



## National Board of NPCA Visits the Grand Canyon

The Board of Trustees of the National Parks Conservation Association held their fall meeting at the Grand Canyon in October. Leaders and advocates for the protection of our national parks, the NPCA board is composed of a wide range of leaders from the private, public and non-profit sectors. The Southwest Regional office was pleased to serve as host to our leadership and provide them with a unique perspective for one of the most remarkable parks in our region, the scope of challenges we are facing and the capabilities and readiness of our regional office to confront these issues. In addition to making some important decisions related to the future of NPCA at this meeting, board members and senior leaders of the organization were treated to some extraordinary fall weather at the south rim of the Grand Canyon. We were fortunate to have the generous support of Superintendent Steve Martin and his wonderful staff who led hikes and tours of park resources, trails and facilities.

Recognized in a recent poll as America's favorite park, the Grand Canyon has a profound need to upgrade its infrastructure which



Gene Sykes, NPCA Board Chair and Tom Kiernan, NPCA President

is sagging from excessive use that reflects the park's popularity. An improved transportation system to help the over 5 million visitors explore the park in an efficient and sustainable fashion is another key priority. And while the Colorado River is the defining feature at the park, it is the Bureau of Reclamation and other stakeholders who make decisions that affect the health of riparian systems that are now substantially altered by river management choices. And finally finding an appropriate compromise to the management of air tours at this popular site so that some visitors can experience natural quiet as prescribed by law and others can enjoy a unique perspective of this remarkable natural landscape from the air. Debate and challenges to these conflicting values has defied compromise for 20 years.

### **FIX OUR PARKS**

As America prepares for the centennial of the establishment of the National Park System – just 8 years away – it is time for renewed commitment to our national parks. Actions taken today will determine what we will have to celebrate in 2016, and whether our tarnished National Park System will be polished and ready for its second century. NPCA recommends the following five ways America can fix our national parks

**RESTORE** the health of natural and cultural resources.

**REINVEST** in the fiscal needs of our parks.

**REPRESENT** the full swath of America's story through additions to the system and increased interpretive capacity.

**RESEARCH** and science to make sound decisions about park management.

**REINVIGORATE** the professionalism and management capacity of NPS by supporting mission-driven decision-making.



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## Buffelgrass at Saguaro National Park and NPCA's New Podcast Series

What was once thought to be an important ornamental and exotic plant, buffelgrass has become a pernicious threat to the integrity of the Sonoran desert. This insidious plant is rapidly expanding throughout desert landscapes and is having a profound impact at Saguaro National Park. Proliferation of this exotic both restricts the propagation of the namesake cactus at the park by crowding out germination of seedlings, and increases the potential for wildfire in the desert.

Last September, the Southwest office led a group of about 50 volunteers in conjunction with Saguaro National Park staff in a buffelgrass removal program as part of National Public Lands Day. While this group bagged almost 100 trash bags that day, an ongoing volunteer initiative lead by the Sonoran Desert Weedwackers of the Arizona Native Plant Society continues to, well, wack away at this growing threat on a regular basis.

Recently, our communications team initiated an expanded tool to enrich description of issues at our parks. Podcasts available for listening on your computer or downloaded to your MP3 can be found at [http://www.npca.org/media\\_center/podcasts/](http://www.npca.org/media_center/podcasts/). The newest podcast in this series features the buffelgrass threat at Saguaro. Have a listen and subscribe to this interesting and informative series.





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# FIELD REPORT

## SOUTHWEST REGION

*Winter 2008 — Vol. 1, No. 1*

## Message from the Director

After a hiatus of several years, the National Parks Conservation Association is reinvesting in the Southwest Region. Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah boast some of the most extraordinary national park units in the United States. In fact, of the 391 park units in the country, 73 of them are located in our Four Corner states. America's favorite, the Grand Canyon, along with icons such as Zion, Bryce, Arches, Rocky Mountain and Mesa Verde are also matched in beauty and cultural significance with parks, monuments and heritage sites such as Chaco Canyon and Bandelier in New Mexico, Organ Pipe and Coronado in Arizona, Capitol Reef and Cedar Breaks in Utah and Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Great Sand Dunes in Colorado.

Our national park units in this region, while extraordinary, are facing many threats and challenges to both their natural and cultural significance, but also to the richness of experience that they offer tens of millions of visitors each year. Our current national park system was established almost 100 years ago (centennial in 2016) – recognition that Wallace Stegner noted was the best idea America ever had. Conserving the natural resources and our heritage sites for the enjoyment of visitors for future generations is the

essential mission of our park system. As an independent conservation organization, NPCA is the primary advocacy entity striving to make sure that the park service is able to hold up their end of this trust. Importantly, we are also engaged in a wide range of strategies and initiatives designed to protect our parks from external threats.

In this and in subsequent editions of the Field Report / Southwest Region, we hope to share some of these initiatives with you, enlist your help and support and to celebrate our success.

Our regional office, located in Salt Lake City is growing. After many years in varied areas of public, private and non-profit sectors with experience in community, housing and business development, I am thrilled to be directing a committed and principled group of professionals. We are passionate about our parks and we recognize that these are some of our most sacred and valued protected areas. As such, these places and the choices we make to manage and protect them, have profound implications for sustaining relationships we have with natural places and our own heritage as a nation and the people and places that helped to shape it.





## Southwest Region

# FIELD REPORT

Winter 2008—Vol. 1, No. 1

[www.npca.org/southwest](http://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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### PARK HIGHLIGHT

# HOVENWEEP NATIONAL MONUMENT

While the Southwest boasts some of the most well-known and highly visited parks in the country, many of our parks and monuments are not as well known. Many of them are far from population centers and in isolated areas. Nevertheless, they are remarkable for their beauty and the cultural values they preserve. One such park is Hovenweep National Monument located almost literally at the Four Corners - with sites in both Utah and Colorado. Hovenweep is a Paiute-Ute word meaning “deserted valley”, and is it ever.

This rarely visited park (only about 27,000 per year) protects six pre-historic, Puebloan-era villages spread over a 20-mile expanse of mesa tops and canyons. The area is noted for its multi-storied towers, both square and circular, that supported a population of as many as 2,500 in the late 1200s. The buildings are further noted for the skill and precision of craftsmanship and attention to detail. Archeologists believe that the towers may have had multiple uses including celestial observatories, defensive structures, storage facilities, civil buildings and homes. The ancestral Puebloans vacated this area by the end of the 13th century due to periods of prolonged draught and possibly combined with resource depletion, warfare and internal factionalism.

While most of the roads in the park are not paved, access to the visitor center and the Square Tower Group are paved and accessible. Most of the hikes are relatively short and provide striking vistas, natural quiet and some of the finest examples of ancestral Puebloan architecture in the Southwest. The night skies of this remote area are about as dark as 700 years ago providing excellent stargazing opportunities, so camping at the campground near the visitor center is encouraged.

This remarkable gem of a park is one of our favorites and worthy of a special visit. For more information about the park, located near Cortez, Colorado, please call 970 562-4283 and/or visit the NPS website <http://www.nps.gov/hove/>.

Happy Trails!

# Regional Park Protection Imperatives

Despite the newness of the Southwest regional office, our small and dedicated team in concert with our NPCA colleagues throughout the country has been actively engaged in a wide range of park protection challenges in this region. In addition to our advocacy for park funding highlighted in another section of Field Notes, the key threats facing parks and some of our initial responses in this region include:

## AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The pristine air quality of our national parks and the very health of the fragile, protected landscapes and ecosystems in the Southwest are compromised by the proliferation of increased demand for energy from coal-fired power plants. With 17 operating plants on the Colorado Plateau and as many as 7 new plants proposed, NPCA has become an important voice in the challenge to these new plants and a force for public education as to the impact of air pollution and effects of climate change in some of America's favorite places. We have initiated public panel discussions that focus on our energy choices and consequences and we have offered comments on several proposed coal fired plants proposed for this region.



## ADJACENT DEVELOPMENT AND PARK EXPANSION

The Southwest boasts some of the most explosive population growth in the United States. Proximity to our national parks and other protected lands is part of the allure. Unfortunately, some of this growth pressure has direct and significant impact on our park lands. We strive to work with local leaders of gateway communities and land trusts to protect zones adjacent to parks that can honor wildlife corridors, native plants, night skies and air quality. We have been active advocates for park expansion efforts at Petrified Forest National Park and expansion and study of threatened areas at Saguaro National Park in Arizona.

## ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, there has been increased pressure on our public lands to provide energy that is produced domestically and to fulfill our continuing growing demand for fossil fuels. Oil and gas leasing and potential tar sand and oil shale development adjacent to many parks on the Colorado Plateau is a real threat to the integrity of the intrinsic values of our parks. We have joined a lawsuit to prohibit conversion of oil and gas leases into hydrocarbon (tar sand) leases in Glen Canyon NRA.

## WILDLIFE

The effects of climate change on wildlife habitats, adjacent development on migration corridors and in some cases loss of natural predators is having a significant impact on wildlife populations in the region. As our parks represent some of the most substantial protected landmasses in the United States, they provide increasingly important habitat for wildlife. We have worked closely with officials at Rocky Mountain National Park in support of their right, responsibility and strategy to manage elk herds that have grown to unsustainable levels in recent years.

## WATER

The Colorado River system is the life source for the economic and social welfare of the West. It is also the most critical resource for some of the Southwest's most extraordinary parks. This system of rivers has not only shaped the canyon country, it is also the critical variable in the maintenance of park health. While water wars have defined the western experience, NPCA is playing an increasingly important role in defining appropriate responsibility to assure adequate water necessary to maintain riparian health. We recently won a court case in Federal District Court that assures the primacy of base flows from the Gunnison River that has formed and provides for life at Black Canyon of the Gunnison in Colorado. We continue to advocate for the park in a complicated mediation process that is currently seeking to meet the requirements of the court decision and the needs and requirements necessary for interests of stakeholders in the water basin.

## OFF ROAD VEHICLES

In recent years, our public lands in the southwest have been literally overrun with new motorized vehicles that can go anywhere. While their use in national parks has been restricted in most cases, proximity of our parks to adjacent public lands where use is authorized (although not always well managed) and the limits of enforcement options resulted in a challenge that has been characterized as "road wars". We have been playing an active role in providing comments for six Resource Management Plans for BLM districts in Utah that have significance for all park units.



While these threats do not exhaust the limits of challenges facing our national parks (and we respond to an ever increasing demand for our assistance and intervention as our renewal in the Southwest becomes more widely known), they reflect a level of significance because they are systemic and impact many of our parks. Correspondingly, our response is designed to reflect the scope and scale of these threats.

## CLIMATE FRIENDLY PARKS

# Rocky Mountain National Park

From nitrogen deposition in alpine lakes to the proliferation of invasive species, climate change is becoming increasingly evident in our national parks. In an effort to protect park resources, seek solutions and educate the public about the far reaching consequences of climate change, the Southwest Regional office is pleased to be partnering with Rocky Mountain National Park in developing its Climate Friendly Parks program. Nationally, this program was begun in 2003 as a collaboration between the National Park Service and EPA. In the spring of 2007, Rocky Mountain went through the Climate Friendly Parks workshop and developed an action plan which will 1) reduce Green House Gas emissions at the park; 2) develop management strategies to adapt to climate change and 3) increase climate change outreach and education efforts. NPCA will be helping the park in education and outreach programs. We will be working with park staff, the public and neighboring communities to raise awareness of Climate Change and its effects on Rocky Mountain National Park. We will also be enabling others to promote change on an individual and community level.



# National Parks Centennial Challenge

NPCA estimates that our national parks are suffering from an estimated annual operating fund shortfall of \$800. This supplies funds for rangers who provide interpretive services for visitors, perform critical research and protect our natural and cultural resources, provide law enforcement and public safety duties and perform critical maintenance work. In addition, several billion dollars (by some estimates, as much as \$9 billion) are needed to address the parks' extensive list of backlogged maintenance, preservation and infrastructure needs. Additionally, many parks are threatened by privately owned land inside parks that are vulnerable to development. Funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, established for just this purpose, has not kept up with land acquisition and protection needs at our parks.

Appropriate funding for our parks so that they can be protected and that visitor experiences can be enhanced is a key priority for NPCA. In August 2006, Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, initiated a bold challenge for the next ten years to rededicate our commitment to the vision and mission of our national parks in recognition of the centennial of the park system in 2016. With encouragement and support from NPCA, the Secretary successfully introduced a substantial increase in park operations in fiscal year 2008 of \$200 million as a first installment to meet this commitment. As a part of the Administrations budget request, Senate and House committees evaluated this request over the past several months. Late last year, Congress authorized a funding increase for the national park system of \$122 million for this fiscal year – which represents an increase of 6.8% from FY07.



NPCA's David Nimkin, First Lady Laura Bush and NPCA Board Member and former Utah Governor Olene Walker at Zion National Park.

We understand that Congress and the Administration wanted to do even more to help restore the national parks, but were precluded by the complicated and difficult budget climate. While we are pleased for what is a substantial increase this year, the Centennial Challenge must translate into on-going sustained funding levels in subsequent years.

NPCA has been gratified that the dialogue in Congress and throughout the country in scores of "listening sessions" held last spring surrounding the Centennial, has raised the needs that our parks are facing and reinforced the significant place our national park system holds in our nation's heritage and identity. NPCA and our Southwest regional office will be an important advocate for park funding as we move closer to the Centennial. We look forward to working with Congressional leaders from this region who are great advocates for our parks and with many committed community leaders and influential civic and conservation organizations who have embraced this vision and goal.