

# Possible Utah monument latest Western land fight

By BRADY MCCOMBS  
Associated Press

BLANDING, Utah — Laminated sheets of paper held in place by rocks rest inside ancient cliff dwellings nestled underneath a spectacular red rock overhang in southeastern Utah.

"Don't erase the traces of America's past," the signs read. "Please do not enter interior rooms."

The weathered signs and a similar warning at the trailhead are the only protections in place for these easily accessible ruins along a canyon hiking path.

The cliff dwellings are part of an estimated 100,000 archaeological sites within a 1.9 million-acre area that a coalition of American Indian tribes wants President Barack Obama to designate a national monument to ensure protections for lands considered sacred.

U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell is visiting the area this week to meet with proponents and opponents — the latest indication the Obama administration is giving serious consideration to the "Bears Ears" monument proposal.

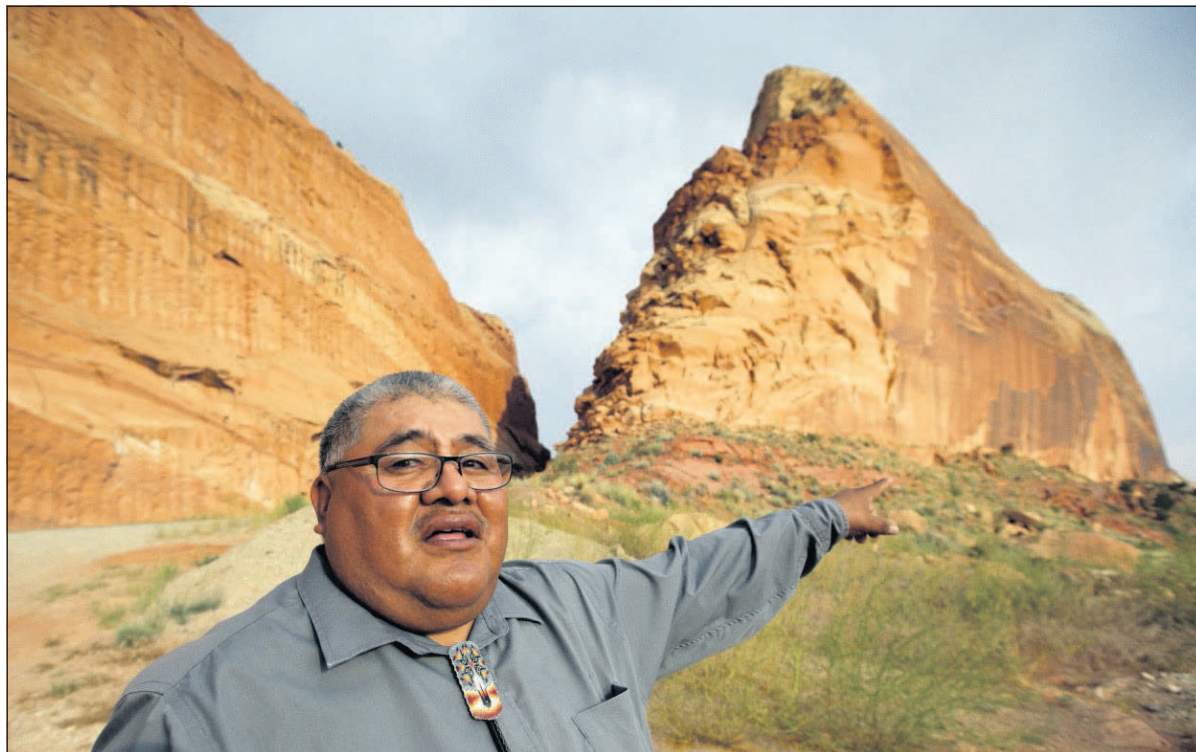
The issue has become the latest battleground in the debate over public lands in the West.

Utah's Republican leaders, many rural residents and a few Native Americans fiercely oppose a proposal they believe would become another layer of unnecessary federal control and close the area for development and recreation.

To supporters, the makeshift Bureau of Land Management signs in the cliff dwellings illustrate the problem — vital remnants of tribal history aren't being properly protected from looting and vandalism.

"We don't want to forget about our ancestors," said Malcolm Lehi, a Ute Mountain Tribal commissioner. "Through them, we speak. That's the whole concept of protecting and healing this land. They are still here among us as the wind blows."

Tribal members visit the Bears Ears area — named for a set of rock formations — to perform ceremonies, collect herbs and wood for medicinal and spiritual purposes and do healing rituals, Lehi said.



In this June 21 photo, Malcolm Lehi, a Ute Mountain Tribal commissioner, points to a rock formation near Blanding, Utah.

Tucked between existing national parks and the Navajo Nation, the proposed monument features stunning vistas at every turn, with a mix of cliffs, plateaus, towering rock formations, rivers and canyons across wide expanses covered by sagebrush and juniper trees.

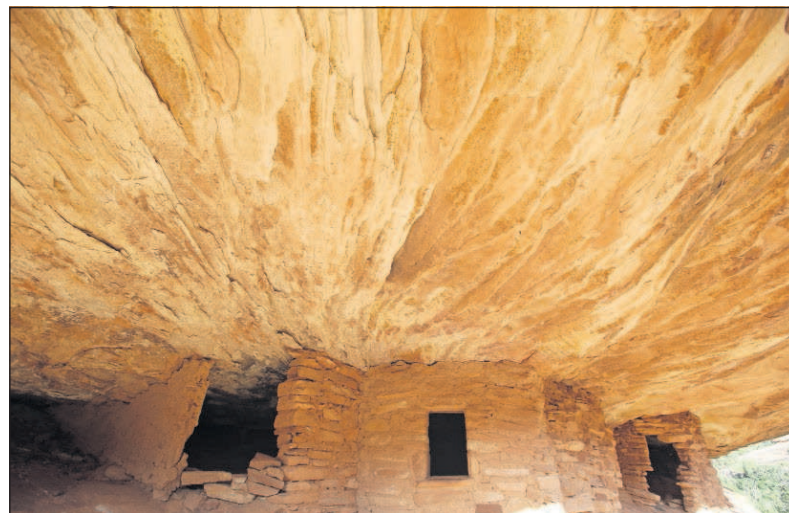
Opponents agree the area is a natural treasure worth preserving but fear a federal designation would create restrictions on oil and gas development as well residents' ability to camp, bike, hike and gather wood.

The management system in place from state and federal agencies works, said rancher Kenny Black, who has cattle grazing permits within the proposed monument.

"These areas are sacred to me because I've grown up here," said Black, a descendant of Mormon pioneers. "They're part of my history and my culture as well."

Members of Utah's all-GOP congressional delegation are urging Jewell to instead back a plan from U.S. Reps. Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz.

The bill introduced Thursday calls for protecting about 4.5



In this June 22 photo, the "House on Fire" ruins are shown in Mule Canyon, near Blanding, Utah. These Anasazi ruins are found along a canyon hiking path in a dry river bed.

million acres in the state, including 1.4 million acres of the Bears Ears area, and to open up 1 million acres for recreation and oil and gas development. Another bill released Thursday would bar the president from declaring a monument in seven Utah counties, including the Bears Ears region.

Conservation groups say the Bishop and Chaffetz bill doesn't

go far enough to protect the area. A tribal coalition stopped meeting with the congressmen because they felt their concerns weren't taken seriously.

Jewell's visit doesn't mean a monument decision is imminent, Interior spokeswoman Jessica Kershaw said.

But other such visits have foreshadowed designations. Obama

designated the Stonewall National Monument gay rights site in June, a month after Jewell visited for a public meeting.

Presidents commonly name monuments in their final year in office. Obama has named 23 monuments during his two terms, said Athan Manuel, the Sierra Club's director of lands protection.

To residents in the small, predominantly Mormon town of Blanding, the proposal is a thinly veiled, repackaged push from environmental groups who recruited tribes after previous attempts at a national monument fizzled out.

The area "became conveniently sacred," said Black, echoing a common sentiment among residents.

Not all tribal members support the monument. San Juan County Commissioner Rebecca Benally, a Navajo, is a vocal critic, saying the designation would limit what Native Americans can do on their own ancestral lands.

Black and other opponents contend that reports of looting and grave robbery are grossly exaggerated.

"I think it's all made up," said Sharon Guymon, a restaurant owner in Blanding. "There are people who destroy things because they're trying to steal them, but that will happen if you make it a monument or not."

Since October 2011, the BLM has recorded 28 cases of archaeological damage within the agency's Cedar Mesa area that comprises a large chunk of the proposed monument, spokeswoman Kimberly Finch said.

In one case this year, somebody etched a heart with initials on a wall with petroglyphs.

Jonah Yellowman, a Navajo spiritual adviser, regularly travels in the area to gather wood for his home and for rituals. Standing in a grassy field dotted with purple wildflowers at the foot of the Bears Ears buttes, Yellowman reflected on the importance of the monument.

"Every monument has its purpose. This one has medicines here. This one has prayers, offerings, something that is very spiritual to us," Yellowman said. "We'd like to keep it that way."

## Final EIS released for major Joseph Creek project

Plan to boost fire resiliency on 98K acres

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
East Oregonian

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is in the home stretch of permitting an ambitious project designed to make 98,000 acres of land healthier and more resilient to wildfire, part of a broader strategy to accelerate the pace and scale of forest restoration in Eastern Oregon and Washington.

The Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project calls for 17,240 acres of timber harvest on the Wallowa Valley Ranger District north of Enterprise. It also establishes two Research Natural Areas — one at Horse Pasture Ridge, and the other at Haystack Rock — where the woods are managed with as little outside interference as possible. These areas are essentially control groups where foresters can compare treatments to natural ecological functions.

The Forest Service released its final Environmental Impact Statement for the project Friday, along with two draft Records of Decision. Wallowa-Whitman Forest Supervisor Tom

Montoya said collaboration has been key to seeing the proposal through, and coming up with a balance of resources.

"This project is better because of collaboration," Montoya said. "We look forward to continued work with the public and our partners on future land management activities."

The Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project was born out of a collaborative watershed assessment conducted by the Wallowa County Natural Resources Advisory Committee in June 2014. That assessment highlighted conditions in need of restoration, and identified potential treatment areas.

From there, the project went to the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative, which is made up of forest personnel, county officials, industry representatives and environmental advocates. Finally, the Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team took it up as their first major project under the umbrella of accelerated restoration.

At its current pace, the Forest Service is able to treat roughly 50,000 acres of local forests every year. This would nearly double that total in a single project.

In addition to timber harvest and 5,400 acres of pre-commercial thinning, the project calls for replacing six culverts and maintaining 208 miles of open roads. The draft decision does not make any change to overall road densities, though approximately 17 miles of roads will be opened to provide public access and another 14 miles closed to protect resources.

The draft Record of Decision for the project is now subject to a 45-day objection period.

The Record of Decision for the Research Natural Areas is subject to a 60-day objection period, and would require an amendment to the existing Forest Plan. Objections to either of the decisions will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted written comments for the draft Environmental Impact Statement.

All project documents are available on the Forest Service's website. Copies of the final EIS and draft RODs can also be obtained by contacting Darcy Weseman at the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest at 541-278-3755 or deweseman@fs.fed.us.

Contact George Plaven at [gplaven@eastoregonian.com](mailto:gplaven@eastoregonian.com) 541-966-0825.

## Bates Pond future in doubt

By SEAN HART  
EO Media Group

A work group of stakeholders will hold its first meeting next week to discuss the future of popular Bates Pond and the management of Bates State Park, located in Grant County.

Grant County Commissioner Scott Myers said that while some fishing, conservation and tribal groups would like to remove the dam on Bridge Creek to return the stream to its natural state for fish passage, he did not believe it would be in the county's best interest.

"Most of us that have been here for a while are interested in preserving the pond," he said. "It has recreational potential for kayakers, boaters, swimmers, fishermen. It has a very strong sense of place for past generations and future generations of families from Bates and Austin."

Myers said the meeting will be hosted by Oregon Consensus, part of the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University, on behalf of the Oregon Parks and Recreation

Department.

The department's master plan for the park focuses on water quality, fish habitat, cultural resources, recreation and stewardship, according to the first meeting's agenda, and the goal is to find a path forward maximizing the interests of all the stakeholders.

Myers said multiple alternatives will be discussed, from removing the dam and the pond to creating a diversion around the pond for fish to deepening the pond and improving the fish ladder.

"I don't see a win-win if we have to compromise and allow the pond to be permanently drained," he said. "I think we will fight that option."

A variety of people, groups and agencies have been invited to collaborate at the meetings.

The first meeting is 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. July 19 in the conference room at the Grant County Regional Airport. Myers said meetings are also scheduled for Aug. 18 and Sept. 15, but he was unsure of the times and places.

## BLOOMIN' BLUES

### Common speedwell has medicinal uses

By BRUCE BARNES  
For the East Oregonian

**Name:** Common Speedwell

**Scientific name:** *Veronica officinalis*

This plant is found from British Columbia to California, and eastward across the northern and eastern U.S. and southeast Canada. It is originally from Europe.

Common Speedwell, also known as Common Veronica, is one of about 15 species of *Veronica* found in Northeast Oregon, and one of the largest. Many of the other species are small plants only a few inches tall, some of which are pesky weeds in local lawns. Mowing them only spreads them as cut stems take root quickly.

Common *Veronica* is not so invasive. The plant in the photo is a young one, which will eventually grow much taller and may lay on the ground. The leaves are up to 2 inches long. The flowers are small, about 1/4 inch wide with



Photo contributed by Bruce Barnes  
Common Speedwell

four blue to lavender petals. Each flower has one petal a little larger than the others, which is true for all species of *Veronica*.

The name "Veronica" may have been for St. Veronica, and "officinalis" is Latin for being medicinal. The name "speedwell" may refer to the plant's uses to treat people who were ailing. Other past common names include

Ground Hale, Gypsy Weed, Paul's Betony, and Upland Speedwell.


An herbalist in 1633 is quoted as saying "it healeth all fresh and old wounds, cleneth the blood from all corruption, and is good for the kidnies and against scurvinesse and foul spreading tetter, and consuming and fretting sores, the small pox and measles."

Even though this plant has not been in North America until relatively recently, perhaps the late 17th century, at least the Cherokee and Iroquois in the east have used it. Medicinal uses included treatment of coughs, boils, earaches, chills, and childbirth. Other uses included treating dried cow's udders and as an emetic to neutralize witchcraft.

**Where to find:** This plant is likely to be seen in shady areas, in wet ditches, seepsprings, and along the edges of ponds, streams, and lakes. Watch for the slender spikes of tiny blue flowers.

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