



## White Sands Now a National Park!

**W**hite Sands National Monument—created by President Herbert Hoover in 1933—was redesignated as White Sands National Park by Congress in December 2019. The country's newest national park (only the 62nd unit to bear that designation) is located just west of Alamogordo, NM and features vibrant white sand dunes, a result of several millennia worth of gypsum deposits from nearby dry lake beds. Gypsum, a soft rock that breaks down easily, reflects light rather than absorbing it, giving the dunes their brilliant snowy appearance.

The redesignation expanded the park by 4,800 acres and added another 3,113 acres of cooperative use research area managed by the Park Service and the U.S. Army at White Sands Missile Range. The legislation establishing this unique corner of the Chihuahuan Desert as a national park goes even further, protecting the park's unique hydrological system (which contributes to the natural processes that create and maintain the dunes) and opens potentials for enhancing the visitor experience on some of the new acreage.

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**Top:** Sunset at White Sands National Park ©Craig Varjabedian from his book 'Into the Great White Sands' **Right:** A pumpjack extracts oil from underground in southeastern Utah near Hovenweep National Monument. ©Paul Martini

## COVID-19 & NEPA Battling a Pandemic & Defending Bedrock Environmental Regulation

**W**e are living in unprecedented times with COVID-19 threatening the health and wellbeing of our families, communities and economy. NPCA supports closing national parks in the face of the pandemic as an unfortunate, but necessary, sacrifice to protect the safety of park staff and the public. We look forward to the time when we can all return to these special places. Until then, we hope you and yours stay safe and healthy.

As our country struggles to adjust to social distancing and stay-at-home orders, the administration has continued moving full speed ahead with oil and gas lease sales, planning processes and rulemaking that affect parks. NPCA has requested a pause on comment periods and decision-making to allow for the public, appropriately preoccupied with the coronavirus, to meaningfully participate in these processes. However, at the time of this writing, there does not appear to be any plan to slow down.

Unfortunately, this isn't new. We've seen national parks and public lands threatened repeatedly under the Trump administration. While resource extraction and energy development are important

for our world and provide needed jobs and revenue to rural economies, NPCA believes it can and should be balanced with the conservation of our public lands and public health. Instead, we are witnessing the systematic dismantling of the bedrock environmental laws intended to protect our lands and communities.



The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has been a foundation for environmental protection since Richard Nixon signed it into law in 1970. NEPA requires

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**OUR MISSION**

Protecting and enhancing America's National Park System for present and future generations.

# FIELD REPORT

SPRING 2020

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico & Utah

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## Council Welcomes Former Governor of the Pueblo of Acoma, Kurt Riley

The Southwest Regional Office is happy to welcome former Governor of the Pueblo of Acoma, Kurt Riley, to its regional council. As governor, Mr. Riley functioned as the chief executive officer, the recognized spokesperson and the secular leader of the pueblo. He was responsible for the provision of pueblo services to its 5,000 members living on and off the reservation. He interacted daily with federal, state, county and private organizations and was responsible for the overall administration and financial wellbeing of the pueblo. Mr. Riley was appointed as governor in 2016 and reappointed in 2017 and 2018. Prior to his appointment to the governorship, Mr. Riley was 2nd lieutenant governor in 2015. He completed his duties in December 2018 after four years of service to the community.

Mr. Riley's varied work experience during his 25 years of service in the Department of Health and Human Services, Indian Health Service, included stints as chief pharmacist and acting chief executive officer. He also served as a member of the Health Committee and co-chair of the Natural Resources Committee for the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG, which received NPCA's 2019 Marjory Stoneman Douglas



Conservationist of the Year award for their leadership in protecting the greater Chaco landscape) and as chairman of the Southern Pueblo Council of Governors.

Now fully retired, Mr. Riley enjoys being with family and works to maintain the language, culture and traditions of the pueblo through the preservation of its cultural resources and landscapes. We are honored to have him advising our region with his insights into tribal history and relationships with national parks and protected lands.

Above: Kurt Riley is former Governor of the Pueblo of Acoma and the newest member of NPCA's Southwest Regional Council. ©Kurt Riley

## Organizing Community Capacity in Dinosaur Country

As a part-time contractor with NPCA, Cody Perry works to protect Dinosaur National Monument—a world-class landscape of open spaces, dark skies, sacred indigenous lands, wild rivers, endangered species and wildlife habitat—and surrounding lands from the impacts of irresponsible energy development. His efforts to build relationships help him better understand the stories and needs of area communities and, in the process, elevate NPCA's credibility toward building support for a more balanced approach to oil and gas leasing and energy development that protects these exceptional natural and cultural resources.

Cody's background is in outdoor education, but he has worked more notably as a filmmaker using conservation stories to create connections and build relationships. In this professional capacity, Cody has had



countless adventures in Utah and Colorado around Dinosaur National Monument. Additionally, he has served on the executive committee of Friends of the Yampa for 10 years, developing a network of relationships in communities across the region. Cody has worked as a community organizer, avalanche safety instructor, ski patroller and writer. He comes from a ranching family in southern Arizona and lives in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Above: Contractor Cody Perry is working with NPCA to organize in the Utah and Colorado communities surrounding Dinosaur National Monument. ©Cody Perry

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# A GIANT SCAR ACROSS THE LAND

## An Update About Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

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**D**espite strenuous objections from conservationists, park lovers, Native peoples and elected officials, the Trump administration continues to waive commonsense laws to build a wall over sacred sites, through saguaro forests, and adjacent to a rare desert oasis. Work is well underway to bulldoze a 60-foot swath along the 30-mile southern border of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and erect a 30-foot tall bollard wall.

Particularly galling is that this expensive and destructive wall will never perform as promised. Critics have shown the wall is easy to climb with a rope or ladder (or freehand if you are a good rock climber) and can be cut with a power saw available at any hardware store. It replaces longstanding pedestrian fencing and vehicle barriers that were deemed sufficient to ensure the safety of the public by the Border Patrol and the Park Service years ago.

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument was created in 1937 to protect its namesake plant and a scenic, biologically rich portion of the Sonoran Desert. One key park feature is a complex of springs in the Quitobaquito Hills

that support a pond and an incredible diversity of desert life. An article in the last edition of NPCA's Southwest Regional Field Report explained the site's cultural, historical and natural significance and told the story of NPCA's involvement in a petition from more than 1,000 scientists requesting this sensitive area be exempted from new wall construction.

NPCA staff member Kevin Dahl was on site at Quitobaquito Hills in late January with international media and witnessed bulldozers and steamrollers scraping the border path about a hundred yards from the oasis. Observers later found cultural artifacts in the slash piles the contractors had pushed to the side, despite promises from the Department of Homeland Security that monitors contracted for such a purpose would scan the area for preservable artifacts.

Living and traveling on this land for time immemorial, the Hia-Ced and Tohono O'odham peoples are particularly vested in the outcome of this project. Their leaders have led ceremonial vigils and protests of their own at the monument and have even testified on Capitol Hill. Ironically, at the

same time that the Border Patrol was televising blasting on Monument Hill in preparation for wall construction, Tohono O'odham chairman Ted Norris was testifying before Congress, stating, "For us, this is no different from [the Department of Homeland Security] building a 30-foot wall along Arlington Cemetery," referring to the presence of Apache burials on the hill that he and the tribal archaeologist had personally pointed out to officials.

While two lawsuits in process might stop construction of the wall, it is just as likely that progress will continue unabated and will conclude by the end of the year as planned. What else can be done? Advocates are asking for funding for mitigation and restoration of vegetation and road infrastructure damaged during this hasty construction project. Planning is also underway to determine which portions of the wall should be removed for the immediate benefit of wildlife connectivity between the monument and other protected, adjacent lands in Mexico.

**Below:** Southern Arizona's Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument at sunrise. ©Anton Foltin | Dreamstime



# BEARS EARS & GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENTS

## What's Happening and What Does It Mean?

**F**or many, President Trump's 2017 decision to cut the size of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in half and reduce Bears Ears National Monument by 85% was a flashpoint for the administration's attack on public lands. Important in their own right, these two monuments are also adjacent to five national park sites. With no ruling on the legal cases challenging the president's authority to shrink monuments, what is happening to these lands, and what does it mean?

The plaintiffs, including NPCA, in the cases challenging the federal government's action maintain that agency land planning should not occur before the litigation is concluded. Nonetheless, federal land managers spent 2018 and 2019 preparing management plans for the shrunken monuments, as well as for the land removed from Grand Staircase-Escalante's boundary, known as the Kanab Escalante Planning Area. This February, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service finalized these three monument management plans. Here's what the plans do:

- **Mining** More than a dozen claims have already been filed on lands removed from the monuments. Of special concern are potential future claims to mine coal in Kanab Escalante and uranium in Bears Ears.
- **Oil and Gas Drilling** While interest has so far been limited, the potential for oil and gas drilling in lands removed from Bears Ears remains a worry. The new Kanab Escalante plan also opens previously protected land adjacent to Capitol Reef National Park to oil and gas drilling and the threat of tar sands extraction persists.

- **Logging** Controversial vegetation management treatments, like ripping down pinyon-juniper forests to open more areas for grazing, are proposed in all three planning areas.
- **Right of Way Development** All three management plans allow for the development of pipelines, powerlines, roads and other infrastructure for utilities via the use of rights-of-way.
- **Visitor and Resource Use Issues** Off-road vehicle travel, unsustainable levels of grazing, and visitor activities (including target shooting and larger group sizes) that threaten fragile ecosystems and cultural sites are permitted in all three planning areas, as well as the lands removed from Bears Ears.



Overall, these plans would reduce protections for the natural and cultural treasures the monuments were originally created to safeguard. Additionally, they leave the lands removed from the monuments and adjacent to national park sites vulnerable to new destructive uses. To add insult to injury, the Department of Interior repeatedly and inaccurately claims these plans are reflective of how the public—particularly Utahns—want these lands to be managed.

Ultimately, the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Kanab Escalante management plans degrade intact ecosystems that have allowed for ground-breaking scientific research on climate change and paleontology, and they threaten growing recreation economies in rural communities. The Bears Ears plan disrespects sacred connections Native Americans have to the region, dismisses the wishes of Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni and Ute Indian Tribe who've called the region home since time immemorial, and eliminates the potential for meaningful tribal co-management of these lands.

With the help of partners and allies in local communities, NPCA continues to monitor activity on the ground. While we do not know the full extent of the damage monument lands will sustain as a result of the breakneck, premature planning process, we do know the judge's opinion on the question of presidential authority could render the plans null and void and make the planning process a massive waste of time. NPCA remains optimistic we will prevail in court, and we will continue to stand with sovereign tribes and those who hope to leave a legacy of intact landscapes preserved for scientific, cultural and recreational exploration.

**Top:** Valley of the Gods, an area removed from the original boundaries of Bears Ears National Monument, is threatened by visitor use management issues as the BLM narrows its attention to the reduced monument and not all areas in need. ©Arlene Hochman Waller | Dreamstime  
**Middle:** The Toadstools is a geologic site and popular recreation area removed from the original boundaries of Grand Staircase National Monument. ©Frank Fichtmueller | Dreamstime

## Preserve the History of Amache

During the first months of World War II, the United States initiated the single largest forced imprisonment in its history when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order forcing more than 120,000 people of Japanese descent to relocate to 10 remote, military-style prisons. The Granada Relocation Center in the southeast corner of Colorado, known as Amache, was one of these 10 incarceration centers.

NPCA, the Amache Preservation Society and other partners are committed to creating a national park site that preserves the Amache incarceration camp, interprets the history under which it operated, and honors the people who were once imprisoned there indefinitely based solely on their ethnicity.

Two-thirds of the people at Amache were American citizens and most had never even been to Japan. Many others were first-generation Japanese elders who had immigrated from Japan and were denied U.S. citizenship for decades. They were given a week or less to dispose of everything they owned, with no idea where they were going or what would happen. Only one thing was clear: They were not welcome at home because they had Japanese faces and names.

Even amid this tragedy, the people imprisoned at Amache created an entire town, including schools, innovative farming techniques and a silk screen shop. Nearly 10% of people at the site patriotically volunteered to serve in the military during the war.

Yet Amache was unmistakably a prison. People lived in trauma, with a constant presence of armed guards and barbed wire. The shoddily built barracks had interior walls that didn't fully touch the ceilings and flimsy windows that allowed snow and dust to blow inside. For many, a sense of family unity was destroyed. Several of the older generation who suffered at Amache died before the U.S. government issued reparations and never received an apology.

What happened to the people incarcerated at Amache is a story of failure by the U.S. government to uphold the Constitution and protect its own citizens. It's a story that remains relevant to how America treats its immigrant communities, including some of the policies and rhetoric we see today. It is a story ready and waiting to be told, deserving of national park site status.

The National Park Service is currently conducting a detailed study on the national significance of Amache and whether it would be appropriate to include the site in the National Park System. The Park Service's recommendation will then go to Congress for a final decision.

Visit [www.npca.org/amache](http://www.npca.org/amache) to learn more, take action and read a blog post of an interview with Mitch Homma, whose family members were incarcerated at Amache during World War II (**Amache: An American Story That Must be Told**).

We urge our Congressional leadership and the National Park Service to see this park designation through. The time is not only right, it is long overdue.

—BOB FUCHIGAMI, AMACHE SURVIVOR

## Park Service Reverses Decision to Open Utah Parks to Off-Road Vehicles

After significant public pressure, including thousands of messages from NPCA supporters, the National Park Service (NPS) reversed a decision that would have allowed certain off-road vehicles on paved and dirt roads in national parks and monuments in Utah.

Last September, the acting NPS Inter-mountain Regional Director issued a directive to park superintendents in Utah that would have allowed all street-legal off-road vehicles on dirt and paved roads in national park sites starting November 1. The directive would have affected all of Utah's national parks—Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef and Zion—as well as several national monuments—Cedar Breaks, Dinosaur, Hovenweep and Natural Bridges.



More than 5,000 NPCA supporters spoke out against the plan, which would have threatened the parks' unique and fragile landscapes and cultural artifacts, and more than 30 local businesses submitted a letter to the Department of the Interior opposing the proposed change. In addition, the Grand County Council, city of Moab and town of Castle Valley passed a joint resolution opposing the move, and the towns of Springdale and Rockville passed their own resolutions.

This decision simply makes sense. National park superintendents have detailed the threats that off-road vehicles pose to parks and visitors while on the roads, and the likelihood that users will drive them off-road, harming the environment and creating dust, noise and pollution.

Fortunately, off-road vehicle users have tens of thousands of miles of roads and dirt trails available throughout Utah. Opening park roads to these vehicles would have resulted in damage to the very things that make these places so remarkable and that draw visitors from around the world to the state.

**Above:** A group of off-road vehicle enthusiasts ride together in a designated area. While national park roads remain off limits to this type of off-road vehicle, there are thousands of miles of roads and trails open to their use elsewhere in Utah. ©Marek Uliasz | Dreamstime

**Above:** Reconstructed guard tower at the Amache Relocation Center in Colorado. ©Tracy Coppola

# Grand Canyon Tops List of Arizona Bills in Congress

Several bills aimed at protecting and enhancing national parks in Arizona are on the docket this spring. Read on for brief details or visit [congress.gov](http://congress.gov) for full bill text and status updates.

## Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act

Passed by the House last October, this bill (H.R. 1317) would protect one million acres of U.S. Forest Service and BLM lands adjacent to the park by permanently banning new uranium mines. This measure would protect the area aquifers responsible for replenishing park springs and side creeks, providing the entire water supply for the Havasupai tribe, and supplying Colorado River water used by millions downstream. A similar bill (S. 3127) was introduced in the Senate by Senator Sinema (D-AZ) in December.

## Casa Grande Ruins National Monument Boundary Modification Act of 2019

These bipartisan supported bills (H.R. 4840 and S. 3119) would adjust the monument's boundary to add important adjacent and nearby archeological sites to the park. The Senate version was heard in committee in March.

**Chiricahua National Park Act** The bill (S. 3121) would redesignate the national monument as a national park. Community chambers of commerce in southeast Arizona are championing the effort.

## Saguaro National Park Boundary Expansion and Study Act of 2020

This act would add several dozen properties to the park, thereby protecting rare riparian areas, providing habitat connectivity between the park and a county preserve, and securing protections for land adjacent to several trailheads.

**Right:** Elves Chasm within Grand Canyon National Park. ©Nicholas Motto | Dreamstime



**Ft. Bowie National Historic Site Boundary Expansion Act** Key Apache Wars locations would be included in the park with this modest enlargement.

**Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area Reauthorization Act** Without passage of this bill (S. 3120), this heritage area and its beneficial protection of Yuma's history will be decommissioned under the sunset clause of its enabling legislation.

## January 8th National Memorial Act

These bills (H.R. 5559 and S. 3156) would direct the Park Service to support a memorial at Pima County's historic courthouse to tell the story of the tragic events of January 8, 2011, when six people were killed and Representative Gabrielle Giffords and 12 others were injured during a constituent outreach event in Tucson.

*NPCA will continue to track and support these bills, and we hope to share good news about them in future field reports!*

## White Sands Now a National Park!

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White Sands now shares a similar origin story as several other treasured national parks, from Grand Canyon to Grand Teton, in which a national monument established by presidential proclamation under the Antiquities Act becomes so cherished by the public and the local community that Congress redesignates it as a full-fledged national park. We hope to see the same someday for other national monuments.



Children sledding down the soft sands at White Sands National Park. ©Craig Varjabedian from his book 'Into the Great White Sands.'

# PROTECTING PARKS FROM DESTRUCTIVE DRILLING

## Challenges and Victories

### Advocating for Clean Air in New Mexico

Rampant energy development in the Permian Basin has contributed to several days of dangerous ozone levels for area communities, not to mention rising levels of other pollutants, all of which contribute to climate change, degrade human health and decrease visibility at Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe Mountains National Parks, both Class I airsheds. To address this massive problem, NPCA is leading a coalition of organizations to engage the public in the state's regional haze rulemaking process to provide the New Mexico Environment Department with tools and information to implement the strongest controls on polluting sources (drilling infrastructure, electric generation, airports, etc.). The Regional Haze provision of the Clean Air Act necessitates improving the air quality in Class I airsheds, like national parks and wilderness areas, by cleaning up or closing pollution sources in the area.

### Carlsbad Caverns Earns Temporary Relief

NPCA's work with our partners in southern New Mexico led to the deferral of two parcels (totaling 800 acres) from a February 2020 lease sale in the Permian Basin. Both of the deferred parcels were located near Carlsbad Caverns and posed a threat to the subterranean cave system and wilderness qualities of the area.

**Right:** Hovenweep National Monument in southeastern Utah. ©Amanda Podmore

### Inclusivity and Capacity in a Connected Cultural Landscape

NPCA continues to advocate for protecting the cultural landscape encompassing southeastern Utah's Hovenweep National Monument from ongoing oil and gas leasing. Together with tribal and conservation allies, we are building a base of support and bringing together innovative ideas for long-term protection of sacred (and largely undocumented) cultural sites, rich paleontological resources and dark night skies in this remote part of the Four Corners that is the ancestral home of many Native peoples.

### A Victory for Recreation in Utah's Canyon Country

In January, the BLM in Utah released a preliminary list of parcels to include in their June 2020 oil and gas lease sale. Not only were six of the parcels near Arches and Canyonlands National Parks,

two were located roughly a mile from the boundary of Arches and directly atop the world-renowned Slickrock Bike Trail and the water supply for the town of Moab. After resounding protests from the community, outdoor recreation industry, park advocates and Utah Governor Gary Herbert, BLM removed these two parcels from the lease sale. While we celebrate this small victory for conservation and recreation, BLM is considering a massive lease sale this September in the same area, potentially offering over 100,000 acres for lease—most of the public land in the area not already leased for oil and gas development. We hope that the agency will come to its senses on this landscape, and others, and protect our iconic national parks along with Moab's world-renowned outdoor recreation opportunities.



## COVID-19 & NEPA

## Battling a Pandemic & Defending Bedrock Environmental Regulation

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the government to analyze the potential impacts of resource extraction or development activities on federal public lands.

For fifty years the NEPA process has saved many parks from incompatible development within and near their borders. The Trump administration's proposed changes to NEPA would 1) restrict or completely ignore public comments, 2) allow private industry to conduct their own environmental assessments (removing objectivity and impartiality), 3) ignore an activity's cumulative and indirect impacts (especially critical in the context of climate change and for communities living downstream or downwind),

and 4) limit the scope of projects that require environmental review.

The 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, which has helped preserve many of the world-class archaeological and cultural sites our southwestern parks are known for, is also under attack. The administration favors limiting the ability of tribes—who know these places so well—and state historic preservation offices to submit nominations for historic sites. Additionally, in an archaic feudal fashion, revisions to the act would give local landowners more discretion over nominations based on how much land they own, as opposed to the one-person, one-vote principle of our democracy.

These proposed changes to NEPA and the National Historic Preservation Act are only the latest examples of why parks and public lands need the support of advocates like you, now more than ever.

Because of people like you, 500,000 comments were submitted in opposition to the NEPA revisions. If you haven't already, please sign up at [www.npca.org/join](http://www.npca.org/join) to stay abreast of opportunities to raise your voice and protect our public lands.

Together, we are stronger. Together, we can make a difference. One only need look at the way we have rallied and supported one another during this time of COVID-19 to know the truth of that.



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## Missing Piece of Valles Caldera Puzzle Completed

**W**e are thrilled to announce that the Park Service has completed the purchase of a 40-acre inholding within Valles Caldera National Preserve—a deal facilitated by NPCA.

The Sulphur Springs property holds the greatest collection of hot springs, steaming volcanic fumaroles and bubbling mudpots in the region, but it was at risk of development under private ownership until recently. In 2016 NPCA worked with the Heritage Partnership Trust to purchase and hold the property until federal funding could be arranged to transfer ownership to the Park Service. The final funding came primarily from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. Other supporting contributions came from an

My wife, Kathryn Mullen, and I are pleased we could protect Sulphur Springs from development until the U.S. government could purchase this unique ecosystem.

— RUSSELL SCOTT, HERITAGE PARTNERSHIP TRUST

anonymous donor, the Cornell Douglas Foundation, Mrs. Frances H. Kennedy (whose gift was in honor of her late husband, Roger Kennedy, Park Service director from 1993 to 1997), the National Park Trust and the Thaw Charitable Trust.


Owing to this joint effort, these unique geothermal features will now be a rich part of Valles Caldera National Preserve and will be preserved for the enjoyment and education of future generations.

**Above:** Valles Caldera National Preserve in New Mexico is the nation's newest national preserve.  
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