



## **NPCA Position for the House Natural Resources Subcommittee Hearing on December 14, 2017**

December 13, 2017

Dear Representative,

Since 1919, National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. On behalf of our more than 1.3 million members and supporters nationwide, we ask that you please consider our position on H.R. 4558, the Grand Staircase Escalante Enhancement Act when it comes before the House Natural Resources Federal Lands Subcommittee on December 14, 2017.

The National Park System was established to protect our most treasured natural resources and connect people to the sites and stories that make up the rich fabric of our nation. From breathtaking plateaus, snow-capped peaks and the waterways of Yellowstone and Everglades, to the sites that honor civil rights and stories of war and reconciliation, our national parks are to be safeguarded in perpetuity, not subject to the interests of a select few. H.R. 4558 puts forth just that, a bill that caters to special interests without the input or guidance of the National Park Service, or reasonable protection of the region's resources.

On the heels of President Trump's illegal actions on December 4, 2017, Congressman Stewart introduced H.R. 4558 to codify the president's actions to decrease protections for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by over 40 percent and undermine the meaning and value of a national park. Grand Staircase-Escalante, as originally established in 1996 by President Clinton, is the connective tissue of the landscape and wild space that abuts some of our most important national parks, including Capitol Reef National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (NRA). Any legislative or administrative action to undermine the original protections for Grand Staircase-Escalante also risks the well-being of the nearby national parks.

### **In summary, H.R. 4558 does the following:**

- The bill legislatively codifies President Trump's action to divide the original Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (est. 1996, Clinton) into three separate units: Escalante Canyons National Monument; Grand Staircase National Monument; and Kaiparowits National Monument.
- Section 4 establishes the Escalante Canyons National Park and Preserve within Escalante Canyons National Monument, but does not provide a map to indicate where the new park unit will be established and weakens protections afforded to every other national park in the system.
- Section 5 withdraws Escalante Canyons Park and Preserve from mineral entry, though these lands were already withdrawn under the 1996 proclamation.

- Sections 7-9 establish the three aforementioned national monuments, but is not accompanied by any management direction including a mineral withdrawal, leaving these sites vulnerable to potential development.
- Section 10 surrenders park resources and values to county interests by establishing a Management Council—with majority county commissioners—for the development and implementation of a management plan for the noted national monuments and national park. These aren't solely county lands, they are federal—owned by and benefiting all Americans including, but not exclusively, those who live in Kane and Garfield counties. In addition, we are concerned by the presence of Kane County on a federal council, when this county has violated federal laws by taking past unilateral action to degrade public monument lands.
- Section 11 goes further to require that federal land managers must adhere to the direction of the Management Council established in Section 10.
- Section 12 codifies President Trump's illegal action on December 4<sup>th</sup> by turning over Utah's public lands not included in the president's recent proclamation for potential development, mineral entry or disposal.
- Section 14 gives away a popular and lengthy road, which covers territory from Grand Staircase-Escalante to Glen Canyon NRA, over to the State of Utah.

### **Park purpose**

The impact of H.R. 4558 cannot be understated. This bill sets dangerous precedents for the National Park System by making the protection and enhancement of grazing and hunting primary purposes of a national park. While the enabling acts for existing National Preserves (outside of Alaska) include hunting as an activity, Congress did not include hunting in the core purpose of these park units. Instead, most units also clearly stated the authority of Secretary of the Interior to determine the times and locations when hunting would not be permitted. Likewise, of the national park units where grazing is permitted, only the continuation of existing leases, or leasing at or below existing levels, is allowed. Most units also include provisions for lessees to voluntarily terminate their leases. Neither of these norms are reflected in H.R. 4558. Instead the bill snubs existing law risking park protections and establishing a harmful new model for the park system.

### **Increased threats**

Mr. Stewart's bill not only releases protections for nearly half of the original Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, but in doing so releases protections from oil and gas development and mining. There is no question that authorizing these activities in the landscape adjacent to national park units will have a profound impact on our existing parks. These impacts include light and air pollution from industrial development that will impact night skies and glorious expansive vistas. It also may include an invasion of natural quiet, an intrinsic value and resource of the National Park System in Southeastern Utah.

The giveaway of public lands and access at Hole in the Rock Road will also likely lead to expanded off-road vehicle (ORV) use. The potential, and likely, elimination of restrictions for ORV adjacent to our park boundaries, given the prioritization of recreation activities in the new monuments, is a grave threat to our park landscapes. Increased ORV traffic in and around park units threatens these desert ecosystems, cultural and archeological resources, and the interests of non-motorized recreators, among other issues.

### **Management Council without NPS guidance**

As noted, Section 10 of H.R. 4558 establishes a Management Council composed of primarily Utah county residents, despite these being lands owned and treasured by all

Americans. The noted counties appointed to the Management Council have a well-documented distrust of federal land managers and background in notorious and illegal activity on Utah's public lands. NPCA participates in and actively supports collaboration among multiple stakeholders, but H.R. 4558 sets forth a dangerous management prescription without input from our federal land managers, experts supported and trusted by the American people.

National monuments are treasured lands and historic sites that all Americans enjoy. They also are economic generators for local communities. Park sites originally designated through the Antiquities Act contributed over \$7.2 billion to the U.S. economy in 2016 and supported over 78,000 private sector jobs. National monuments like Grand Staircase-Escalante in its original form, which shares a landscape with national parks, are success stories. There is no need to alter this remarkable monument, or further monetize this landscape with false labels or extractive uses.

NPCA is very disappointed with the actions offered in H.R. 4558; we do not support this bill as an opportunity for our national parks or enhancing our National Park System. We urge the committee to reject H.R. 4558 and prevent it from further congressional action.

Thank you for considering our views. For further information, please contact me at [akameenui@npca.org](mailto:akameenui@npca.org).

Sincerely,

Ani Kame'enui  
Director of Legislation & Policy, Government Affairs