# SPOILED PARKS

**The 12 National Parks Most Threatened by Oil and Gas Development**

NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

100 YEARS

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# CONTENTS

The Trump administration's drilling policies are accelerating leasing in national park landscapes and eliminating vital environmental protections. Without immediate action to counter these policies, the parks will suffer long-lasting harm to their natural, cultural and economic values.

From the otherworldly rock spires in Canyonlands to wood storks of the Everglades, America's national parks today are facing unparalleled threats. Under the current administration, public lands are being leased at a breakneck pace with oil and gas development on the doorsteps of our national parks.

At the same time, the administration has rolled back critical protections for air, water and wildlife—and eliminated or drastically reduced opportunities for the public to weigh in on drilling leases. The combined effect of these environmental rollbacks and massive expansion of oil and gas leasing puts our national parks at risk of irreparable harm.

Since taking office, the Trump administration has offered almost 19 million acres of public land for oil and gas leasing—an area larger than the entire state of West Virginia. All this is being done at the same time the administration is revising the management plans for more than 24 million acres of public land and proposing to slash conservation protections by 80%.[1] The imbalance of land management by this administration's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is astonishing and hurting our national parks and treasured landscapes next to them.

This reckless process could have devastating results for some of America's most treasured parks and their wildlife, people, and cultural and natural resources that call these places and surrounding lands home.

With its unrelenting focus on drilling at any cost, the administration has set the stage to fundamentally alter America's landscape.

Threats to America's national parks are growing increasingly urgent by the day with leases being offered across the West every three months. The administration is now offering practically any parcel that industry nominates for an oil and gas lease, many at only $2 an acre. These new measures have led to tens of thousands of acres being offered for lease at every sale.

The need for restraint and better planning has never been more important to keep drilling from protected and sensitive areas. Furthermore, the administration's rush to drill is compounding the serious effect that climate change is having on parks and communities. A new study shows that between now and 2050, new U.S. drilling could release 120 billion metric tons of carbon pollution, or the equivalent of the lifetime carbon dioxide emissions of 1,000 coal-fired power plants.[2]

To expedite drilling on public lands, the administration has adopted an aggressive series of executive orders, rules and memoranda that place the interests of big oil above the voice of everyday citizens—essentially, cutting the public out of public lands decisions. Instructional Memorandum (IM) 2018-034, issued by former Department of the Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, identified and eliminated policies that protect communities and wildlife and discouraged public

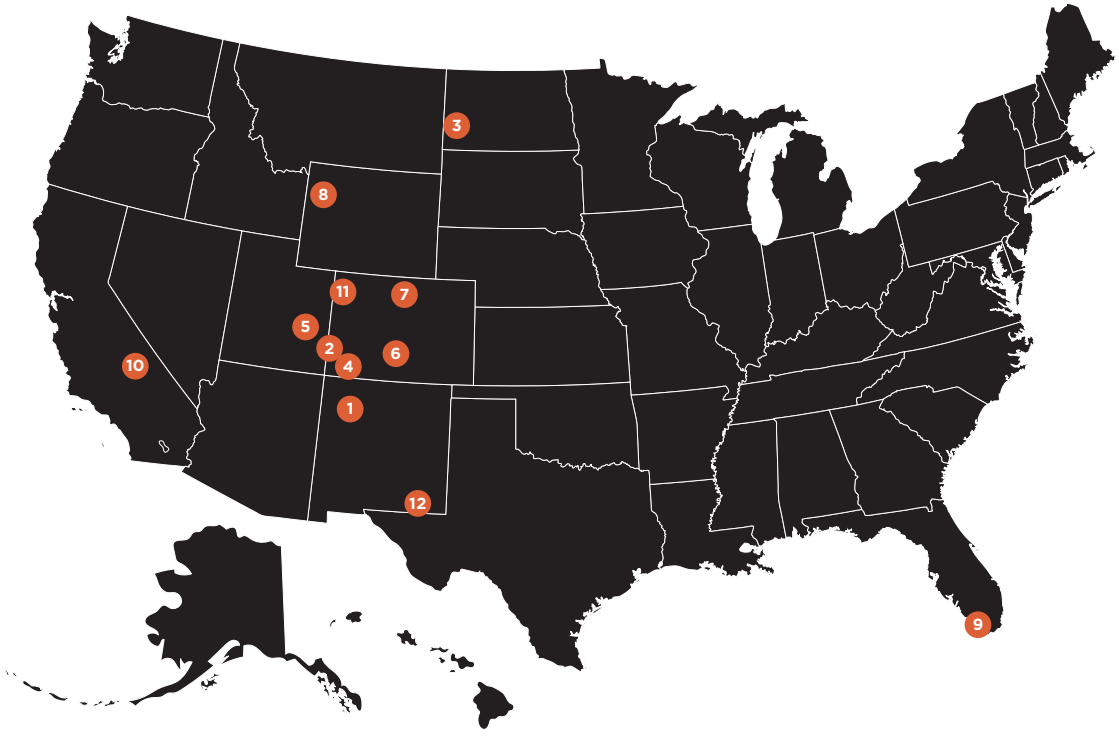
Credit: © Chris Boyer | Kestrel Aerial Services

participation in decision-making around lease sales. The administration also scrapped an oil and gas lease planning process called Master Leasing Plans (MLPs). These collaborative processes brought stakeholders together to help officials steer leasing away from national parks and other lands of high cultural, ecological and recreational value. In contrast, this administration is allowing the oil and gas industry to drill ever closer to national parks with much less oversight and accountability.

For more than 100 years, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), along with its more than 1.3 million members and supporters, has served as the fearless defender of our national parks. Just as park threats do not stop at park boundaries, nor does our work. Oil and gas development that is occurring within national parks and surrounding landscapes threatens to undermine the sustainability of tribal cultures, public health, wildlife populations and outdoor economies. Our leaders must take these steps to protect our values and sustain our national parks:

- **Improve the lease-planning process to ensure that national park landscapes are unharmed by oil and gas development and that the National Park Service has a prominent, official role in all leasing decisions that affect parks;**
- **Pass legislation that protects sensitive park landscapes from oil and gas leasing;**
- **Curtail fossil fuel extraction from public lands to mitigate the impacts of climate change; and**
- **Maintain and strengthen keystone conservation laws such as the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act to better protect our precious natural resources from oil and gas leasing.**

# THE 12 MOST THREATENED NATIONAL PARKS




1. Chaco Culture National Historical Park
2. Hovenweep National Monument
3. Theodore Roosevelt National Park
4. Mesa Verde National Park
5. Canyonlands National Park
6. Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve
7. Rocky Mountain National Park
8. Grand Teton National Park
9. Big Cypress National Preserve
10. Sequoia National Park
11. Dinosaur National Monument
12. Carlsbad Caverns National Park

*Spoiled Parks* examines the national parks that are most impacted by oil and gas development across the contiguous United States.

The 12 national parks included face widespread impacts that are, in many cases, irreversible. From polluting the air to contaminating water to scarring landscapes, the policies pursued by this administration are detrimental to our parks.

Impacts to parks and surrounding landscapes are grouped around four themes:

### LEASING OUR LEGACY

National parks and their surrounding landscapes protect and tell the unique stories of America and celebrate our conservation heritage. Among the stories are those sacred to native cultures and civilizations who have lived on the land for generations. Places including Chaco Culture National Historical Park and Theodore Roosevelt National Park are at risk from oil and gas development that threatens to erode the very stories and artifacts our parks strive to protect.

### WELLS IN THE WILD

National parks including Grand Teton and Big Cypress are home to some of the most unique and diverse ecosystems in the entire world. Elk, panthers, pronghorn antelope, wolves and grizzly bears roam the prairies and forested lands protected within park boundaries. Their habitat and migration corridors surrounding parks are becoming fragmented by drilling and development, threatening the long-term viability of some of our nation's most iconic and endangered species.

### PAYING THE PRICE

People travel from all over the world to visit America's national parks, spending time and money on lodging, food and other activities. From Sequoia to Rocky Mountain, the national parks covered by this report together generate more than $1.7 billion in annual economic output for gateway communities.[3] In its quest to develop as much oil and gas as possible, this administration fails to consider the impacts to thriving local economies that stand to suffer the most from shortsighted drilling proposals.

### CONTAMINATING COMMUNITIES

The long-term human health impacts caused by air and water pollution associated with fossil fuels is well documented. In many cases, including near Dinosaur and Hovenweep national monuments, the negative health effects are already being felt in communities that stand to suffer even more under this administration's policies. A recent report by NPCA found that 96% of all parks are plagued by significant air pollution problems, an increasing amount of which stems from nearby oil and gas development at national parks.

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Credit: © Sumikophoto | Dreamstime

# LEASING OUR LEGACY

National parks are more than iconic landscapes; parks tell the stories of our shared history and cultural heritage.

Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico, Hovenweep National Monument in Utah and Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado protect stories and cultures of the Ancestral Puebloan people—a civilization that continues to define the Southwest United States. In North Dakota, Theodore Roosevelt National Park and the former president's ranch mark the beginnings of the modern conservation movement and the creation of publicly protected places that belong to all Americans.

The cultural legacy of these four parks has already been diminished, and could be forever tarnished, due to the reckless energy policies pursued by this administration.

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# CHACO CULTURE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

The largest methane hot spot in the United States, attributable to oil and gas drilling, sits above one of the most important cultural sites in the National Park System.

Between 850 and 1150 A.D., Chaco Canyon was the hub of the Puebloan civilization and is the ancestral homeland of numerous Southwestern tribes. The scale and sophistication of these communities and economies were unparalleled in the region. The structures completed by these Native populations were some of the largest buildings constructed in North America until the 19th century. For generations, their complex culture brought people together from areas as distant as southern Mexico to engage in commerce, share knowledge and celebrate important milestones and religious events.

Chaco Culture National Historical Park was first established as a national monument in 1907 to preserve and tell the story of Chaco Canyon, which continues to be an important cultural center for tribal communities today. The park protects many of these impressive structures and is one of the largest collections of ancestral sites north of Mexico.

While the footprint of Chaco Culture National Historical Park itself is small, the larger connected cultural landscape is vast. For many Native peoples, the boundaries of the park do not encompass all that is important spiritually and culturally.

The park's location within the San Juan Basin, a geologic formation rich in fossil fuel resources, creates an ongoing threat to the park's cultural resources. The oil and gas industry has already heavily developed the region on a patchwork of private, state, federal and tribal lands. Such development has scarred the landscape with tens of thousands of oil and gas wells and roads that now cut through the Chaco landscape, trafficked by trucks and heavy equipment, which destroy and endanger numerous ancient archaeological sites. This only makes it more important that federal lands in the region be protected for their cultural values, not opened to even more drilling.

The Bureau of Land Management's Farmington Field Office in New Mexico has already leased more than 91 percent of Chaco's surrounding public

**RESOURCES THREATENED**

- CULTURAL LANDSCAPE
- NIGHT SKIES
- PUBLIC HEALTH
- AIR QUALITY

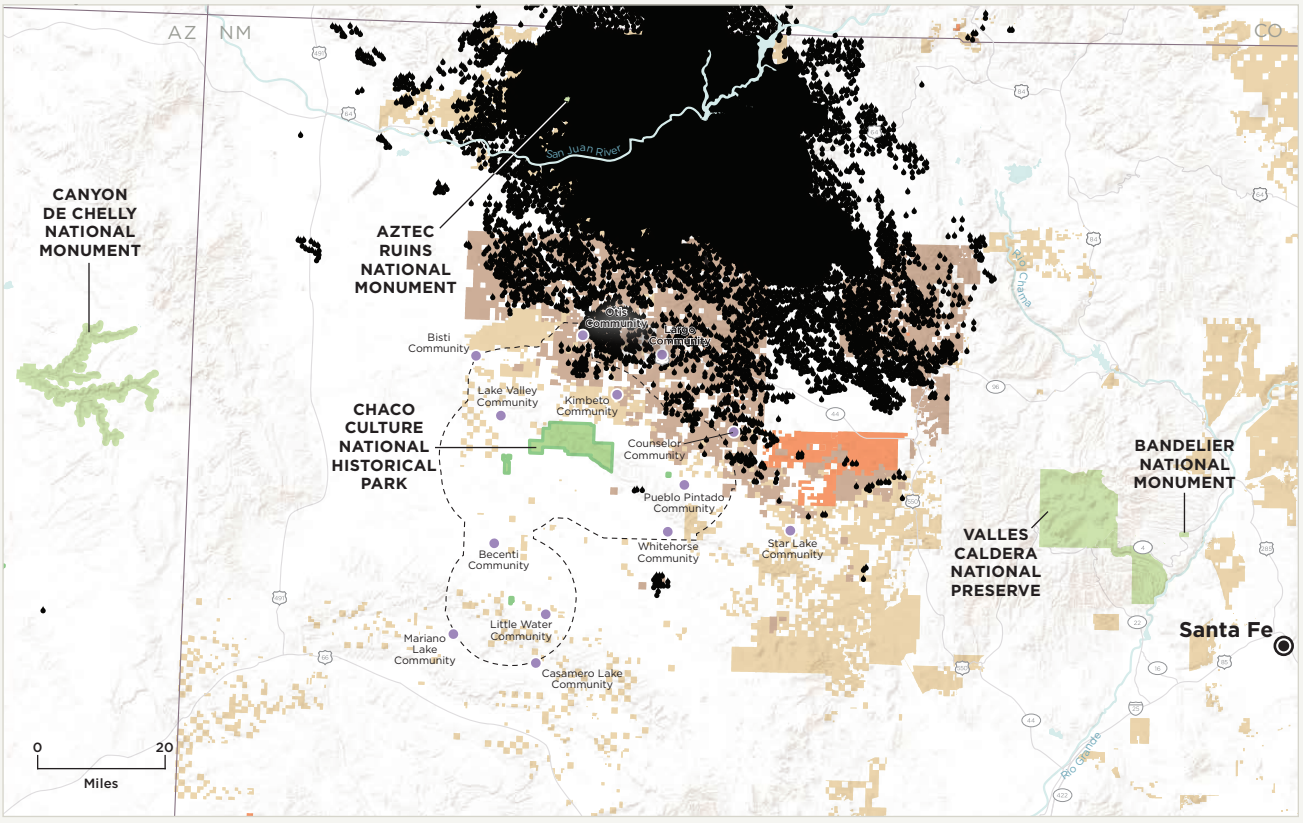
**BY THE NUMBERS**

**2,500**
**Size, in square miles, of the methane hot spot above the Four Corners region[5]**

**316,076**
**The proposed number of federal acres withdrawn from new mineral extraction in the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act**

**5,000**
**Conservative estimate for number of cultural sites currently unprotected in the Greater Chaco region[6]**

**75**
**Percentage of residents of San Juan County who live within a half mile of oil and gas infrastructure[7]**




land to the oil and gas industry.[4] Gas flares light up the dark night skies, and pollution from flares and leaking infrastructure endanger the health of the Native American communities who have lived in the area for centuries. Rampant methane waste, particularly in the San Juan Basin, has created a 2,500-square-mile methane cloud—the size of the state of Delaware—over the Four Corners region and national parks including Chaco.

All of the drilling advanced by this administration has taken place without meaningful consultation with the local tribal communities.

Fighting back, a historic coalition of the Pueblo and Navajo peoples in the region have come together to protect the landscape. Along with the entire New Mexico congressional delegation, they are advancing legislation to permanently protect the area surrounding the park from new oil and gas development (depicted on the map as the “Chaco Withdrawal Area”).

Credit: © Chris Boyer | Kestrel Aerial Services

# 2 HOVENWEEP NATIONAL MONUMENT

In many cases, as little as 2% of recently leased land around Hovenweep National Monument has been surveyed for cultural and archaeological artifacts. Without swift action, the area could be industrialized before we even know what we stand to lose.

The lands of Hovenweep National Monument in southeast Utah show evidence of Ancestral Puebloan inhabitants and cultures as far back as 1200 and 1300 A.D. The Puebloans constructed a series of intricate multistory towers overlooking canyons and the arid desert landscape, demonstrating a close connection between civilizations at nearby sites such as Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde. Hovenweep is also home to some of the best remaining examples of the skillful masonry of this era.

One prominent example in the region is Hovenweep Castle—an archaeoastronomy site that features a solar calendar, marking the beginning of each solstice. Other still-existing structures hold many additional mysteries to uncover.

Prior to the Trump administration, the Utah Bureau of Land Management had recognized the importance of the landscape surrounding Hovenweep National Monument and was slated to develop a Master Leasing Plan, a "smart from the start" approach to leasing designed to ensure that oil and gas development near sensitive places like national parks is done with consideration and care for the many nondrilling uses of the land.

However, the Trump administration immediately targeted this region for development — first by reducing the size of the neighboring Bears Ears National Monument by nearly 85% and leaving that previously protected landscape open to mineral, oil and gas development. In fact, the administration has nearly completed a new management plan for the smaller Bears Ears National Monument that jeopardizes everything the monument was originally created to protect, including extraordinary, sacred landscapes and troves of priceless cultural resources, while leaving the landscape that was removed from the monument open to potential development. The administration is now leasing heavily in the region against the protests of tribes, archaeologists, nearby communities and conservation groups.

**RESOURCES THREATENED**

- CULTURAL LANDSCAPE
- NIGHT SKIES
- AIR QUALITY

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**112,000**

**Number of acres leased by the BLM in Southeast Utah since the beginning of 2018**

**2**

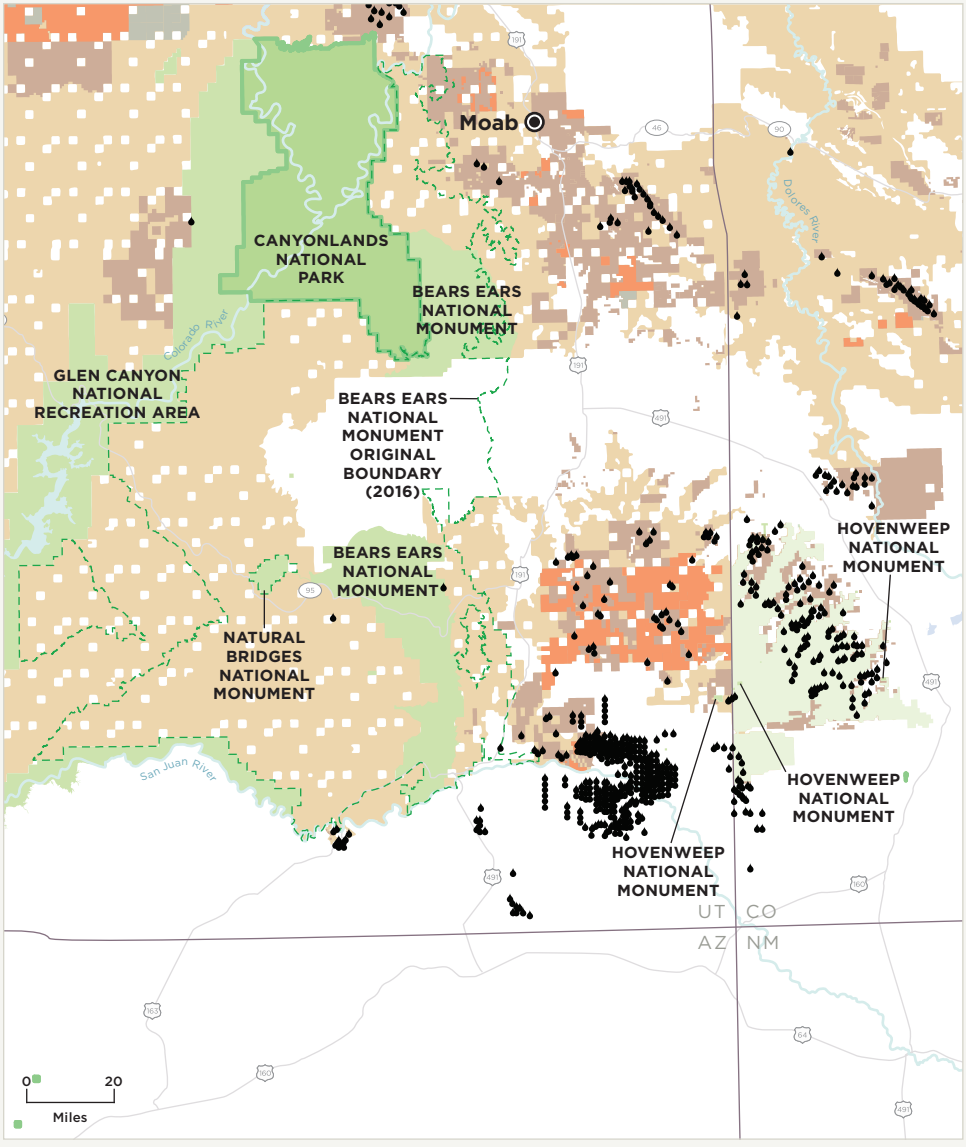
**Percentage of some recently leased land that has actually been surveyed by archaeologists[8]**

**3 miles**

**The closest oil and gas lease to Hovenweep National Monument**

**1,700**

**The number of known cultural sites in three recent lease sales[9]**




The region is home to thousands of historically significant cultural sites, few of which have been properly inventoried or studied. Without a comprehensive resource analysis, this landscape could be industrialized beyond recognition before we even know what stands to be lost. The All Pueblo Council of Governors in New Mexico, the Hopi Tribe, the Ute Mountain Ute and the Navajo Utah Commission have all called for a moratorium on new leasing until a full cultural resources inventory—including sacred sites still used today—has been completed.

Additionally, Hovenweep National Monument is recognized as an International Dark Sky Park of the highest tier, designated for its exceptional quality of starry nights and nocturnal environment. Because light pollution from oil derricks and methane flaring can be seen from more than 35 miles away, the quality of this pristine dark sky is also under threat.

Credit: © Dave Bruner | NPS

# 3 THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL PARK

North Dakota produces 2.8 billion cubic feet of natural gas every day.[10] Theodore Roosevelt National Park is now almost completely surrounded by oil and gas development.

"I have always said I would not have been president had it not been for my experience in North Dakota" — Theodore Roosevelt. A young Roosevelt visited the badlands of North Dakota and fell in love with the landscape. The badlands had such a profound impact on Roosevelt that he returned to the area to heal after the death of his wife and mother. Roosevelt immersed himself in frontier life and lived at his Elkhorn ranch on the banks of the Little Missouri River. Today, the park protects the Elkhorn ranch site and stands as a testament to America's conservation legacy and the president who helped shape it.

The landscape holds the history of diverse cultures and remains important to Native American tribes today. Lands within the park are a part of the traditional bison hunting and eagle trapping grounds of the Hidatsa and Mandan tribes. The Arikara, Crow, Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Chippewa, Cree, Sioux and Rocky Boy tribes are all associated with lands within the park.

Each tribe has a unique history, spirituality and tradition with the badlands. The national park protects more than 70,000 acres of these sacred lands, iconic wildlife and unique rock structures.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park sits atop the Bakken Formation, an enormous oil and gas reserve that has been developed since the 1950s. With the recent advent of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, development began encroaching on the park.

To date, 90% of the Little Missouri National Grasslands, which fully surround the park, has already been leased for oil and gas development. This development has brought large infrastructure to the doorstep of the park and the communities nearby. In fact, there are many locations within the park where visitors can see the flares from nearby oil and gas operations.

We must act now to ensure this piece of American history is not completely consumed by the oil and gas boom.

**RESOURCES THREATENED**

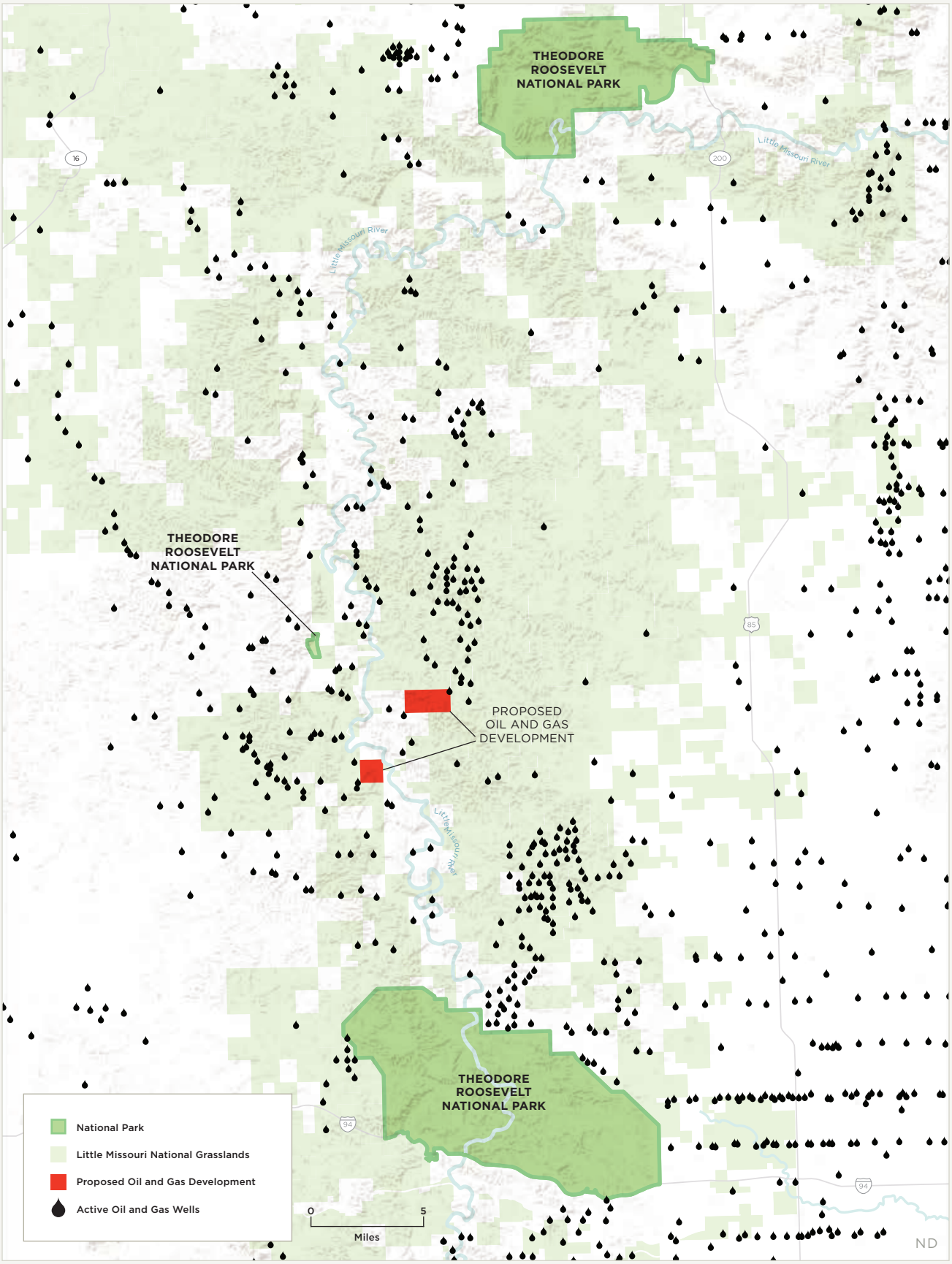
- AIR QUALITY
- VISITOR EXPERIENCE
- NIGHT SKIES
- PUBLIC HEALTH
- CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**2.8 BILLION**
**Cubic feet of natural gas produced in North Dakota on a single day in early 2019, 20% of which was wasted through venting or flaring**

**180**
**Well sites approved in 2019 near the Little Missouri River, which flows through Theodore Roosevelt National Park**

**749,000**
**Annual visitors to the park in 2018, making it one of North Dakota's top tourism destinations**


THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL PARK
THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL PARK
THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL PARK
PROPOSED OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT
Little Missouri River
Little Missouri River
Little Missouri River
16
200
85
94
94
National Park
Little Missouri National Grasslands
Proposed Oil and Gas Development
Active Oil and Gas Wells
0
5
Miles
ND

Credit: © Eclecticamusement | Dreamstime

# 4 MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

**Without comprehensive, landscape-level planning that takes into account the needs of the park and its resources, Mesa Verde could be surrounded by a thousand new oil and gas wells.**

Some of the most well-known and well-preserved Ancestral Puebloan archaeological sites in existence are protected within Mesa Verde National Park in southwestern Colorado. The park contains over 5,000 sites, including over 600 cliff dwellings. Mesa Verde is home to the largest cliff dwelling in North America—the Cliff Palace, which dates to the 12th century. Mesa Verde was the first national park to focus on protecting both cultural and natural resources.

The area surrounding Mesa Verde has long been targeted by the oil and gas industry. A 2015 plan for the area included 1,000 new oil and gas wells surrounding the park, sparking concern among community groups. Such an extensive and wide-ranging development plan put numerous park resources at risk.

An alternative plan, which would have included a comprehensive stakeholder process to manage the landscape for multiple uses, was slated to begin under the previous administration's Bureau of Land Management. This would have resulted in a Master Leasing Plan accounting for the needs of the community, the park and its landscape—not just the needs of extractive industries. That process was halted by the Trump administration. The plan for 1,000 new wells is still in place.

Without the Master Leasing Plan, the landscape is at risk of becoming completely overwhelmed by oil and gas development—something that has already occurred at nearby Canyons of the Ancients National Monument, where 80% of the surrounding BLM lands have been leased and the landscape has been scarred by roads, well pads, storage tanks and pipelines. In 2018, a gas well at Canyons of the Ancients spilled over 3,000 gallons of wastewater, contaminating nearby lands and water resources. We can't let Mesa Verde have a similar future.

Along with Chaco Culture National Historical Park and Hovenweep National Monument, Mesa Verde is part of a cultural landscape that tells the story of an ancient interconnected civilization that is still part of a thriving culture today.

**RESOURCES THREATENED**

- CULTURAL LANDSCAPE
- OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY
- VISITOR EXPERIENCE
- AIR QUALITY

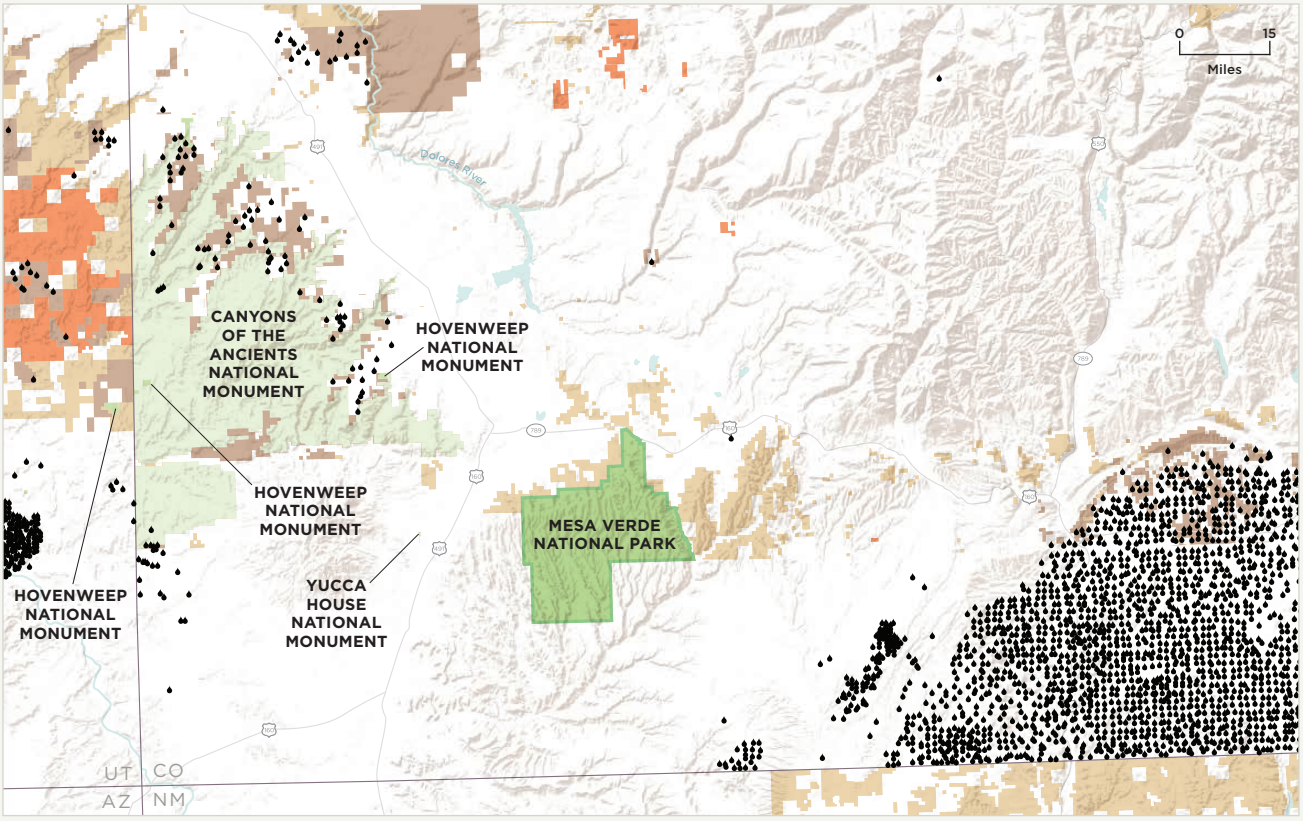
**BY THE NUMBERS**

**2,500**

**The size of the methane cloud in square miles over Mesa Verde and the Four Corners. This hot spot is the largest ever measured in the United States and is directly attributable to oil and gas development.** [11]

**1,000** **The number of new wells included in a 2015 BLM resource management plan for public lands neighboring Mesa Verde**

**13th** **Century when Spruce Tree House, an Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwelling, was built. It is now closed to the public for the first time as fluctuations in temperatures caused by climate change has caused sections of rock to cleave from the rock face.** [12]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15
Miles
Dolores River
CANYONS OF THE ANCIENTS NATIONAL MONUMENT
HOVENWEEP NATIONAL MONUMENT
HOVENWEEP NATIONAL MONUMENT
HOVENWEEP NATIONAL MONUMENT
MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK
YUCCA HOUSE NATIONAL MONUMENT
UT
CO
AZ
NM
National Park
National Monument
Other Public Lands
BLM Oil and Gas Lease Offered and Sold During This Administration
Authorized Oil and Gas Leases
BLM Lands Open for Leasing
Active Oil and Gas Wells

Credit: © Chris Boyer | Kestrel Aerial Services

## GATEWAY COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIES

# PAYING THE PRICE

Visitors travel from all over the country and the world to enjoy America's national parks. Visitors spend money on lodging, food and other services that help support the neighboring communities.

In 2018, the Park Service received more than 318 million visits to park units across the country. These visitors spent $20.2 billion in gateway communities, supporting more than 329,000 jobs.[13]

Credit: © John Anderson | Tandem

# 5 CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK

The city of Moab has become a thriving hub for travel and adventure tourism thanks to the popularity of Utah's National Parks, the area's extensive outdoor recreation opportunities and successful marketing efforts. In 2018, national park tourism was a billion-dollar industry for the state.

Preserving an immense desert wilderness sculpted by the Green and Colorado Rivers, Canyonlands National Park features hundreds of colorful canyons, mesas, buttes, fins, arches and spires. This landscape draws visitors from across the world to hike among the breathtaking rock formations.

Canyonlands and nearby Arches National Park have turned the neighboring city of Moab into a thriving destination hub for tourists. Combined, these parks welcomed more than 2.4 million visitors in 2018 who spent $246 million in nearby communities, supported 3,725 local jobs and produced $317 million in cumulative benefit to the local economy.[14]

Recent advances in drilling technology have brought renewed industry attention to aging oil and gas fields in southern Utah. Lease sales, drilling, light and air pollution, industrial traffic and climate change all pose real threats to the parks and visitor experience of this one-of-a-kind landscape found nowhere else on earth.

This administration halted an ongoing, stakeholder-driven process to create a Master Leasing Plan in the San Rafael Desert covering over 500,000 acres north of Canyonlands and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. This effort would have provided protections to the Horseshoe Canyon unit of Canyonlands, which contains some of the oldest and most important rock art in North America.

The plan also would have protected the Orange Cliffs of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and sections of the Colorado River. Without a Master Leasing Plan, this land is now available for oil and gas leasing. In 2018, the administration offered 200,000 acres for lease within this region, threatening numerous resources within the park along with many of the outdoor recreation-driven businesses in the region.

### RESOURCES THREATENED

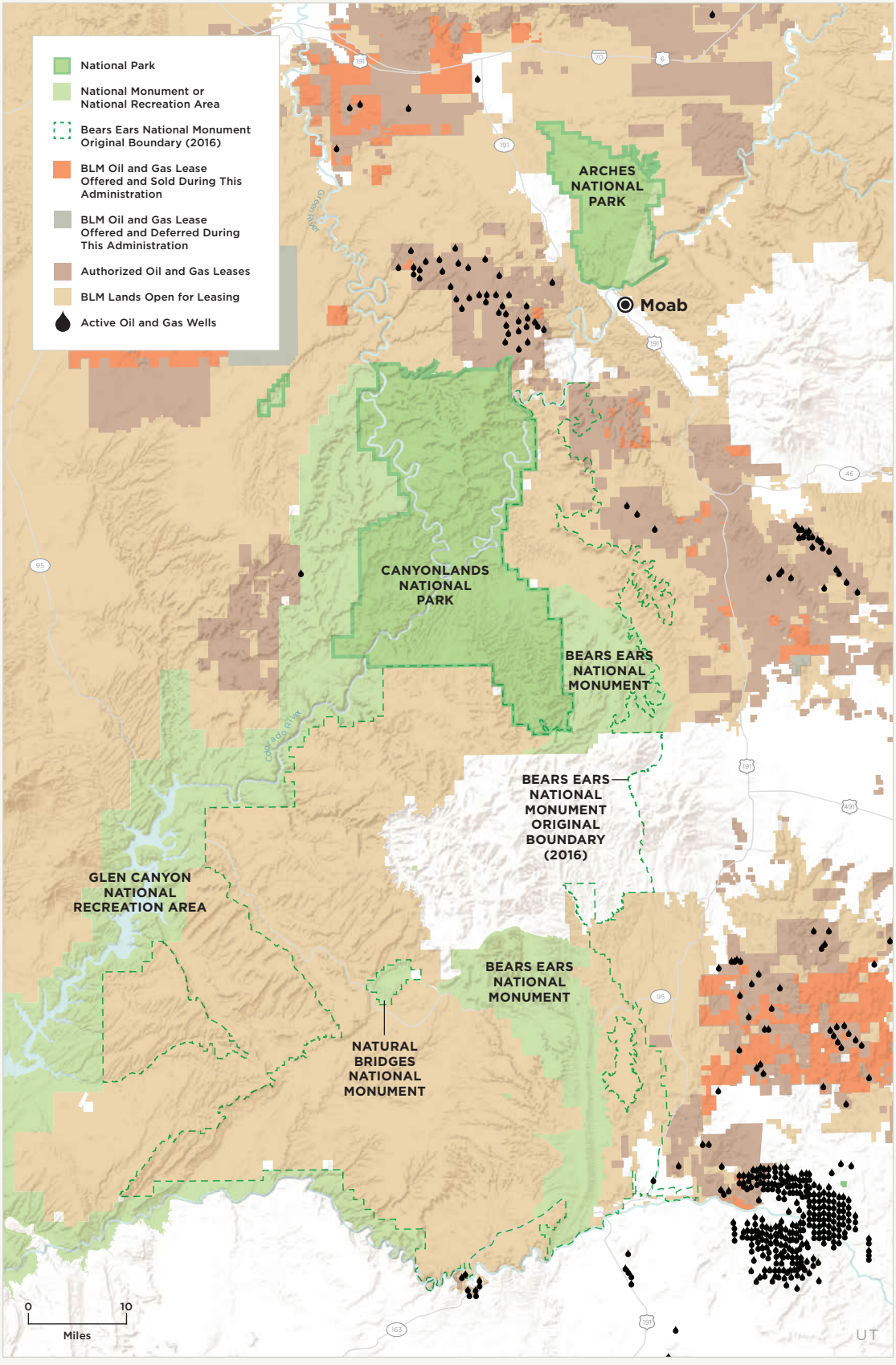
- AIR QUALITY
- VISITOR EXPERIENCE
- OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY
- NIGHT SKIES

### BY THE NUMBERS

**0**
**Number of days Utah BLM allowed the public to review environmental analysis in 2018 for leases covering 134,000 acres near the park**

**$2**
**The price paid per acre by oil and gas companies for more than 40 parcels near Canyonlands**

**$1,000,000,000**
**The amount of money national parks contributed to Utah's economy in 2018**


National Park
National Monument or National Recreation Area
Bears Ears National Monument Original Boundary (2016)
BLM Oil and Gas Lease Offered and Sold During This Administration
BLM Oil and Gas Lease Offered and Deferred During This Administration
Authorized Oil and Gas Leases
BLM Lands Open for Leasing
Active Oil and Gas Wells
ARCHES NATIONAL PARK
Moab
CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK
BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT
BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT ORIGINAL BOUNDARY (2016)
GLEN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT
NATURAL BRIDGES NATIONAL MONUMENT
Green River
Colorado River
0
10
Miles
UT

Credit: © John C. Pohl | Tandem

# 6 GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

Almost half a million people travel to this park every year for its unique landscape. Those people spend $27 million annually in nearby communities.

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve protects over 100,000 acres in the Sangre de Cristo mountains within the San Luis Valley of Colorado. It was originally designated a national monument in 1932 to protect its dunes from gold mining and sand extraction for cement, but for millennia before the designation, indigenous communities have viewed the sand dunes as a sacred place. The park contains the tallest dunes in North America at over 750 feet tall. The rugged mountain range provides a dramatic backdrop to the dunes with peaks soaring to over 14,000 feet.

Almost half a million people visit the dunes every year, an enormous number for a remote park, and an economic boon and anchor for the nearby communities such as Crestone, Westcliffe and Alamosa. In 2018 alone, visitors to the park spent over $27 million in nearby communities and supported nearly 400 jobs.[15]

Without the proximity of the Great Sand Dunes, these towns would be left without a major economic engine.

In addition to the economic importance of the park to gateway communities, the San Luis Valley also is a gateway to the Old Spanish National Historical Trail, illustrative of the area's diverse cultural heritage. The valley is also located at the uppermost terminus of a major wildlife corridor along the Upper Rio Grande river that stretches into New Mexico. The corridor is vital for elk, bighorn sheep, bobcat, black bear, mountain lions and the rare Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

In 2018, the BLM announced the sale of a series of lease parcels that covered more than 18,000 acres on the eastern side of the park boundary. Due to strong opposition from the local community and environmental groups, these leases were deferred by the BLM. However, since deferrals are only temporary and the BLM routinely reoffers deferred parcels for sale, it is very possible they will soon be offered again.

### RESOURCES THREATENED

- WILDLIFE
- AIR QUALITY
- NIGHT SKIES
- NATURAL QUIET
- OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

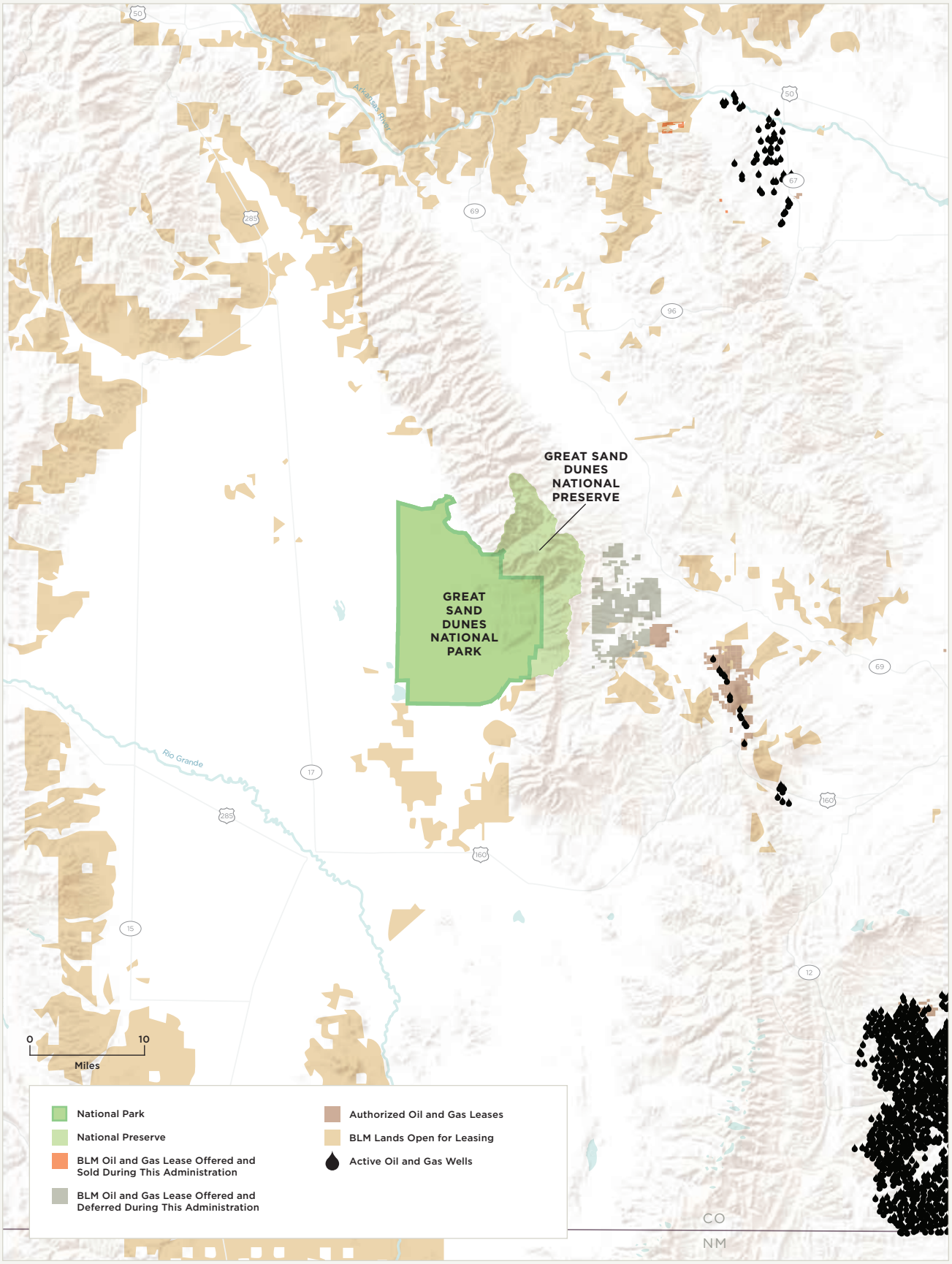
### BY THE NUMBERS

**18,316** Number of acres for oil and gas leasing deferred in 2018 due to lack of consultation regarding lands owned by the Navajo Nation[16]

**$33.2 million**
The economic output generated by visitor spending at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve in 2018

**9,000** Age in years of some of the archaeological sites in Great Sand Dunes, some of the oldest in North America[17]

**750 feet**
Height of the wind shaped dunes in the park, the tallest in North America


GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PRESERVE
GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK
Arkansas River
Rio Grande
50
285
69
96
67
17
160
15
12
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10
Miles
National Park
National Preserve
BLM Oil and Gas Lease Offered and Sold During This Administration
BLM Oil and Gas Lease Offered and Deferred During This Administration
Authorized Oil and Gas Leases
BLM Lands Open for Leasing
Active Oil and Gas Wells
CO
NM

Credit: © Dana Romanoff | Tandem

# 7 ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

One of the nation's most-visited parks, Rocky Mountain National Park has been, and continues to be, adversely affected by air pollution due to a boom in oil and gas production in neighboring Weld County. Rocky Mountain National Park covers 415 square miles atop the Continental Divide in the Front Range mountains of Colorado. The park consists of a varied terrain of extremes, from wooded forests to mountain tundra, and has some of the highest altitudes of national parks in the nation, with Longs Peak rising up to 14,259 feet.

All this is within easy driving distance of the millions of residents of the Denver metropolitan area and Front Range communities. Rocky Mountain National Park is also integrally connected to the surrounding landscape and gateway communities along both its east and west entrances.

With over 4.5 million visitors every year, Rocky Mountain is one of the most visited parks within the National Park System. The majority of visitors pass through one of the two major gateways to the park: either Estes Park from the east or Grand Lake from the west. Recent statistics show that visitors to the park spend about $306 million annually in gateway regions, supporting over 4,300 jobs and creating a total economic output of $464 million for the region.[18]

Air pollution from drilling activities threaten the clean air and healthy ecosystems that draw visitors to the region. The BLM has offered leases near the park's western entrance. And just east of the park is Weld County, home to a dramatic boom in oil and gas production. This development has caused the park to fall out of compliance with the standards set under the Clean Air Act.

Analysis from the National Park Service and the Environmental Protection Agency shows Colorado's already severely compromised air quality is worsening. The same sources of pollution harming health, wildlife and landscapes are also driving climate change, a grave threat in the arid west transforming ecosystems in sensitive alpine zones, including Rocky Mountain National Park. Climate change is facilitating the spread of invasive grasses in the park as well as pine bark beetles, which are killing millions of trees. These changes, combined with a hotter, drier climate, are in turn driving a significant increase in wildfires in the parks.

**RESOURCES THREATENED**

- AIR QUALITY
- CLIMATE
- WILDLIFE
- PUBLIC HEALTH
- OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**3.4**

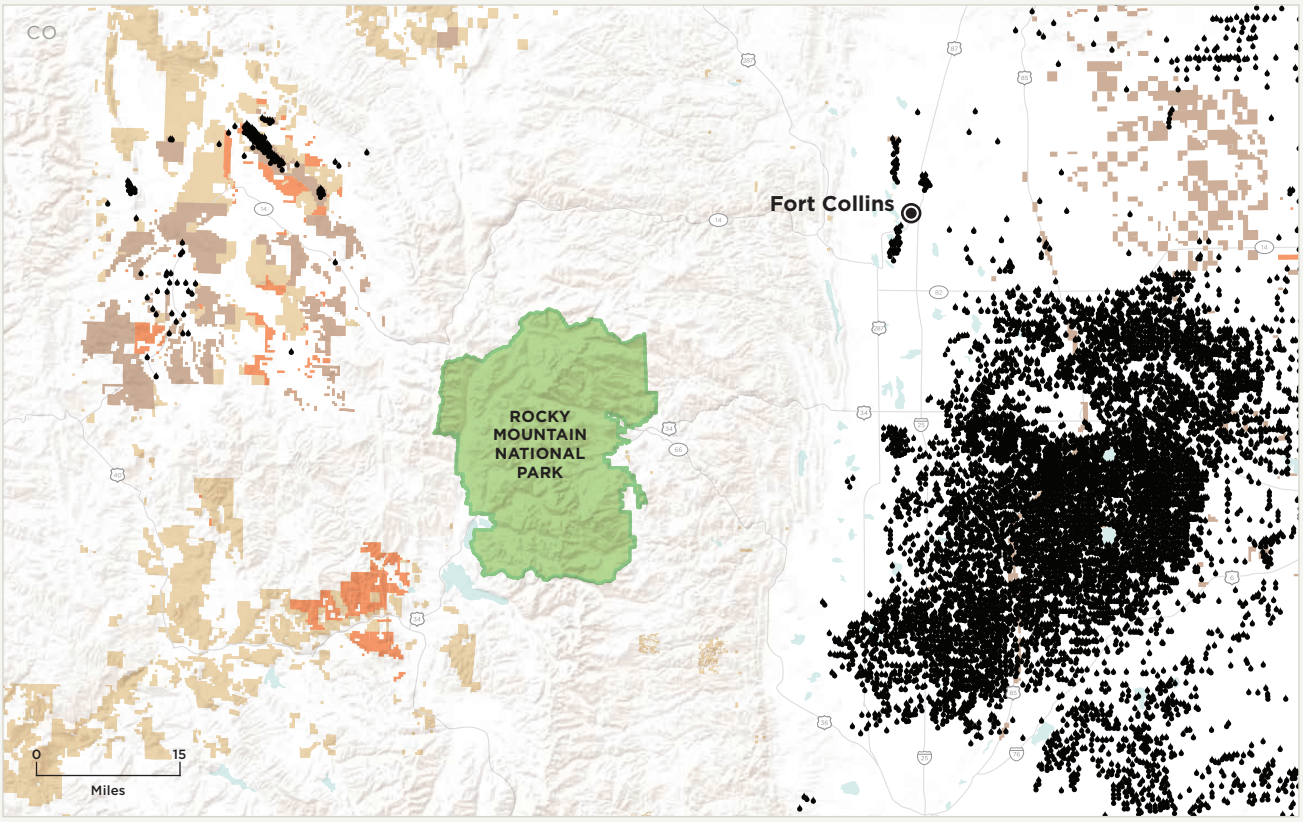
**Average annual temperature increase in degrees °F over the last century in the high-elevation park from climate change[19]**

**27,499**

**Acres offered for lease by the BLM that were challenged in 2018**

**4,590,493**

**Visitors to the park in 2018, a 42% increase over 2012, generating $464 million in economic output**


CO
Fort Collins
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK
0
15
Miles
National Park
BLM Oil and Gas Lease Offered and Sold During This Administration
Authorized Oil and Gas Leases
BLM Lands Open for Leasing
Active Oil and Gas Wells

Credit: © Corbis Images | Tandem

WILDLIFE

# WELLS IN THE WILD

Wildlife are one of the principal attractions for visitors in many parks. Species such as panthers, wolves, grizzly bears and mountain lions are as much iconic features of the American landscape as any mountain or canyon. But these animals' habitats and migration corridors are being fragmented by increased oil and gas development, and the drilling of wells in wild lands could have serious consequences for many species.[20]

Two parks renowned for their wildlife are now threatened by oil and gas development—Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida (part of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem), home to the endangered Florida panther, and Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming, part of one of the largest intact ecosystems on the planet.

Credit: © Ykumsri | Dreamstime.com

# 8 GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

The Bureau of Land Management continues to lease hundreds of thousands of acres within and adjacent to migration corridors, putting the future of species that migrate from Grand Teton at a crossroads.

Grand Teton and Yellowstone National parks are both part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, comprising one of the largest intact temperate ecosystems left on Earth at nearly 18 million acres. This region is home to some of the most diverse and abundant wildlife populations in existence.

Grand Teton National Park provides refuge for many Northern Rockies species, but their territories don't end at the park boundaries. In fact, species such as mule deer and pronghorn antelope travel many hundreds of miles each year to feeding and birthing grounds.

Over the past decade, there has been a striking decline in the mule deer population in Wyoming as a result of habitat loss associated with energy development. Current estimates show mule deer numbers 46 percent below the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's recommendations for a healthy population.[21]

In February 2018, then-Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke issued a secretarial order[22] to "improve habitat quality and western big game winter range and migration corridors for antelope, elk and mule deer." However, the administration continues to sacrifice wildlife migration in favor of oil and gas interests. An analysis conducted by the Center for Biological Diversity[23] found that in 2018, the Department of the Interior offered 1.2 million acres of pronghorn and mule deer winter habitat and migration corridors in the state of Wyoming to oil and gas development.

The Trump administration is interpreting its own migration order to mean that they will only defer leasing on a parcel if 90 percent of it falls within a wildlife corridor, a number that is arbitrary and unsupported by science. Oil and gas development along wildlife corridors would be devastating for species. Often, once a species encounters new roadblocks within its path, it disrupts foraging and breaks apart the herd, making it that much harder to reach their destination.

**RESOURCES THREATENED**

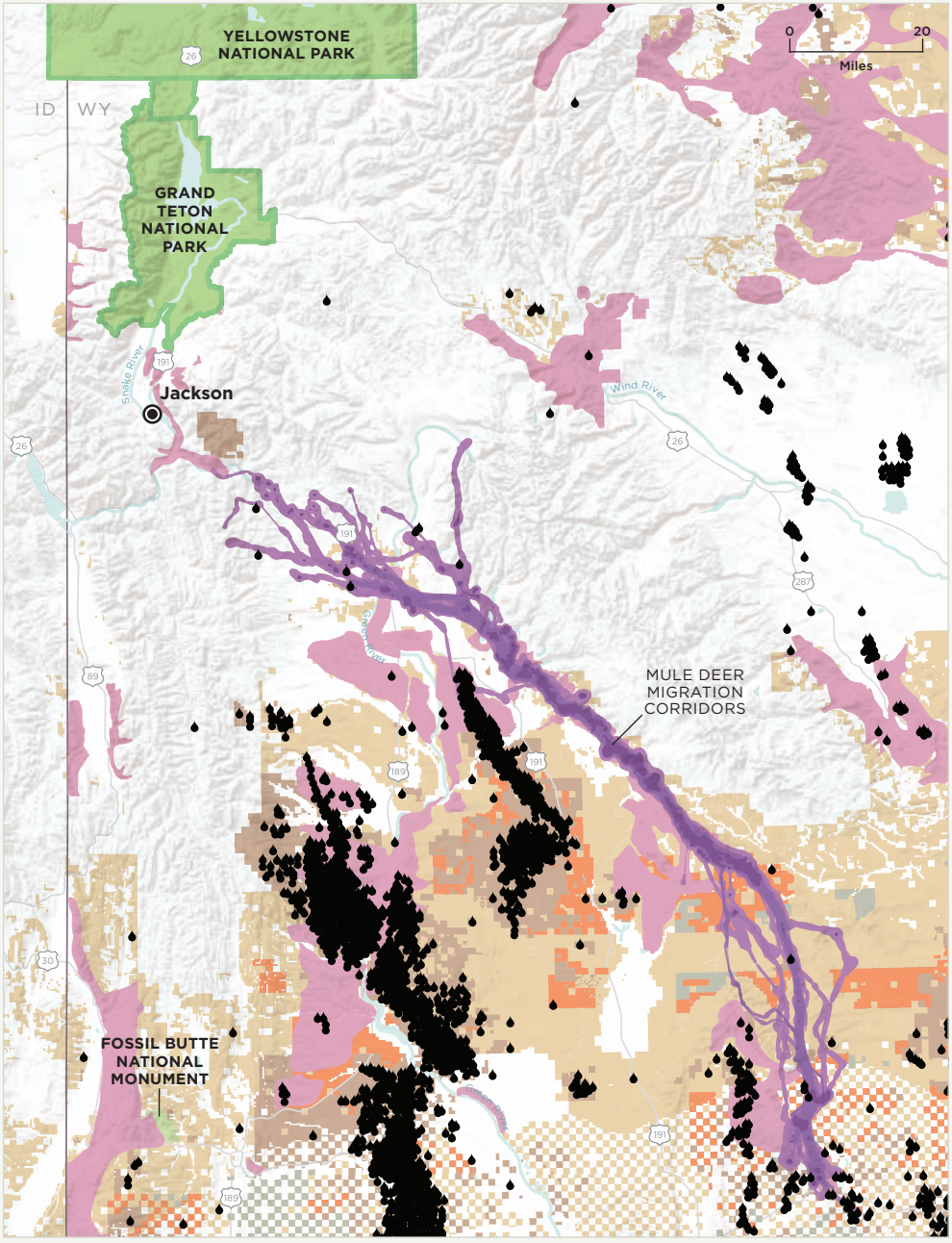
- WILDLIFE
- VISITOR EXPERIENCE
- OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**31**
**Percentage of the mule deer population lost since 1991[24]**

**400**
**Percentage increase in applications for permits to drill in the last five years according to the Wyoming Oil and Gas Commission**

**242**
**The record-breaking number of miles traveled by a mule deer that holds the record for the longest documented land migration in the lower 48 states. This deer was pregnant with twins for much of her migration through Idaho and Wyoming.[25]**


YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK
ID
WY
GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK
Jackson
Snake River
Wind River
Green River
MULE DEER MIGRATION CORRIDORS
FOSSIL BUTTE NATIONAL MONUMENT
0
20
Miles
National Park
National Monument
BLM Oil and Gas Lease Offered and Sold During this Administration
BLM Oil and Gas Lease Offered and Deferred During this Administration
Authorized Oil and Gas Leases
BLM Lands Open for Leasing
Mule Deer Crucial Habitat
Mule Deer Migration Corridors
Active Oil and Gas Wells

Credit: © Vince M. Camiolo | Tandem

# 9 BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE

Habitat destruction occurring inside this national preserve due to oil and gas exploration could be the single most damaging energy development threat within any park unit's boundaries. Further, it is taking place in a crucial habitat for the last 230 surviving Florida panthers.[26]

The Greater Everglades Ecosystem encompasses millions of acres of south and central Florida. At its heart is Everglades National Park, a 1.5 million acre world of mangroves, wet prairies and idyllic blue waters.

The Greater Everglades also incorporates two other park sites: Big Cypress National Preserve to the north, an area larger than 700,000 acres, and Biscayne National Park to the east, which is the largest marine park in the National Park System. This ecosystem provides multiple rare habitats, including the unique combination of salt and freshwater that is a haven for migratory birds, alligators, endangered crocodiles, dolphins, orchids, endangered Florida panthers, coral reefs, manatees and hundreds of other species.

Legislation that created the Big Cypress National Preserve included language that allows for limited oil exploration and development. The National Park Service has broad authority to reject oil and gas activities in order to preserve, conserve and protect the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the preserve.

Yet, in Big Cypress, damaging new oil and gas exploration continues. The majority of oil and gas beneath the preserve is owned by the Collier family, who have leased some of their mineral rights to the Burnett Oil company, which has been conducting seismic testing operations within 110 square miles since 2017. This process involves driving heavy 33-ton "vibroseis" vehicles and other equipment throughout wetlands in the preserve to hunt for oil, which has damaged one of the last refuges remaining for the critically endangered Florida panther. This is only the first of four proposed phases of exploration, which could ultimately encompass around 360 square miles, or one-third, of the preserve—an area larger than many national parks, including Shenandoah, Crater Lake, Biscayne and Zion.

Of the 40+ National Park Service park

**RESOURCES THREATENED**

- WILDLIFE AND HABITATS CRITICAL TO ITS SURVIVAL
- NATURAL RESOURCES, INCLUDING WETLANDS AND ANCIENT TREES
- OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

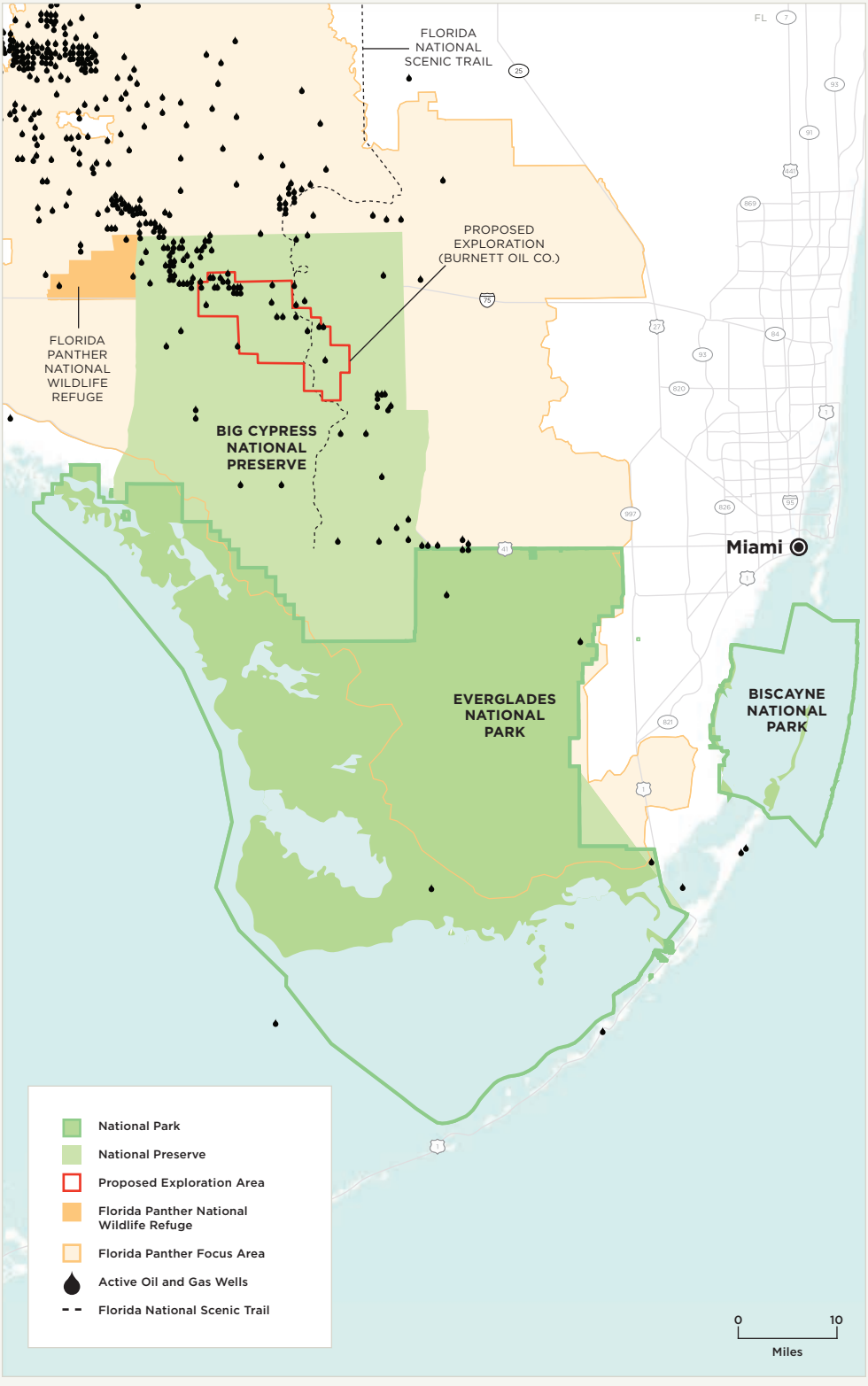
**BY THE NUMBERS**

**230** The estimated number of Florida panthers still in existence

**230,000 acres** The area within Big Cypress National Preserve where current seismic testing could expand

**33 tons** The weight of some of the "vibroseis" vehicles sent through sensitive wetlands to hunt for oil, cutting lines more than 15 feet wide and 2 feet deep in places

**>500** The estimated age of cypress trees that were cut down or driven over inside the preserve to make way for seismic testing equipment




units with at least some privately held mineral rights, there is no single project that comes close to the scope and scale of what is being proposed for the Big Cypress National Preserve. This oil exploration is the single most damaging energy development project happening inside national park unit boundaries anywhere in the country.

Credit: © Daniel Kuras | Tandem

PUBLIC HEALTH

# CONTAMINATING COMMUNITIES

Many national parks are close to and tightly integrated with major population centers. Often, they are part of interconnected landscapes that include both natural and built environments. In many cases, the existence of a national park helps drive visitation, population growth and the local economy. Just like the parks, these communities are vulnerable to the harmful effects of oil and gas development. In fact, some of America's most visited landscapes fall far short of the air pollution standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency. The pollution created by oil and gas development can have real impacts on human health for park staff, visitors and neighboring communities, including issues affecting the lungs, heart and brain.

Credit: © Dmitry Vinogradov | Tandem

# 10 SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK

California's Central Valley borders some of America's most spectacular parks—and is home to some of the worst air pollution. Parks and communities now face even greater risks with proposals for yet more oil and gas development.

Along with neighboring Kings Canyon and Yosemite, Sequoia National Park helped spur the creation of the National Park System. Visitors travel from around the world to see the towering granite cliffs of Yosemite and the giant sequoias of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The largest tree on earth, the General Sherman, is found in the groves at Sequoia National Park.

Sequoia and its neighbors protect a large-scale ecosystem directly east of California's heavily populated Central Valley. Unfortunately, this administration has recently proposed to open over 1.2 million acres of the Central Valley to oil and gas development.

Over the years, Sequoia National Park has seen its fair share of air pollution from one of the largest oil fields in the United States, just down the road in Bakersfield, California. The massive footprint of the oil and gas industry, along with the smog from other sources within the Central Valley, has led to some of the poorest air quality in the entire nation. In fact, the town of Visalia near Sequoia ranked as No. 2 for ozone pollution by the American Lung Association's State of the Air Report.[27] And in 2018, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks were two of four national parks that had unhealthy air for most park visitors to breathe for more than two months of the year.[28]

Communities of the Central Valley, particularly Latino communities, bear the brunt of the unhealthy air quality. The historical disenfranchisement of these communities has resulted in lower median income and lower health outcomes. If the BLM opens more lands near these parks for development, it would further add to the public health crisis and worsen the air quality for the entire region.

**RESOURCES THREATENED**

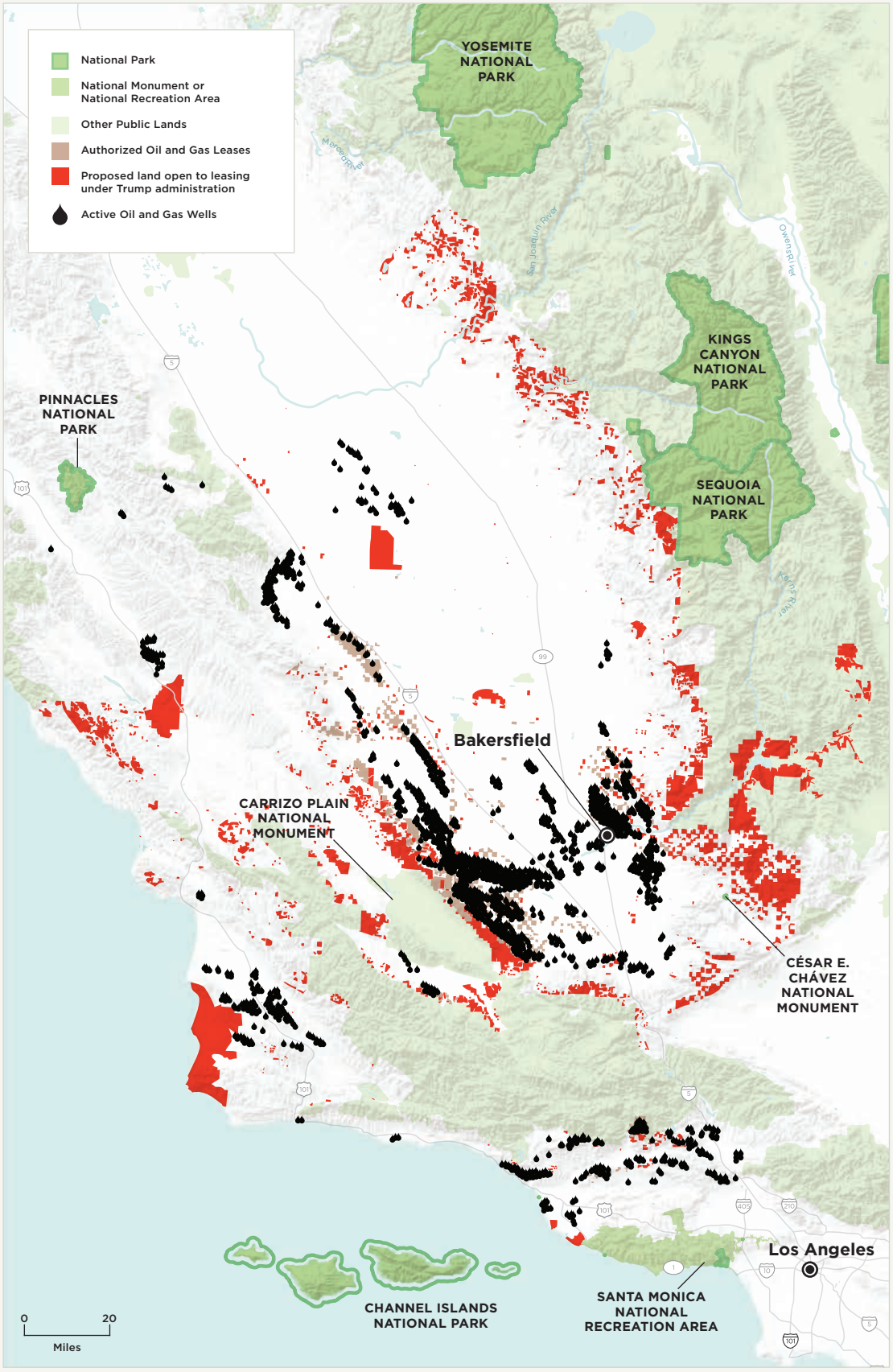
- PUBLIC HEALTH
- AIR QUALITY
- WILDLIFE
- VISITOR EXPERIENCE

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**1.2**
**Million acres proposed for new oil and gas development across California[29]**

**2,739**
**Days that air quality in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks was rated "unhealthy" between 1993-2014. Los Angeles had 2,443 bad air days during the same period**

**8**
**Percentage of the average drop in visitation to national parks during poor air quality days**


National Park
National Monument or National Recreation Area
Other Public Lands
Authorized Oil and Gas Leases
Proposed land open to leasing under Trump administration
Active Oil and Gas Wells
YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK
KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARK
SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK
PINNACLES NATIONAL PARK
Bakersfield
CARRIZO PLAIN NATIONAL MONUMENT
CÉSAR E. CHÁVEZ NATIONAL MONUMENT
Los Angeles
CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK
SANTA MONICA NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
0
20
Miles

Credit: © Zrfphoto | Dreamstime

# 11 DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT

Time and again, leases near Dinosaur National Monument are offered, deferred and offered again, a product of BLM's aggressive approach to oil and gas development, even in the face of serious concerns about damage to this park.

Dinosaur National Monument straddles Colorado and Utah and is renowned for the fossils of dinosaurs that remain embedded in the rocks and canyon walls. The park contains over 800 paleontological sites in total.

The park is also home to petroglyphs and pictographs left behind by the Fremont people from over 1,000 years ago.

The park provides a glimpse into geologic history, created by the erosion from the Green and Yampa rivers. These rivers have exposed 23 rock layers that tell the story of the landscape's evolution from an ancient sea to grassy plains to arid deserts.

The monument is embedded in a dynamic rural landscape where oil and gas has long been present. Year after year, the Uinta Basin reports serious air quality issues. In 2019, Uintah County, Utah, received a failing grade from the American Lung Association's report card measuring the state of the air.[30] Oil and gas operations are the largest source of air and climate pollution in the Uinta Basin, plaguing this once-pristine region with significant air pollution comparable with densely populated cities like Los Angeles and Denver. Elevated levels of ozone pollution endanger public health, causing asthma attacks, cardiovascular disease and premature death. It's particularly dangerous for vulnerable populations, including children, seniors and people with respiratory conditions.

Despite the well-documented problems with air quality, the administration has accelerated leasing in the Uinta Basin. While a few lease sales close to the park have been temporarily withheld, the BLM has continued to take an aggressive approach of rapidly leasing numerous acres throughout the region to oil and gas companies.

The BLM has a legal duty to analyze and address potential harms to human health and landscapes before leasing. The agency routinely skips

## RESOURCES THREATENED

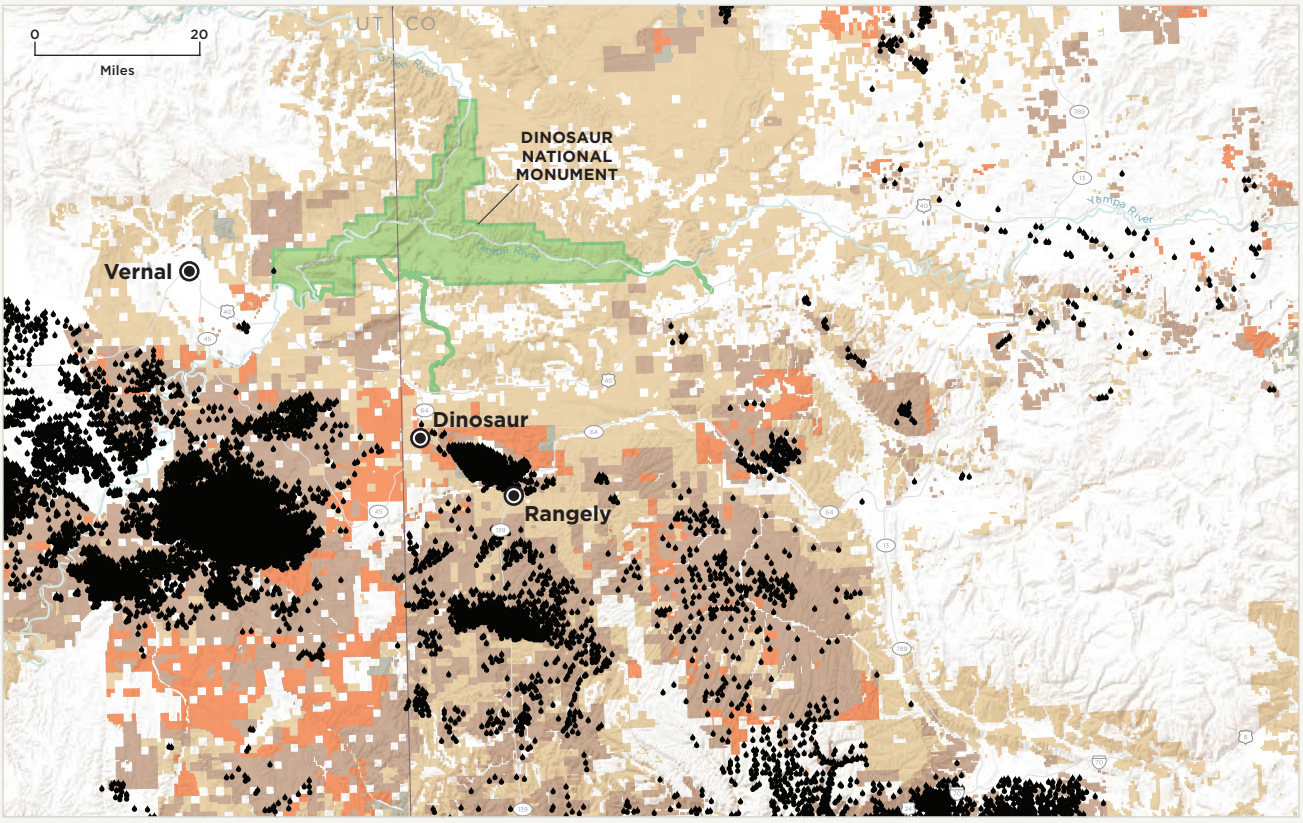
- PUBLIC HEALTH
- AIR QUALITY
- NIGHT SKIES
- VISITOR EXPERIENCE

## BY THE NUMBERS

**1** Percentage of acreage deferred from 2018 lease sales near Dinosaur National Monument in 2018

**26** Percentage of Utah's section of Dinosaur National Monument unprotected from oil and gas development, despite the same federal land manager implementing a Master Leasing Plan for Colorado's section of Dinosaur National Monument

**11** Air violation days in 2018 according to the American Lung Association for Uintah County, the Utah home of Dinosaur National Monument, more days than the rest of Utah combined[31]




this analysis, instead prioritizing the interests of oil and gas companies over public health and environmental protection.

These lease sales, offered by the BLM, violate federal environmental laws and will worsen air quality in a region already laden with harmful levels of ozone pollution.

Credit: © Galyna Andrushko | Tandem

# 12 CARLSBAD CAVERNS NATIONAL PARK

New underground treasures are still being discovered at Carlsbad Caverns, many of which are jeopardized by expanded drilling in the area.

Carlsbad Caverns is home to some of the most spectacular examples of underground geologic features found anywhere in the United States. Located in southeastern New Mexico, the park contains more than 300 limestone caves carved over the course of 250 million years.

One of the most exemplary caverns in the system is known as the Big Room. At nearly 4,000 feet across and 255 feet high, the Big Room is the fifth-largest underground chamber in the United States. Many areas have yet to be explored. In fact, an entire new chamber was most recently discovered in 2013.

Carlsbad Caverns sits at the convergence of the Delaware and Permian Basins, one of the nation's most active and profitable oil and gas fields. Oil and gas development can have unanticipated consequences to the unique geology of the caverns and groundwater sources. It can also have disastrous effects on the health of nearby communities.

In the city of Carlsbad, wells can legally be drilled within 500 feet of a home. That number drops to 300 feet outside of city limits. The skyrocketing pace of development in the region has already produced tremendous threats to the people who call this community their home. In January 2019 alone, operators in the Permian Basin in New Mexico flared or vented more than 1.9 billion cubic feet of methane. Along with this venting and flaring comes hydrogen sulfide, benzene, toluene and other volatile organic compounds that are hazardous to human health.[32] Meanwhile, this administration has continued to roll back regulations requiring operators to capture their excess methane.

Not all threats to Carlsbad Caverns are currently known. Scientists continue to discover caverns and formations that are at risk of being lost forever if the breakneck development pace continues under this administration. One of the most famed recent discoveries, Lechuguilla Cave, was discovered after decades of cave explorers hearing wind rushing

### RESOURCES THREATENED

- PUBLIC HEALTH
- NATURAL RESOURCES
- AIR QUALITY
- NIGHT SKIES
- VISITOR EXPERIENCE

### BY THE NUMBERS

**101**

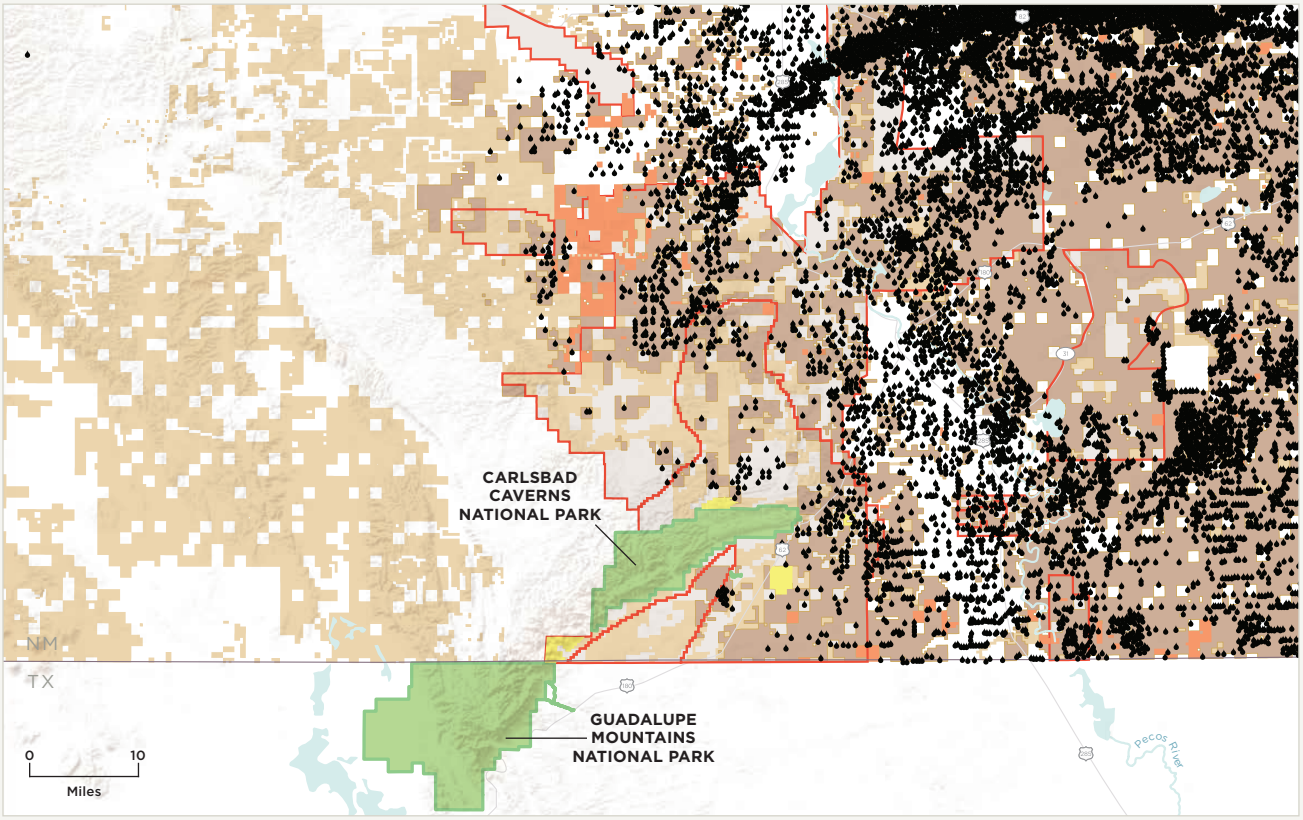
**Active drilling rigs in New Mexico. More than Wyoming, North Dakota and Utah combined. Most are located in Eddy County, home of Carlsbad Caverns National Park.** [35]

**600**

**Percentage increase in air pollution such as volatile organic compounds in the Permian Basin of Southeast New Mexico since 2011**[36]

**31**

**Parcels the BLM has offered for oil and gas but then deferred due to conflicts with Park resources.**




through the cave.[33] The National Park Service conducted a dig operation to reveal a much larger labyrinth of caves—of which over 136 miles have been mapped, running to a depth of 1,600 feet.

This incredible discovery is particularly vulnerable to oil and gas drilling as stated by the Park Service: "Oil and gas drilling on BLM-managed areas could leak gas or fluids into the cave's passages, killing cave life, destroying the fragile ecosystem and threatening the safety of people inside the cave."[34]

Credit: © Chris Boyer | Kestrel Aerial Services

# POLICY SOLUTIONS

National parks have become increasingly threatened by oil and gas development as a result of this administration's acceleration of drilling within park landscapes and its aggressive rollback of environmental safeguards. To combat these threats and ensure parks are protected for current and future generations, NPCA is advocating for a stronger role of the Park Service in leasing decisions, increased protections in specific park landscapes, curbing of fossil fuel extraction to mitigate effects of climate change and safeguarding of our bedrock environmental laws.

If this administration continues prioritizing its reckless oil and gas agenda over conservation, wildlife and local economies, America's public lands will be irreparably harmed. We are already seeing the damage as the natural and cultural landscapes are being scarred and trampled. These are not problems that can simply be fixed after the fact; they must be addressed now. Americans must call on Congress to act now to protect our national parks from runaway oil and gas development. Join NPCA in fighting to protect these special places now and for future generations.

1

**SOLUTION: Improve the lease-planning process to ensure that national park landscapes are unharmed by oil and gas development and that the National Park Service has a prominent, official role in all leasing decisions that affect parks**

This report clearly demonstrates the need for an oil and gas leasing process that ensures park resources, visitor experience and local park economies are considered when leasing decisions are made. NPCA believes that the National Park Service should be a formal, collaborating partner on all BLM leasing decisions that affect park landscapes and that park landscapes should be a priority for protection in all BLM planning processes. Additionally, NPCA is advocating for the BLM to reinstate the stakeholder-driven, landscape-level planning that considers park resources, communities and oil and gas development together.

2

**SOLUTION: Pass federal legislation that protects specific park-adjacent landscapes**

National parks protect our country's cultural legacy, wildlife habitats, clean air and clean water. To protect these resources, NPCA is working to enhance and increase safeguards for park-adjacent federal lands, ensuring these lands are put off-limits from extractive activities.

One example of proactive legislation that NPCA is working to advance is the Chaco Cultural Heritage Protection Act.[37] This bill would withdraw federal lands around the park from new oil and gas development to ensure protection of the cultural and tribal resources and visitor experience.

Other policy solutions include pursuing new wilderness designations or park boundary adjustments, which would ensure increased protections for the park landscapes and increased opportunities for other activities that do not permanently damage our public lands.

3

**SOLUTION: Curtail fossil fuel extraction to mitigate effects of climate change**

National parks are ground zero for some of the biggest impacts of climate change: Glaciers are melting, air quality is deteriorating, wildlife migration patterns are changing and plants are stressed by rising temperatures.[38] Fossil fuel extraction is a major contributor to climate pollution. As part of a comprehensive plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect our national parks, we must curtail or eliminate extraction of fossil fuels on public lands. Such policies could include increasing the amount of conservation lands protected by the United States, implementing climate change mitigation strategies within the land management agencies, prioritizing nonfossil renewable energy development and limiting the number of lease sales and available acreage for lease.

4

**SOLUTION: Defend and enhance keystone conservation protections**

National parks are not islands of conservation. They depend on healthy ecological connections to the lands and waters that surround them. Air, water and wildlife not only move freely in and out of parks, they also provide invaluable resources for communities and the larger park landscape. If we fail to protect these resources at the landscape scale, both parks and communities suffer the consequences. The Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act are all crucial to the protection of America's national parks, particularly in areas with immense oil and gas development. Attempts to roll back conservation laws, regulations and policies are direct threats to all parks, especially those that are already vulnerable because of oil and gas drilling.

# FOOTNOTES

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100 YEARS

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