

ENERGY

Out of Balance

National Parks and the Threat of Oil and Gas Development

A report from
National Parks Conservation Association

Executive Summary

The 2016 National Park Service Centennial was a special time to celebrate those iconic places that reflect the varied dimensions of our nation's landscape, history and culture.

In fact, more than 330 million people visited national parks in 2016, a record high for the third year in a row.

The strong worldwide interest in visiting America's national parks carries immense economic benefits for local communities. According to the National Park Service, national park visitors spent an estimated \$18.4 billion in 2016 while visiting national park lands. This spending reverberates, particularly in gateway communities, supporting additional businesses and resulting in diverse, reliable local economies. Overall, national parks generated nearly \$35 billion in economic activity while supporting over 318,000 jobs nationwide.

These strong local economies deserve protection, as they are vulnerable if not given thoughtful consideration.

Oil and gas production and its associated infrastructure and industrial traffic can be an incompatible activity when occurring on park-adjacent lands. In many parts of the West, our national parks exist next to or near other federal lands, including those managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

National parks are rightly beloved as being havens from the busy world, and management on adjacent lands should be done with care to balance those needs with other land uses. If not managed properly visitor impacts include: viewshed disruptions; noise and night sky impacts; entrance road development; air and water quality impacts; habitat fragmentation; and others.

Strong national park economies and the development of oil and gas resources are not mutually exclusive.

The industries can coexist, but local communities and the BLM should work together to ensure that oil and gas leasing in sensitive areas like near national parks does not have the unintended effect of harming the park's environment or visitation experience.

In order to ensure mutual prosperity and to avoid conflicts, drillers, local communities, tribes, recreationalists, conservationists and others need to come together early on to ensure that wherever leasing occurs it is "smart from the start."

PARKS AT RISK

NPCA highlights the following national parks as being at risk from oil and gas development on adjacent lands:

Canyonlands National Park

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Capitol Reef National Park

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Carlsbad Caverns National Park

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Chaco Culture National Historical Park

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Dinosaur National Monument

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Mesa Verde National Park

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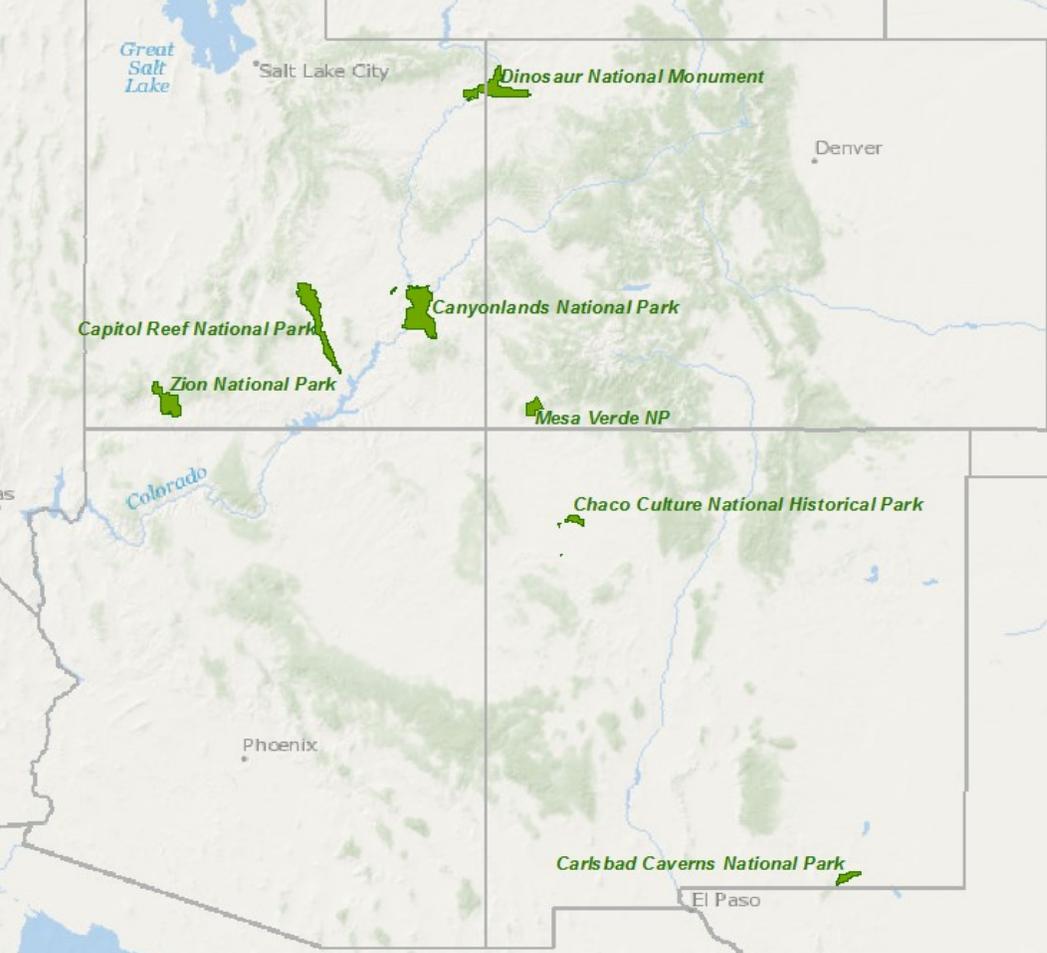
Zion National Park



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HOW TO PROTECT NATIONAL PARKS FROM THE IMPACTS OF DEVELOPMENT ON ADJACENT LANDS

1. Engage with National Park Service staff in order to preemptively identify at-risk resources, sensitive areas, or other opportunities to avoid impacts to park resources;
2. Actually consider the leasing potential of areas near national parks and in other sensitive areas, and balance the benefits of development with the potential impacts to existing economies;
3. Engage with local businesses and elected officials to receive input from the local perspective on where areas should and should not be leased, and under what conditions leasing should proceed;
4. Conduct a collaborative planning process such as a Master Leasing Plan to fully ensure local voices are heard and that NPS and other affected agencies have a chance to find solutions that allow leasing with the least possible impact.

PARKS AT RISK FROM OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT

Canyonlands National Park

This park protects the very essence of Utah: red rock vistas, arches, buttes, and spires. The BLM is considering additional leases in an unprotected area to the northwest of the park, in the San Rafael Desert.

Capitol Reef National Park

This geologic wonder in Utah hosted a record 1.06 million visitors in 2016. The BLM is considering leasing a dozen parcels in the adjacent San Rafael Swell in Dec. 2017, and vulnerable lands exist along the east and west borders of the park.

Carlsbad Caverns National Park

The cave systems under this New Mexican park are some of the largest and most famous in the world. Development from the Permian Basin is rapidly approaching the park, threatening resources above and below ground.

Chaco Culture National Historical Park

A UNESCO World Heritage site, this New Mexican park was the center of the ancient Chacoan civilization. Heavy development pressure around the park has resulted in an innovative planning process between the BLM, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and local communities.

Dinosaur National Monument

Both recreationists and paleontologists enjoy visiting this popular park on the border between Utah and Colorado. Smart planning has helped protect the park's Colorado side, but the Utah end of the park is vulnerable to new leasing.

Mesa Verde National Park

This Colorado park protects more than 600 cliff dwellings built by ancestral Pueblo peoples between AD 550 and 1300. In response to local request, the BLM in 2016 agreed to conduct local, smart-from-the-start planning near the park.

Zion National Park

One of Utah's Mighty Five national parks, Zion is one of the most visited parks in the country. In June 2017, the BLM listened to overwhelming public outcry and decided against leasing three parcels very close to the border of Zion National Park.

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