



March 12, 2019

Dear Representative,

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. On behalf of our more than 1.3 million members and supporters nationwide, we urge you to consider our perspectives and support for the protection of Southern Utah's Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments during the Wednesday, March 13th Full Committee hearing in House Natural Resources. Like many of the voices you will hear from this week, NPCA supports the noted monuments under their original boundaries, as established through the Antiquities Act under Presidential Proclamation 9558 (2016) for Bears Ears National Monument and Presidential Proclamation 6920 (1996) for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

The Antiquities Act of 1906 is one of the most important tools available for the preservation of public federal lands and historical sites for all Americans to enjoy. The Act was passed by a Republican-led Congress and signed by a Republican President, Theodore Roosevelt, and empowers the President to set aside as national monuments federal lands whose nationally significant resources are at risk. For over 100 years the Antiquities Act has been used as an important conservation tool by Presidents from both parties. With the exception of the Organic Act of 1916, no law has had more influence over the development of the modern National Park System.

The original monument boundaries for both Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments provided thoughtful protection for Southern Utah's public lands, including adjacent Canyonlands, Capitol Reef and Bryce Canyon National Parks, Natural Bridges National Monument and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. These park units, as well as the resources protected under both Establishing Proclamations, are now gravely threatened by the diminution of the original monument boundaries and the Bureau of Land Management's rush to develop new management plans; plans that threaten the landscapes illegally removed from protection by the Trump administration in December 2017, as well as their adjacent national park units.

Protection for national parks can only be assured when their adjacent lands are well managed. Activities outside the boundaries of national park units can and often do have dramatic adverse effects on the parks themselves. The reduction of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments threatens the nearby national park units with incompatible adjacent activities such as mining, drilling, extensive off-road vehicle use and livestock grazing, right of way development for pipelines and communications and intensive vegetation treatments, which can harm park resources including dark night skies, natural soundscapes, clean, clear air and water, wildlife habitat, expansive viewsheds, paleontological and cultural resources, visitor experience and the area's tourism economies.

Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument and Surrounding National Parks

NPCA is a strong supporter of President Clinton's Proclamation 6920 creating the original Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument over 21 years ago, and as ratified and enlarged by Congress on multiple occasions. When President Clinton issued this proclamation, he protected lands rich in geological, paleontological, ecological and cultural resources, as well as scenic views and recreation opportunities in the iconic canyon country adjacent to and surrounded by three crown jewels of the National Park System: Bryce Canyon National Park, Capitol Reef National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. For more than twenty years, the BLM managed the Grand Staircase-Escalante lands in accordance with their protected status, thereby contributing to preservation of the clean air, clear night skies, unspoiled vistas, and natural soundscapes in the surrounding parks.

December 2017, President Trump signed Proclamation 9682 illegally excluding nearly 862,000 acres from the original monument boundaries and dividing the remaining monument land into three smaller, disjointed national monument units: Grand Staircase, Kaiparowits, and Escalante Canyon. Today, BLM is rushing to develop new management plans for the three monument units as well as the land adjacent to the national parks that was removed from the original monument boundaries. So far in the planning process, the BLM is proposing to allow activities within the reduced monument and on lands excised from the original monument which were prohibited or limited under the 1996 proclamation. The new and more intensive activities and the night lighting that accompanies mining and drilling would result in intrusion into national park unit viewsheds, degradation of their night skies, disruption of their natural quiet, and degradation of their air, soil and water quality.

Bears Ears National Monument and Surrounding National Parks

NPCA is also a strong supporter of President Obama's Proclamation 9558, establishing Bears Ears National Monument in 2016. This designation provided better security for the management of Southeastern Utah's public lands, including Canyonlands National Park, Natural Bridges National Monument and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. In fact, NPCA has a long-standing commitment to protect a significant portion of the original Bears Ears area of northern San Juan County, adjacent to Canyonlands National Park. Since 1988, we have publicly advocated for expanded protections of the natural and cultural resources around Canyonlands National Park through our Canyonlands Completion campaign. Our vision includes extending protections from the existing national park boundary to the natural erosional boundary of the Wingate cliffs—this better incorporates the whole basin, as well as adjacent cultural and natural resources, while removing some of the external threats to park resources.

NPCA's Canyonlands Completion area closely aligns with the original Bears Ears National Monument boundary (Proclamation 9558) to the east and south of Canyonlands National Park. To the east of Canyonlands, the original Bears Ears National Monument included Lockhart Basin up to the rim of the Wingate cliffs, where threats from irresponsible off-road vehicle use and resource extraction within the viewshed of Canyonlands National Park are longstanding concerns for the National Park Service (NPS) and NPCA. Potential resource development within Lockhart Basin, as well as on the rim of the basin threatens not only the views from within the park, but dark night skies, natural sounds and air and water quality—all critical resources and values of the national park.

To the south of Canyonlands, NPCA's proposal for Canyonlands Completion also includes extending protections to incorporate Beef Basin, with its substantial archeological and cultural sites, as well as areas near Newspaper Rock State Historic Monument and Indian Creek. Just as in NPCA's proposal, these contiguous cultural sites were incorporated into the larger protected landscape of the original Bears Ears National Monument. However, as part of the 2017 monument reduction, Lockhart Basin and the land south of Canyonlands are now unprotected.

In addition to Canyonlands National Park, the original national monument boundaries at Bears Ears secured protection for other national park units both inside and adjacent to the monument, including Natural Bridges National Monument and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. The reduced monument under Proclamation 9681 removed those protections and again put the adjacent landscapes at risk to incompatible uses.

Utah's public lands are cherished by residents and millions of visitors for their spectacular scenery and rich recreational, cultural and paleontological values. Removing protections for Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments could irreparably harm the connected landscape, adversely affect our national parks and the vibrant tourism economy this region supports. We urge the committee to join us in our support for these remarkable landscapes and the communities they support.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Cory MacNulty at cmacnulty@npca.org.

Sincerely,

Ani Kame'enui
Legislative Director