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# THE WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY:

100 YEARS OF OPPOSITION TO OUR NATION'S NATURAL TREASURES



Center for  
**Western Priorities**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1.</b>
<b>THEN: CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>3.</b>
YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK	4.
GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK	6.
OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK	8.
GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE	10.
CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK	12.
REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK	14.
<b>NOW: CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>16.</b>
RIO GRANDE DEL NORTE NATIONAL MONUMENT	17.
GREATER GRAND CANYON HERITAGE NATIONAL MONUMENT	18.
BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT	19.
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>20.</b>



# INTRODUCTION

Americans from coast to coast treasure our national monuments, parks, and forests. Given the overwhelming popularity of these lands today, it is often forgotten that for over 100 years conservation critics have opposed virtually every attempt to protect public lands for future generations. From the very earliest days of American conservation, a vocal minority has remained opposed to any and all new land protection measures.

Thankfully, America's great conservation leaders had the foresight and courage to protect our nation's iconic lands in the face of intense hostility from pro-development and anti-conservation interests. If our national leaders of yesterday had heeded the demands of these conservation opponents, the West's backbone—from Yellowstone to the Grand Canyon and from Canyonlands to California's redwoods—would have remained unprotected and open to the pressures of development and privatization.

In this report, we examine the past and present history of opposition to land conservation in the United States and look at the often-colorful language employed by opponents warning against new parks, monuments, and other protected lands. We look at the history of six current parks and monuments, where, in each case, early criticism was eventually overwhelmed by strong public and political support that remains today. We also examine three present-day examples, including the recently protected Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, along with the proposed Greater Grand Canyon Heritage and Bears Ears National Monuments. In each case opponents recycle ideological arguments against protections.



— Grand Canyon National Park —

What we find is that the ideological arguments made against land protections today are reminiscent of those made in past decades as leaders worked to protect some of America's most iconic parks and monuments. The claims in 2013 that New Mexico's spectacular Rio Grande Del Norte National Monument would lock up lands and destroy local economies were also made against Yellowstone in 1872.

National parks and monuments have become part of the fabric of the American West and the benefits afforded by these protected lands are undeniable. People from all over the country—and across the globe—make the trek to visit America's public lands. These result in tangible economic benefits for nearby communities. In 2014, America's national parks received 292 million visits.<sup>1</sup> Park visitors fill up gas tanks, stay in hotels, purchase in-park concessions, buy and rent outdoor gear, and eat in local restaurants. In 2014 alone, national park visitors infused nearly \$30 billion into the U.S. economy, including \$15.7 billion into "gateway communities."<sup>2</sup> In addition to increased tourism, national parks and other conserved lands provide nearby towns and cities with a unique competitive advantage.<sup>3</sup> They are a draw for entrepreneurs and provide a valuable recruitment tool for businesses to attract top talent.<sup>4</sup>

But even today, vocal opponents to proposed conservation measures continue to march out the same tired predictions: conservation will "stifle," "ban," and "stunt" local economic activities. Time and time again they are proven wrong.

## the ANTIQUITIES ACT

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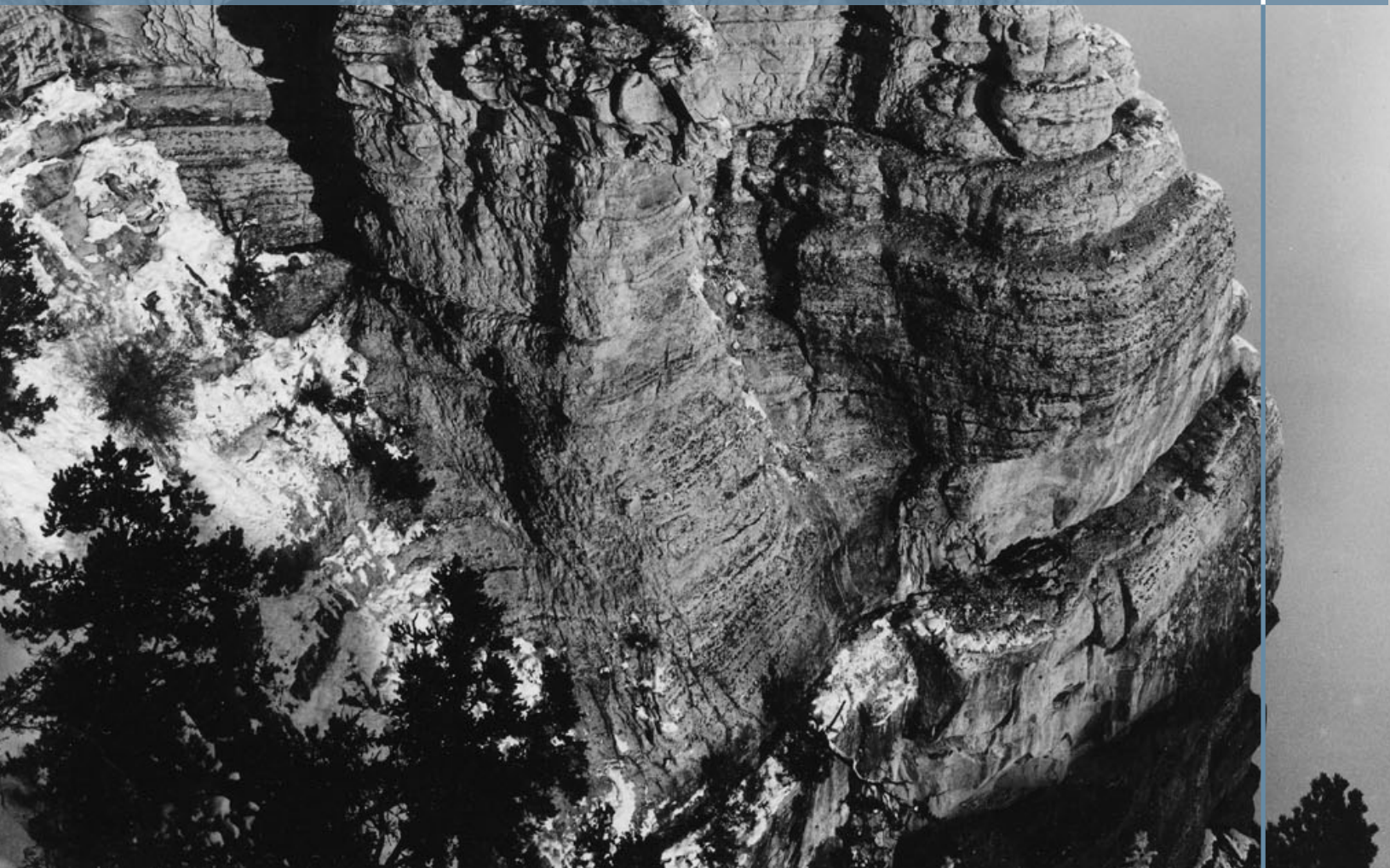
Two of the most important ways to permanently protect American public lands are through Congressional legislation or through the Antiquities Act. One of the most pivotal pieces of conservation legislation ever passed, the Antiquities Act allows the President to directly preserve "objects of historic and scientific interest" as national monuments.<sup>5</sup> Here are a few key takeaways about the Act:

- Some of our most iconic national parks—like Arches and the Grand Canyon—were first protected under the Antiquities Act.<sup>6</sup>
- Since its passage in 1906, the Antiquities Act has been used 145 times to protect iconic lands.<sup>7</sup>
- The Antiquities Act has been used by both Republican and Democratic presidents.<sup>8</sup>
- The largest national monument protected by the Antiquities Act is the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, west of the Hawaiian Islands, at 139,797 square miles—an area larger than every national park combined.<sup>9</sup>





# THEN : CASE STUDIES



# 1872

“We regard the passage of the act [to protect the area] as a great blow struck at the prosperity of the towns of Bozeman and Virginia City.”<sup>10</sup>

— THE *HELENA GAZETTE*







# YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Before its designation as the first national park, Yellowstone's sole white settlers were homesteaders and itinerant trappers and hunters.<sup>11</sup> Drawn by ample beaver, bison, and other large game, this cadre of sportsmen were the most vocal opposition to conservation measures.

The 1872 national park designation did little to quell discontent from locals. With scarce funding and resources, the newly created park staff could not adequately protect the expanse of Yellowstone from poaching. The first supervisor was not even offered a salary. Congress eventually allocated funding for building roads and creating a visitor infrastructure—and in doing so setting an example for scores of national parks to follow.<sup>12</sup>



## TODAY

With roaming bison, open expanses, and impressive geysers, each year Yellowstone brings in:<sup>13</sup>



## 1976

“Yellowstone is the oldest and the largest [national park]...I want to be as faithful to my grandchildren's generation as Old Faithful has been to ours.”<sup>14</sup>

— PRESIDENT GERALD FORD

# 1897

“[This move to protect the area is] a fiendish and diabolical scheme ... The fate of Arizona depends exclusively upon the development of her mineral resources.”<sup>15</sup>

— THE *WILLIAMS SUN*







# GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

In the second half of the 19th century, commercial interests coalesced in opposition to efforts to protect the Grand Canyon: mining prospectors, cattle grazers, and railroads all eyeing tracts of land.<sup>16</sup> The steady opposition to conservation efforts resulted in an arduous process on the way to permanent protection. The canyon first became a forest reserve, then a game preserve, and finally a national monument in 1908.<sup>17</sup> The steady drumbeat of support ultimately resulted in the Grand Canyon National Park being established in 1919.

**TODAY** The Grand Canyon is perhaps the most iconic American landscape, each year bringing in:<sup>18</sup>



**1991**

“Here, as we look over the south rim of the world's greatest natural wonder, we see Arizona skies, a kaleidoscope of beauty of the Grand Canyon, we see a place that has made even the most calloused observer gasp with awe.”<sup>19</sup>

— PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH

# 1911

“[We] would be fools to let a lot of foolish sentimentalists tie up the resources of the Olympic peninsula in order to preserve its scenery.”<sup>20</sup>

— M.J. CARRIGAN,  
Seattle Tax Commissioner







# OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

Photo: Flehy Studio  
Washington State Historical Society

The Olympic Peninsula west of Seattle is home to some of the largest specimens of Douglas fir and red cedar trees in the country<sup>21</sup>—which is why logging companies voraciously fought any efforts to protect the swath of mountainous forest.

After President Theodore Roosevelt protected the peninsula as a national monument in 1909, outrage ensued with logging companies lashing out at timber restrictions.<sup>22</sup> But opposition faded as public perception slowly recognized the threat logging posed to wildlife and old growth forest. In 1938, the area became Olympic National Park.<sup>23</sup>



**TODAY** Olympic National Park stretches from snowy mountains to the Pacific coast, each year bringing in:<sup>24</sup>



**2014** “Every town around... benefits from having this world-heritage park in our midst.”<sup>25</sup>

— DIANE SCHOSTAK, Director  
Olympic Peninsula Visitor Bureau

# 1924

“[This designation] is a monstrous crime against development and advancement. It leads one to wonder if Washington has gone crazy through catering to conservation faddists.”<sup>26</sup>

— THE ALASKA DAILY EMPIRE







## GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE

The campaign to protect Glacier Bay began in the 1920s. At the time, gold mining was common in the area, and homesteaders drawn by the promise of wealth vehemently opposed rumors of a national monument designation.<sup>27</sup>

Through tireless advocacy by Dr. William Cooper and the Ecological Society of America, in 1925 land conservation supporters harvested the fruits of their labor: a national monument designation from President Calvin Coolidge.<sup>28</sup> Fifty-five years later, the monument became a national park, finishing a marathon journey of conservation efforts spanning much of the twentieth century.



**TODAY** Visitors travel from around the world to survey the broad expanse of Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve, each year bringing in:<sup>29</sup>

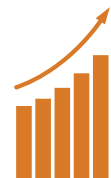
**500.7**  
thousand visitors



**1,979**  
local jobs



**\$160**  
million into economy



**2006**

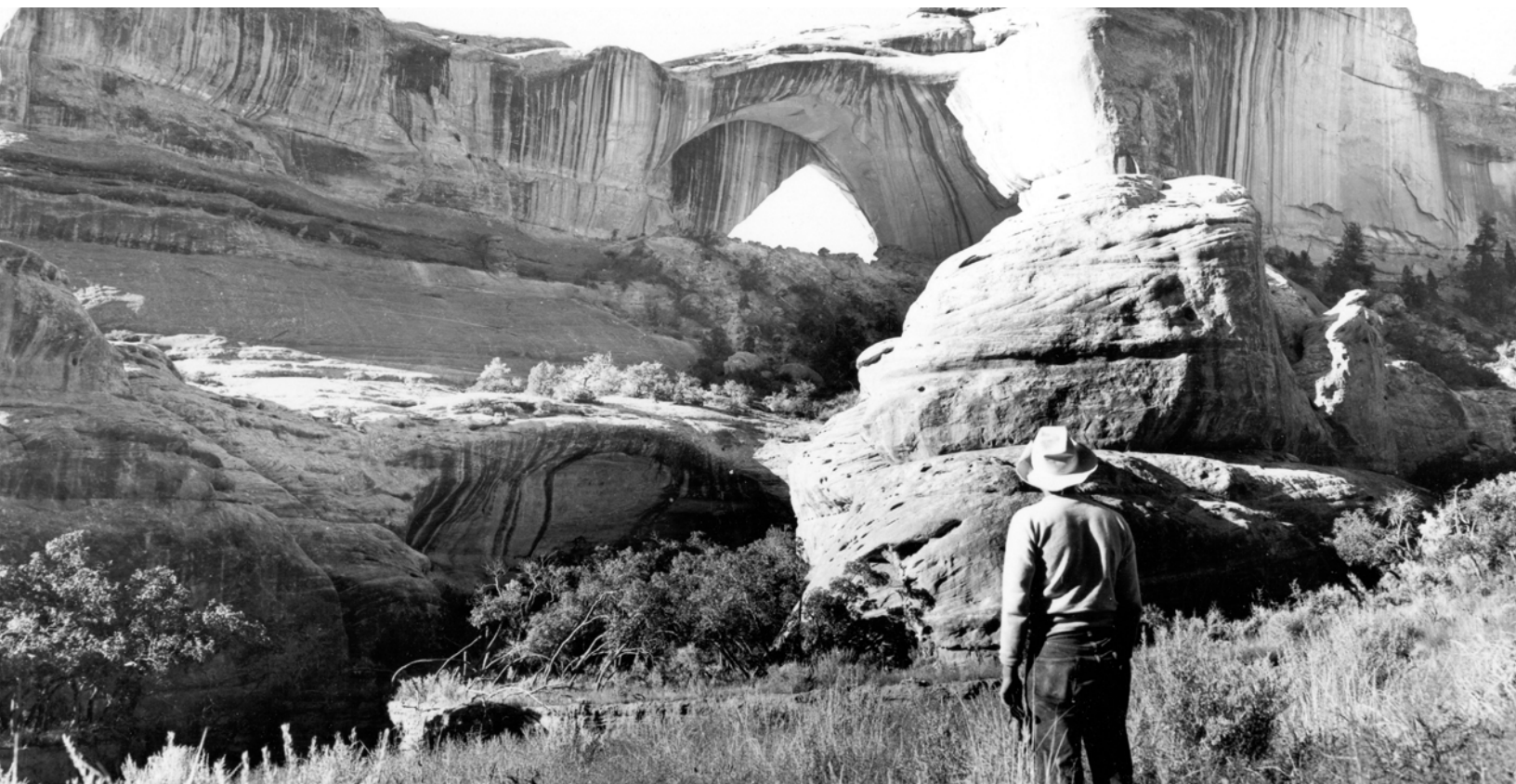
“The fact is, Glacier Bay National Park fuels the economy of Gustavus...You can wrestle over issues that aren’t that big, but are emotional, or you can look at the big picture.”<sup>30</sup>

— WAYNE HOWELL,  
Former Vice Mayor of Gustavus

# 1961

“All commercial use and business activity would be forever banned and nearly all of Southern Utah’s growth would be forever stunted [should this area be protected].”<sup>31</sup>

— WALLACE F. BENNETT







## CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK

The fight for Canyonlands National Park epitomized the myriad challenges that sometimes faced conservationists in the 20th century: political squabbling, industry opposition, and legislative failures.<sup>32</sup> But it was followed soon after by popular and economic successes.

Legislation to protect Canyonlands was first proposed by Utah Senator Frank Moss in 1961, which immediately provoked the ire of Governor George Clyde and fellow Senator Wallace Bennett.<sup>33</sup> Along with the petroleum industry, Bennett and Clyde feared that a park would harm mineral extraction and grazing, and they publicly opposed Senator Moss and Interior Secretary Stewart Udall's proposal.

After three years—and several iterations of legislation—President Lyndon Johnson finally rewarded the Canyonlands coalition's years of work by signing legislation to permanently protect Canyonlands National Park.<sup>34</sup>

### TODAY

Canyonlands draws rafters, mountain bikers, campers, and hikers, each year bringing in:<sup>35</sup>

**542.4**

thousand visitors



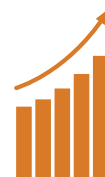
**477**

local jobs



**\$37**

million into economy



**2014**

“We owe a debt of gratitude to the people, both elected officials and citizens, who possessed the foresight to recognize the value of Canyonlands and created the park 50 years ago.”<sup>36</sup>

— SENATOR ORRIN HATCH

# 1966

“A tree is a tree. How many more do you have to look at?”<sup>37</sup>

— GOVERNOR RONALD REAGAN



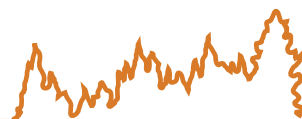




## REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK

With technological advances in the timber industry, the harvesting of old-growth California redwoods increased dramatically around the turn of the 20th century.<sup>38</sup> Land conservation proponents began a fifty-year campaign to protect the northern California giants but were often thwarted by an entrenched timber industry.

By 1964, a new study showed that only 750,000 acres of old-growth redwoods remained of the original 1.9 million, prompting President Lyndon Johnson to pressure Congress for protections.<sup>39</sup> While the effort took another four years, logging companies eventually agreed to scale back harvesting, and Congress finally passed a national park designation in 1968.<sup>40</sup> In a collaborative effort, the national park was designed to overlap with three existing state parks and forty miles of California coastline. Ten years later, President Jimmy Carter added 48,000 acres to the national park, the majority of which had already been logged.<sup>41</sup> Restoration of these lands continues today.



**TODAY** The sequoias of Redwood are among the most iconic trees in America. Every year the national park brings in:<sup>42</sup>

**429.2**

thousand visitors



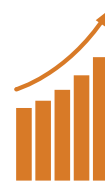
**428**

local jobs



**\$33**

million into economy



**1985**

“From the dense stands of hardwoods in New England to the towering redwoods of California, America has been blessed with an abundance of forestland.”<sup>43</sup>

— PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN,  
nearly 20 years after his previous statement





# NOW : CASE STUDIES

Despite the incontrovertible evidence that national parks, monuments, and other conserved lands are economic boons for local communities, there are still prominent figures that repeat the same tired maxims about present-day conservation efforts. Opponents of Rio Grande del Norte, designated in 2013, and of two potential national monuments—the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage monument and the Bears Ears monument—are recycling worn-out criticism that, as shown above, has been proven wrong by a century of conservation successes.





# RIO GRANDE DEL NORTE NATIONAL MONUMENT

The Rio Grande del Norte spans the semi-arid plains of New Mexico's Taos Plateau, rising to an elevation of over 10,000 feet at the peak of Ute Mountain<sup>44</sup>—an extinct reminder of the area's volcanic history—before plunging 800 feet down the Rio Grande Gorge to the river below.<sup>45</sup>

Driven by a desire to preserve the area's recreational value, cultural resources, and traditional land uses, a broad coalition of conservationists, sportsmen, local elected leaders, ranchers, the Taos Pueblo, and 160 local businesses formed to support the permanent protection of the Rio Grande del Norte.<sup>46</sup>

After considerable consultation with local stakeholders,<sup>47</sup> legislation to conserve the region was first introduced by Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall in 2009, but languished in Congress.<sup>48</sup> The bill was reintroduced in 2011<sup>49</sup> and again in 2013<sup>50</sup>, but no action was taken. With the bills languishing, in 2013 President Obama stepped up to permanently protect the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.<sup>51</sup>

The primary voices of opposition came from outside of the state: Representatives Doc Hastings from Washington and Rob Bishop from Utah, whose attacks fell flat amid widespread support and celebration.<sup>52</sup>

**JUST ONE YEAR** after designation, Rio Grande del Norte already draws rafters and hikers looking to explore this unique cultural landscape, bringing in:<sup>53</sup>



**2014** “The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument has already become an important part of our community.... The Monument is one more thing we turn to in promoting Taos and Northern New Mexico as a first-rate outdoors and tourism destination.”<sup>54</sup>

— COMMISSIONER LARRY SANCHEZ,  
Taos County



# GREATER GRAND CANYON HERITAGE PROPOSED NATIONAL MONUMENT

Photo: Kristen Caldon

“[The proposal]... pandering to extremist environmental groups, will kill jobs, stifle development, permanently prevent mining and future grazing leases... in northern Arizona.”<sup>55</sup>

— REPRESENTATIVE PAUL GOSAR

“Too often, presidents have forced monument designations on communities over local objections and disrupted economies....”<sup>56</sup>

— REPRESENTATIVE CYNTHIA LUMMIS,  
Western Caucus Chairwoman

The greater Grand Canyon and its sensitive water resources, forests, wildlife, and cultural values are at risk from industrial development, including uranium mining. With strong leadership from local tribes, a long-running effort to gain more permanent protections for the canyons and open spaces surrounding the Grand Canyon National Park remains underway.

The proposed monument, as described in the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage Monument Act introduced in 2015 by Arizona Representative Raúl Grijalva, would make permanent the temporary ban on new uranium mining near the canyon—a withdrawal that had tremendous local, bipartisan support.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, it would preserve existing activities, including hunting, fishing, cycling, and traditional tribal access.

Unfortunately, some political interests continue to oppose common-sense protections for one the America’s crown jewels. Arizona Senators Jeff Flake and John McCain have both publicly opposed a national monument designation,<sup>58</sup> and industrial interests eyeing the area’s uranium deposits are critical as well.<sup>59</sup>

The language of the opposition to this monument is eerily reminiscent to the arguments made over a century ago, when ranchers and railroad companies feared economic constriction after the protection of the Grand Canyon.





## BEARS EARS PROPOSED NATIONAL MONUMENT

Photo: Keith Cuddeback  
CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

“We’re a mineral county. We’ve survived on the mineral extraction industry in this county. [I’ll fight the monument] so that we who live here 365 days a year can survive, not like those who just come to visit and then leave and enjoy the place that they live in.”<sup>60</sup>

— COMMISSIONER BRUCE ADAMS,  
San Juan County

The Bears Ears mesa—named for its distinctive twin plateaus—and the surrounding lands contain more than 100,000 archaeological sites.<sup>61</sup> This living cultural landscape is plagued by vandalism and looming oil and gas exploration.<sup>62</sup> The Utah legislature even called for the “full development”<sup>63</sup> of much of the Bears Ears region<sup>64</sup> in 2015.

After being diminished in the Utah public lands planning process,<sup>65</sup> an inter-tribal coalition—including six of the seven Utah Navajo Chapters and five Southwestern tribes<sup>66</sup>—unveiled a proposal calling for the Bears Ears National Monument.<sup>67</sup>

The proposal was unprecedented, marking the first time that the call for a new national monument came directly from Native American leaders.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the support of nearly 300 tribes nationwide, the Utah delegation has largely dismissed a potential monument.<sup>69</sup> Representative Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) said that if the President were to designate a national monument at the request of the tribes, he would be “so disappointed and frustrated and I would use every muscle I have in the [House] Oversight Committee to get the administration to explain it.”<sup>70</sup>

Some county commissioners, like Commissioner Bruce Adams, are echoing opponents from centuries past, contending that a designation would damage the economy, despite a century’s worth of evidence to the contrary.<sup>71</sup>

# CONCLUSION

“Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, [national parks and monuments] reflect us at our best rather than our worst. Without them, millions of American lives...would have been poorer. The world would have been poorer.”<sup>72</sup>

— Wallace Stegner —

For more than a century, the most vocal land conservation opponents have scarcely changed their message. Instead of well-informed debate, critics resort to a reactionary, anti-federal government message and a knee-jerk fear of economic stagnation—an argument that has been soundly rebuked by the significant economic successes of America’s public lands.

While many deserving and sensitive landscapes—like Arizona’s Greater Grand Canyon Heritage National Monument and Bears Ears National Monument—await much-needed protection, vocal opposition echoes outdated platitudes. These criticisms ignore the critical, long-term, and sustainable economic and intrinsic benefits of the West’s protected public lands.



— Yellowstone National Park —



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