



Bureau of Land Management
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument
669 South Highway 89 A, Kanab, UT 84741

Sent via eplanning

September 26, 2022

RE: Public Scoping Comments for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Resource Management Plan (DOI-BLM-UT-PO10-2022-0006-RMP-EIS)

Dear Adé Nelson and the Resource Management Planning Team,

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) and the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks submit the following scoping comments for the resource management plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM) as designated by Presidential Proclamation 10286, which restored the GSENM boundaries and conditions that were in place prior to December 4, 2017. These comments are in addition to joint comments NPCA has signed with Grand Canyon Trust (GCT), Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance and other conservation organizations that have been submitted by GCT. We value the connected landscape and the historic, prehistoric and scientific objects, and recreation opportunities within the entire monument designated under Presidential Proclamations 10286 and 6920. Our greatest concerns and expertise, however, are focused on park adjacent lands and potential impacts to the resources and values of Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef National Parks and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. We submit these comments in addition to GCT et al. to address those park specific concerns.

National Parks Conservation Association

The mission of the National Parks Conservation Association is to “protect and enhance America’s National Park System for present and future generations.” Founded in 1919, NPCA is the leading citizen voice for the national parks. We are a national non-profit with headquarters in Washington, DC, and 29 regional and field offices across the country, including our field office in Salt Lake City, Utah. NPCA represents over 1.6 million members and supporters who care deeply about America’s shared natural and cultural heritage preserved by the National Park System.

Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks

The Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks represents over 2,200 current, former, and retired employees and volunteers of the National Park Service, with over 45,000 collective years of stewardship of America’s most precious natural and cultural resources. Our membership includes former National Park Service directors, deputy directors, regional directors, and park superintendents. Recognized as the Voices of Experience, the Coalition educates, speaks, and acts for the preservation and protection of the National Park System, and mission-related programs of the National Park Service.

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument History

A top priority for NPCA and the Coalition is protecting the resources within national parks and we aim to do so within the larger landscape in which they are embedded, and the air and water on which

they depend, to enhance their ecological and cultural integrity. With that in mind, we were strong supporters of President Clinton’s Proclamation 6920 (Pres. Proc. No. 6920, 61 Fed. Reg. 50,223 (Sept. 18, 1996)) creating the original GSENM over 25 years ago on September 18, 1996, and as ratified and enlarged by Congress on multiple occasions. Proclamation 6920 protected lands rich in geological, paleontological, ecological and cultural resources, as well as scenic views and recreation opportunities in the iconic canyon country adjacent to and surrounded by Capitol Reef National Park to the northeast, Bryce Canyon National Park to the northwest and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area to the south and east.

On December 4, 2017, President Trump signed Proclamation 9682 (Pres. Proc. No. 9682, 82 Fed. Reg. 58,089 (Dec. 4, 2017)) excluding nearly 862,000 acres from the original GSENM boundaries, severing the connections across the monument and with adjacent national parks and opening those lands, identified as the Kanab-Escalante Planning Area (KEPA), to incompatible uses such as mining and drilling. New resource management plans were completed in 2020 for the KEPA lands and the remaining three smaller national monument units: Grand Staircase, Kaiparowits, and Escalante Canyon.

President Biden signed Proclamation 10286 (Pres. Proc. No. 10286, 86 Fed. Reg. 57,335 (Oct. 8, 2021)) on October 8, 2021, which restored the original GSENM size (1.87 million acres) and boundaries to be managed as a single unit and declared the entire landscape “an object of historic and scientific interest requiring protection under the Antiquities Act.” The Proclamation also identifies specific and discrete objects nested within the landscape for which the monument is to be protected, including but not limited to: “evidence of habitation by the Ancestral Pueblo and Fremont cultures,” pristine night skies, the remarkable natural soundscape, the Burr Trail, Waterpocket Fold and “the Grand Staircase, a series of intensely colorful cliffs and plateaus that connect Bryce Canyon to the Grand Canyon.” On July 29, 2022 the BLM published its notice of intent to revise the management plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and initiated scoping. 87 Fed. Reg. 45796-01 (July 29, 2022).

Longstanding Compatible Management of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and National Parks

Prior to Proclamation 9682, the federal government for decades managed GSENM and the national parks in an interconnected manner such that each unit served as protection for its neighboring unit. For example, the National Park Service (NPS) stated in its Capitol Reef General Management Plan (adopted in 1998, shortly after Proclamation 6920 was signed establishing GSENM) that its future plans would be intertwined with those of the monument: “Capitol Reef will coordinate with the national monument and other adjoining land-managing agencies to seek compatibility with the management goals and objectives outlined in this General Management Plan.”¹ President Clinton also was clearly mindful of the original GSENM’s interconnectedness with the surrounding parks when he noted its nexus to the “rim of Bryce Canyon” and its importance to completing protection of the Waterpocket Fold. Pres. Proc. No. 6920, 61 Fed. Reg. 50,223 (Sept. 18, 1996)

In 2000, after widespread consultation and review, BLM adopted the 2000 Grand Staircase-Escalante Monument Management Plan (2000 GSE MMP). The “overall vision” of that plan was predicated on safeguarding the “remote and undeveloped frontier character of the Monument.” 2000 GSE MMP at 4-5. Accordingly, BLM administered the Monument using “management zones” to constrain land uses. The majority of the Monument (65%) was designated “Primitive Zone,” which provided “an undeveloped, primitive and self-directed visitor experience without motorized or mechanized access.” *Id.* at 8-9. Most of the remaining lands were designated “Outback Zone” (29% of the total), which provided “an undeveloped, primitive and self-directed experience while accommodating motorized and mechanized access on designated routes.” *Id.*; *See also* 2000 GSE

¹Capitol Reef Final Environmental Impact Statement (“FEIS”)/ General Management Plan (Capitol Reef Gen. Mgmt. Plan) at 26 available at <https://www.nps.gov/care/learn/management/upload/caregmp.pdf>

MMP at Map 2 (Management Zones and Transportation System). A small portion was designated “Frontcountry Zone” (4%), to serve as the focal point for visitation; and “Passage Zone” (2%), to provide secondary travel routes to recreation destinations and throughways. *Id.* In short, 94% of the Monument was designated as either Primitive Zone or Outback Zone.

The Primitive Zone, said BLM in the 2000 GSE MMP, “is also intended to connect primitive and undeveloped areas on surrounding lands managed by other Federal agencies.” *Id.* at 9. Those surrounding lands included Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef and Glen Canyon. The lands adjacent to Capitol Reef were designated either the Primitive Zone (to the south) or the Outback Zone (to the north). *Id.*; *compare id.* at 2 (map showing adjacent lands). Almost all of the lands that wrap around the boundaries of Glen Canyon were designated Primitive Zone, with small strips of Outback Zone and Passage Zone. *Id.* at 9; *compare id.* at 2 (map showing adjacent lands). In addition, part of the Planning Area to the northwest, adjacent to Bryce Canyon, was a Primitive Zone. *Id.* at 9; *compare id.* at 2 (map showing adjacent lands).

Both Capitol Reef and Glen Canyon are managed by management zones. Almost the entire portion of Capitol Reef adjacent to GSENM is managed as a “Primitive Zone.” Capitol Reef Gen. Mgmt. Plan at 27. According to NPS: “In Capitol Reef National Park, the primitive zone represents the highest order of wilderness qualities, where isolated landscapes remain in an essentially wild and undeveloped condition. Terrain is rough, trails are few, and opportunities for solitude is abundant. The visitor is surrounded by one of the most ruggedly beautiful and remote rockscapes in America, defined by craggy uplifts and deep, twisting canyons. . . . Travel through this zone requires cross-country hiking or horseback riding on unimproved trails and routes.” *Id.* at 28.

Similarly, NPS has designated a significant portion of Glen Canyon’s land adjacent to the GSENM boundary as Glen Canyon’s “Natural Zone,” which “includes the recreation area’s outstanding scenic resources, relatively undisturbed areas isolated and remote from the activities of man . . .”²

Proclamation 9682 severed the connection to the national parks with the removal of KEPA lands from the monument and opened lands adjacent to the parks to incompatible development including mining, drilling and OHV access.

President Biden clearly intended to restore the connection between GSENM and the national parks in the broader landscape in Proclamation 10286 by enumerating the objects and values to be protected in lands adjacent to the parks including but not limited to: the Circle Cliffs “in the northeast corner of the Grand Staircase-Escalante landscape adjacent to Capitol Reef National Park”, “the Upper Escalante Canyons, adjacent to Capitol Reef National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area” and “the Grand Staircase, a series of intensely colorful cliffs and plateaus that connect Bryce Canyon to the Grand Canyon.” Pres. Proc No. 10286, 86 Fed. Reg. 57,335 (Oct. 8, 2021)

The GSENM Resource Management Plan (RMP) is an opportunity to return to managing the monument and the parks in an interconnected manner such that each unit serves as protection for its neighboring unit. To do this, we encourage BLM to reestablish zones to manage recreation as it did in the original plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante – compatible with management goals and objects for adjacent federal land where consistent with protecting monument objects and values.

² Glen Canyon National Recreation Area General Management Plan (Glen Canyon Gen. Mgmt. Plan at 4-5).

Input Regarding Planning Criteria

The Analysis of Management Situation (AMS) sets forth several preliminary management concerns and analytical frameworks for addressing preliminary issues. We request that the Agency consider the following additional planning criterion in development of the draft management plan:

BLM will strive for consistency of management decisions with other adjoining federal planning jurisdictions, particularly the National Park Service, where compatible with protecting monument objects and values.

This criterion directly aligns with Proclamation 10286 as it states, “The Secretary, through BLM, shall consult with other Federal land management agencies or agency components in the local area, including the National Park Service, in developing the management plan.” Pres. Proc No. 10286, 86 Fed. Reg. 57,335 (Oct. 8, 2021)

Given their proximity to and connection with National Park System sites, it is our hope that BLM managers will utilize, under this criterion, the expertise of NPS officials to help shape the management of the adjacent landscape. Such collaboration will likely help prevent impacts from incompatible uses, while also sharing NPS expertise in visitor and recreation management and interpretation.

NPS has strong authority to protect its resources from harmful impacts on nearby lands. The significance of park resources, including scenic values, at our national parks and the responsibility of NPS to protect them was clearly articulated in the Organic Act of 1916: “... to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Further, because national parks are not islands of protection, and their scenery and fundamental resources are more often at risk from adverse impacts originating outside national park boundaries, the NPS Management Policies 2006 (§ 4.1.4) outline well the responsibility of NPS to engage with other agencies and decision-makers: “... the Service will seek the cooperation of others in minimizing the impacts of influences originating outside parks by controlling noise and artificial lighting, maintaining water quality and quantity, eliminating toxic substances, preserving scenic views, improving air quality, preserving wetlands, protecting threatened or endangered species, eliminating exotic species, managing the use of pesticides, protecting shoreline processes, managing fires, managing boundary influences, and using other means of preserving and protecting natural resources.”

In addition to select issues outlined below, we emphasize the importance of ensuring management of the monument lands that are adjacent to the national parks complement and are consistent with park management. In particular, management of the Waterpocket Fold area must be consistent with the adjacent primitive and semi-primitive zones in the Waterpocket Fold District of Capitol Reef National Park as defined in the park’s General Management Plan. “In Capitol Reef National Park, the primitive zone represents the highest order of wilderness qualities, where isolated landscapes remain in an essentially wild and undeveloped condition...The primitive zone provides abundant opportunities to experience wilderness solitude and natural quiet. The area is substantially free of modern human influence and alteration...natural processes and conditions are perpetuated...The National Park Service maintains close control over resource-damaging activities.”³

³ *Capitol Reef Gen. Mgmt. Plan* at 28 (1998), available at <https://www.nps.gov/care/learn/management/upload/caregmp.pdf>

Capitol Reef National Park's semi-primitive zone is: "...similar in nature to the primitive zone, except that evidence of human activity is more pronounced, road corridors are more abundant, and access is easier."⁴

Similarly, Bryce Canyon National Park's Foundation document identifies the resources and values that make Bryce Canyon National Park nationally significant and worthy of designation as a national park. Significant resources and values that could be affected by decisions on park-adjacent lands, including those under consideration by BLM in the current scoping process, include the park's viewshed, clean air, dark night skies and natural soundscapes. Bryce Canyon National Park's Foundation Document states: "The location of the park at the summit of the Grand Staircase, surrounded by a system of nationally protected lands, and combined with the exceptional clarity of the air and natural quiet, provides a multisensory experience. The outstanding views often extend more than 100 miles and begin with the colorful and intricately carved Claron Formation and include panoramic vistas of cliffs, canyons, and forested landscapes." And "With a nearly pristine night sky, thousands of stars shine brightly at Bryce Canyon National Park. As one of the darkest publicly accessible places in North America, the Milky Way Galaxy can be viewed from horizon to horizon. The clear, clean air and a lack of artificial light in the park and the region are essential to this unparalleled nighttime experience. The darkness is also an important resource for nocturnal wildlife."⁵

Management decisions for GSENM could have the greatest impact on Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GCNRA) given the significant stretches of monument land adjacent to its boundaries. Management decisions made on land near GCNRA should be consistent with the park's purpose and protect its recommended wilderness as identified in the GCNRA Foundation Document: "Glen Canyon National Recreation area, located at the center of the Colorado Plateau, provides for public enjoyment through diverse land- and water based recreational opportunities, and protects scenic, scientific, natural, and cultural resources on Lake Powell, the Colorado River, its tributaries, and surrounding lands."⁶ And, "Glen Canyon National Recreation Area includes 588,855 acres of proposed wilderness and 48,955 acres of potential wilderness. Together this represents 51% of the total land area of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, containing a variety of culturally and ecologically unique landscapes where visitors can experience the character and solitude of wilderness within a recreation area."⁷

Select Monument and National Park Resources of Concern

Dark Night skies

Proclamation 10286 specifically recognizes the quality of the dark night skies of GSENM as a resource that must be protected. "The Grand Staircase-Escalante's large, isolated, and, at times, impenetrable landscape is one of the most naturally dark outdoor spaces left in America, providing views of the cosmos that are nearly unrivaled in the contiguous United States, and an opportunity for visitors to encounter a landscape at night, undisturbed by electric lights, in the same way people have experienced the West for most of America's history. According to recent research, over 90 percent of the landscape, or nearly 1.7 million acres, contains pristine night skies, meaning that observers would see no indication of artificial skyglow anywhere in the night sky. Only natural sources of light are visible to the human eye, such as starlight, airglow, aurora, and zodiacal light." Pres. Proc No. 10286, 86 Fed. Reg. 57,335 (Oct. 8, 2021).

⁴ *Id.* at 29

⁵ *Bryce Canyon National Park Foundation Document* (Bryce Canyon Foundation Doc.) at 8 (May 2014), available at https://www.nps.gov/brca/learn/management/upload/BRCA_FD_SP.pdf

⁶ *Glen Canyon National Recreation Area Foundation Document* at 1, available at <http://www.nps.history.com/publications/foundation-documents/glca-rabr-fd-overview.pdf>

⁷ *Id.* at 6

The Colorado Plateau is one of the last sanctuaries of darkness amidst a rising surge of light pollution with one of the highest concentrations of Dark Sky Places designated by the International Dark Sky Association in the world. Circling GSENM, Capitol Reef, Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks, Pipe Springs and Cedar Breaks National Monuments and Kodachrome Basin State Park are all designated International Dark Sky Parks, a designation reserved for parks with “exceptional”⁸ and well-preserved night sky resources. Torrey is an International Dark Sky Community recognized for adopting “quality outdoor lighting ordinances” *Id.* and educating their residents about the importance of dark skies. Rainbow Bridge National Monument is a designated International Dark Sky Sanctuary, “the first of its kind in the National Park Service, and distinguishes Rainbow Bridge National Monument for the quality of its naturally dark night skies and the site’s cultural heritage.” *Id.* The Kaibab Paiute Tribe earned a designation as the first “dark sky nation” in the world and the Kaibab Paiute reservation is an International Dark Sky Community known as the “Thunder Mountain Pootsee Nightsky.”⁹

NPS has recognized dark night skies as an important resource that plays a critical role in natural resource processes and the evolution of species, as well as contributing to the national park visitor experience. NPS Management Policies 2006, § 4.10. People visit International Dark Sky Parks just to experience their dark, night skies, to learn about them through ranger-led interpretive talks and view them through high powered telescopes. Therefore, it is critical that BLM continue to ensure that these qualities are maintained throughout the monument.

Similarly, BLM is also required to manage public lands in part for “scenic values,” which include night skies. 43 U.S.C. § 1702(c). Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), BLM must account for the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of “past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions” on night skies. 40 C.F.R. §§ 1502.16, 1508.7, 1508.8. In addition to reducing impacts on night skies and protecting the purity of dark, night skies within the monument, we urge BLM to celebrate and interpret this dwindling resource for monument visitors.

Natural Soundscapes

Proclamation 10286 specifically recognizes the intense quiet and quality of GSENM natural soundscape as a resource that must be protected. “The Grand Staircase-Escalante area also provides a remarkable natural soundscape with infrequent human-caused sounds. From popular recreational destinations to remote, isolated locations, acoustic baseline research has found that some of the quietest conditions found in protected areas across the United States can be found in the Grand Staircase-Escalante landscape.” Pres. Proc No. 10286, 86 Fed. Reg. 57,335 (Oct. 8, 2021).

Noise impacts the acoustical environment by obscuring the listening environment for both visitors and wildlife. An appropriate acoustical environment is also an important element in how we experience the cultural and historic resources in the monument and national parks. Places of deep quiet are most vulnerable to noise. Therefore, wildlife in remote wilderness areas and park visitors who journey to these quiet places are likely to be especially sensitive to noise. In addition, soundscapes are part of the “human environment” subject to the requirements of NEPA. 42 U.S.C. § 4331 (C); *see also Wyoming v. United States DOI*, 674 F.3d 1220, 1236 (10th Cir. 2012) (upholding NEPA analysis in part because NPS properly considered “soundscapes”).

NPS strives to “preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the natural soundscapes of parks.”¹⁰ “In and adjacent to parks, the Service will monitor human activities that generate noise that adversely affects park soundscapes, including noise caused by mechanical or electronic devices.” *Id.* Bryce Canyon has

⁸ International Dark Sky Places, available at <https://www.darksky.org/our-work/conservation/idsp/>

⁹ *Dark Sky over Thunder Mountain Pootseev Nightsky*, available at <https://www.intermountainhistories.org/items/show/542>

¹⁰ NPS, Soundscape Management Policy 4.9 (2006) available at https://www.nps.gov/subjects/sound/soundscape-management-policy_4-9.htm

identified the “predominance and maintenance of natural quiet” as “an essential resource critical to visitor experience and the functioning of biological systems.”¹¹ Indeed, “[d]uring sound monitoring efforts in the park, at some locations natural ambient decibel levels often were lower than data collection systems could measure, making Bryce Canyon an exceptionally quiet place.” *Id.* at 24. “However, this also means the quiet nature of the park—and by extension the visitor experience—are exceptionally susceptible to disturbance from extrinsic noise.” *Id.*

Similarly, natural quiet is an important part of visitors’ experience in Capitol Reef. There is currently “very little noise pollution in the park” and “[t]he backcountry areas of the park are managed for wilderness qualities, including natural quiet.” Capitol Reef Gen. Mgmt. Plan at 109. Thus, any “increase in noise that affects the natural quiet of the backcountry . . . would be considered significant.” *Id.*

To protect the natural quiet in the Planning Area and adjacent Parks, BLM should continue to manage with constraints on development and human activity and add stipulations or enforceable requirements to any permitted development or activity that has the potential to degrade the natural soundscapes. The RMP should inventory and monitor natural soundscapes and require interpretive materials/programs to be developed to educate and engage the public about natural soundscapes.

Visual Resource Management and Viewsheds

The Colorado Plateau is a vast, wide, open landscape that affords incredible views across the mosaic of public lands, in some cases 360-degree views for a hundred miles without any visual intrusion from development. Public land management boundaries are indistinguishable to most visitors. Part of the unique experience of visiting this remote area of Southern Utah is the opportunity to seemingly travel back through time to imagine our lands as seen by the first inhabitants.

From Bryce Canyon’s rim, visitors can look east over hoodoos and to the Monument beyond to unspoiled lands and geological features of Grand Staircase. “The location of the park at the summit of the Grand Staircase, surrounded by a system of nationally protected lands, and combined with the exceptional clarity of the air and natural quiet, provides a multisensory experience. The outstanding views often extend more than 100 miles and begin with the colorful and intricately carved Claron Formation and include panoramic vistas of cliffs, canyons, and forested landscapes.” Bryce Canyon Foundation Doc. at 8.

These unspoiled views have been preserved because the GSENM has long been under federal protection and because there was little development in this remote area prior to Proclamation 6920.

As a national monument, there should be no alternative analyzed in the DEIS that considers managing the planning area as VRM Class III or IV. We urge the agency to do its utmost to ensure that high quality conditions are preserved in areas visible from Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef and Glen Canyon, as well as viewpoints in the monument.

Additionally, we urge BLM to safeguard the high quality, unspoiled scenic byways and backways that connect the planning areas with the parks, particularly Burr Trail and Hole in the Rock Road. The viewsheds along these byways should be maintained as VRM Class I or Class II. These routes are gateways to the adjacent national parks and their quality affects the overall visitor experience in the region.

¹¹ Bryce Canyon National Park Foundation Document at 11, available at https://www.nps.gov/brca/learn/management/upload/BRCA_FD_SP.pdf

Air Quality

Both Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef have been designated as mandatory Class I areas under the Clean Air Act. 42 U.S.C. § 7472; 40 C.F.R. § 81.430.¹² Class I areas are places where the law requires the air quality to be at its most pristine, virtually unaffected by human-made or human-caused pollutants. Congress “declare[d] as a national goal the prevention of any future, and the remedying of any existing, impairment of visibility in mandatory class I Federal areas which impairment results from manmade air pollution.” 42 U.S.C. § 7491(a)(1).¹³ Glen Canyon is a Class II area for air pollutants.¹⁴ Class II areas, like Class I, are established to prevent any significant deterioration of the air quality standards set by the Clean Air Act but allow a moderate increase in certain air pollutants.

Visitors to National Parks and wilderness areas consistently rate visibility and clear scenic vistas as one of the most important aspects of the experience.¹⁵ Bryce Canyon’s Foundation Document explains that the “[c]lean, clear air in Bryce Canyon National Park is essential to the exceptional views of the colorful Claron Formation and panoramic vistas of the surrounding region,” which include hundred-mile views of dramatic landscapes.¹⁶ Capitol Reef’s Management Plan likewise emphasizes the importance of air quality, which is “usually very good”; the park’s clear air allows “[v]isibility from points within and around the park [that] usually exceeds 100 miles.” Capitol Reef Gen. Mgmt. Plan at 81-82, 109.

Clean air enhances the color and contrast of landscape features; allows visitors to see great distances; and safeguards ecosystem, visitor, and public health. Haze-causing pollutants would obscure scenic vistas in adjacent national parks by impairing a viewer’s ability to see long distances, color and geologic formation. They also contribute to unhealthy National Ambient Air Quality Standard pollutants, ozone and particulate matter.

Wildlife Habitat

The GSENM landscape includes five life zones, from low-lying desert to coniferous forest, providing opportunities for biological study of an area that is “perhaps the richest floristic region in the Intermountain West” and “characterized by a diversity of species” such as mountain lion, bear, desert bighorn sheep and over 200 species of birds.¹⁷ BLM should identify and protect wildlife corridors, migration pathways and critical habitat for wildlife and vegetation to preserve healthy wildlife communities, overall ecosystem functions and resiliency in a changing climate.

Protection of wildlife species in the Planning Area, which include big game populations and more than 40 special status species, will also help to protect wildlife values in immediately adjacent NPS-

¹² In 1977, Congress amended the Clean Air Act to deem all “national parks which exceed six thousand acres in size” to be mandatory Class I areas (i.e., areas that “may not be redesignated”). 42 U.S.C. § 7472(a)(4). Both Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef were greater than 6,000 acres and were therefore designated as class I areas under this statute. Congress also instructed the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”), after consulting with the Secretary of the Interior, to “promulgate a list of mandatory Class I Federal areas in which he determines visibility is an important value.” 42 U.S.C. § 7491(a)(2). Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef are both among the Class I areas in which the Administrator determined that “visibility is an important value.” 40 C.F.R. § 81.430 (adopted at 44 Fed. Reg. 69,122, 69,126 (Nov. 30, 1979)).

¹³ NPS has a statutorily-mandated “affirmative responsibility to protect the air quality related values (including visibility) of any such lands within a class I area” that NPS manages, “and to consider, in consultation with the Administrator [of the EPA], whether a proposed major emitting facility will have an adverse impact on such values” 42 U.S.C. § 7475(d)(2)(B).

¹⁴ See Glen Canyon National Recreation Area Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan / Final Environmental Impact Statement at 18 (Jan. 2017).

¹⁵ Clean Air Task Force, *Out of Sight: Haze in our National Parks* at 1 (Sept. 2000).

¹⁶ Bryce Canyon, Foundation Document (“Bryce Canyon Foundation Document”) at 11 (May 2014). In addition, preservation of the fragile geological features such as those found in Bryce, Capitol Reef and Glen Canyon, depends in part on clean air, without acidic chemicals that can erode the fragile formations. *Id.* at 19..

¹⁷ *Id.*

managed areas. As stated in Bryce Canyon's Foundation Document, "Park boundaries are irrelevant to the migratory hummingbirds or nesting peregrine falcons; Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, and pronghorn cross through the plateau forests and meadows within and beyond the park; other animals have adapted to occupy the distinctive erosional features of the amphitheater and adjacent habitats."¹⁸

Capitol Reef likewise shares wildlife species habitat with the adjacent Planning Area, including, among others, mule deer and bighorn sheep as well as threatened, endangered and sensitive species such as the bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, peregrine falcon, and the southwestern willow flycatcher.¹⁹

Glen Canyon hosts bighorn sheep, bald eagles, golden eagles, and California condors, and these species ranges are not confined to the Parks.²⁰ In addition, the Escalante River and its tributaries within the monument feed into riparian areas in Glen Canyon. The health of these water bodies is vital to the health of numerous fish species downriver, including endangered species such as the Colorado Pikeminnow, Razorback Sucker, bonytail and humpback chub.

Along with being important components of these park ecosystems, these animals are also observed and enjoyed by park visitors. They are NPS resources and values that are important to consider in monument management and planning decisions.

BLM should exert maximum effort to achieve stated wildlife conservation goals: preserving the integrity of wildlife corridors, migration routes, and access to key forage, nesting, and spawning areas by limiting adverse impacts from development in the monument; managing habitats for the recovery or reestablishment of native populations and work to improve habitat quantity and quality (forage, water, cover, space, security, trophic level integrity, and biogeochemical processes); and conserving habitat for migratory birds. Finally, BLM should continue to facilitate appropriate research to improve understanding of fish and wildlife species and habitat and increase public education and appreciation of fish and wildlife species through interpretation.

Livestock Grazing Management

Livestock grazing within and adjacent to protected landscapes, if poorly managed, can affect the health of key water sources and watersheds, vegetation communities, important wildlife habitat, and entire ecosystems. When addressing livestock grazing levels and administration within the GSENM landscape, we urge BLM to base management decisions on scientific data, robust monitoring of forage availability, rangeland and ecosystem health and to take an adaptive approach to ensure the resiliency of our public lands in the face of a changing climate.

We emphasize the critical importance of protecting threatened and endangered species, native cold desert plant and animal communities, streams and riparian areas, biological soil crusts and archaeological and historic resources. We are particularly concerned about the concentration of livestock in fragile perennial streams, wetlands and riparian areas.

¹⁸ Foundation Document, Bryce Canyon National Park, May 2014 at 6. (https://www.nps.gov/subjects/sound/upload/BRCA_FD_SP.pdf); see also Species Checklist for Bryce Canyon National Park at <https://irma.nps.gov/NPSpecies/Reports/SpeciesList/Species%20Checklist/BRCA/1,2,4,5,3,11,12,7,9,6,8,10,13,14,16,15,17/false>, viewed November 15, 2018.

¹⁹ See Species Checklist for Capitol Reef National Park at <https://www.nps.gov/care/learn/nature/species-lists.htm>, viewed November 15, 2018; see also Capitol Reef National Park General Management Plan, September, 1998 at 79 (<https://home.nps.gov/care/learn/management/upload/caregmp.pdf>).

²⁰ See Species Checklist for Glen Canyon National Recreation Area at <https://home.nps.gov/glca/learn/nature/animals.htm>, viewed November 15, 2018.

Grazing Management Inside Glen Canyon National Recreation Area

Glen Canyon operates under the same NPS Organic Act of 1916 as national parks, monuments, and historic sites with the fundamental purpose to “... conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” Although the enabling legislation for Glen Canyon states that the administration of grazing leases within the recreation area shall be by BLM, it is also explicit that BLM administration of grazing inside Glen Canyon is subject to the provisions of the Organic Act i.e. with no resulting impairment to park values and purpose.

Several agreements between BLM and NPS (“Umbrella” Memorandum of Understanding 1984 Between Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service, Interagency Agreement between Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service for Grazing Management on Glen Canyon National Recreation Area) also state that before authorizing a grazing activity within Glen Canyon, NPS must determine if recreation area values and purposes are affected, a process called a “Values and Purposes Determination”. In addition to the purpose of the NRA described above, the values of the recreation area have been defined by NPS as the vegetation, soil, water quality, wildlife, archaeological, historic, paleontological, scenic and recreation resources that make up the scenic, scientific, and historic features which define the outdoor recreational use and enjoyment of Glen Canyon. Glen Canyon Grazing Mgmt. Plan 1999 at 2.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) must clarify the decision-making process for grazing inside the recreation area and demonstrate how the EIS process adheres to the grazing management agreements with NPS and obligations of each agency. The RMP should incorporate appropriate guidelines for ensuring non-impairment and protection of Glen Canyon values and purpose and grazing management in the NRA should be approved by the National Park Service and consistent with their recommendations.

Grazing Adjacent to Capitol Reef National Park

NPCA and the Coalition also encourage BLM to work closely with Capitol Reef National Park staff to ensure livestock grazing and trailing in the GSENM landscape is consistent with the Livestock Grazing and Trailing Management Plan for the park. This is particularly important as three traditional stock trails crossing Capitol Reef National Park connect the GSENM monument to lands east of the park. Therefore, any alteration to the number and management of AUMs in this area could have direct impacts on sensitive park resources.

Recreational Use and Visitor Services and Travel, Transportation and Access Management

We appreciate BLM’s focus on and recognition of the need to address increased motorized and non-motorized recreation in GSENM in the RMP to protect monument objects and values. The AMS at 5-35 notes the dramatic increases in visitation to the nearby national parks between 2007 and 2021, more than doubling in Zion National Park (to a record 5 million visitors in 2021), increasing 108 percent in Bryce Canyon and 153 percent in Capitol Reef. NPCA has identified overcrowding as one of the most pressing and complex challenges facing national parks in their second century – degrading park resources (e.g., increased instances of graffiti, litter and improperly disposed-of human waste; soil erosion and plant loss; wildlife disturbance and habitat degradation) and diminishing the visitor experience (e.g., traffic congestion, long lines, crowding at keystone sites, increased search and rescue).

It is critical for BLM and NPS to work across their jurisdictions to manage visitor access and recreation, ideally through regional recreation planning such as the Zion Region Recreation

Management planning process²¹ to ensure that “recreation spillover” is managed in a coordinated, thoughtful and sustainable way. We are particularly concerned that dispersing visitors across federal land recreation destinations has been identified repeatedly as a tool to reduce crowd density at heavily visited destinations. While dispersal as a strategy might provide some relief to parks experiencing intense crowding, unintended consequences of increased visitation in new places adds to management burdens and poses long-term threats to irreplaceable resources (see GCT et. al. comments under Recreation Use and Visitor Services for a thorough discussion of resource impacts from non-motorized recreation). For instance, as recreation has expanded in recent years, we’ve witnessed more instances of cultural resource defacement (e.g., graffitied petroglyphs), an uptick in search and rescue operations (which stress staff capacity and mental and physical health), as well as “spill over” effects of crowding to new destinations.

As we stated in the section above, *Longstanding Compatible Management of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and National Parks*, we encourage BLM to delineate management zones for the entire monument that emphasize certain types of management and experiences as it did in the original plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante – compatible with management goals and objects for adjacent national parks and Tribal recommendations and traditional uses, and consistent with protecting monument objects and values. Establishing desired future conditions for resource protection and recreation in management zones will help guide decisions on visitor use management including the appropriate number and flow of visitors, as well as areas with sensitive natural and cultural resources where access must be limited to protect objects and values.

Visitor use and recreation monitoring, planning, implementation and adaptive management are time, resource and staff intensive, and we recognize that GSENM has limited staff resources to dedicate to this challenge. BLM can look to the adaptive visitor use management tools parks have put in place as models to manage the impact of visitors on resources, facilities and staff. Research measuring the impacts of visitors to ecosystems abounds as do frameworks for establishing and managing for desired conditions for visitor experience and resource integrity.²²

Off-Highway Vehicle Access

Off-high way vehicle (OHV) recreation (also referred to as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and utility-task vehicles (UTVs)) is one of the fastest-growing recreation sectors in Utah and the AMS at 5-36 states “ATV and UTV use has become one of the fastest-growing—and one of the most controversial—recreational activities” in the monument.

OHV use diminishes the natural soundscape, generates emissions from both vehicle exhaust and the generation of increased particulates in the air (dust), can result in direct injury and/or mortality of big game species through collision, and can have direct and indirect adverse impacts on biological soil crusts, vegetation and water resources (especially surface-disturbing illegal off-road trespass).

For many years, across the nation, NPCA and the Coalition both have advocated for NPS management action to prevent illegal off-road vehicle use and reduce environmental impacts through appropriate planning, visitor education, outreach and enforcement. We have also consistently raised concerns with OHV use outside park boundaries that cross illegally into national parks, which can intrude on natural quiet, negatively impact wildlife, crush fragile desert soils and plant life, and increase wind and water erosion. OHVs, including street legal ATVs, are not allowed on any roads inside Capitol Reef and Bryce Canyon National Parks and only on designated routes

²¹Zion Regional Recreation Management Plan available at <https://www.conservationfund.org/projects/zion-regional-recreation-management-plan>

²² Interagency Visitor Use Management Framework available at <https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/VUM/Framework> and the story map for the Arches National Park Visitor Use, Access and Experience Planning Process available at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/909991e9919f4722adf1700379074f99>

and areas inside Glen Canyon NRA. Therefore, we continue to urge the BLM to consider appropriate levels of OHV use both within the GSENM and adjacent to national park units, particularly roads that cross jurisdictions or are near park boundaries. We have significant concerns about increased pressure on our public land managers to expand OHV use, particularly nearer to our national parks. With literally thousands of miles of designated OHV routes, we maintain that allowing for increased use within and adjacent to protected landscapes risks resource damage.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management

To ensure that the best possible policies are in place, we strongly recommend BLM incorporate a provision for close monitoring of resource impacts and degradation as well as the ability to incorporate adaptive management to be able to address unanticipated impacts or environmental degradation stemming from allowed activities.

Tribal Consultation and Co-Stewardship

Proclamation 10286 articulates the historic and current day connection that Tribes have to the GSENM landscape and management direction to ensure this connection is maintained. “The Secretary shall, to the maximum extent permitted by law and in consultation with Tribal Nations, ensure the protection of sacred sites and cultural properties and sites in the monument and provide access to Tribal members for traditional cultural, spiritual, and customary uses, consistent with the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (42U.S.C. 1996) and Executive Order 13007 of May 24, 1996 (Indian Sacred Sites), including collection of medicines, berries and other vegetation, forest products, and firewood for personal noncommercial use in a manner consistent with the care and management of the objects identified above and in Proclamation 6920.” Pres. Proc No. 10286, 86 Fed. Reg. 57,335 (Oct. 8, 2021).

BLM must engage Tribal Nations early in the planning and decision-making process to prioritize traditional ecological knowledge and better protect cultural resources and values. Meaningful consultation with Tribes throughout the public lands management planning process is necessary to identify traditional cultural properties, sacred landscapes, traditional uses and other issues and concerns within the monument. In addition, the BLM must incorporate traditional cultural knowledge and Tribal representatives in co-stewardship and management of the monument and the interpretation of monument history, cultural sites and traditional uses.

Coordination with Stakeholders

Because national parks and monuments share both boundaries and resources and are, to some extent, interdependent, it is important for land managers to engage with other agencies, decision-makers and stakeholders. We urge the agencies to maintain ongoing communication and strong coordination with NPS managers of adjacent parks. Their expertise and cross-boundary management experience can and should help shape the management of the GSENM.

Conclusion

The National Parks Conservation Association and the Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks urge you to choose the most protective management alternative for the monument; one that recognizes Tribal communities and the millions of people who have expressed support for and care about these places, while ensuring healthy national parks and monuments and a vibrant, sustainable tourism economy. We ask BLM to move forward with a plan that embraces this “exceptional and inimitable landscape filled with an unparalleled diversity of resources.”²³ in a manner that protects neighboring national parks, is consistent with existing law and preserves our natural and cultural history.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and those of our members and supporters. As mentioned previously, in addition to these comments, NPCA has also signed on to comments of our

²³ Pres. Proc No. 10286, 86 Fed. Reg. 57,335 (Oct. 8, 2021).

allies submitted by Grand Canyon Trust. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding comments or positions described in this letter, please contact NPCA staff, Cory MacNulty at 801-834-3125 or cmacnulty@npca.org.

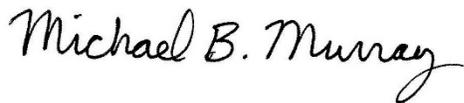
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