



FIELDREPORT

Southwest Region • Winter 2021

Safe from Oil & Gas Development ... for Now

In August we celebrated the removal of more than 85,000 acres of public land from a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oil and gas lease sale held in September. This move is an important step in furthering protections for Arches and Canyonlands National Parks and Bears Ears National Monument.

We are grateful to the thousands of people—elected officials, tribal leaders, business owners, outdoor enthusiasts and public land advocates—who stood with us and spoke out to protect these extraordinary lands. Our successful campaign hinged on a few key arguments: 1) Oil and gas development threatens the outdoor recreation and tourism mecca of Moab; 2) BLM failed to adequately consult with tribes about impacts to sacred cultural sites in the middle of a pandemic; 3) It's fiscally irresponsible to lease prime recreational and scenic land, closing it off to other public uses, while in a depressed energy market; and 4) The lease nomination process for public lands is fundamentally flawed, favoring private interests.

Unfortunately, these lands could end up back on the auction block without a permanent solution to inappropriate leasing practices. We will continue to raise our voices whenever our parks come under threat. (You can read more about this story at npca.org/archesdeferral.)

A New Day for Parks and Public Lands

With the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, and the beginning of a new Congress, NPCA is very excited about opportunities to protect parks and public lands. We have always believed that national parks bring people together, and that is more critical than ever at this very tense and divided moment in our nation's history. Parks can bridge some of our deep social rifts and help us heal.

For the last four years we have been forced into a very defensive position, fighting off terrible development plans, off-road vehicles in parks and a fire sale of quarterly oil and gas leases surrounding parks. With changes in federal priorities, we are hopeful we can dedicate our energies toward more proactive park protection and improvement projects. These projects will benefit the parks we all love, as well as the hundreds of millions of people who visit them each year.

We can focus on fixing aging infrastructure, such as trails and roads, buildings and utilities. We can support the Park Service in developing thoughtful visitor use and traffic management plans that protect both park resources and the visitor experience. We can prioritize restoring the diminished Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante

National Monuments to their rightful boundaries. We can work with allies to develop programs and exhibits that tell honest and inclusive stories about these important places. And we can help make parks more welcoming to *all* Americans because they belong to all of us. No doubt our work is cut out for us, but we are ready for the challenge.

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Top: Canyonlands National Park under a starry night sky ©Kwiktor | Dreamstime **Above:** Grosvenor Arch in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument ©Cynthia McCrory | Dreamstime

OUR MISSION

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

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WINTER 2021

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico & Utah

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News from the Southwest Region

National Parks Will Benefit from Biden Administration's Public Lands Oil and Gas Moratorium—In late January, President Biden issued an executive order that protects public lands—and nearby parks—by temporarily pausing all oil and gas lease sales pending a comprehensive reassessment of the program. This is great news for numerous parks in the Southwest, like Carlsbad Caverns National Park, Chaco Culture National Historical Park and Hovenweep National Monument, which have seen prolific leasing and development on their doorsteps. Our parks, and the stories and resources they protect, live within a connected cultural and natural landscape that merits thoughtful planning. Carlsbad, for example, is part of an extensive underground cave system that is home to precious groundwater. NPCA looks forward to working with the Biden administration to protect parks and the public interest from reckless oil and gas leasing and drilling in the Southwest.

Acreage Added to Rocky Mountain—Early this year, Rocky Mountain National Park grew by 40 acres. The Rocky Mountain National Park Boundary Modification Act authorized the Interior secretary to acquire a land parcel, donated by former astronaut and Longmont, CO native Vance D. Brand, for inclusion within the boundaries of the park. The acreage on the eastern boundary

of the park protects a portion of a high elevation ecosystem and provides access to hundreds of miles of trails in the park.

NPCA Files Lawsuit Over Off-Road Vehicle Use at Glen Canyon—In January NPCA filed a lawsuit against the Park Service for its destructive plans to authorize off-road vehicle (ORV) use throughout Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. ORVs can wreak havoc on sensitive lands and disturb wildlife. The engine noise can travel for miles, impacting the natural quiet in wild and remote places, such as within the Orange Cliffs. ORVs could even be heard at neighboring Canyonlands National Park, where the Park Service has consistently prohibited off-road vehicle use. The Park Service's final rule authorizes a vast network of ORV trails throughout Glen Canyon and leaves open the possibility for even more off-road access in the Orange Cliffs, potentially compounding the impacts. NPCA challenged this unacceptable decision because it is inconsistent with Park Service values and ignores the substantial potential damage ORV use can inflict on the park's plants, wildlife and backcountry solitude.

Below (Clockwise): Stalactites and columns at Carlsbad Caverns National Park ©Pixabay • Bull elk in Rocky Mountain National Park ©Keith Livingston | Dreamstime • Lake Powell and the Colorado River in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area ©Amadeustx | Dreamstime



A New Day for Parks and Public Lands

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As a promising indicator of the new administration's priorities, Rep. Deb Haaland of New Mexico has been nominated as the first Native American cabinet member in history to lead the Department of the Interior (DOI). This agency not only oversees national parks, but also the Bureau of Land Management (responsible for many of the landscapes surrounding parks in the Southwest), Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation (which manages dams, such as Glen Canyon just upstream of the Grand Canyon), Bureau of Indian Affairs and other agencies pivotal to our advocacy work. We cannot imagine a more fitting appointment than a Native American person to oversee the interior of her ancestral

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homeland. And we are confident, given her deep experience and previous positions, that she will steward DOI to benefit all Americans and the places, lands and wildlife we care about.

We are ready to roll up our sleeves and get to work, and we welcome your continued support to help get it done.



Rep. Deb Haaland, President Biden's nominee for Secretary of the Interior ©Wikimedia Commons

Clean Air and Climate a Priority for the Southwest

This fall, our efforts to secure the best possible air quality standards for national parks saw mixed results.

As part of the regional haze rulemaking process in Colorado, NPCA helped secure the retirement deadlines for six coal plants and a gas plant by 2028 and the closure of a coal mine by 2031. In addition to these units, the Colorado Air Quality Control Commission approved our proposal to accelerate the retirements of several coal plants in the state, but that decision was

reversed after intense pressure from industry. Though disappointing, the good news is these facilities *will* retire (by 2030 instead of 2028), and those retirements will be made enforceable through the state's regional haze plan. As coal plants contribute to the haze that mars public lands and produce the overwhelming majority of greenhouse gases from producing electricity, these victories mean clearer skies at national parks, such as Rocky Mountain, improved public health, and progress toward achieving Colorado's climate goals.

Unfortunately, the outlook is less rosy for Utah. Last fall, state and federal officials opted to replace the Environmental Protection Agency's common-sense plan to dramatically cut pollution from two of the dirtiest coal-burning power plants with a backward-looking plan that will have no effect on cleaning up the state's air, especially at national parks. NPCA and a coalition of conservation groups are challenging the Trump administration's rollback of these pollution-control requirements under Utah's regional haze plan, while simultaneously working to cut pollution from other sources that impair the scenic views that make Utah a tourist destination.

In New Mexico—as the state Environment Department takes strides to craft its regional haze implementation plan and works with the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resource Department to pursue the reduction of methane, ozone and other pollutants emitted from industrial sites—NPCA is leading a coalition effort to mobilize public support for industry accountability. The coalition is also banding together to provide technical analysis of haze-reducing pollution controls. NPCA is joining partners to spread awareness of these processes and urge the state to develop the strongest possible rules.

Rest assured that clean air and climate action for parks and people remains a strong priority in the Southwest. You can track our efforts on NPCA's new Haze Hub (npca.org/reports/regional-haze).

Below: A clear day at Rocky Mountain National Park ©Bobby J Norris | Dreamstime





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Expanding Protections for Parks in Arizona

The close of 2020 brought good park news to Arizona. In late December, Congress passed a massive pandemic relief and government funding package that included a bill to expand the boundary of Saguaro National Park. This expansion impacts several dozen land parcels, representing 1,152 total acres. Some parcels will protect recreation trailhead access and views; others will protect riparian and wildlife habitat. And one parcel in particular will prevent a beautiful hiking trail from being developed into a 2-mile-long private driveway! Several of the new additions create an important wildlife link between the county's Sweetwater Preserve and the park.

NPCA is thrilled about this outcome for Saguaro and looks forward to continuing our work to fully protect park resources in Arizona. These efforts include consolidating visitor resources at Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument and adding important cultural and historic sites to Casa Grande Ruins National Monument and Ft. Bowie National Historic Site.



Above: Saguaro National Park was expanded by over 1,100 acres late last year. ©CeciliaLim | Dreamstime

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