

FINAL PLAN ENDANGERS SOUTHEASTERN UTAH'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL TREASURES

The Bush administration has released the final installment of its program to implement an anti-wilderness, pro-development agenda on our public lands for a generation to come. Eleven million acres of public lands in Utah—many of them wilderness quality—will be governed by the Resource Management Plans (RMPs) that have been finalized and released over the past two months. Exploitation of oil and gas resources, and biases toward motorized recreation have been hallmarks of this administration—from the shadowy Cheney Energy Task Force of 2001, to the administration's rejection of its authority to identify and protect previously overlooked wilderness areas, to its ongoing failure to protect public lands from increasing off-road vehicle (ORV) damage.



Arch Canyon ruin. © Liz Thomas/SUWA.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released the Final Monticello RMP on September 5, 2008 for a 30-day protest period—this is the sixth such “Final Plan” to be released to the public in the past 8 weeks. The Monticello Field Office of the BLM manages 1.8 million acres of public lands in southeastern Utah, including Cedar Mesa, the San Juan River, White Canyon, Dark Canyon, Lockhart Basin and Nokai Dome. The BLM's proposed plan fails to provide meaningful protection to the unique archeological resources within the region, opens up areas in this scenic and fragile environment to oil and gas leasing, and protects only a small portion of these wild lands from off-road vehicle abuse.



White Canyon. © James W. Kay.

Southeastern Utah is renowned for its dense collection of Ancestral Puebloan artifacts, kivas, and dwellings. Unfortunately, less than 6% of these public lands have been surveyed to document and record the irreplaceable prehistoric artifacts they contain. Nevertheless, lands rich with cultural heritage sites—such as Arch and Moqui canyons and Beef Basin—would be open to ORV use in BLM's final plan, putting these exceptional archeological treasures at increased risk of vandalism and looting. The BLM's final plan would negatively impact these amazing lands for decades and reflects the Bush administration's single-minded focus on motorized use and development:

- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) are an important management tool the BLM can use to protect specific threatened resources such as archaeological



sites, riparian ecosystems, endangered plants and animals. The BLM identified 16 potential ACECs in the Monticello BLM Field Office area, but in the final plan only 14%, or 73,492 acres, are desingated. In the final RMP the BLM eliminates “Area of Critical Environmental Concern” for all of Bridger Jack Mesa, Butler Wash, Scenic Highway 95 Corridor, Dark Canyon and Cedar Mesa. And, the final RMP eliminates part of the ACEC protection for Indian Creek, Shay Canyon.

- The final RMP only provides protection from off-road vehicle abuse for 15% of the outstanding wilderness quality lands in the Monticello BLM Field Office area.

- The plan designates 2,800 miles of off-road vehicle routes - further than the distance between San Francisco and Washington D.C., leaving almost 80% of the land managed by the Monticello BLM Field Office open to off-road vehicles.

- All of the lands adjacent to Natural Bridges National Monument would be open to oil and gas leasing, as well as the vast majority of the area surrounding Canyonlands National Park, including Lockhart Basin, the Highway 95 Scenic Corridor, and lands adjacent to the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.



Raplee Ridge and the San Juan River. © Steve Mulligan.

- The BLM identified 12 rivers and stream segments that were eligible for inclusion in the Wild & Scenic River System, but the final plan only designates 39% of the eligible segments. The Upper San Juan River, Indian Creek, Fable and Arch Canyon creeks have been determined to be ineligible for this protection.

In addition to failing to protect outstanding natural and cultural resources, the BLM has made it extraordinarily difficult for the public to participate in this planning process. The agency has taken the last seven years to prepare the six plans affecting much of Utah’s public lands, but they are now rushing to finalize them before the Bush Administration leaves office, as a last gift to the off-road vehicle and energy development communities.



Indian Creek. © Ray Bloxham/SUWA.

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