

TRUSTEES FOR THE PARKS

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2020



Pine Tree Arch Devils Garden
Arches National Park Moab
Utah

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Oil and gas
leasing threatens
spectacular
landscapes and
sacred places
throughout the
southwest.

UTAH RED ROCK SPARED FROM DRILLING

Big Win for Public Lands and the Public

Months of determined activism by National Park Conservation Association members, supporters and a broad coalition of partners have paid off in a very big way. When the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) removed over 85,000 acres of public lands in Utah from a September oil and gas lease auction, it was literally one of the largest conservation victories in NPCA's 101-year history.

The lands taken off the auction block are close to several national parks. Arches, Canyonlands and Capitol Reef National Parks, as well as Bears Ears National Monument, would have all

been affected by the ruinous impacts of industrial drilling.

The massive infrastructure required to extract oil and natural gas brings air, water and noise pollution. Wildlife habitat becomes even more fragmented. New roads and heavy equipment can damage ancient cultural sites that hold deep significance to Native Americans. Local communities reliant on tourism revenue also suffer when public lands are locked up only for oil and gas companies to exploit, with recreational uses prohibited.

Despite the many risks associated with drilling so close to national parks,

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A hiker in Capitol Reef National Park (UT)
© Kwiktor/Dreamstime

the acreage of federal lands being leased for oil and gas development has skyrocketed, particularly in the West. Over the last few years, 5.2 million acres of public land have been leased to industry. One million of these acres have been sold at a mere \$2 each. Millions more acres remain available to any oil and gas developer for as little as \$1.50 per acre.

A Recreational Mecca and Economic Engine

Currently the Moab region of southeastern Utah is world famous for sculpted canyons, towering red rock formations, invaluable cultural sites and breathtaking beauty. National parks in the region draw tourists from around the globe.

People come to parks in Utah to hike, camp, marvel at prehistoric petroglyphs and watch exceptionally dark night skies filled with millions of stars, among other amazing experiences. These visitors collectively generated \$1.2 billion in spending, supported nearly 19,000 jobs and \$614 million in

labor income in 2019 alone.

So although the natural wonders in the region can be rightly described as “priceless,” the cost of diminishing those places with drilling operations is quantifiable and enormous. Concerns about damage to local economies on top of negative environmental impacts led more than 100 outdoor businesses and the local Moab community to oppose the proposed lease sale.

Our coalition also included elected officials at the local, state and federal levels, outdoor enthusiasts and conservation groups, and tribal leaders committed to preventing irreversible harm to sacred sites and their cultural history.

Loud and Clear

When BLM announced in May that it planned to put so much public land in Utah up for auction, NPCA and our allies immediately mobilized to oppose the sale. Petition drives, online activism, media outreach and public education initiatives were all part of our

strategy for convincing BLM leaders to change course.

Our collective voice was not only heard but heeded. The BLM’s September announcement that over 85,000 acres of public lands would not be auctioned off was a direct result of NPCA members’ activism and tenacity. It is important to note, however, that the lease sale was deferred, not eliminated from future consideration.

That means we must remain vigilant — and vocal — to ensure federal lands in Utah and other parts of the country are not auctioned off to oil and gas companies at bargain basement prices.

NPCA is grateful to all the people who stand with us and speak out to protect national parks against irreparable harm.

Visit npca.org for more photos and information on the lands spared from drilling and NPCA efforts to preserve public lands for the public’s enjoyment.

Gratitude & Resolve

National parks have the power to be the great unifiers.

They bring friends and family together, to learn about America's history, or enjoy Mother Nature at her very best. And they bring leaders together, to create new parks and to better fund them. Parks represent who we are, and the democratic ideals upon which we were founded. They are worthy of our voices, and our collective efforts to protect them. And with the incoming administration and congress, that's exactly what we will do.

Just as we have for more than one hundred years, we will work to create a better future for our national parks. That means fighting against initiatives when we must, and finding new opportunities for them when we can.

Over the last four years, clean air safeguards were erased, park wildlife was endangered, and clean water protections were undermined. These will be among the top priorities NPCA will work to reverse with the incoming administration and congress.

And we are equally committed to seeking out new opportunities for our parks, from new and expanded sites to addressing the very real impacts of climate change.

We have serious work ahead of us. But with you by our side, we are ready.



All the best to you and your loved ones this holiday season.

With gratitude,



Theresa Pierno
NPCA President & CEO



SHOW YOUR PARK PRIDE!

NPCA's new online store is the best spot to buy parks gear & NPCA logo items!

Check it out at npca.org/shop

Don't miss out on the perfect gift for park lovers!

With stunning photographs and behind-the-scenes stories, "A Century of Impact" captures 100 years of park history in a beautifully designed keepsake book. Use the code **HOLIDAY** for 20% off your order: www.npca.org/book



Give a secure, year-end gift at my.npca.org/newsletter



Colorado River that runs through Canyonlands National Park (UT)

JUSTICE PREVAILS FOR BLACKFEET NATION

Courtroom Victory Was Decades in the Making

The Badger-Two Medicine area is a federally-designated Traditional Cultural District, managed by the U.S. Forest Service and encompassing more than 165,000 acres along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front. The area is considered sacred by the Blackfeet Nation and is home to many of the tribe's traditional foods, medicines and Blackfeet creation stories. It is an active cultural landscape, where Blackfeet practice ceremony.

Since the early 1980s, the Badger-Two Medicine has also been at the center of a dispute over oil and gas leases that were issued by the federal government without proper environmental review or Blackfeet consultation. While other companies acknowledged the region's rich natural and cultural values by voluntarily relinquishing their holdings, Louisiana-based Solenex LLC demanded access to its 6,200-acre lease.

In a 2013 lawsuit, Solenex lawyers demanded the "right" to begin drilling in the Badger-Two Medicine backcountry despite risks to sacred sites, stunning landscapes and iconic wildlife. The federal government responded to that suit by canceling the Solenex lease, but the company immediately challenged that cancellation in court. In June 2020, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit ruled against

the company by upholding the lease cancellation, eliminating the last remaining federal oil and gas lease in the Badger-Two Medicine.

Our Last Refuge

When the ruling was issued, Blackfeet Tribal Preservation Officer, John Murray, spoke about clouds of threat and uncertainty that were finally parting. "Blackfeet have lived for decades with the risk of our traditional homelands being industrialized," Murray said. "The Badger-Two Medicine is essential to the cultural survival of the Blackfeet. It is our last refuge."

NPCA Crown of the Continent Senior Program Manager, Michael Jamison, also celebrated the court's decision as a victory for the Blackfeet: "Today's ruling rights the historic wrong of illegally leasing the Badger-Two Medicine without tribal consent. It gives voice to those who, throughout this legal history, have struggled to be heard."

NPCA is proud to have been a party to the legal defense that ultimately brought a long-delayed measure of justice to the Blackfeet Nation and saved sacred ground from industrial exploitation.



Sinopah Mountain and its reflection in Two Medicine Lake, Glacier National Park (MT)

ALASKAN WILDLIFE TARGETED

A new rule issued by Department of the Interior Secretary, David Bernhardt, has put bears and wolves on Alaskan parklands in the crosshairs by legalizing egregious sport hunting practices that are anything but sporting.

The state of Alaska has engaged in a twenty-year effort to reduce bear and wolf populations. Now bears and wolves and their young are not even safe in their dens. That is because under the new rule, national preserve lands in Alaska managed by the National Park Service now allow:

- Use of artificial light to enter dens to kill black bears, including females and their cubs;
- Trapping and killing wolves and their pups during denning season; and,
- Use of bait, such as donuts and grease-soaked bread, to draw in and kill brown bears.

This shocking reversal of common sense science-based wildlife management regulations began taking shape three years ago. That's when the previous Interior Secretary, Ryan Zinke, directed the National Park Service to reconsider regulations that limited hunting aimed at reducing bear and wolf populations.

That reconsideration proceeded through the Department of Interior's leadership change despite wildlife biologists, conservationists and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle being vehemently opposed to the inhumane rule change.

NPCA President, Theresa Pierno, expressed the outrage of people across the country: "National preserve lands at Denali, Katmai, Gates of the Arctic and others are places people travel to from thousands of miles away in hopes of seeing bears and wolves alive in their natural habitat. Shooting hibernating mama and baby bears is no way to treat or manage park wildlife."

NPCA's Alaska Regional Office fought long and hard to protect bears and wolves against barbaric hunting practices. Losing this round of the battle does not mark the end of NPCA's association-wide efforts to give iconic Alaskan wildlife a fair chance at survival. NPCA has filed a lawsuit challenging the new rule and will continue to push the Department of Interior to reconsider its decision. We will not quit fighting until bears, wolves and their cubs and pups are at least safe in their own dens.



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A Grizzly bear leads her triplets across one of the Alaska Peninsula's many tidal flats.

VICTORY IN ALASKA!

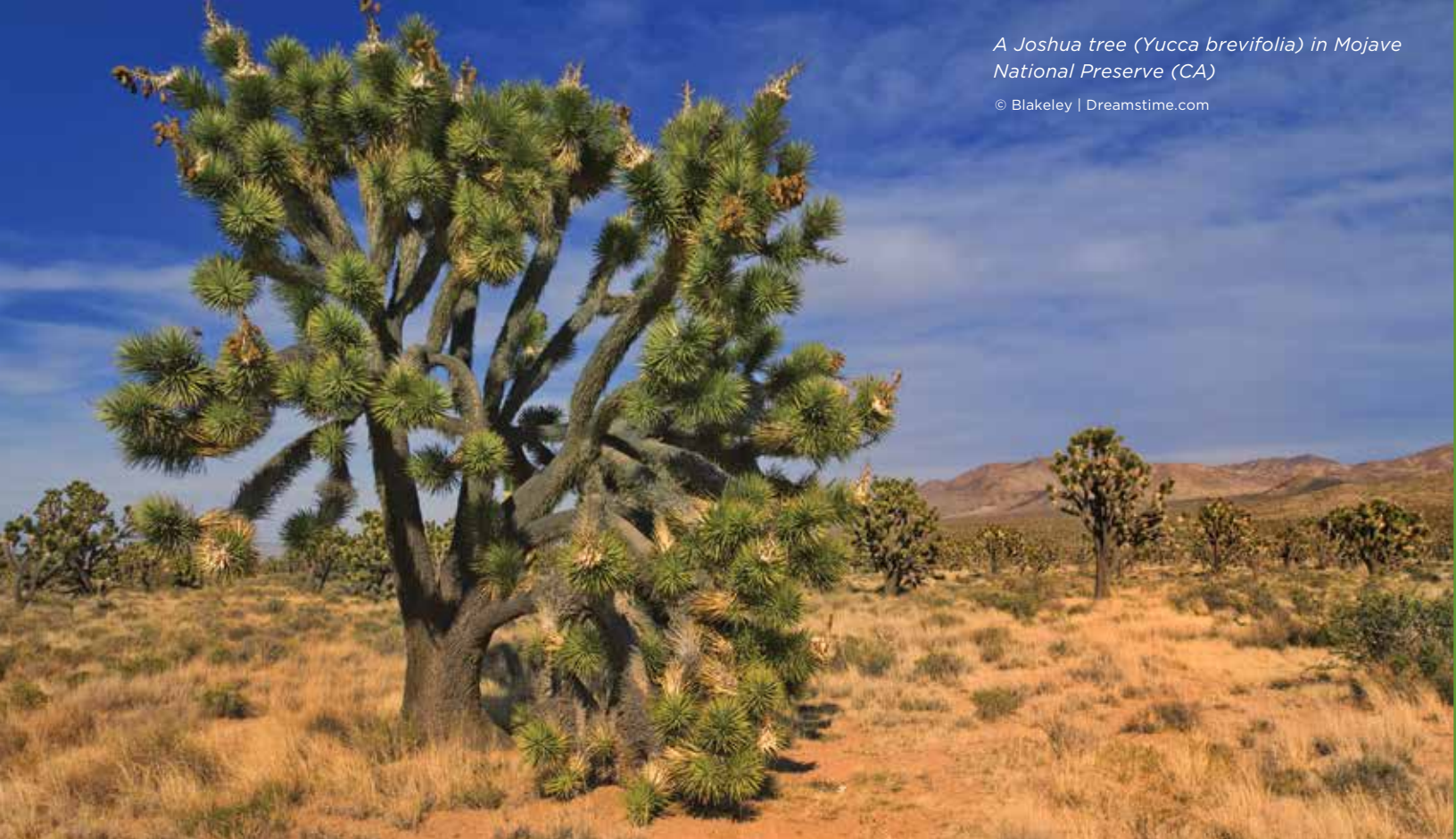
Pebble Mine Permit Rejected

On November 25th, in an about-face decision, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rejected a permit for the environmentally disastrous Pebble Mine in Alaska's Bristol Bay watershed.

The Pebble Mine and related construction activity would directly jeopardize the highest concentration of brown bears in the world along with the world-class salmon fisheries which are the bears' primary food source. Katmai and Lake Clark National Parks are within the Bristol Bay watershed and provide habitat for brown bears that rely on Bristol Bay's healthy salmon populations.

NPCA has worked for more than a decade to fight the proposed Pebble Mine, for threats to water, wildlife habitat, and subsistence resources for Alaska Natives, related to Katmai and Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.

NPCA President and CEO, Theresa Pierno notes, "This decision smartly prioritizes the long-term health of people, national parks and wildlife including the world's largest salmon run, over international mining interests. From Alaska to D.C., NPCA has worked alongside our partners for years, working to stop this dangerous proposal from becoming a reality. We will continue to stand with allies and advocates to protect this spectacular, untamed region of the country, its surrounding community and its vibrant salmon and bear populations."



WILL JOSHUA TREES SURVIVE?

Another Burning Question of Climate Change

The Joshua tree is a hearty plant. It has to be to thrive in hot, dry and rocky desert environments found in its namesake Joshua Tree National Park and other parks in the Southwest.

But the impacts of climate change — larger and more frequent wildfires in particular — are increasing concerns about the long-range survival of this unique tree. This summer's Dome Fire provided alarming evidence of how quickly Joshua trees can be wiped out on a massive scale. The Dome Fire burned across almost 44,000 acres of Mojave National Preserve in southern California. Over just a few days in mid-August, the world's largest and densest Joshua tree forest was ravaged by flames.

“It's heartbreaking to me personally and to anyone who might have thought Joshua trees would always be here,” says NPCA California Desert Associate Director, Chris Clarke. “I've camped here among the trees and watched them grow and develop through the years. Now they've gone up in smoke, and the odds against the forest's recovery are staggering.”

Joshua trees take 50 to 60 years to reach their full height and require relatively cool and wet climate conditions to grow and reproduce so their survival is indeed an open question.

To read Chris Clarke's full blog post, “What the Fire Took” visit www.npca.org/whatthefiretook

Temporary Protection Better Than None

An encouraging development came in late September when the California Fish and Game Commission unanimously approved temporary protections for the western Joshua tree under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). The unanimous vote gives state officials one year to study the species' outlook for survival and gather data to inform a final decision on whether to grant permanent threatened status to the western Joshua tree.

In addition to providing a glimmer of hope for Joshua trees, the commission's vote was the first use of CESA to protect a species mainly threatened by climate change.

NPCA's Chris Clarke hailed “California's longstanding commitment to defending California desert ecosystems and critical species including the Joshua tree.” He also stressed the need to keep working on behalf of every Joshua tree that remains standing. “Although the Dome Fire in Mojave National Preserve burnt a different species of Joshua tree, it's a stark reminder of the importance of protecting fragile species and ecosystems in the face of the climate crisis.”

TRUSTEE SPOTLIGHT: MAXINE JOHNSTON

Maxine Johnston's love of the great outdoors started at an early age. "Having grown up on a farm one almost inevitably becomes aware of nature, the seasons that change, the animals and the growth of vegetation in the woods. You grow up with it. It becomes a part of you."

Similar to how nature has been a part of Maxine's life for as long as she can remember, she has been a big part of NPCA's work for nearly 50 years. She first got involved when serving as president of the Big Thicket Association, originally in Saratoga, Texas. Maxine recalls, "I was looking to join organizations that were supporting national park status for Big Thicket, and NPCA was at the top of the list."

Having stood up to developers and politicians to protect the Big Thicket forests and the wildlife she loves, becoming an NPCA member was a logical choice for Maxine. "NPCA is a leader in park protection. From funding issues to general oversight and public education, it's all very important to the future of our parks."

Maxine estimates she has spent nearly 37,000 hours volunteering in and for Big Thicket National Preserve. That

adds up to more than four years total, and it doesn't even count all the hours she has volunteered for NPCA projects through the years. She has also provided generous financial support as one of our most dedicated Trustees for the Parks.

Of course, Big Thicket is Maxine's favorite part of the National Park System. But she acknowledges, "it's hard to choose between Yellowstone, Yosemite, Rocky Mountain, Great Smoky Mountains ... they're all wonderful and have so much to offer us."

Everyone at NPCA is grateful for all Maxine offers us — including an inspiring example of dedication to America's national parks. "One never finishes the job of advocating for parks," Maxine says, "you keep at it because that's what it takes to protect these spectacular places."



Maxine Johnston





Did You Know You Can Deduct All of Your 2020 Charitable Donations?

Earlier this year, Congress passed the CARES Act to help stimulate the economy. The CARES Act gives those who itemize their taxes the ability to deduct 100% of your cash donations this year. It raises the existing cap on annual contributions for those who itemize from 60 percent of adjusted gross income to 100 percent for most donors. This only applies to donations given to a public nonprofit, such as NPCA.

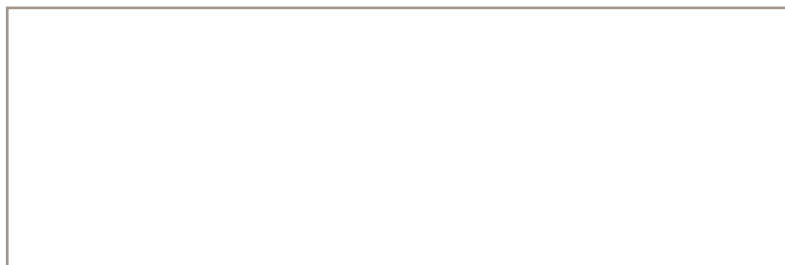
Please talk with your tax adviser to learn more about how the changes under the CARES Act may benefit you.



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OUR NEW TRAVEL COLLECTION

In 2021 NPCA is launching a brand-new collection of curated tours designed to give you exclusive experiences within the parks and special behind-the-scenes access to our staff, partners and local specialists. These all-inclusive, NPCA-led, small-group tours will highlight NPCA's important contributions to park protection while delivering outstanding educational hikes and sight-seeing in the places we know best: America's national parks.

The Wilderness of Isle Royale (August 15-22, 2021)

Immerse yourself in the dense forests, rocky ridges and small lakes of this remote island in Lake Superior.

Natural Fortunes of the Four Corners (September 26-October 2, 2021)

Known for sweeping vistas and culturally rich Puebloan settlements, the Four Corners, connecting NM, CO, UT, and AZ, is unlike anywhere else in the world.

On the Road to Freedom: Understanding Civil Rights Through our National Parks and Heritage Areas (October 1-8, 2021)

This remarkable journey takes you through some of the most significant sites in the American Civil Rights Movement.

The Backroads of Big Bend (November 8-14, 2021)

From the rugged canyons of Rio Grande to the breathtaking Chisos Mountains, you will explore this diverse landscape and dive deep into the region's cultural history.



Wolf in Isle Royale National Park (MI)

Great Deserts of the West: Joshua Tree and Death Valley (November 15-21, 2021)

Get an inside look into America's stunning Mojave Desert on this NPCA tour in five Southern California national park sites.

To learn more and reserve your spot, contact JaredDial at 202-454-3305 or jdial@npca.org