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## Trump administration slashes 2 Utah monuments, with ongoing reviews to spur more reductions

December 7, 2017

On December 4, following an ongoing review by the Department of the Interior (DOI) of 27 national monuments that were created or expanded since 1996, President Donald Trump signed two proclamations reducing the Bears Ears National Monument and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah by about 85 percent and 47 percent, respectively. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke publicly released his final report to the President one day later, which recommended reductions to both Utah monuments as well as modifications to national monuments in Nevada, Oregon, and California.

The Bears Ears National Monument will now include two units, Indian Creek and Shash Jáa, while the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument will be separated into three units, known as Grand Staircase, Kaiparowits, and Escalante Canyons. According to a DOI press release, the new Bears Ears proclamation allows for increased public access and restores traditional use allowance for activities such as cattle grazing and motorized recreation. The Department also assures that the modified monument area at Grand Staircase-Escalante contains important features identified in the original designation, including those areas with the highest concentration of fossil resources.

While the current administration and some western lawmakers have pushed for reductions to the monuments claiming there had been insufficient consultation or warning prior to their initial designation, several non-governmental and tribal groups that support maintaining these monument boundaries have filed individual lawsuits arguing the recent executive actions are illegal under the Antiquities Act of 1906. On December 7, a broad coalition – Patagonia Works, Utah Diné Bikéyah, Friends of Cedar Mesa, Archaeology Southwest, Conservation Lands Foundation, Access Fund, the Society for Vertebrate Paleontology, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation – sued the Trump Administration over the reduction of Bears Ears National Monument. David Polly, President of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, explained the importance of protecting the landscape for scientific discoveries in a statement reacting to the President's decision: "Some of the first vertebrates to walk on land have been found in the Valley of the Gods region, and packrat middens that reveal the climatic history of the west are scattered across the entire Monument."

*Sources: Department of the Interior, Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, The White House*

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