



Protecting the places you love to hike

March 11, 2019

House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: American Hiking Society Supports Strong National Monuments Protections

Chairman Raúl Grijalva and Ranking Member Rob Bishop,

On behalf of American Hiking Society, our members, supporters, and the millions-strong hiking community, we thank the committee for holding this important oversight hearing, “Forgotten Voices: The Inadequate Review and Improper Alteration of Our National Monuments.”

Public Lands are a haven for recreation that must be protected

The nearly 1,000,000 square miles that comprise federally managed public lands are our most treasured natural resource.¹ Whether a hiker enjoying the 193,500 miles of trails or one of the 145 million recreation users, these lands are of enormous personal value.² Our public lands are treasured by Americans and tourists from around the world, creating an emotional and spiritual connection with every visit. These lands are of immense cultural and historical importance for the original indigenous stewards of the land, whose peoples have called this land home for centuries. Public lands are also an economic driver for the recreation economy, generating 508,740 jobs and an economic output of \$52 billion each year.³ Unfortunately, due to actions by the current administration, access to our public lands are at risk.

National Monuments Must Be Protected and Expanded, Not Reduced

In April 2017, President Trump ordered a review of all National Monuments designated since 1996; and former Department of Interior (DOI) Secretary Ryan Zinke subsequently recommended cutting 223 million acres of National Monuments protection, reverting the areas back to unprotected status.⁴ In December 2017, the Administration enacted the first cuts, shrinking the

¹ American Hiking Society, Public Lands Position Statement, <https://americanhiking.org/advocacy/public-lands-policy-statement/>.

² American Hiking Society, Hiking Trails In America 16 (June 2015), https://americanhiking.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/AHS_RPT_fnl_LOW.pdf; ProtectOurPublicLand.org, This Land Is Our Land, <https://www.protectourpublicland.org/>; Outdoor Industry Association, The Outdoor Recreation Economy 16 (2017) https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf.

³ Headwaters Economics, Updated Summary: The Economic Importance of National Monuments to Local Communities (Spring 2017), <https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/monuments-summary.pdf> citing Rasker, R., P.H. Gude, M. Delorey. 2013. The Effect of Protected Federal Lands on Economic Prosperity in the NonMetropolitan West. Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy.

⁴ Executive Order, Review of Designations Under the Antiquities Act (Apr. 26, 2017), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-executive-order-review-designations-antiquities-act/>;

Bears Ears National Monument by 85% (the largest shrinkage of protected public land in history) and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by about 40%, for a total of 2,000,000 acres. In February 2018, the Administration opened this acreage to claims by energy developers, and attempts have been made to extract resources from these areas.⁵

Luckily, a mining company that owns rights within Grand Staircase-Escalante scrapped initial plans to mine due to apparent financial struggles.⁶ However, the threat to energy development in these previously protected areas remains a grave concern, given the administration's focus on "energy dominance."⁷ Just last month, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved a mine expansion just outside the original boundaries of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.⁸

Reductions in National Monuments Threaten Recreation

The cuts to Grand Staircase- Escalante and Bears Ears removed the protected status of almost 60% (245 miles) of hiking trails within the monuments.⁹ The erosion of protected monument status and new energy development can deprive hikers, anglers, hunters, campers, and all other permitted users the opportunity to enjoy their desired form of recreation; obstruct views; and generate noise and air pollution. Additionally, these changes are likely to negatively impact the recreation economy, including rural areas that rely on recreation for their livelihoods. For example, Kane and Garfield counties, in which Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument sits, had seen economic growth since the initial monument designation, with the leisure and hospitality sector now making up 34% and 47% of the counties' economy.¹⁰ A recent study found that protected public lands increase per capita income in rural counties by \$4,360 relative to counties with unprotected public lands.¹¹

We urge the committee to inquire whether DOI considered the local economic impact of curtailing recreation activities when deciding to alter monument designations.

Press Release, Secretary Zinke Sends Monument Report to the White House, Aug. 24, 2017, available at <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-zinke-sends-monument-report-white-house>.

⁵ Wilderness Society, Starting today, companies can mine in former Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante (Feb. 2, 2018),

<https://wilderness.org/blog/starting-today-companies-can-mine-former-bears-ears-and-grand-staircase-escalante>;

Kathryn Van Waes, American Hiking Society, What Just Happened in Utah,

<https://americanhiking.org/blog/what-just-happened-in-utah/>; President Donald Trump, Remarks on Antiquities Act Designations (Dec. 4, 2017), available at

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-antiquities-act-designations/>.

⁶Chris D'Angelo, *Canadian Firm Scraps Plan to Mine Land that Trump Stripped from Utah Monument*, HUFF. POST., Feb. 1, 2019, available at

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/grand-staircase-copper-mine-cancelled-trump-monument_us_5c54744ce4b00187b550761f.

⁷ Press Release, Dep't of Interior, The War on Coal is Over: Interior Announces Historic Coal Projects in Utah (Feb. 14, 2019), available at <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/war-coal-over-interior-announces-historic-coal-projects-utah>.

⁸ Brady McCombs, *Trump Administration approves 2 coal mining projects in Utah*, SALT LAKE TRIBUNE, Feb. 14, 2019, available at <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2019/02/15/trump-administration/>.

⁹ 195.8 miles of hiking trails lost protection within Bears Ears (86% reduction) and 49.8 miles of hiking trails within Grand Staircase-Escalante (26% reduction).

¹⁰Juliet Eilperin, *A Diminished Monument*, WAPO, Jan. 15, 2019, available at

https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/national/environment/will-anyone-mine-after-grand-staircase-escalante-reduction-by-trump/?utm_term=.729dd0e185ca.

¹¹ Headwaters Economics, Updated Summary: The Economic Importance of National Monuments to Local Communities (Spring 2017),

<https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/monuments-summary.pdf> citing Rasker, R., P.H. Gude, M.

Delorey. 2013. The Effect of Protected Federal Lands on Economic Prosperity in the NonMetropolitan West. Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy.

Congress must act to protect all National Monuments

To prevent further monument reductions, Congress must solidify its sole authority to modify National Monuments, including by passing:

- America's Natural Treasures of Immeasurable Quality Unite, Inspire, and Together Improve the Economies of States (ANTIQUITIES) Act of 2019 (H.R. 1050), introduced by Rep. Debra Halland (D-NM-1).¹² The ANTIQUITIES Act of 2019 ensures America's treasured national monuments are protected against relentless attacks on public lands and enhances future monuments by requiring presidentially designated monuments be treated the same as congressionally designated monuments, including in management, planning, and resource allocation.
- Bears Ears Expansion and Respect for Sovereignty Act (H.R. 871), introduced by Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ-7) restores protected status to the 85% of the monument that was cut.¹³ The bill respects the sacred land of local tribes by expanding the monument to fully protect the sacred artifacts and cultural resources within Bears Ears and requires tribal consultation in how the land is managed.

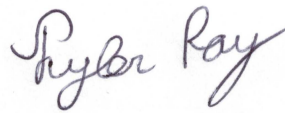
We face a critical moment in the protection of our public lands for future generations. As a country, we must recognize the personal and economic benefit of recreation that these lands provide and move federal land managers away from a singular focus on the finite goals of energy development and energy dominance. This hearing is an important first step in recognizing the necessity of strong public land and National Monument protections. We look forward to continuing to work with the committee to protect and preserve our public lands.

Please contact Tyler Ray, Director of Policy and Advocacy, American Hiking Society, tray@americanhiking.org with any questions.

Thank you,



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¹² ANTIQUITIES Act of 2019, H.R. 1050, 116th Cong. (2019).

¹³ Bears Ears Expansion and Respect for Sovereignty Act, H.R. 871, 116th. Cong. (2019).