



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations

FIELD REPORT

SOUTHWEST REGION

Fall/Winter 2008-2009 — Vol. 1, No. 2

Grand Canyon Irony

It is indeed ironic, that as we face a financial crisis of historic and global proportions—due in a large extent to deregulation and diverted oversight—the Bush Administration would seek to reduce oversight and safeguards for a place as significant and remarkable as the Grand Canyon. Yet that is what has happened.

The swelling price of uranium ore on world markets has sparked renewed interest in mining claims throughout the Colorado Plateau. There are more than 10,000 hard-rock mining claims near Grand Canyon National Park already, and 3,000 uranium-mining claims. Then late last year, the Administration authorized a permit for exploratory uranium drilling on federal land just two miles from Grand Canyon, risking this national treasure.

Alarmed, Congressman Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) introduced legislation to protect upwards of 1 million acres of public land adjacent to the Grand Canyon from mining. The bill was endorsed by local and national conservation groups, local elected officials, and National Park Service scientists. All 11 native tribes whose lands border the Grand Canyon also oppose uranium mining throughout the Colorado River watershed.

Recognizing the urgency of the threat to the Grand Canyon and the reality of a log-jammed Congress, Rep. Grijalva then introduced a little-used resolution, authorized in the 1976 Federal Land

Policy and Management Act—Section 204(e), which instructs the Secretary of the Interior to withdraw federal lands from potential mining if the appropriate Congressional committee deems that an emergency exists and that extraordinary measures need to be taken. This authority is granted for a period of up to three years, thereby providing a reasonable period of legislative review and public participation in such urgent situations. Congress handily passed the resolution in June, but since that time, the Interior Department has given every indication it would not comply.

And then, on a Friday afternoon in October, with everyone's attention diverted by the global financial crisis, the Interior Department proposed a rule change to eliminate Section 204(e) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act—essentially weakening the authority of Congress to provide oversight of public lands, and undermining the recent congressional action to protect the Grand Canyon from mining operations. The Administration then offered the public a meager 15 days to learn about the rule change and comment on it.

We would be foolish, and future generations profoundly sorry, if we didn't challenge this perverse effort to ravage our national treasures in the name of resource extraction. It is up to all of us to ensure that the Grand Canyon and all national parks are preserved unimpaired for our children and grandchildren.

Note: This op-ed, written by David Nimkin, appeared in the Arizona Republic on Saturday October 25.



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www.npca.org/southwest

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah

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Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park system. NPCA, its members (340,000) and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical and cultural heritage for generations to come.

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Recent growth of NPCA's capacity in Salt Lake City—with the addition of a very talented Liz McCoy as our Administrative Coordinator and our first Field Office in Tucson, Arizona, managed by the capable and experienced, Kevin Dahl—could not have come at a better time. The Southwest region has been extremely busy and chal-

lenged both by threats to parks in our region, and opportunities to promote NPCA's strategic priorities.

The federal elections and change of administration provides an opportunity to ensure a better future for the National Park System. National parks in our region could be significantly impacted by coal-fired power plants that have been proposed and/or are seeking permits, so NPCA is working with allied groups and government leaders to deny those permits. Burning coal to produce power has profound negative impacts on air quality and visibility in our parks and also contributes to the production of greenhouse gases (including CO₂) that hasten climate change. Our parks are the proverbial "canaries in the mine," with evidence of the impact of climate change taking many forms, like drought, habitat change and proliferation of invasive species. Our work with the National Park Service through the Climate Friendly Parks program (detailed in this Field Report) will help our parks manage threatened resources and further help park visitors to understand the impacts of climate change on natural systems and how they can help to arrest this problem.

While there have been modest advances on the Centennial Initiative to increase the woefully short funding of our parks, we are pleased and optimistic that even in times of significant economic stress, protecting our parks and assuring adequate funding will become a priority in the coming years. Our office is actively planning with media outlets and allied groups to promote a new series on our national parks by award-winning filmmaker, Ken Burns. This series will be aired on PBS stations beginning in September 2009, and will be preceded by several events throughout the region highlighting the themes and messages about the parks.

Our new and talented staff in the region enable NPCA to confront the many and varied threats our parks are facing. We are working to fight potential uranium mining at the Grand Canyon, and continue to face challenges with management of the Colorado River through several of our southwestern parks (especially the Grand Canyon). We are still advocating for increased funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire private lands within or adjacent to our parks that are threatened with development (Petriified Forest, Zion, Capitol Reef). We are also working to protect our border parks in Arizona that are challenged by border fence construction, and increased human activity and law enforcement in the area. During the past several months, the Bureau of Land Management has issued six new resource management plans in Utah that have significant and profound impacts on national park units in that state, such as promoting oil and gas lease sales adjacent to Arches, Canyonlands, and Dinosaur.

With a small but growing regional presence, we face many challenges and threats. Our work is enabled by working with so many dedicated and skilled allies, Park Service employees, local leaders, and donors to protect these special places.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: SOUTHWEST REGION PROGRAM MANAGER

Meet Karen Hevel-Mingo

Karen joined NPCA and our southwest regional office in February 2007 as a senior program coordinator. With a masters degree in natural resource policy from the University of Utah and a bachelors degree in anthropology from the same school, Karen is uniquely qualified to assist with our park protection work in the Southwest region, an area noted for its incredible natural and cultural resources. She assisted with the formation of our new regional office headquarters and quickly joined a strong and substantial group of clean air and renewable energy advocates who are challenging six coal fired power plants proposed in the region.

With remarkable alacrity and precision, Karen prepared comments for four resource management plans proposed by the Bureau of Land Management in Utah. These plans that regulate management objectives for lands adjacent to Utah's magnificent parks could have profound impacts on park resources. Moreover, Karen has helped to prepare and review comments and advocacy against permitting coal plants in the region and potential Environmental Protection Agency rule changes that would weaken clean air standards in the southwest. This threat is featured in NPCA's Dark Horizons report(www.npca.org/darkhorizons). Karen helped organize a series of public actions at Zion, Capitol Reef, Mesa Verde, and Great Smokies national parks to draw attention to this grave threat.

Currently, Karen is leading our regional effort to promote activities at select national parks that are designated, "climate friendly." In conjunction with National Park Service leaders, Karen is raising the profile of significant achievements in carbon footprint reduction and climate change education for visitors at Rocky Mountain, Zion, and Bandelier national parks.

And when she is not battling climate change and threats to clean air, Karen is on point with many of our allies and park managers who are facing oil and gas development, refineries, coal mines, and energy transmission corridors that threaten our parks. Karen's skill, dedication, and growing responsibilities led to her recent promotion to program manager. The southwest region is big, sprawling, and diverse—we are indeed fortunate to benefit from the varied skill set and dedication of Karen Hevel-Mingo.

National Parks Second Century Commission

Looking to the Centennial of the National Park System and the National Park Service in 2016, the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) is convening a body of distinguished private citizens as an independent Commission to conduct a broadly inclusive dialogue about national parks, their values and role in society. The goals of the Commission are to produce a report in September 2009 that offers a vision for the national parks as they approach their second century of operation, and shape an agenda for the next Administration and Congress. The report should include recommendations for actions on Park Service policy, programs including resource preservation and education, funding, organization issues, and future growth of the Park System. NPCA expects to engage significant institutional partners in this effort, including the National Geographic Society, which has offered to help produce the report and assist with media outreach.

Almost a hundred years ago, it was observed by the British Ambassador to the United States, James Bryce, in speaking about the importance of national parks, that we must "carefully guard what we have got," for we are the "trustees for the future." The centennial of the park system in 2016 offers a special and unique opportunity to think anew about this charge, consider what we want our park system and Park Service to be in the next century, and develop changes for its betterment and ours. Envisioning the future should not be based on thinking of a hundred years ago, but on the realities and opportunities of today. A vision for the future must embrace the complexity of managing parks within ever-changing landscapes, evolving cultural demographics, and new scientific and scholarly studies that continuously refine our understanding of the environment and a sense of who we are as a society.

The National Park System today is vastly different from the one envisioned in 1916—in size and the diversity of resources it protects—and the Park Service is an institution with significantly broader and evolving purposes. National Park units preserve not only great national areas, historic sites and structures, but also recreational spaces in and around urban areas, lakes and seashores, long distant trails, free-flowing rivers and places that chronicle the nation's intellectual and social history. Increasingly, the Park Service is challenged to manage these resources in accord with a complex mix of laws and congressional directives in areas that include, among others, clean air and water, climate change, historical preservation, endangered species, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and environmental protection. It now thinks in terms of ecological integrity and civic engagement, life long learning, and sustainable technologies and practices.

The Commission will deliberate through the fall of 2009 with five meetings. The first meeting was conducted in August 2008 at Santa Monica Mountains NRA and the second in Lowell NHP in November. Meetings in Yellowstone NP, Gettysburg NMP, and Great Smoky Mountains NP are scheduled through June.

The Second Century Commission is co-chaired by former US Senators Howard Baker (R-TN) and J. Bennett Johnston (D-LA). Some of the twenty-seven commissioners include biologist E.O. Wilson, National Geographic Society President and CEO John Fahey, REI CEO Sally Jewel, Ret. US Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and Rob Portman, Former Director Office of Management. The fall 2009 release of this unprecedented report will coincide with the PBS airing of a fabulous Ken Burns documentary series on our national parks.

Climate-Friendly Parks

Raging wildfires, buffelgrass choking out fledgling saguaro cactus, stands of dead and dying pine felled by bark beetle infestations,—the national parks of the Southwest are feeling the pressures of climate change. Recent scientific studies predict that Rocky Mountain National Park could lose up to 50 percent of its tundra habitat with as little as a 5 degree F temperature increase. Pika, trout, and other species are being forced into narrower ranges of habitat.

In response to climate change, the National Park Service and the Environmental Protection Agency began the Climate Friendly Parks program in 2003. This program gives the Park Service measures to assess an individual park's greenhouse gas emissions and take steps to reduce its carbon footprint. For example, this summer Bandelier National Park went through its Climate Friendly Park workshop, making it the Southwest Regional Office's third national park to enter the program. Bandelier has identified ways to reduce the park's greenhouse gas emissions and has set the goal to reduce emissions 50 percent by 2012. Additionally, the park has set a carbon neutral target date of 2016. At Zion National Park, the visitor's center was rebuilt as a sustainable LEED certified building with features such as cooling towers, passive solar, and operable windows. Heating and cooling of the entire facility is accomplished solely by the use of wind, water, and sun.

So how can you help? This June, NPCA and the Park Service launched the "Do Your Part" website at www.doyourpartparks.org. This site allows individuals to determine their carbon footprint and take action to reduce their impact. Take the pledge, then consider asking a staff member of NPCA to speak to your local service club or school about the impacts of climate change and how the Climate Friendly parks program is helping. Contact our office for projects and ideas. Climate change does not respect borders, and we all need to become involved and "Do Our Part."

SWRO'S CLEAN AIR EFFORTS

- On July 2nd, the Southwest Regional Office, along with several other groups, organized a multi-park event raising awareness of a proposed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rule-change. Events were held at Zion, Mesa Verde, Capitol Reef, and Great Smoky Mountain National Park. EPA is proposing changes to the laws protecting the air quality of our national parks. Proposed changes would allow polluters, such as coal-fired power plants, to circumvent pollution limits by relying on annual averages, thus masking pollution spikes.
- On October 2nd, NPCA filed an amicus "friend of the court" brief in a lawsuit challenging the issuance of the Prevention of Significant Deterioration permit for Desert Rock Energy Project by EPA in New Mexico.
- SWRO attended the Utah Supreme Court hearing on Sevier Power Plant held in early October. NPCA filed an amicus brief supporting the Sierra Club when this case was heard last fall in front of the Utah Division of Air Quality. Sierra Club has sued the division to prevent the construction of this coal-fired power plant.
- On October 3rd, the BLM issued the final environmental impact statement for the White Pine Energy Facility in Nevada. The Southwest Regional office worked in conjunction with the Pacific Regional office to submit comments last year on the draft EIS.



Superintendent Photo of Zion National Park, a park facing the effects of climate change.

NATIONAL PARKS CHAMPION

AN INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSMAN RAÚL M. GRIJALVA



Representative Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ, left) Chairman of the House Subcommittee, National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, and Kevin Dahl (right), SWRO AZ Program Manager.

Third-term Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ) released a report, “The Bush Administration Assaults on our National Parks, Forests and Public Lands (A Partial List),” in October. The report, an indictment of current public lands management and a check list of needed fixes, is on his website, grijalva.house.gov. Grijalva represents Arizona’s 7th Congressional District, the state’s southwest quadrant. He often says that his top three policy concerns are education, employee rights, and the environment. NPCA’s new Arizona Program Manager Kevin Dahl asked Congressman Grijalva to share his vision for our parks.

NPCA: *From your experience as Chair of the House’s Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, what are the biggest challenges facing the National Park System?*

Grijalva: There are two big challenges. First, we must bring some stability to the Interior and public lands; we must go back to some level of professionalism. We lost so many career employees—it hurt us. We ended up with political appointments, whose philosophy wasn’t based on stewardship, but on opening up these lands for every type of private, commercial and extractive industry possible. Dedicated career employees have been driven out because they refused to comply with unethical activities, science has been manipulated to enrich industry, and environmental laws and regulations have been subverted to push forward damaging activities. We lost many, many good career employees. We need to re-staff, and bring back decisionmaking based on ethical and science-based criteria.

Money is the other thing. We can do a few things, even without much money: We can roll back some of the bad rules, create new executive orders, and pass legislation. But resources are vital for expansion, new areas, staffing, and the backlog of maintenance.

NPCA: *How can our national parks better serve the interests and needs of America’s diverse populations?*

Grijalva: Now is a good time for us to respond to the new demographics of our country. One of the important links to be made is with schools. We need to bring the new generation of young people into the parks. Kids are concerned about the environment and climate change—that’s our primary audience, and one that the

parks can serve well. This audience is urban, of color, and of different economic status—we need to let parks be innovative to reach out to this group. We should not be afraid to target these populations and go after them.

NPCA: *Next year, with a new Congress and a new Administration, what will be your top priorities for the national parks?*

Grijalva: My top priority, right on the top, is the selection of a new Secretary of Interior. We’ve been taking it on the chin for eight years, and that has to stop. We need leadership attuned to the ideas of preservation and good management of our resources rather than extracting everything possible.

NPCA: *This year you took swift action to place a moratorium on exploratory drilling for uranium mining on public lands adjacent to the Grand Canyon, using authority under section 204(e) of the Federal Land Planning & Management Act. Is it true that the Department of Interior is attempting to reduce this authority?*

Grijalva: The federal regulation allows either the Congressional Natural Resources Committee to withdraw certain lands temporarily to give Congress time to consider if permanent protection is warranted and to prevent harm before that occurs. The authority has existed for decades but has been used very rarely: only three times by Congressman Mo Udall in the 1970s and 1980s, and most recently in the case of the Grand Canyon, where I successfully introduced a resolution to require the Secretary to withdraw certain lands from around the national park due to the rapid increase in proposals for uranium mining nearby.

The Interior Department has ignored our directive and broken the law that requires them to withdraw the lands, while continuing to allow uranium mining. The Department knows it is legally vulnerable in federal court where it is being sued over this same issue.

NPCA: *What do you think about NPCA?*

Grijalva: I am really glad that NPCA has recently created a presence in Arizona, particularly in Tucson. NPCA intimately knows how the system works—within the parks, at regional and national levels, and also in Interior, the Administration, and Congress. As an organization, the National Parks Conservation Association has great impact both because of its active membership and because of its skillful support of the parks within the system.

NPCA: *Anything else for us to watch for next year?*

Grijalva: A huge issue we will be facing in the next Congress, one that is part of and not separate from our need to protect public lands, is the border. Along the borderlands the public lands include cultural sites such as petroglyphs thousands of years old, and great natural resources such as Arizona’s Sky Islands, the Rio Grande wetlands in Texas, the beauty of New Mexico, and even areas in southern California. These border areas are under heavy stress from immigration, new security measures, and hyper population growth—and because we are in the Southwest, water is involved as well. I’m going to ask that all agencies involved collectively look at this, assess where we are now and what’s looming as issues and threats, and come up with solutions.



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National Public Lands Day at Mesa Verde

Each September for National Public Lands Day, tens of thousands of volunteers come together nationwide to enhance public lands by removing invasive species, building trails and bridges, planting trees, and cleaning up garbage. This year, the staff of the Southwest Regional office joined more than 30 volunteers as “Graffiti Busters” at Mesa Verde National Park in Southwestern Colorado. This was the first Graffiti Busters group organized by park leaders to eliminate scores of markings and carvings added by modern day vandals on the soft sandstone along the Petroglyph Trail. Incredibly, some people feel compelled to add their mark to the archeological wonders of this remarkable national park.

Budget and staffing cutbacks have made detection and removal of graffiti in the park difficult. Park staff used the National Public Lands Day event to organize a team of local and regional volunteers. The park’s goal is to train several of these teams so that they can be deployed on an as-needed basis.

Strung out over a 1.5-mile trail that leads to one of the most magnificent petroglyph panels in the park, the buster team cleaned scores of sites. Prior to hitting the trail, NPCA staff and the volunteers were trained on appropriate removal techniques: the use of water, soft and hard brushes, circular motions, and color matching with sandstone and charcoal.

The Southwest Regional Office provided funds to help purchase equipment, including a variety of wire brushes, charcoal, and lunch for everyone. We helped connect the Mesa Verde staff to a local backpack company, Osprey Packs, based in Cortez, Colorado. Osprey is the park’s first regular corporate volunteer Graffiti Buster team, and is scheduled for a cleansing session in another part of the park later this year.

After the hard work, park staff led volunteers to the park’s extraordinary cliff dwellings, where we learned more about Puebloan history and the things that threaten its preservation. The theories as to why the ancestral Puebloans departed their homes in the alcoves point to climate change, drought, over-population, and depletion of resources—lessons that are relevant today.

If your company is interested in forming a Graffiti Buster team, or if you are interested in volunteering, please contact Tessy Shirakawa, Chief of Visitor Services at Mesa Verde National Park at 970.529.4628.

CALLING VOLUNTEERS!

The Southwest Regional Office is interested in building a list of regional NPCA members and park advocates who are interested in becoming more involved in our park protection work. Here is a list of many of the opportunities we have to offer:

- Write personal comments on issues like uranium mining in or near the Grand Canyon National Park;
- Volunteer opportunities in the parks;
- Write letters to the editor;
- Help with information and hand-outs at special events;
- Representation at public meetings and hearings.

If you are interested in learning more or have suggestions, please contact Liz McCoy at lmccoy@npca.org or 801.521.0785.

