



Review threatens Tribal ancestral homelands

By David G. Lewis

Beginning the day after his inauguration, President Donald Trump questioned the need to have so much land locked up in national monuments.

In April, Trump ordered a review of many of the most recent national monuments that are protected under the Antiquities Act of 1906. The law was enacted to prevent looting of Indian artifacts from archaeological sites. The act has been used since then by many presidents to turn vulnerable public lands into national monuments that are then protected forever from commercial development or future mineral exploitation.

President Theodore Roosevelt, who signed the Antiquities Act into law, created 18 monuments, including the Grand Canyon in Arizona and Olympic National Park in Washington state, totaling more than a million acres. Since then many more national monuments have been created.

The only national monument in Oregon is the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, which lies mostly south and east of Medford with a small area crossing the border into California. It was first signed into law by President William Clinton in 2000 and President Barack Obama, who created 28 national monuments during his two terms in office, expanded the Cascade-Siskiyou.

In July, there was a visit to the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who toured the monument for a couple of days to scrutinize the monument for reduction. In August, Zinke recommended shrinking the Cascade-Siskiyou over the objections of Oregon's senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, Gov. Kate Brown and local environmental activists and community members.

National monuments possess some of the most threatened archaeological sites in the United States. These Native cultural resources are subject to destruction by hordes of tourists and to theft of artifacts by pot hunters. This is one of the reasons these lands were set aside, to permanently protect the archaeological resources.

One of the most recently created national monuments, Bears Ears in Utah, contains one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in North America. This spectacular cliff dwelling rests in the side of a huge cliff face and is the ancestral homelands of the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni and Ute peoples, all of whom supported the creation of the national monument.

Establishing the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument preserved a biologically diverse landscape for the future of all Americans. For Native peoples, the ability to interact within our ancestral landscapes is priceless. In the Cascade-Siskiyou area, Tribes can practice restoring cultural practices interacting in a nearly pristine and undeveloped landscape where our people lived for more than 10,000 years.

Many people in the Grand Ronde Tribe have ancestral connections and affinities to the Rogue River region, and the national monument preserves the wilderness for us and our descendants. Many Tribal peoples in the region are using the landscape for their cultural practices. This place is an

important vault of information about Tribal lifeways.

Now Bears Ears, Cascade-Siskiyou and a number of other Obama-era designations are threatened. The most recently designated national monuments are the first to be scrutinized because they have less federal and state infrastructure built up around them, and so their elimination would cause less economic and political problems for their regional communities.

However, a reduction or elimination of the national monuments would mean there would no longer be the extra protection for the cultural resources or species biodiversity in these areas.

Why is this important to Grand Ronde? The Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument spans more than 66,000 acres of forestlands in southern Oregon and northern California. These lands are the traditional homelands of the Takelmans, Athapaskans, Shastans and Klamath peoples. These Rogue River Tribes, as they are known today at Grand Ronde, were the Takelma, Athapaskan, Shasta and some Umpqua Tribes of the region. Therefore, the present monument expanded by Obama in 2016 spans the territory of three primary Tribes from Grand Ronde and the western edge of Klamath territory.

In this territory were fought many of the Rogue River Indian wars from 1851-56, where our people fought for their rights to live on their lands against the incursions of gold miners, ranchers, farmers and ranger militia who sought their ultimate extermination.

Treaties were signed by three Tribes in this area (Rogue River treaties 1853 and 1854 and Chasta Costa Treaty 1854), which proposed peace between the Tribes and the Americans. Chief John led the Tribes off the Table Rock Reservation to fight for their lands against the Americans and eventually surrendered at Port Orford. The Tribes were removed from southwestern Oregon in 1856 on several Trails of Tears. The removals brought the Tribes to the Grand Ronde Indian Reservation and many of us at the Reservation are descended from these people.

Our homelands in southern Oregon were always known as rough and mountainous terrain. This made defending that land much easier for the Tribes in 1855-56. But the rough terrain also has not allowed people to settle there in great numbers. The rough terrain and rugged conditions have helped maintain a place of great biodiversity of animal and plant life. It is a logging region, but it is first and foremost a vast natural landscape that the Tribes adapted to live within for a very long time.

The Rogue River Tribes knew the ecology of the region and lived within the seasonal cycles. They hunted, fished and gathered from all eco-zones of the land. Many of the important places maintain our names, like Siskiyou, Illahee and Umpqua.

At this time, the governor of Oregon has threatened legal action if there is an attempt to eliminate the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. Tribes on Reservations have little control over their ancestral homelands. Tribal governments are allowed to critically respond to proposals that affect their ceded lands. It is in the various federal environmental and archaeological protection acts that Tribes have a lot of power to protect their cultural resources and the area's species biodiversity.

If Zinke's recommendation is acted on and becomes law, and the federal government eliminates this monument, it would be a serious blow to Tribal rights to have their archaeological resources protected. It would also seriously threaten one of the most biologically diverse areas of Oregon.

For more information, visit www.nps.gov/archeology/sites/Antiquities/MonumentsList.htm.

(David G. Lewis is the former historian of the Grand Ronde Tribe and previously managed the Tribe's Cultural Resources Department. If you would like to submit a "My Voice" guest column, contact Smoke Signals Editor Dean Rhodes at dean.rhodes@grandronde.org or 503-879-1463.)

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DEADLINE DATE ISSUE DATE

Friday, Oct. 6.....	Oct. 15
Friday, Oct. 20.....	Nov. 1
Friday, Nov. 6.....	Nov. 15
Monday, Nov. 20.....	Dec. 1
Tuesday, Dec. 5.....	Dec. 15
Thursday, Dec. 21.....	Jan. 1, 2018

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