s verdant valleys. The river is critical for natural and human communities across the entire southwestern United States, supporting Western Colorado’s ranching heritage and essential habitat for native fish like the Colorado River Cutthroat trout and hundreds of species of birds and mammals, including elk, mule deer and bighorn sheep. After losing in court to the state of Colorado and conservation groups, the BLM finalized balanced resource management plans for its Colorado River Valley and Grand Junction field offices in late 2024, which included important protections for the region.

## Western Colorado Canyons and Mesas Under Threat

Reckless oil and gas development looms once again over Western Colorado’s sensitive wildlife habitat, cultural sites and wildlands, as both management plans are at risk of being rescinded. This would open the vast majority of lands to oil and gas leasing—including beloved recreation areas and important cultural sites—and overturn years of local public input on the plans.

Proposals in Congress would nullify several land management plans, including for the Colorado River Valley and Grand Junction, as well as others in Colorado, replacing them with older, problematic versions of the plans that could open more than 1 million acres of public lands and minerals to new oil and gas leasing. For example, recent use of the Congressional Review Act to overturn land-use plans that were adopted with extensive public input has created precedent that undermines communities’ ability to shape how their public lands are managed. It also threatens future conservation and introduces legal uncertainty across millions of acres in Western Colorado and across the West.

## Protecting Western Colorado Canyons and Mesas

Local environmental groups, sportsmen groups and national organizations have joined together to advocate for protections for mid- and lower-elevation lands that are critical to conserve the region’s robust biodiversity and habitat for wildlife in the face of a warming climate.

## ZOOMING IN Recreation Opportunities



© Mason Cummings, TWS

The outdoor recreation economy in Colorado generated **\$65.8 billion in 2023 and supports more than 404,000 jobs** in the state. From whitewater rafting on the upper Colorado River to biking the Lunch Loops and 18 Road trails near Grand Junction, Western Colorado offers world-class outdoor recreation opportunities that could soon be in jeopardy if oil and gas is allowed in these treasured areas.

## SPECIES HIGHLIGHT

### Eastern Collared Lizard



The eastern collared lizard is one of the most colorful lizard species in the Southwest, frequently seen sunning on rocks during the spring, summer and fall.

“If you want to get out and connect with nature, the public lands in Western Colorado provide an amazing opportunity that certainly brings me a lot of happiness. I just try to share that with the people and really try to highlight the fact that being in these unique places is a privilege that is worth maintaining.”

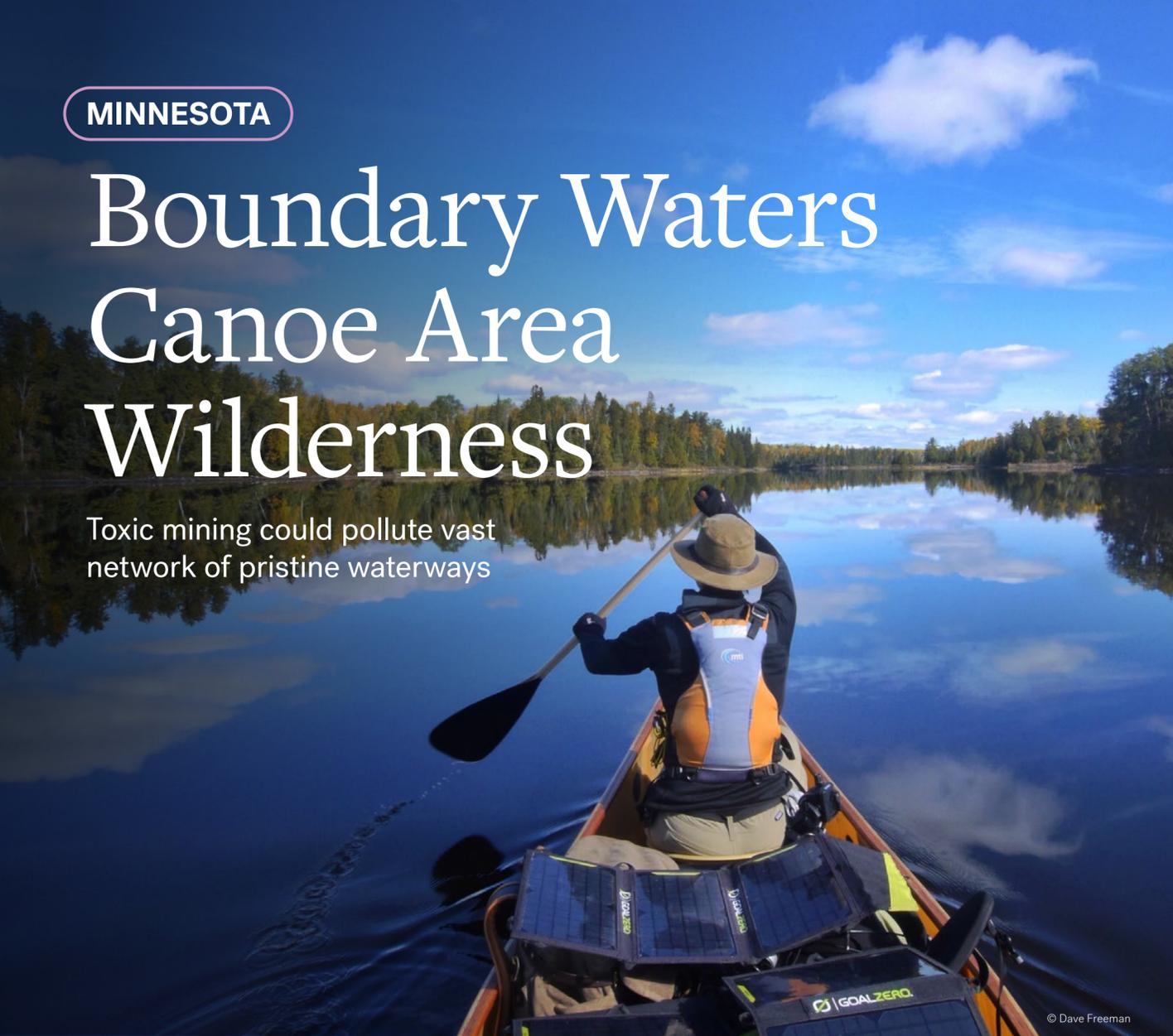


**Vince Anderson**

Owner of Skyward Mountaineering, Grand Valley Outdoor Recreation Council board member, athlete ambassador for Grivel, Scarpa and Patagonia

# Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness

Toxic mining could pollute vast network of pristine waterways



Located in Northeast Minnesota, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (Boundary Waters) is one of America's most visited wilderness areas.

Visitors to the Boundary Waters have the freedom to paddle and portage a vast and interconnected system of lakes, streams and rivers that spans 1 million acres of wilderness and marvel at one of the world's largest "dark sky sanctuaries," which features dazzling views of the northern lights.

Not only is recreation in the Boundary Waters uniquely accessible for a range of ages and abilities, the landscape and large aquatic ecosystem also serve as important habitat for iconic wildlife such as moose, Canada lynx and gray wolves. The region also provides important subsistence resources like wild rice to Indigenous Anishinaabe people, who retain longstanding treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather there.

“

**Our tourism and hospitality industry is our biggest employer in our community. And so I worry about the ripple effects of having a copper nickel mine on the edge of the wilderness...What is the economic benefit in the short term? Is that copper more valuable than clean potable water with healthy fisheries and healthy wild rice for centuries into the future?**



**Lacey Squier**  
Manager, Boundary Waters Connect

## Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Under Threat

For many years, mining corporations have coveted mineral deposits in the area. Recognizing the unacceptable threats that proposed mining activities pose to the wilderness, subsistence foods and numerous other resources and values in the Boundary Waters watershed, then-Interior Secretary Deb Haaland issued a 20-year mining ban in January 2023. The decision followed a robust public engagement and environmental review process that included multiple comment periods and public meetings.

Now, the second Trump administration is taking steps to rush mining projects across many public lands, with a bullseye right above the Boundary Waters.

A mine in this landscape could have disastrous impacts as pollutants such as sulfuric acid and heavy metals could be carried downstream into the wilderness, contaminating the pristine waters the landscape is known and protected for.

## Protecting Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness

The movement to protect the Boundary Waters has truly been a locally led initiative, with thousands of Minnesotans making their voices heard, saying "no way" to toxic mining at the doorstep of this national treasure. The fight to save the Boundary Waters, however, extends beyond Minnesota and is wildly popular across the country—nearly 250,000 people voiced support for the 20-year mining moratorium during a 2022 public comment period.

Since mining once again threatens the landscape, local groups and members of the Minnesota delegation continue to fight for protections, for today and for future generations. The recently introduced Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection Act, for example, would permanently protect the watershed of the Boundary Waters.



### ZOOMING IN Abundant Source of Clean Water

The surrounding 3-million-acre Superior National Forest holds 20% of the freshwater in the entire National Forest System, adding to the region's unique role in providing abundant sources of clean water today and for future generations. Sources of clean water are crucial for healthy habitats,

for both humans and wildlife, especially as climate change increases the risk of harmful algal blooms and other threats. Opening the landscape up to dangerous sulfide-ore copper mining could risk permanently leaching toxic heavy metals into the area's vast interconnected waterways.



### SPECIES HIGHLIGHT Common Loon

The Boundary Waters provide a perfect haven for the common loon. Their iconic calls can be heard from quiet lakeshores across the waterways of the wilderness.

The Ruby Mountains, often called the “Swiss Alps of Nevada,” are known for their unparalleled outdoor recreation and hunting opportunities.

The rugged landscape in northeastern Nevada draws hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts from around the world, offering the freedom to adventure and enjoy the refuge of public lands.

The area is the ancestral homeland of the Te-Moak Tribe of the Western Shoshone Indians and provides critical habitat for wildlife, including Nevada’s largest mule deer herd and the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout.

The region has a storied history of Tribes, conservationists, sportsmen and local communities coming together to fight energy interests and keep the area protected for future generations. This effort has been backed by Nevadans, who overwhelmingly support protecting air, water and recreation over maximizing lands available for oil and gas drilling and mining. In late 2024, the Biden administration announced a proposal to ban oil and gas and geothermal development in the region.

“ We’re all holding hands on this effort to say: ‘This area is very special to all of us. We all use it and we don’t want it jeopardized by oil and gas leasing, because it flat out doesn’t make sense in this area.’ This place is too special and there are appropriate uses on the landscape, but oil and gas is not one of them here in the Ruby Mountains.

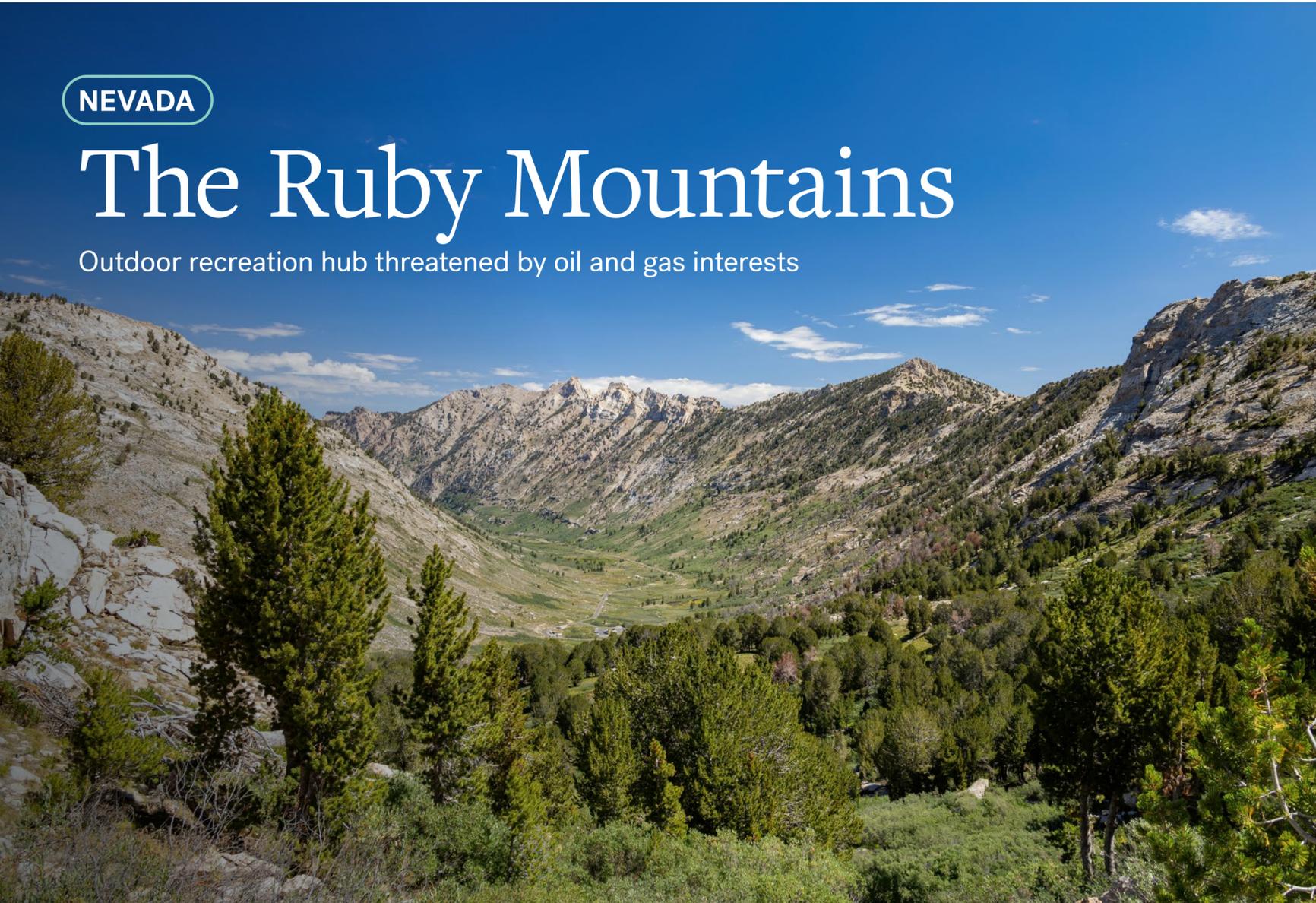


**Russell Kuhlman**  
Executive Director,  
Nevada Wildlife Federation

NEVADA

# The Ruby Mountains

Outdoor recreation hub threatened by oil and gas interests



## ZOOMING IN Recreation Opportunities



The diverse adventure opportunities in the Ruby Mountains contribute to Nevada’s nearly [\\$14-billion annual recreation economy, which supports more than 75,000 jobs](#). Recreation in the area includes outstanding hunting and fishing, world-class backcountry skiing, popular mountain biking trails and the 48-mile Ruby Crest backpacking trail. Without permanent protection for the area, these activities and the local and state economies that rely on them will be on shaky ground.

## SPECIES HIGHLIGHT Lahontan Cutthroat Trout



The state fish of Nevada, Lahontan cutthroat trout, a federally listed threatened species, is native to the Lahontan Basin of northeastern Nevada. The cold, clean alpine lakes and streams of the Ruby Mountains provide high-quality habitat for the fish.

## The Ruby Mountains Under Threat

In April 2025, the Trump administration walked away from the proposal to ban oil and gas development on nearly 264,000 acres in the Rubies for the next 20 years. Industry has shown no interest in drilling in the Rubies to date due to the low potential for oil and gas resources, but once lands are leased, even if just for corporate speculation, those lands are managed for oil and gas development and not for other uses such as recreation or wildlife habitat restoration.

## Protecting The Ruby Mountains

The hunting community led the effort to bring stakeholders together to stand up against attempts to drill for oil and gas in the Rubies. One effort is working to permanently protect the Rubies from oil and gas development through legislation. Communities across Nevada, along with the entire bipartisan congressional delegation, remain dedicated to opposing drilling in the Rubies and ensuring future generations can enjoy this unique landscape.



NEW MEXICO

# The Greater Chaco Region

Oil and gas drilling jeopardizes sacred landscape

© Mason Cummings, TWS

The Greater Chaco Region, which surrounds Chaco Culture National Historical Park (Chaco Canyon) in Northwest New Mexico, is a sacred landscape important to the ongoing cultural practices of the Pueblo, Hopi and other Indigenous peoples throughout the Southwest.

The Greater Chaco Region has been a cultural center to Indigenous people since time immemorial. These places were significant points of migration and movement, centers for social, economic and cultural learning and exchange that descendants of the ancestral Chaco still use today. Large-scale ceremonial structures, known as kivas, and dozens of ancient villages, roads and shrines that were built by the Ancestral Puebloan peoples between 850 and 1250 BCE, offer a glimpse into this world.

For modern-day Pueblo, Hopi and other Indigenous peoples in the area, Chaco Canyon is much more than a historical site. It's a direct, continuous connection with their ancestors and a place integral to their ongoing cultural practices. And that connection doesn't stop at the boundaries of the national park.

## ZOOMING IN Cultural Resources



© Mason Cummings, TWS

The Greater Chaco Region is a living, ancestral landscape, replete with invaluable cultural resources and deeply sacred to Indigenous people of the Southwest since time immemorial.

For centuries, Greater Chaco has been a major center of Pueblo culture. In fact, the 10-mile protective zone around Chaco Canyon is likely home to over 4,000 archaeological and historic sites. Today, the area remains integral to the ongoing cultural practices of the Pueblo, Hopi and other Tribes throughout the Southwest.

## HIGHLIGHT Starry Dark Skies



© Mason Cummings, TWS

The Greater Chaco Region's night skies are some of the darkest in the country due to its remote location and high elevation, giving the national park the title of an International Dark Sky Park.

## The Greater Chaco Region Under Threat

However, in recent years, more than 90% of public lands in the area have been leased for oil and gas drilling, and over 37,000 wells have been drilled, putting sacred sites and wildlife across the Greater Chaco Region at risk of being destroyed by drill pads, pipelines and a web of industrial access roads. Continued oil and gas development poses significant threats to the cultural resources left by the Ancestral Pueblo and other Tribes.

In 2023, advocates to protect the Greater Chaco Region breathed a small sigh of relief when after a lengthy public engagement process, the Department of the Interior approved a mineral withdrawal that banned new oil and gas leasing for the next 20 years.

But these hard-won protections are now in jeopardy. A day-one executive order by the Trump administration directed the Department of the Interior to reassess any public land mineral withdrawals for potential revision, including the Greater Chaco withdrawal.

## Protecting The Greater Chaco Region

Local communities and New Mexicans have been far from silent, calling for the continued protection of this culturally significant landscape. The entire New Mexico congressional delegation supported the withdrawal and they have introduced a bill to permanently protect the Greater Chaco Region from new oil and gas leasing. During the Trump administration, the fight has continued: The National Congress of American Indians and the All Pueblo Council of Governors both recently passed resolutions calling to defend federal protections in the Greater Chaco Region.

**“ I, as an Acoma woman, would not be who I am without places such as Chaco...If these landscapes were ever obliterated by development, we as Acoma people would be missing a pillar of our history, we would not be Pueblo people.**



**Theresa Pasqual**

Executive Vice President of Indigenous Affairs at Crow Canyon Archaeological Center



UTAH

# Bears Ears National Monument

Tribal Nation interests and red-rock country threatened by mining and drilling

© Mason Cummings, TWS

Established in 2016, Bears Ears National Monument in southeast Utah contains more than 100,000 archaeological and ancestral sites that are associated with Tribal stories and traditions, including remarkably well-preserved cultural resources like petroglyphs and ancient dwellings.

It was the first national monument designated at the request of Tribal Nations. The Hopi Tribe, Navajo (Diné) Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Zuni Tribe and Ute Indian Tribe of The Uintah and Ouray Reservation formed a coalition to protect these sacred lands and their ancestral resources.

The red-rock landscape includes stunning piñon-juniper forest and desert punctuated by dramatic sandstone mesas, canyons and arches, making it a prized area for outdoor recreation, as rock climbers and hikers come from all over the country to explore the landscape and camp. The monument also contains significant paleontological troves of Triassic-period fossils. Protecting this place ensures that future generations can continue exploring, learning and connecting with this extraordinary landscape.

## Bears Ears National Monument Under Threat

The toxic effects of uranium mining have plagued Native communities in the Southwest for decades; pollution to air, soil and water in the region has been linked to cancer, kidney disease and other health threats. In 2016, President Trump issued a proclamation that slashed Bears Ears by about 85% and opened up much of the landscape to uranium and other mining interests, plus oil and gas drilling. President Biden later restored and expanded the monument, but it remains under threat.

In 2025, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum ordered a monuments review, putting Bears Ears protections, along with other national monuments, up for consideration for possible energy development. Rollbacks of protections for Bears Ears would undermine Tribal Nation priorities and interests, jeopardize irreplaceable cultural and ecological resources and strip communities of their freedom to shape the future of their homelands.

## Protecting Bears Ears National Monument

In 2022, the five Tribes of the Bears Ears Commission signed a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service defining and expanding the collaborative management model that will ensure the protection of sacred places, cultural heritage and the environment. This sets a powerful precedent for Tribal leadership and shared stewardship in public lands management. The plan was finalized in early 2025.

The approval of the plan was a historic achievement and a prime example of how collaboration among Tribal Nations, federal agencies and stakeholders can shape a resilient future for the region—one grounded in conservation values, cultural continuity and responsibility to future generations.



**We've been here since time immemorial. I will continue to be that advocate. I will continue to voice the issues and to help other Tribes across this nation, but also to educate those that don't fully understand the importance of coalition work, not only with Bears Ears. I'm so excited to sit alongside the other Tribes and continue to share our vision.**

**Davina Smith-Idjesa**

Bears Ears Intertribal Coalition representative and Co-chair, from the Navajo Nation



## ZOOMING IN Support for Co-stewardship



Voters in Utah overwhelmingly support Bears Ears National Monument and the protection of public lands in general. A [recent survey](#) revealed that a majority of voters support Native American co-stewardship of ancestral lands and four in five favor keeping the landmark collaborative management plan between Tribes and land managers in place for Bears Ears, reflecting a deep public commitment to conservation, shared access to public lands and preserving these landscapes for future generations.

## SPECIES HIGHLIGHT Numerous Endangered Species



Bears Ears National Monument is home to at least 18 species listed under the Endangered Species Act, including the California condor and the Mexican spotted owl.

Stretching across 1.8 million acres of rivers, towering slot canyons, stunning red-rock arches and epic sandstone walls, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is a vibrant landscape, alive with history and cultural importance.



UTAH

# Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

Mining and drilling threats loom over iconic landscape and fossil beds

© Jenny Tarpley, BLM

The monument in southern Utah is a place of gathering for many Tribes that have lived in and around Grand Staircase-Escalante since time immemorial. Nicknamed “the Science Monument,” the landscape features unique scientific and historical resources that advance understanding of Southwestern landscapes. It also contains one of the highest concentrations of well-preserved dinosaur fossils in the world.

President Bill Clinton designated the landscape as a national monument in 1996. In 2017, the Trump administration removed protections from nearly half of the monument to make way for extractive development, including coal mining, oil and gas drilling and road-building.

Immediately, a coalition of conservation, scientific and local groups came together to file a lawsuit to block this egregious attack and ensure the monument is protected for future generations. In 2021, President Biden restored the boundaries of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, returning protections for natural and cultural sites.

## Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Under Threat

This iconic landscape once again faces grave threats. In 2025, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum ordered a review of Grand Staircase-Escalante and other national monuments, raising the possibility of energy development in the area. Opening Grand Staircase-Escalante to mining and oil and gas drilling would threaten culturally and scientifically significant sites, poison community drinking water, destroy intact habitat for rare plants and animals and limit freedom to enjoy the beauty and wonder of this national monument.

## Protecting Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

In 2025, representatives of six Tribes, including the Hopi Tribe, the Navajo Nation, the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and the Zuni Tribe announced the formation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante Inter-Tribal Coalition. The coalition puts a spotlight on the necessary input of Tribal knowledge and expertise to ensure the landscape remains protected and not handed over to private industry in the name of a fictitious “energy emergency.” The Tribes within this coalition have written directly to Secretary Burgum requesting the Department of the Interior to maintain the boundaries of the monument, honor government-to-government consultation and meet directly with Tribal leaders.

“Our villages now, today are living museums...and in the future, my kids, my grandkids, my grandkids’ kids, I want them to go there and look at what I’ve seen through my lens, my eyes. If we don’t protect it, if we don’t respect it, then it’s going to go away.”

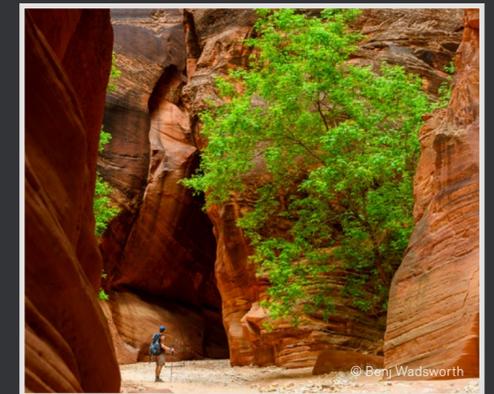
**Craig Andrews**

Former Vice Chairman of the Hopi Tribe



### ZOOMING IN

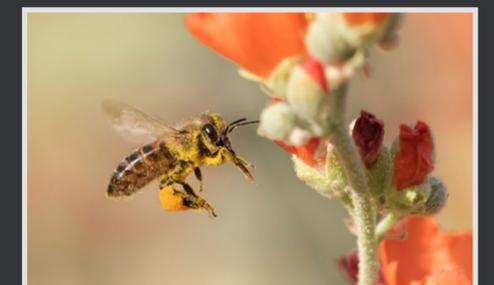
## Local Economic Benefits



Grand Staircase-Escalante is a thriving destination for tourists from around the globe who come to enjoy the freedom to hike, backpack and camp in its extensive network of slot canyons and rock formations. Since its formal designation in 1996, monument status has bolstered the economies of local communities. In fact, personal income in neighboring counties grew by 32% since the monument’s establishment, according to a [study by Headwaters Economics](#).

### SPECIES HIGHLIGHT

## Bee Species



The monument is buzzing with more than 600 bee species, nearly as many as in the entire Eastern United States.

WYOMING

# The Northern Red Desert and Big Sandy Foothills

Colorful badlands and wildlife corridors threatened by drill rigs and pollution



© Mason Cummings, TWS

In the southwest corner of Wyoming, the Northern Red Desert and Big Sandy Foothills are vast, wide-open public lands rich with cultural sites and wildlife habitats.

They are home to Wyoming's longest pronghorn migration, and contain critical habitat for mule deer, elk and imperiled bird species like burrowing owls, golden eagles and sage-grouse. Visitors flock to these landscapes for backcountry experiences including solitary hiking, gravel-road bike-packing, family camping, hunting and traditional food-gathering.

These landscapes are the traditional lands for several Tribes, including the Eastern Shoshone, Northern Arapaho, Ute, Crow and Northern Cheyenne. For generations, these lands have supported cultural traditions, clean air, wildlife and the freedom to roam, hunt and experience solitude in wide-open country.

Some of the country's most recognizable iconic historic trails, including the Oregon, California and Mormon Pioneer trails and a segment of the Continental Divide National Recreation Trail, wind across these landscapes. Safeguarding these areas means protecting both Wyoming's natural heritage and opportunities for future generations to explore these lands.

In late 2024, after an extensive public input process, the Bureau of Land Management finalized the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan, which better balanced local infrastructure and energy needs with conservation of these special lands.

“

**Concerned citizens and organizations have been inspired to protect the Northern Red Desert from exploitation, development and fragmentation since the late 1800s. I hope that with all these efforts, we can finally get some protection and real conservation actions in place so we can keep this space as it is for us and for future generations.**



**Andrea Orabona**  
Retired wildlife biologist

## The Northern Red Desert and Big Sandy Foothills Under Threat

Oil and gas drilling threatens these iconic landscapes once again. The BLM reopened the widely celebrated resource management plan for the region, raising concerns that the agency's new leadership will scrap years' worth of careful planning and public input to produce a new plan that offers far fewer protections for important wildlife habitat and recreation areas.

ZOOMING IN

## Crucial Habitat for Migrating Wildlife



© Mason Cummings, TWS

Every fall, thousands of animals migrate out of the nearby mountain ranges, sometimes traveling over 100 miles, to spend their winters in this high desert before returning in the spring to the lush forests of the Wind River, Gros Ventre and Wyoming Ranges.

SPECIES HIGHLIGHT

## Pronghorn



© Mason Cummings, TWS

Wyoming has the largest pronghorn population in the world.

## Protecting The Northern Red Desert and Big Sandy Foothills

Today, many grassroots citizen groups and community organizations are actively engaged in efforts to ensure that the Northern Red Desert and Big Sandy Foothills will remain intact with preserved cultural heritage sites and healthy wildlife habitats for future generations to enjoy. Organizations like the Wyoming Outdoor Council, Wyoming Wilderness Association and Friends of the Red Desert have been leading tours in the area for decades to elevate the invaluable qualities these landscapes provide.



© Mason Cummings, TWS

The 10 American landscapes in this report face a common threat: a dangerous agenda to expand oil, gas and mining on public lands at the expense of communities' health, economic prosperity, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and cultural resources and values.

The stories in this report represent the fight to keep these places protected. Together, we send a clear message: **Our public lands are not for sale.**

**For more information:**

**Kim Stevens**

Director, Climate Policy Advocacy

[kim\\_stevens@tws.org](mailto:kim_stevens@tws.org)

720-647-9524

[wilderness.org/notforsale](https://wilderness.org/notforsale)

This report would not be possible without the guidance and support of TWS staff, partners and the 11 incredible spokespeople featured who graciously shared their stories and perspectives. Thank you.

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