



## National Monuments Victory!

### More on the Horizon

Bears Ears National Monument, Utah  
Mason Cummings

President Biden's executive action last October to restore protections to Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monuments was a critical step to honor the ancestral lands of Indigenous peoples and to build momentum toward reaching conservation goals necessary to address the climate and extinction crises.

Tribal leaders, scientists and local businesses led the charge to restore protections to these lands and waters. And millions of others, like you, joined with us to fight alongside them. You submitted tens of thousands of comments to elected officials, made donations to help fund our legal battles and pressured the Biden administration to stick to its promise.

The announcement capped a long, arduous journey. As leaders of the national coalition of conservation partners, we have been pushing for restoration of these national monuments since 2017. We tracked the damaging effects of the Trump administration's agenda of unlawful, unpopular and unprecedented rollbacks of protections to our lands and waters and fought tooth and nail with our partners to defend the Antiquities Act, which enables the President to designate national monuments.

The long-awaited action by President Biden signaled a strong rebuff of the destructive policies of the past. Immediately, the restored protections helped to alleviate escalating threats that plagued these monuments, including, but not limited to, the

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## Dear Conservation Champion,

Your commitment to public lands continues to result in important conservation victories—and to lay the groundwork for greater things to come!

It was an honor to represent you at the White House ceremony where President Biden restored protections to Bears Ears and other national monuments that had been unlawfully stripped away. As the President spoke, I thought of you, because you helped make this historic moment possible with your unwavering support.

In 2022, we will build on last year's success. We are hopeful that the President and key Congressional leaders will find a way to deliver on climate progress and protection of irreplaceable landscapes, like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, that are so critical to the health of our communities and the planet. And we are hard at work with many partners to make it so.

Your commitment and your voice will continue to be essential to building a groundswell of support for accelerating the protection of public lands. Together, we can unlock the potential of these shared lands to help our nation meet the great conservation challenges of our time.

Let's do it!

Jamie Williams  
President



Oxbow Park, Colorado  
Mason Cummings

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### The Wilderness Society recognizes Native Americans and Indigenous peoples as the longest serving stewards of the land.

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### Wild Places



Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Minnesota  
Adam Baker / Flickr

# Biden Takes Key Step to Protect the Boundary Waters

In October 2021, the Biden administration took a critical step to protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northeastern Minnesota from destructive mining that had been given the green light by the previous administration. President Biden initiated a “mineral withdrawal process” that triggers a two-year moratorium on leasing and permitting for mining, while launching an environmental review that could form the basis for a 20-year mineral withdrawal.

Encompassing more than one million acres in the Superior National Forest, the Boundary Waters contains nearly 1,200 lakes that are connected by rivers and is accessible to visitors by 1,200 miles of canoe routes and 2,000 campsites. A haven for wildlife such as beavers, black bears, lynx, otters and moose, the Boundary Waters is the most visited Wilderness Area in the country.

But since 1966, the area has been threatened by the prospect of a copper mine in the headwaters of the Wilderness Area, within the Superior National Forest. In 2016, the U.S. Forest Service determined that the proposed copper mine would almost certainly release toxic waste that would flow inexorably into the Boundary Waters, causing irreversible damage to the watershed and wildlife. The mineral leases were

canceled by the federal government and a 20-year mining ban was proposed. Then came Trump, whose administration made an abrupt U-turn, reinstating the leases and opening the area for mining. We've been fighting every step of the way ever since.

Your support has enabled The Wilderness Society to play a key role in the Coalition to Save the Boundary Waters, which is led by Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness. We have raised the profile of the Boundary Waters fight in Minnesota and nationally with our communications and advocacy campaigns. In partnership with EarthJustice, we have led a sophisticated strategy leveraging litigation and negotiations with the Biden administration to secure this important initial step toward protecting the Boundary Waters, but the fight is not yet over.

It is your commitment that allows The Wilderness Society and our partners—local and national—to bring our combined skills and power together for the sustained effort necessary to defend and protect America's public lands. And we will continue to bring that strength to the fight for the Boundary Waters, working together to urge the administration to cancel the remaining leases that threaten this cherished landscape.

vandalism of archaeological sites in Bears Ears, vehicular damage to fossil beds in Grand Staircase-Escalante, and commercial fishing pressures on sensitive marine species in Northeast Canyons and Seamounts. Furthermore, it signaled a new commitment to working with Tribal leaders to co-manage their ancestral homelands and to limit species loss and secure essential wild places for people and the planet.

While there was much to celebrate, our work did not end there. The restoration of protections also ignited a surge of enthusiasm to secure new and expanded national monuments, which will speed our progress toward the nation’s goal to conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

Our focus now turns to this important next phase. We are working hard to amplify community voices and to support the President in pursuing permanent protections for other significant landscapes—especially those that hold tremendous significance

for Tribes and underserved communities and are important for preserving wildlife and healthy watersheds.

For example, in southern Nevada, a movement is growing to protect the 350,000-acre landscape known as Avi Kwa Ame, which is Mojave for “Spirit Mountain.” Located east of the Mojave Desert in Clark County, the mountain and surrounding area are sacred to 13 different Tribal nations. A national monument designation would preserve Indigenous cultural sites and petroglyphs, as well as critical habitat for desert tortoise, golden and bald eagles, and desert bighorn sheep.

In addition, the West Texas community of El Paso has been fighting to protect its crown jewel, Castner Range, for more than 50 years. A closed military firing range, the 7,000-acre open space lies in the heart of the Chihuahuan Desert and is directly adjacent to one of the nation’s oldest and largest Latinx populations. Preserving Castner

Range as a national monument would protect the area’s role as a water conservation area, as a habitat for diverse mountain wildlife and vegetation, and as a recreational haven and retreat for present and future generations to enjoy.

These new national monument proposals represent important steps toward realizing our vision of *a future where people and wild nature flourish together, meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing planet*. Both Avi Kwa Ame and Castner Range are vitally important to people, and their protection will increase equitable access to the outdoors, ensuring that more people can enjoy and benefit from public lands. The clock is ticking. We must urge the President to act swiftly to protect these special places before they are lost forever. Together, and with momentum on our side, we know we can get it done.



Avi Kwa Ame Proposed National Monument, Nevada  
Mason Cummings

On October 8, 2021, President Biden followed through on his commitment to restore protections to Bears Ears National Monument. Invited by the Tribal leaders who led the efforts to create and restore Bears Ears, The Wilderness Society’s President Jamie Williams (2nd from right, back row) represented the million-plus supporters, like you, who helped secure this important victory and set the stage for additional national monument protections to come.



Washington, D.C.  
Department of Interior



## Advocates for Wilderness

Make a gift of \$1,000 or more to join *Advocates for Wilderness*, a group of our most dedicated supporters who are leading the fight to protect America’s wildest places.

To learn more about becoming an *Advocate for Wilderness*, including special member benefits, please visit [wilderness.org/benefits](https://wilderness.org/benefits).

Great Gray Owl, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska  
Lisa Hupp / USFWS

# The Great Dismal Swamp National Heritage Area Act

You helped gain an impressive legislative victory last September, when the Great Dismal Swamp National Heritage Area Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives by an overwhelming margin of 391-36!

This success is a strong example of effective community led conservation by our Southeast team, which has worked for years to support the goals of The Great Dismal Swamp Stakeholder Collaborative to increase protection for the Great Dismal Swamp region on the Virginia-North Carolina border. The collaborative represents more than 35 organizations and communities who hold deep ties to the landscape and are determined to preserve the unique history and ecology of the Great Dismal Swamp as a refuge for wildlife and people.

If the legislation passes in the Senate, it will direct the Secretary of the Interior, in close consultation with the community, to assess the suitability and feasibility of designating the Great Dismal Swamp region and its associated sites as a National Heritage Area. National Heritage Areas hold historical, cultural and environmental significance and tell important stories celebrating our nation's diverse heritage.

Known as one of the most ecologically and historically significant areas on the east coast, the Great

Dismal Swamp qualifies for recognition as a National Heritage Area for many reasons. In addition to being the ancestral homeland of the Nansemond Indian Nation and the historic lands of the Haliwa-Saponi and Meherrin Tribes, it contains one of the only water-based stops on the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

A critical source of clean air and water, the Great Dismal Swamp region includes a 112,000-acre national wildlife refuge that preserves an entire wetland ecosystem. It is the largest intact remnant of a habitat that once covered more than one million acres of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina and remains rich in biodiversity, supporting wildlife such as bears, bobcats, and river otters and more than 200 species of birds, including the endangered red cockaded woodpecker. This unique landscape also plays a crucial role in our continued fight against the climate crisis. With its rich peat soil, the swamp represents one of the highest density concentrations of stored carbon on the continent.

With your help, we remain committed to supporting the community in its goal to highlight the ecological importance of the Great Dismal Swamp, as well as the enormous role it has played in our nation's history and culture, with a National Heritage Area designation.



# Your Champion for National Monuments: Nicole Layman

“It takes a village to create a national monument, and it took the nation to restore three of them,” affirms Senior Director of Conservation Campaigns, Nicole Layman as she reflects on President Biden’s restoration of Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante, and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monuments last October.

A 15-year Wilderness Society veteran, Nicole has dedicated her career to working closely with grassroots partners to identify and seize opportunities to gain permanent protection of the public lands they love and rely upon. During the Obama administration, she led or supported 12 successful national monument campaigns, including those to protect Gold Butte in Nevada and San Gabriel Mountains in California.

And then came Trump, who, in 2017, executed the largest reversal of public lands protection in history by unlawfully stripping millions of acres from three national monuments. Alongside our national coalition and community partners, Nicole and her colleagues within our Government Relations, Legal

and Communications teams to mount a fierce—and successful—defense, keeping the Trump administration and extractive industries at bay.

While the monument restoration was a cause for celebration, Nicole notes that we must move quickly to secure the Biden administration’s commitment to designate new national monuments that have long been sought by communities. “The clock is ticking on the intertwined crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and inequity,” says Nicole. “And because it takes years—and sometimes a decade—to get legislation through Congress, we can’t afford to wait.”

Fortunately, locally driven national monument campaigns to protect Avi Kwa Ame in Nevada and Castner Range in Texas are both ripe for action. “Using his authority under the Antiquities Act now, President Biden can meet the urgency of the moment,” says Nicole. “It’s an incredible tool to mitigate the effects of climate change, ensure the survival of wildlife, and address historic inequities by protecting the diversity of experience in America—and we’re ready to help him put it to use now.”



Nicole Layman



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San Juan Mountains, Colorado  
Mason Cummings