



# FIELDREPORT

Southwest Region • Winter 2019



## Outlook for the 116th Congress

**T**he 2018 midterm election resulted in a 116th Congress that will look more like the fabric of America. For starters, 126 women—the most ever—will serve in the House of Representatives and the Senate, representing over 23 percent of Congress. The class of freshmen House members will include: the first two Native American women, the first two Hispanic women representing Texas, a Rhodes scholar/Harvard-educated lawyer/rap artist, a National Teacher of the Year recipient, over a dozen military veterans, and two former professional football players. The diversity of backgrounds, opinions and ideas will help move our democracy forward.

Additionally, there's plenty of good news for national parks. Voters elected new House members with pro-environmental agendas in places where we haven't had pro-park votes in many years, or ever. If these new members of Congress—representing districts in Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma and southern California—vote even once in favor of a park issue, it will be enormous progress on the political map for national park legislation. As political fights loom

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**Top:** Winter sunrise in Great Sand Dunes National Park. ©Marek Uliasz | Dreamstime **Right:** January snow in Saguaro National Park. ©Kevin Dahl

## Parks and Public Lands Need Public Engagement Now More Than Ever

**T**he new year is a time for reflection and taking stock. For the most part, 2018 was profoundly challenging. We saw multiple unprecedented assaults on our national parks and public lands as well as bold face threats to bedrock environmental laws that protect our air, water and wildlife. Here in NPCA's Southwest region, we feel our magnificent and culturally significant national parks and protected public lands are ground zero for the pernicious intentions of this administration.

2018 began with the fallout of an extraordinary (and we believe wholly illegal) action by President Trump to drastically reduce the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. During the balance of the year the agency responsible for managing these remarkable areas developed new management plans that if enacted would profoundly threaten the very values and significance that inspired the monuments' protection in the first place. Despite these mounting threats, we continue to stand with tribal communities and millions of people who want full protections for our national monuments.

The full impact of "energy dominance" became apparent last year. Over 20 national park units, mostly in the Southwest, were targets of lease sales on adjacent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. Underlying

the "energy dominance" agenda is the unsettling pattern of eliminating opportunities for the public to reasonably review, comment on and protest oil and gas lease sales on public lands. We believe this new protocol is dangerous—even devastating—for parks and larger landscapes. We continue to strive to engage public stakeholders in this leasing process because we know we can reach common ground when actions are transparent and accessible.



Despite this grim picture, we have seen some cases of common sense prevail, which we describe in this field report. We are grateful for our members and supporters who have been taking action and giving voice to protecting our parks, our public lands and our shared values. We know an engaged public is the foundation of a strong democracy, and we need to be informed and active now more than ever.

# FIELD REPORT

WINTER 2019

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico & Utah

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## Troubling Glen Canyon Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan Gets Green Light from NPS



Visited by roughly 4.6 million people in 2017, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area is perhaps best known for its nearly 1,000 miles of meandering shoreline. Every year, boaters on Lake Powell explore these steep sandstone cliffs and narrow inlets. Many of these visitors do not realize that more than 85 percent of Glen Canyon consists of a remote, vast upland desert and slickrock canyon landscape situated amidst several other parks, including Canyonlands and Capitol Reef. Over 50 percent of Glen Canyon's acreage is managed for wilderness qualities, and visitors can spend days exploring its untrammeled deep canyons and windswept mesas containing 10,000 years of human history and an even longer paleontological record.

Glen Canyon's designation as a national recreation area means all of its spectacular natural and cultural resources are to be safeguarded for the enjoyment of future generations under the management of the National Park Service (NPS). Disappointingly, the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Management Plan released by NPS in September—after more than a decade of development—authorizes an increase in the use of ORVs.

The NPS plan misses the mark in many ways. It encourages more ORV use when the need has not been demonstrated (there are nearly 7,000 miles of existing designated routes for ORV use around Glen Canyon) and ignores the broad and significant potential impacts from widespread ORV use on the park's plants, wildlife and remote wilderness qualities. Particularly concerning is the NPS decision to introduce all-terrain vehicles to a portion of the remote Orange Cliffs area which has historically been off-limits to such use. Known for its striking sandstone cliffs, incredible dark night skies and preserved natural soundscapes, the Orange Cliffs area borders Canyonlands National Park where all-terrain vehicle use is prohibited to protect that park's resources and values.

For decades, NPCA has advocated for NPS to prevent illegal off-road vehicle use and reduce environmental impacts through appropriate planning, visitor education, outreach and enforcement. We will continue to explore our options to hold NPS accountable to their stewardship obligation at Glen Canyon. We cannot allow this area to become an ORV playground at the expense of park resources and other visitor experiences.

Above: Orange Cliffs, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area ©Tom Till

# Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments

**A** year has passed since President Donald Trump signed two proclamations attempting to remove federal protections from roughly 2 million acres of land in Utah's Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. The 2017 administrative action was the largest reduction in public lands protection in U.S. history, and in the case of Bears Ears, an affront to the five Native American tribes who originally proposed protections for this area as a sacred place for protection and healing. Since then, the Intertribal Coalition and many organizations (including NPCA) have filed lawsuits in federal court on the grounds that the president's decision was illegal. NPCA maintains the illegality of the administration's move and remains hopeful that the decision will be overturned in the courts.

Despite the unresolved nature of these cases, BLM—the entity responsible for managing these monuments and much adjacent federal land—has initiated a planning process to create new management plans for these areas. As part of this process, BLM put forth potential management plans including their 'preferred alternative' and solicited public comments. While we believe it is irresponsible to make preemptive management decisions on lands whose fate is actively being argued in the courts, we submitted comprehensive public comments

to ensure BLM hears the argument for protecting the full scope of the original monuments and adjacent national parks.

NPCA's comments, prepared and submitted with the Coalition to Protect America's Parks (a nonprofit organization composed of retired, former or current NPS employees), highlight the threats posed to nearby national parks by resizing the monuments, including:

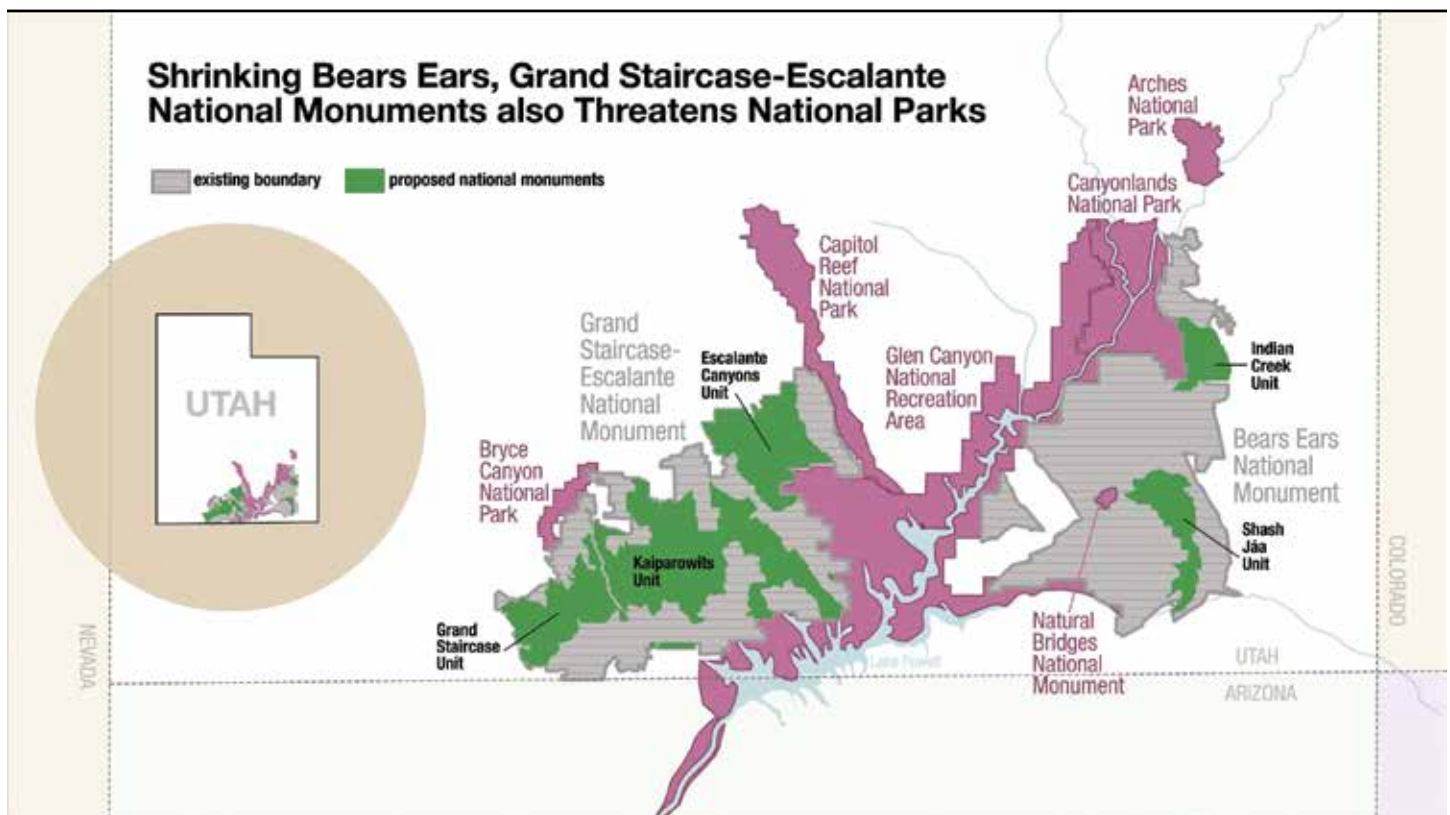
- Industrial development (e.g. oil and gas development, off-road vehicle use, mining, grazing) proposed for lands excised from Grand Staircase-Escalante that abut Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef National Parks and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.
- Incompatible uses and inappropriate development allowable on lands adjacent to and near Canyonlands National Park and Natural Bridges National Monument as a result of protecting and planning for a mere 15 percent of the original Bears Ears National Monument.

Overall, BLM's 'preferred alternative' management plans legalize activities that have no place in protected national monuments, and they do not adequately protect the dark night skies, natural quiet, uncompromised viewsheds, wildlife

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migration routes or quality of air, soil, and water of the larger landscapes in southern Utah. Our comments reflect these concerns and identify the unparalleled resources at risk under the proposed plans.

Furthermore, our work to protect these monuments is a fight against an assault on the Antiquities Act. Trump's unprecedented administrative action shrinking Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears threatens the viability of a century-old law and puts every monument created by presidential authority—from Devils Tower in 1906 to Stonewall in 2016—at risk. With your support, NPCA continues to stand with tribal communities, local business leaders and millions of people to keep full protections in place at all our national monuments.



# Untold Stories of the Manhattan Project

By Alexie Rudman, Stanback Intern at NPCA

*The Stanback Internship Program funded by Fred and Alice Stanback provides Duke University students with project-based learning experiences in energy, conservation, advocacy, policy, research and applied resource management.*

**T**he Manhattan Project profoundly impacted our world. The stories from this top-secret project are now being preserved and interpreted at three sites across the country—Los Alamos, New Mexico, Oak Ridge, Tennessee and Hanford, Washington—now collectively known as the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, one of the newest units of the National Park System.

Stories from the Manhattan Project have typically followed a narrative focused on the impressive scientific and technological accomplishments of prominent white scientists and the pivotal role the first atomic bomb played in ending World War II. But the whole picture, especially in the communities of Hanford, Los Alamos and Oak Ridge, is far more complicated.

To shine a light on the contributions and sacrifices of thousands of New Mexicans involved with the project, NPCA is compiling previously untold community stories which the park will incorporate into exhibits and



interpretive information. Duke University Stanback intern Alexie Rudman spent last summer assembling a comprehensive database of over 100 oral histories and community testimonies from Pueblo Indian tribes, Hispano communities, Navajo uranium miners and those living downwind of project sites (commonly referred to as 'downwinders'). She tracked down numerous existing archives and collections throughout the Southwest—everything from video interviews to handwritten oral histories—and she collected a handful of new stories.

For all the opportunity the Manhattan Project brought to centuries-old subsistence communities in Española Valley, it came at a steep price. Though Pueblo and Hispano laborers helped build the "Atomic City,"

many families were forcibly removed from the site. Locals played many roles, from laborers, babysitters and drivers to janitors, health care providers and mail clerks, but jobs and economic growth came with the unforeseen legacy of environmental contamination and multigenerational health impacts that communities still struggle with today. Feelings about the project remain mixed, and the stories themselves are tinged alternately with pride and bitterness.

Some of the victims of this darker history include Navajo uranium miners who had no idea about the risks of their work. "The men working with the 'stuff' turned yellow. It was all over their faces," recalled one project veteran. Unsuspecting families downwind of the first test blast at the Trinity Site in southern New Mexico continue to feel the brunt of the health impacts, dealing with cancers and tumors generations later. "The scary thing is we all wait to hear who gets the next diagnosis," said Rosemary Cordova of the Tularosa Basin Downwinders.

We thank NPS for its support of this project to collect and share community perspectives at all three park sites, an endeavor that enriches our collective understanding of this story and increases its relevancy and reach.

**Above:** USO transport truck to Santa Fe from Los Alamos, NM. ©Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Center

## Outlook for the 116th Congress

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over bedrock laws such as the Antiquities Act and the Endangered Species Act, these votes become more critical than ever.

NPCA's Southwest region will welcome four new members of Congress:

- Mitt Romney representing Utah in the Senate,
- Ben McAdams representing part of Salt Lake County in Utah's 4th district,
- Jason Crow representing parts of Denver in Colorado's 6th district, and
- Xochitl Torres-Small representing southern New Mexico's 2nd district.

The region will also see two members return in new roles:

- Kyrsten Sinema representing Arizona in the Senate (formerly of Arizona's 9th congressional district from 2013 to 2019).
- Ann Kirkpatrick representing Arizona's 2nd district (formerly of Arizona's 1st congressional district from 2009 to 2011 and again from 2013 to 2017).

Many of these new members have strong environmental protection perspectives which we hope will translate into support for national parks. Moreover, the Southwest region's new members, in addition to new members in other Sun Belt and Western states, could make these areas friendlier to park issues than they were before.

On the other hand, fewer moderate Republicans will be returning to their jobs in January. As the country becomes

increasingly polarized and the political center continues to shrink, many of NPCA's proud park allies on the right side of the aisle have lost their jobs. NPCA lost strong Republican park defenders in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Washington. While we are confident that the new Democrats taking these seats in 2019 will continue to represent park priorities in these districts, NPCA remains committed to investing in bipartisan support for all our national park issues. The potential loss of cooperation across the aisle in some states may hurt political dialogue and worsen the political climate for everyone.

NPCA has worked with every Congress and every administration for the last 99 years, and we remain dedicated to protecting America's best places with your help.

# Meet the Newest Southwest Staffers and Regional Council Members



## New Conservation Programs Staffer **MATT KIRBY**

Matt Kirby joined NPCA's Conservation Programs team in November as the director of energy and landscape conservation. Matt comes to NPCA with over a decade of experience leading public lands campaigns. Most recently he served as the campaign director for the Western Energy Project where he helped develop funding strategies and oversaw the implementation of the organization's work to push for a more responsible oil and gas program on BLM lands.

Prior to that role, Matt held several positions at the Sierra Club. He led their national monuments campaign during the Obama administration working to permanently protect public lands through administrative designations. He also served on their Government Affairs team in Washington, D.C. working to secure new wilderness designations.

Matt has a B.A. from Carleton College in Minnesota. He is passionate about public lands and holds a deep belief in the power of people and communities to enact change for the better. Based in Denver, he tries to be a weekend warrior, escaping to the mountains as often as possible to play and sleep amidst those lands that we all own.



## New Southwest Regional Council Member

### **SARAH JUDKINS**

In May, the Southwest Regional Office welcomed Sarah Judkins to its volunteer advisory council. Sarah is an attorney practicing public lands, energy and environmental law in Denver where she represents clients addressing public lands and environmental issues across the country. Sarah previously worked for a federal judge and several environmental nonprofits and Colorado state agencies. Before law school, Sarah was a climate organizer in the Pacific Northwest and led wilderness expeditions for teens across North America.

A Colorado native, Sarah has spent much of her childhood and adult life exploring public lands in the West and cherishes every moment she is able to spend outside exploring beautiful and special places. Sarah is an outdoor adventurer and enjoys backpacking, paddling rivers, skiing and trail running.

Sarah has an undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies-Biology and Music Performance from Whitman College and a J.D. and Masters in Environmental Studies from the University of Colorado.



## New Southwest Regional Staffer **TRACY COPPOLA**

Tracy Coppola joined the Southwest Regional Office in September as the Colorado program manager. Prior to NPCA, Tracy served as senior legislative counsel on public lands policy for Earthjustice where she worked on campaigns to defend bedrock environmental laws and protect national forests, parks and monuments primarily in the Southwest and northern Rockies. She also previously campaigned to protect endangered species, lobbied Congress on resource conservation, passed statewide domestic violence survivor protection bills and created diverse coalitions.

If you meet her, you will quickly learn that Tracy gets her energy from engaging with advocates and community leaders throughout Colorado. She will share that her heart beats faster when remembering the first grizzly bear she saw when visiting Admiralty Island National Monument, that she was humbled when hiking among towering old growth trees in the Tongass National Forest, and that she was in awe when she danced on the sand in Great Sand Dunes National Park. She earned a J.D. and Master of Studies in Environmental Law from Vermont Law School and an undergraduate degree from Yale University. Tracy grew up with family roots in various states and Puerto Rico; she now lives with her family in Denver.

# The Ugly Impacts of “Energy Dominance” on Parks and Adjacent Public Lands



Last February, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke issued an order that drastically limits public comment opportunities in BLM oil and gas leasing activities and shortens timelines for decisions, making it nearly impossible for the public to meaningfully participate in the management of their public lands. Previously, the public had numerous opportunities to review, weigh in and protest when new leases on federal lands were proposed, but now advocacy groups like NPCA can barely keep up with the fast pace of lease sales, and the general public is effectively cut out completely.

Streamlining the public process is part of the administration’s “energy dominance” policy and has resulted in 17 million acres of public land being handed over to the oil and gas industry in less than two years. This rapid-fire leasing, now happening every quarter throughout the West, puts some of our most beloved parks at risk. Companies that purchase these leases benefit from a 10-year lease term that can be extended even before drilling begins. This means impacts to the recreation assets and cultural resources of our parks and adjacent public lands from oil and gas exploration and drilling could last decades.

NPCA actively defends national parks by commenting on and protesting individual lease sales across multiple states, empowering our members and supporters to take action, and engaging and educating elected officials. We also pursue litigation when necessary. A recent court decision regarding leasing in sage grouse habitat in Colorado, Idaho and Wyoming gives us some hope. It established an important legal precedent that requires BLM to slow their leasing schedule and give the public more opportunity to be involved.

The threats to our parks are great, but we will remain vigilant. The following case studies from New Mexico highlight some of these threats and demonstrate the efficacy and importance of collaborative advocacy and vigorous opposition.

## Chaco Canyon

This past year, we’ve seen glimpses of relief followed by renewed pushes to lease at Chaco Canyon National Historical Park. Last March, Secretary Zinke abruptly deferred a 2,500-acre lease sale near the park, acknowledging the need for more documentation of the area’s sensitive archaeological and sacred sites. His decision didn’t stop BLM from proposing new sales in the area, however. After several parcels within an informal 10-mile core protection area around the park were deferred from a sale in December, BLM released their plans



to include more sales within this same area in the March 2019 lease sale. This push for leasing continues despite the absence of a long-overdue Resource Management Plan (RMP) to guide oil and gas development in the area for the next 20 years. NPCA continues to work in an inclusive manner with a diverse set of stakeholders with the shared common goal of protecting Chaco and its connected cultural landscape.

## Carlsbad Caverns

At the other end of New Mexico, in the southeast corner of the state, Carlsbad Caverns National Park is feeling the pressure of oil and gas development on the edge of the booming Permian Basin. This is the most active and fastest-growing oil and gas field on Earth. This development, if not planned and conducted correctly, poses serious threat to Carlsbad Caverns’ resources, both above and below ground, as well as to the teaming biodiversity in Guadalupe Mountains National Park in neighboring Texas. Despite the continued pressure of development, NPCA and its partners successfully pushed for deferral of 31 proposed lease parcels in land surrounding the park in an area with caves that could be connected to the Carlsbad system. We submitted comments on the area’s draft RMP in late 2018, which were supported by over 11,000 comments from members and supporters like you. We focused on the importance of protecting the Carlsbad system and the associated cave and karst landscape and highlighted the impact oil and gas activity could pose to water and air quality, viewsheds, dark night skies and wildlife habitat.

**Top Left:** Pueblo Bonito at Chaco Canyon National Historical Park ©Cody Brothers **Middle** (Left to Right): Elizabeth Miller (journalist), Ernie Atencio (NPCA), Chuck Tayman (BBC), Jim Goodbar (retired BLM cave and karst expert) on an aerial tour of oil and gas leasing activity in southeast New Mexico. ©EcoFlight **Above:** Oil and gas access roads and well pads near Carlsbad Caverns National Park. ©EcoFlight

## Grand Canyon Protected (mostly) from Uranium Mining

In October, the Supreme Court put an end to the mining industry's lengthy legal challenge when it supported a lower court ruling not to reopen one million acres of public land around the Grand Canyon to new uranium mining. The decision—supported by many, including the Havasupai, anglers and hunters, and the conservation community—abated fears that the Trump administration might reverse the 20-year ban. NPCA and others seek congressional action that would build on the momentum of the recent Supreme Court decision and end uranium mining in the Grand Canyon region completely.



## A Potential "Road to Nowhere" Threatens Saguaro National Park

**W**hen you leave the city of Tucson and drive west through the Tucson Mountains to get to Saguaro National Park's Visitor Center, you might stop at Gate's Pass to enjoy the panorama. You'll see the movie set Old Tucson on the left and the world-famous Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum on the right. Look farther — across the broad, sparsely settled valley— and you'll glimpse the rugged desert mountains of the Tohono O'odham Nation and Ironwood Forest National Monument on the far horizon. You'll find yourself surrounded by the quiet of cactus-studded hills and you'll proceed, anticipating your park visit where chirping birds and the sweet fragrance of desert plants await.

The proposed route of an ill-conceived freeway threatens all of the views and experiences that highlight the trip from Tucson to Saguaro National Park. Imagine your future visit once a freeway is built at great cost: a steady stream of semitrucks

and other traffic speeding nearby, the rumbling noise of tires on pavement, and the overpowering smell of exhaust drifting out into the forest of saguaros.

NPCA joins a majority of local individuals and community groups who have commented on the plan and strongly oppose the construction of this freeway segment—the preferred alternative chosen by state and federal agencies despite the fact that the environmental compliance process is only halfway completed. The route is slated to be chosen this winter without any new studies of impacts to wildlife, park visitation, soundscape, air quality or night skies. Moving forward in the absence of these studies would be an extraordinary action that we believe violates existing federal environmental laws.

Interstate 11 was conceived to provide a route for trade from Mexico to Canada, but it can easily accommodate expected future

travel by being co-located with improved sections of Interstate 19 and Interstate 10 through the greater Tucson area. A citizen's coalition supports this alternative and points out that this less-costly plan could be part of a multi-tiered approach that diverts traffic from I-10 through the use of tolls, enhancements to the rail system, and improvements to other roads. The group urges the Federal Highway Administration and Arizona Department of Transportation to find innovative solutions that don't just add lanes to the freeway but capitalize on this redesign opportunity to address historic mistakes that divided communities.

NPCA will speak loudly and effectively for Saguaro National Park so that its wildlife, plant communities and visitors will not be damaged by what can easily be called a road to nowhere.

**Above:** Saguaro National Park  
©Anton Foltin | Dreamstime



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## Historic Meeting Between Navajo Nation and Park Superintendents

**A**t the invitation of the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources (DNR), NPCA convened a meeting with Navajo officials and national park superintendents from throughout traditional Navajo territory to discuss economic development opportunities for the Nation. Held in the Navajo Nation capital of Window



Rock, Arizona, the meeting focused on creative approaches to hiring and promoting more Navajo tribal members to NPS positions or related concession and commercial enterprises. The Nation is facing a serious hit to revenues and local employment with next year's likely closure of the Navajo Generating Station near Page, Arizona.

Closing the coal-burning plant will help improve air quality, thereby benefiting the health of people throughout the region—including those living near or visiting Grand Canyon National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area—but its closure exacerbates the economic challenges facing Navajo and Hopi communities. In our efforts to assist these communities however we can, the Window Rock meeting was just the first step. All parties were eager to participate and left the meeting feeling encouraged by the start of new relationships. One participant said of the gathering, "It exceeded my expectations." Eventually, we hope our relationship-building efforts can expand to include other tribes in the Southwest.



**Left:** Window Rock, the local sacred landmark and namesake for the seat of the Navajo Nation Government. ©James Feliciano | Dreamstime

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