

**American Rivers ▪ American Hiking Society ▪ Friends of the Earth  
Grand Canyon Trust ▪ National Trust for Historic Preservation ▪  
National Wildlife Federation ▪ Sierra Club ▪ Southern Utah  
Wilderness Alliance ▪ US Public Interest Research Group ▪  
The Wilderness Society**

March 15, 2005

The Honorable Gale Norton  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Norton:

Recently, the State of Utah filed an amicus brief in the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals in support of a lawsuit challenging the creation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. This action is a troubling indication that there continues to be unfortunate misconceptions about the monument and the Antiquities Act under which it was created.

Since its creation over eight years ago, support for the monument has grown both across the country and in Utah. For example, residents of the communities adjacent to the monument recently formed a nonprofit organization, Grand Staircase-Escalante Partners, to educate and inspire people to get involved with their “most exciting national monument.” This group works in partnership with BLM: to increase public awareness and support of the monument; to support the monument’s activities and programs; and to support educational and interpretive activities both on site and via outreach to individuals, schools, colleges and other groups. The Monument Advisory Committee, which formed in 2003 and includes scientists, the State of Utah, Kane and Garfield counties, educators, outfitters and guides, and the conservation community, also shows the growing diverse interest working cooperatively around the monument.

The monument has proven to be an economic boon to the communities of Southern Utah. Several key economic indicators dispel initial concerns that the monument’s designation would hurt local economies. For example, Garfield County has experienced a shift from wages declining at a rate of 6 percent to wage rate *growth* of 7 percent; a decline in unemployment, and a significant growth in personal income. Kane County has benefited from similar economic growth. Average earnings, which had been declining at a rate of 22 percent in the four years before the monument, grew by more than 18 percent in the

four years after the monument was created. Unemployment has decreased in Kane County from 8.7 percent in 1995 to 3.5 percent in 2001.

Real estate values outside the monument have also increased not decreased as monument opponents had predicted. The median value of a home in Escalante rose from \$69,432 in 1990 to more than \$100,000 in 2001. In Kanab, the mean value of a home dropped by 13 percent from 1980 to 1990, but rose by 23 percent from 1990 to 2000.

Grand Staircase-Escalante is the third most visited site in the National Landscape Conservation System, behind only the California Desert, which covers a large portion of Southern California, and Red Rock Canyon, which is just outside of Las Vegas. The BLM reports that 689,980 people visited the Monument in FY 2003. It is no surprise that both Kane and Garfield counties have published travel brochures that highlight the monument.

Much of the value of the monument is not easily captured in economic terms. The monument offers something for everyone – from opportunities for healthy outdoor adventure to the discovery of exciting new dinosaur fossils and cultural and historic sites to 20 eligible Wild and Scenic river segments, including the Escalante River, the last river to be discovered by Europeans in America. The monument is truly a resource for present and future generations.

Beyond potential ramifications to the monument, this legal challenge attempts to undermine the purpose and authority of the Antiquities Act. Next year will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Antiquities Act, a cornerstone of American conservation. The Act has played a central role in the protection of our greatest public land treasures, including the Grand Canyon. Now is a time to celebrate this popular Act, not attack it as the State of Utah has done in the appellate court.

With new scientific and historic discoveries occurring in the monument almost every day, Grand Staircase has unquestionably fulfilled the purpose of the Antiquities Act – to protect significant objects of scientific and historic value. For example, the BLM and the Navajo Nation Archaeological Department endeavored in 1998 to conduct a survey of the 800,000-acre Kaiparowits Plateau within the monument. The study documented 710 archaeological sites; 514 of these were considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

We ask that you work with us to reach out to the Governor and the citizens of Utah to ensure that the benefits of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and other public land treasures are better understood and protected for future generations. Much work remains to be done to increase the recognition of the importance of our National Monuments. In particular, BLM's monuments, managed as part of the National Landscape Conservation System, warrant your attention to ensure that BLM succeeds in its conservation mission and that the public benefits from this newest land system.

Finally, we urge the Department of the Interior to vigorously defend the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and the Antiquities Act in this ongoing litigation.

Sincerely,

**Bill Hedden**  
Executive Director  
Grand Canyon Trust

**Bill Meadows**  
President  
The Wilderness Society

**Richard Moe**  
President  
National Trust for Historic Preservation

**Scott Groene**  
Executive Director  
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

**Rebecca Wodder**  
President  
American Rivers

**Larry Schweiger**  
President  
National Wildlife Federation

**Gene Karpinski**  
Executive Director  
US Public Interest Research Group

**Brent Blackwelder**  
President  
Friends of the Earth

**Celina Montorfano**  
Acting President  
American Hiking Society

**Maribeth Oakes**  
Lands Protection Director  
Sierra Club

cc: The Honorable Jon Huntsman, Jr., Governor of Utah  
Kathleen Clarke, Director, BLM  
Sally Wisely, Utah State Director, BLM  
Dave Hunsaker, Grand Staircase-Escalante Monument Manager, BLM