“A Civilization to Match Its Scenery”: Western Land Management Policy and Canyonlands National Park

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This paper addresses the underlying tensions between development and conservation inherent in western land policy, as revealed by the December 19th Bureau of Land Management (BLM) energy leasing controversy. Using Canyonlands National Park and the surrounding erosion basin as a case study, this paper highlights the history and development of these opposing land management philosophies as embodied by the BLM (multiple-use) and the National Park Service (conservation). This conflict is explored in the context of BLM-NPS border issues in the lands adjacent to Canyonlands National Park, with a focus on oil/gas development, off-highway vehicles (OHV), and impact on local communities. Several possibilities for ensuring better management of the entire Canyonlands basin ecosystem are explored, with the ultimate recommendation that the lands surrounding the national park be designated a national preserve under NPS-management. The paper concludes with a call for larger western land policy reform.

“I was shaped by the West and have lived most of a long life in it, and nothing would gratify me more than to see it, in all its subregions and subcultures, both prosperous and environmentally healthy, with a civilization to match its scenery...”

Wallace Stegner

On November 4, 2008, as the nation focused on the high-profile presidential election, the Utah office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) quietly announced a quarterly oil and gas lease sale scheduled for December 19 of the same year. The sale included 132 parcels of land, totaling approximately 164,000 acres (“Decision to Lease,” December 12, 2008). Proposed parcels bordered Arches National Park, some endangering the view shed of the iconic Delicate Arch. The location of other parcels could have undermined the ecological integrity of Canyonlands National Park. Promising to uphold strict stipulations on extraction practices, the BLM argued that the lease process “ensures that the nation can produce its vital energy resources in an environmentally responsible way” (Utah BLM, 2008, ¶ 9).

While forming its well-researched and heavily documented lease sale proposal, the BLM left out a key player in the process: the National Park Service (NPS). Since a 1993 memorandum set a precedent for better inter-agency collaboration, the NPS has been an active player in BLM lease sales (BLM-NPS Utah, 2008). The exclusion of the NPS from this particular sale sparked public controversy regarding the management of federal lands (Barringer, 2008).

The public outrage culminated in an individual act of protest on December 19, 2008, at the BLM office in Salt Lake City. While hundreds of activists crowded the entrance to the auction, Tim DeChristopher, an undergraduate at the University of Utah, entered the auction posing as a bidder and purchased 13 parcels valued at $1.7 million. Aside from winning parcels he had no means of purchasing, DeChristopher’s other bids inflated prices, forcing corporate bidders to pay much more for their leases. By the time auction officials realized what was happening, the oil and gas lease sale had already been effectively disrupted, closing any subsequent bids and leaving several parcels unsold (Foy, 2008).

Building on DeChristopher’s momentum, several community and conservation groups joined forces and filed for a temporary restraining order. On January 17, 2009 a U.S. District Court judge ruled in favor of the order and temporarily halted the sale of 77 of the 116 parcels sold (Norlen, 2009). Then on February 4, 2009, new Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar suspended all the leases in question, cit-
ing his desire to conduct new environmental evaluations and to further consult with other land management agencies regarding the area (Riccardi & Tankersley, 2009).

The controversial proposals for oil and gas leasing in southeastern Utah (and Salazar’s subsequent suspension of those leases) are examples of radical policy shifts in the management of public lands. It cannot be stressed enough that Salazar’s suspension of those leases is a band-aid solution. Whether or not such aesthetically and ecologically sensitive lands are developed is simply a reflection of the current administration’s agenda.

Salazar’s decision, then, is an example of the contemporary political problems surrounding public land use and how the absence of a unifying policy complicates them. The Department of the Interior, we argue, lacks any unifying land use policy, and Salazar’s decision to temporarily suspend the leasing of these contested parcels is not a clear victory for conservation or development—it is rather just another instance of wildly shifting land use policies.

In what follows, land use policy will be seen as divided between development and conservation. This divide, we further argue, is embodied in the tensions that exist between the NPS and the BLM mandates. Both of these agencies are branches of the Department of the Interior, and each agency was created to manage very different lands for very different purposes. With the NPS guided by a philosophy of conservation and the BLM guided by a philosophy of multiple use and development, tensions between these two agencies have been particularly problematic surrounding the national parks of southern Utah.

None of Utah’s national parks demonstrate these tensions more than Canyonlands. The leasing controversy reinforces this fact. It is our claim that Canyonlands reveals even more about NPS/BLM tensions: Canyonlands is a window into understanding the intricate mess that is contemporary public land policy, and the guiding example used in this paper.

To be clear, the problem that is often identified as a “Canyonlands” problem is actually a “border” problem. That is to say, the issue is neither how Canyonlands National Park is managed, nor the BLM-management of the land surrounding Canyonlands. Rather, the issue explodes into a myriad of political tensions where these two land types—with their divergent land use mandates—come into contact with one another. The BLM and NPS meet at a line on the map, a border that precipitates an ideological collision over the basic questions of how we all use and view our public lands.

Because Canyonlands is defined by arbitrary political boundaries that are much smaller than the Canyonlands basin ecosystem, there are many people who feel the park was left incomplete. Effectively, Canyonlands National Park is a small island surrounded by BLM managed land, making the border a site of problematic intersections between agencies. “Canyonlands completion,” the idea of expanding preservation management policies to meet the ecological boundaries, is one proposed way of resolving these issues. The Canyonlands issue highlights the specific public land policy intersections we will examine in this essay, which include the BLM and NPS, energy extraction and recreation, OHV use and soil erosion, as well as local economic development and preservation. The paper will conclude with recommendations addressing Canyonlands park completion. Ultimately, we argue that the fierce current political partisanship that has generated oppositional land use policies serves neither conservation nor development. We must define a western land use policy that serves the needs of both.

**LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES**

In order to understand the tensions underlying the BLM’s lease sale and the Canyonlands completion proposal, it is important to define the opposing land philosophies at play in America’s consciousness and the land management agencies that embody them. The genesis of the land use discussion can largely be traced back to Manifest Destiny, the term coined in the mid 1800s to describe a belief that the United States had a divine right and duty to stretch across North America, which served as the driving impetus for westward expansion (United States Bureau of Land Management [BLM], 2009). Coupled with the California gold rush and the development of the railroad, Manifest Destiny helped to create the myth of the West: an impossible ideal of inexhaustible resources, economic independence, and free land.

The era in which America pursued this unattainable dream is best characterized by what is termed the “disposal era” of land management. Scholar R. B. Keiter, director of the Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources, and the Environment, explains that the “disposal era” centers on the Homestead Act of 1862 and the General Mining Law of 1872, which “sought to attract prospective settlers and entrepreneurs to the western frontier with the enticement of free land and minerals” (Keiter, 2003, p. 17). It was the prevailing public land philosophy during the “disposal era” that the West needed to be developed and civilized, and that eager settlers would do this in exchange for private land.

With private land came bountiful water rights, mining rights, and grazing rights. The privatization of public lands and the settlement of the West were one and the same. In 1878, John Wesley Powell, an explorer, scientist, and early champion for conservation, cautioned the government that Western settlement had already reached its limit, and that further expansion would be detrimental to both the settlers and the land (Stegner, 1990). Powell’s Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States set a precedent for natural resource assessments, and he drew greater attention to the concerns of unconstrained resource development in the arid lands of the west. Powell’s warnings, as well as an expanding conservation sentiment and an ever-shrinking wilderness, helped the government to see the need for land protection in the face of frenzied development.
Indeed, this rapid growth in the West made it difficult for authorities to verify legal claims for land development. Recognizing the need to preserve and capitalize on aesthetically pristine lands in the face of this expansion, Congress established Yellowstone National Park in 1872 and Yosemite National Park several years later. When Yellowstone and Yosemite became "places of great public attractiveness [this] created an urgent sense that means must be taken to protect these treasures from destruction" (Sax, 1976). As the parks' popularity grew, the need for government-controlled land management offices became more acute (National Park Service [NPS], 2009). In 1916, the passage of the National Parks Organic Act officially created the NPS and helped to answer this call for balance between land preservation and use by creating guidelines for managing the most protected of these lands. Though the government recognized the need to protect land from unregulated exploitation, it was still keenly interested in promoting tourism and recreation. These competing ideas are evident in the Organic Act itself, which states:

The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of...national parks, monuments and reservations...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations (16 USC § 1, National Parks Organic Act, 1916).

The Organic Act created a contradictory mandate. Congress asked that the NPS conserve the aesthetic, ecological, and historical importance of a designated area so that these resources are available “unimpaired for...future generations”—reflecting the conservationist land philosophy. Yet, while safeguarding these valuable aspects of a chosen landscape, the NPS was also expected to “provide for the enjoyment of the revered features. In other words, the NPS must allow for human interaction with the land while also ensuring that this exchange does not destroy the land for others. While the NPS has chosen to emphasize “unimpairment” as its chief priority, the difficulty of executing this mandate remains to this day.

Though the NPS’s mandate provided for a double-mission of conservation and enjoyment, the disparity between traditional utilitarian land use and national park-style land management was apparent in vast public lands beyond the designated parks. The areas with national park distinction are only a fraction of government owned western land. The need for a separate bureau with a more function-driven objective than the NPS—one that could address mining, cattle ranching and other land uses—resulted in the creation of the BLM in 1946. In its early days, the primary responsibility of the BLM was to administer those public lands that were unreserved for another specific purpose (Keiter, 2003). This opened the agency to the influence of traditional use industries like grazing and mining, which had a vested interest in this unclaimed land. It was not until 1976 that specific land management responsibilities were spelled out for the BLM in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), though with a clear and overt emphasis on “multiple use”:

The term ‘multiple use’ means the management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people—a combination of balanced and diverse resources uses that takes into account the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and nonrenewable resources, including, but not limited to, recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife and fish, and natural scenic, scientific, and historical values... (43 USC 1702(c), Federal Land Policy and Management Act, 1976).

Though the BLM has also been charged by Congress to protect the quality of the lands it manages, the emphasis on use reflects a far more utilitarian approach to land governance than that of the NPS. Born out of the western land use tradition, the BLM has a greater breadth of competing interests, including oil drilling and recreation. These fundamental differences—both in philosophy and approach—ensure that the BLM fills a role the NPS cannot. But disparities also set the stage for frequent and unavoidable conflict where the respective lands meet.

Nowhere are the differences between the NPS and the BLM more problematic than when these two agencies share a land border. In these instances, the distinct mandates that guide each agency begin to cancel one another out through sheer physical proximity. Often, the utilization of resource development opportunities encouraged under the BLM comes into direct conflict with the NPS’s mandate to ensure unimpaired land for the future. Likewise, an emphasis on NPS’s conservation mandate could restrict the land uses the BLM can offer. When these two agencies share the same border, it signifies a historic clash of opposites—conservation or utilization, preservation or use, Tim DeChristopher or the leasing sale—a testament to the ongoing tensions surrounding western land. Such is the case with Canyonlands.

Canyonlands

The concept of a national park at Canyonlands, a province of the Colorado Plateau, can be traced to the Utah State Planning Board of the 1930s, when a park was conceived as a way to generate tourist revenue. Various government groups drafted proposals for a national park, but local opposition proved insurmountable. The idea was resurrected in the 1960s when Interior Secretary Stewart Udall was taken to see a proposed dam site. On the airplane ride over the confluence of the Green and the Colorado rivers he saw an area of land that needed to be preserved, not developed: “I had no idea anything like that existed there... ‘God almighty, that’s a national park’” (Neal, 2006). Udall found support for the idea from Sen. Frank Moss (D-UT), and 1 million acres were studied for possible inclusion. However, the proposed park’s size, bound-
aries, and use came under attack by San Juan County officials and Sen. Wallace Bennett (R-UT). Eventually 257,000 acres were included in the bill that passed Congress and was signed into law in 1964.

Today’s Canyonlands National Park, after an expansion in 1971, totals 337,597 acres, with the boundaries drawn in unerringly straight lines. The product of a political compromise, the park’s boundary has been criticized as having no relation to the ecology or topography of the region. From within the Canyonlands basin there is no visual or topographical means of distinguishing NPS from BLM lands. Many park advocates use this criticism to promote the idea of “Canyonlands completion.”

Canyonlands completion advocates identify the erosion basin that encircles the park as the natural boundary. The boundaries of today’s park, however, are defined well within this grand and imposing cliff wall, formed by the Wingate Sandstone rim. As it now stands, the Canyonlands border looks like stacked squares of geometric tension, as if the political chess game over the park did not end in a clear decision but in a stalemate.

TENSIONS

This political stalemate has led to specific tensions and debates which have grown around the park’s contested borderlands: energy extraction, OHV use, and the economic complexities of Canyonlands’ gateway communities. While the park is a preserve for stunningly beautiful landscapes and priceless ecosystems, the lands surrounding the park host a number of intensely competing interests.

ENERGY EXTRACTION

The sharp increase in petroleum prices during the summer of 2008 reemphasized America’s precarious dependence on foreign oil, which poses an economic dilemma and a national security threat. As the numbers at the pump continued to rise, many citizens and politicians began to push for the development of domestic energy sources through increased drilling, oil shale development, and the like. Even though gas prices had dropped substantially by the BLM’s November 4th auction announcement—largely due to the economic recession that began in the weeks prior—the summer panic was still used to justify the sale.

Domestic oil production concerns around Canyonlands illuminate the opposing land philosophies that dominate discussion over land management. For energy security advocates, including those who generally value western land development, Utah’s promise of oil reserves is an alluring prospect. According to the Utah Department of Natural Resource’s Division of Oil, Gas and Mining (DNR), the state ranked tenth in the nation for proven oil reserves and eighth for gas in 2006 (Oil, 2008). For conservationists, however, any benefit derived from exploitation of the land cannot outweigh the consequences to the native ecology and wilderness values.

Lockhart Basin, found within the Canyonlands basin and well within sight of Grand View Point, has been cited as an area of high oil drilling potential according to the November 2008 Resource Management Plan (RMP). RMPs are released periodically by the BLM to define land management goals and provisions for the next decade or so. Lockhart Basin has been allotted a gas and oil leasing stipulation that includes time limits (TL) and controlled surface use (CSU). According to the RMP:

Areas identified as TL are open to oil and gas leasing but would be closed to surface-disturbing activities during identified time frames. This stipulation would not apply to operation and maintenance activities, including associated vehicle travel, unless otherwise specified.

Areas identified as CSU are open to oil and gas leasing but would require that proposals for surface-disturbing activities be authorized according to the controls and constraints specified (Monticello RMP, Appendix B, 2008).

While there would be some constraints on activities during oil drilling, oil leases are still allowed within the Canyonlands basin. In other words, extraction, including the rigs and roads necessary, would be on land that many visitors assume is part of the national park.

Statistics suggest that oil and gas leasing around Canyonlands is not likely to be productive. San Juan County, where most of Canyonlands is located, had only seven gas wells producing in 2008 (Drilling results, 2009). The county yielded a mere 3% of the state’s 385 billion cubic foot production of gas in 2007 (Utah natural, 2009), and 20.2% of the state’s 19.5 million barrels of oil the same year (Utah oil, 2009). San Juan County’s production of 3.9 million barrels of oil a year, however, does not promise to make much of a dent in America’s use of 20.68 million barrels a day (Petroleum, 2007). Additionally, most of this oil is produced in the Aneth Field, located in the southeastern corner of the county and far removed from Canyonlands (Monticello RMP, 2008). These statistics demonstrate that oil and gas development around Canyonlands would provide only nominal gains in energy security.

Furthermore, drilling oil around this national park threatens the integrity of the park’s viewscape, posing a conflict with local tourism. As we will see, visitors are a substantial source of revenue for the communities surrounding national parks in general and Canyonlands in particular. While Moab receives most of the economic benefits from being the gateway community to Canyonlands, both its and Monticello’s economies would feel negative repercussions if the Canyonlands tourism industry was injured by oil extraction. Both are located far from any major cities or industrial areas and have very few other revenue sources for their towns (C. DeLorme, personal communication, October, 13 2008).
Nine-Mile Canyon, located 90 miles north of Canyonlands, illustrates the problems that oil exploration can visit on desert ecologies. Here, the impact of magnesium chloride on ancient rock art and cultural resources is a primary concern. Used as a dust suppressant, these salts are ground into powder by the frequent traffic and settle on the extensive rock art panels of the canyon, irreversibly degrading them through chemical reactions (Kloor, 2008). Additional concerns include light pollution and brightening of the night skies, displacement of species, destruction of habitat, and air, water and noise pollution.

These effects from possible oil and gas development create a tension at the borderlands of Canyonlands. While the NPS is established to preserve the beauty and authenticity of the land, it is challenging to do so when the BLM manages land in the same watershed and viewed. Though drilling would never actually be allowed in Canyonlands National Park, it could still occur inside the basin on the BLM land. This means that the same impacts of noise and light pollution, dust dispersion, and species displacement that will happen outside the park will also take place inside the park because the two lands are so integrally connected. It is then impossible for both agencies to carry out their separate mandates without infringing on each other. Within the Canyonlands view- and watershed, either the BLM must curb its multiple-use obligation so the NPS can maintain the natural landscape, or the NPS must yield its protection so the BLM can promote a variety of intensive uses.

**Off Highway Vehicle Use**

The Canyonlands basin also faces another controversial struggle over preferential land use, namely using land for recreational purposes that can have a negative impact on the landscape. On the BLM lands around Canyonlands National Park, these activities include off highway vehicle (OHV) use, mountain biking, rock climbing, and unregulated camping and hiking. While wheeled vehicles are not allowed off-road in the park, the impact they have on adjacent BLM lands also affects park lands and resources through sediment runoff and nutrient loss. While other preferential land uses can and do have impacts of varying intensity, OHV use, in particular, poses a critical threat to the Canyonlands ecosystem.

One vital component for a desert’s ecological health is biological soil crust cover. These interacting communities of cyanobacteria, mosses and lichens are the single most important stabilizer against soil erosion in arid lands (Bowker, 2008). Soil erosion is among the most pressing environmental concerns because it degrades an ecosystem’s function, decreases productivity and sustainability of agriculture, and displaces human populations (Bowker, 2008, p. 2309). Barger (2005) conducted a study that further suggests:

> Runoff and sediment loss increase[s] with the disturbance [caused by OHV use] . . . which suggests that downslope plant communities may receive a higher flux of nutrients in water and sediment transport from plant interspaces and may also result in high nutrient losses from the watershed (p. 260).

While the soil crust destruction may happen outside the park, because the watershed crosses the park boundary the resulting runoff can cause a loss of nutrients to plants inside the park—thus unavoidably interconnecting land management policies inside and outside the park.

One of the largest threats to biological soil crust cover is the unregulated use of OHVs on BLM lands, because the tires from the motorized vehicles tear up the soil. When the top crust has been broken into different and separated clods, it cannot simply mend itself. The broken soil will wash away and erosion will increase in that area until the soil crusts can be reestablished, a process which can take years or even centuries (Barger, 2005).

However, OHV recreation also offers an economic opportunity for the sparsely populated southeastern corner of the state. Through an economic model called Customer Value Management (CVM), a study analyzed how much Arizona residents spend on OHV trips, which translates into profits for the local communities. “Economic value from the CVM shows that OHV recreation by Arizona residents produces consumer surplus to the users, ranging from $54 to $96 per trip depending on the type of vehicle used” (Silberman, 2006, p. 220). That kind of capital, combined with the high number of recreationists who frequent the Moab and Monticello area is evidence of OHV use’s important contribution to these local economies. Silberman (2006) emphasizes that

> The net economic benefits reported here should be considered in the controversy over use of public recreation lands by off-highway vehicles . . . Off-highway vehicle recreation may be an economically competitive use for public recreation lands when the consumer surplus or economic value is evaluated against the environmental and social costs (p. 221).

Put simply, the economic benefits of OHV use should be weighed against any environmental damage they may cause, and all the players in this debate should be heard. Ultimately, a decision needs to be made that will balance these two opposing desires.

These studies illustrate the conflict between recreation and preservation—tensions that are concentrated on the lands surrounding Canyonlands. For conservationists, the arid desert is a dynamic land where small shifts in human use patterns can impact the ecological integrity of the region. Conversely, recreationalists view the land as a resource to be used in the pursuit of their hobby. Some members of the OHV recreation community believe the problems of environmental degradation can be solved with better signage and maps. One member, however, was quoted as saying, “But we also think the ranger group is not really interested in working together with us—they simply want to eliminate motor recreation on public lands” (Clayton, 2007, p. 2). This highlights the tension between the two communities: OHV recreation-
ist feel threatened by conservationists and are distrustful of any effort to cooperate, while conservationists know that, as long as some OHVs ride freely across the land, the environmental harm will continue.

The BLM’s 2008 RMP for the Monticello area specifies that OHVs are to remain on designated trails. It also provides that most of the BLM land inside Canyonlands basin, and immediately beside the park, is open to OHV use on designated trails and roads. If all OHV riders stayed on their trails, this would probably be an acceptable compromise. However, even under the best of circumstances, it would be impossible for anybody to ensure that all riders stayed on the trail. This is further complicated because, as will be elaborated later, the BLM has a very limited number of individuals who would patrol the land to stop OHV users from leaving their trails.

These opposing views hit a high point of conflict in the 2005 case of Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. National Park Service. The lawsuit originated from the NPS’s decision to close the dirt road running through Salt Creek Canyon to Angel Arch, a well-known landmark and destination in Canyonlands. This particular route crossed the Salt Creek more than 70 times in its 10-mile trek up the canyon, using the creek bed for the trail. In addition to erosion concerns, vehicles regularly lost transmission or engine fluids into the creek. “Utah Shared Access Alliance et al., a coalition made up of Utah Shared Access Alliance, Blue Ribbon Coalition, High Desert Multiple Use Coalition, United Four Wheel Drive Associations of U.S. and Canada, and Historic Access Recovery Project,” maintained that the NPS Organic Act required a balancing between the mandates of resource conservation and visitor enjoyment (Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. National Park Service, 2005, p.1). However, the appeals court ruled in favor of the National Park Service, which saved the creek from irreparable damage but also substantially compromised relationships between locals, the Park Service, and conservationists (Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. National Park Service, 2005).

Because the park has only been in existence since the 1960s, the OHV recreationist and local public feel an entitlement to the public lands, and they do not appreciate unwanted regulation of their full access to their choice of activities. Furthermore, the shared boundaries between BLM and NPS create a huge enforcement problem. Without a fence or other demarcation of the park boundaries, it is impossible to entirely prevent further off-road damage to park lands and resources.

**Local Economy**

The division between the NPS and the BLM is apparent even within the local communities surrounding Canyonlands. Since Moab had benefited from tourism due to nearby Arches National Park, Monticello anticipated similar benefits from the creation of Canyonlands National Park. This expectation was not unfounded, given that the vast majority of the park is located in Monticello’s own San Juan County. However, Moab became the principal gateway to Canyonlands due to its proximity to the main access road (as well as its proximity to the Arches access road). Moab was also the logical gateway community for Canyonlands because of existing tourist amenities and infrastructure. This led to bitter resentment on the part of Monticello and helped feed two divergent economic relationships, philosophies, and cultures with regard to the park.

Initially serving as a crossroads for the Colorado River, Moab based its early economy in agriculture. In the early part of the 20th century, the discovery of uranium and vanadium shifted the economy toward mining. By 1950, Moab had become a mining boomtown, but, with declining demand, went bust by the mid 1960s. With the influx of visitors to nearby national parks and the mountain-bike craze of the 1980s, Moab restructured its economic approach and by the mid 1990s was thriving with a recreation-based tourism economy (“History,” n.d.).

The new flow of money, much of which was generated by park-related tourism, with national and international visitors spending their money on traveling, lodging, food and other services, saved Moab from an economic disaster (S. Bauman, personal communication, October 14, 2008). Today, the town continues to run on such an economy, with 80-90% of its revenue coming from tourism. Though some long-time residents may resent Moab’s role as a gateway community, the town’s economic success and future coincides with the NPS mantra of preservation of land for the enjoyment of this and future generations (S. Bauman, personal communication, October 14, 2008).

The economic history of Monticello bears a striking similarity to Moab’s, at least for a time. Monticello also began its economy in agriculture, and then shifted to mining and extraction following the discovery of uranium and vanadium. After the decline of demand in the mid 1960s, Monticello also went bust, forcing the town to restructure its economy (McPherson, n.d.). With 92% of the surrounding county owned by the federal government, Monticello returned to its roots, using cattle and sheep grazing permits to bolster its weakening economy, but with little success (L. Stevens, personal communication, October 13, 2008). Moreover, while Monticello receives economic benefit from tourism and OHV use, it has not realized success on the same scale as Moab.

As noted, the creation of Canyonlands National Park did not result in the same tourism-based boom for Monticello’s economy. In addition to its remote location, Monticello’s barrier to economic innovation can be linked to the local resistance to becoming “another Moab,” which stems largely from their disappointed expectations of Canyonlands as a source of revenue (L. Stevens, personal communication, October 13, 2008). Instead of receiving economic benefit from the new park, locals were left with “a feeling of colonialism” as portions of their land, which had traditionally

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108
been used for grazing and recreation, fell under the protection of the NPS (B. Boyle, personal communication, October 13, 2008). With less land "in their own backyard" and more land being preserved, Monticello locals have felt the loss of personal freedoms and economic possibilities for their town. Monticello and other San Juan County communities have embraced the BLM's mandate of multiple uses on federal lands, supporting energy development and other intensive uses as a last resource to bolster economic prosperity (C. Delorme, personal communication, October 13, 2008).

There are, however, local jobs and economic opportunities associated with Canyonlands. In 2007, the park had 417,560 tourist visits, which supported 418 jobs in the local region. These numbers were up from 2006 when the park saw 392,537 visitors supporting 366 jobs (Stynes, 2007). These jobs were not limited to retail and other tourist-related industries, but included 113 NPS positions within Canyonlands National Park, providing a substantial impact on the local economy (These economic opportunities are substantial for Moab and Monticello, both of which have populations smaller than 5,000 residents, according to the 2000 U.S. Census).

Monticello and Moab demonstrate, through their respective economic experiences, the culture of opposing federal land philosophies. Moab has found economic prosperity by capitalizing on the NPS's motto of preservation and conservation for the sake of human enjoyment. In contrast, Monticello has embraced the BLM's multiple-use mission and the monetary benefit gained through resource development. With Moab (in Grand County) reaping most of the economic benefit from a park located in San Juan County, Monticello residents opposed park expansion. Residents view this possibility as greatly limiting potential resource development and motorized recreation opportunities.

**Implications**

The above examples describe only a few issues among the many that affect Canyonlands National Park. The park is poised in the center of nearly every type of western land use controversy because so many groups depend on it and the surrounding lands as a resource. It impacts the economies of both Moab and Monticello, though in very different ways. It is also the guardian over the confluence of the Colorado and Green Rivers, which supply the water for nearly all of the Southwest. Moreover, the lands around Canyonlands supply the possibility of oil and offer exciting landscapes for motorized recreation.

With so many stakeholders interested in the use of public lands in and around the park, Canyonlands becomes an ideal case study for the problems that result when NPS and BLM share a common border, especially one as ambiguous as Canyonlands. The problems embedded in the differing NPS and BLM mandates are aggravated by the lack of a topographically sound border that addresses Canyonlands as an ecosystem. This leaves most citizens unable to differentiate between NPS and BLM land. Additionally, the BLM has a limited ability to control its lands adjacent to Canyonlands, particularly given the volume of tourists, recreationists, and others who want to use them (K. Cannon, personal communication, October 14, 2008). With so many visitors to monitor and regulate, the BLM cannot prevent some from straying onto the park with their motorized vehicles or from damaging the delicate ecosystem. This lack of enforcement can result in damage to the park and surrounding lands that could take decades to repair.

Currently, the NPS has over one hundred staff members to address recreation, facility needs and enforcement for the 441,250 acres that make up Canyonlands and surrounding NPS areas; this number is considerably higher at peak season times. In contrast, the Monticello BLM has thirty employees; two of these employees are responsible for the patrolling and enforcement of 1,800,000 acres ("Utah Directory," n.d.). This disparity in employment directly reflects a disparity in the two agencies' budgets.

Agency mandate and funding disparities also impact local scientific studies and data collection. While they will share data, the two agencies will often present different facts because "everyone has an agenda, even scientists" (J. Belnap, personal communication, October 13, 2008). When the numbers do not add up, it becomes increasingly difficult for the NPS, the BLM, local political officials, and other constituents to agree on a course of action. In a personal interview, Lynn Stevens of the San Juan County Commission stated, "We are open to compromise, but we do not trust the environmentalist data from the impact studies." With the agencies unable to reach a scientific consensus, it is almost impossible to reach consensus-based decisions because no one really knows what the environmental impact of BLM actions will be.

It is significant that the NPS regional office is located in Moab and the BLM office in Monticello, reflecting the divide between two opposing land philosophies. As Lynn Stevens (2008) expressed, speaking for Monticello residents, "We don't like people who don't pay taxes here telling us how to use our land". These hostile feelings resonate even louder in his statement, "We don't want to become another Moab, but we want to be able to have our children and grandchildren around. It's a question of how to move and handle economic growth."

These tensions also spill over into BLM policies. According to Kate Cannon, the regional National Park Superintendent, "One difference between the BLM and the National Park Service is the weight they give to local people. BLM is much more subject to local politics, but the Park Service is more broadly regional". In other words, the attitudes of the local population can sway BLM management policies much more than NPS. This is in large part due to the difference in scope between the two agencies. Multiple-use is
driven by the short-term needs and desires of citizens and corporations. Preservation, however, is a more narrowly defined goal within the agency itself, which allows for a smaller degree of subjectivity.

All of these observations lead back to the lease sales on December 19, 2008. The leases are currently off the table, as a result of the actions of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar; however, this represents a temporary solution at best. The leases are only suspended, and there is nothing preventing a reinstatement of the lease sales. Put simply, the leasing controversy demonstrates the way that land management policies can and do alter radically with each change in administration. In roughly one month, the BLM moved from a concentration on resource extraction to resource conservation, and it can just as easily shift the other way. These rapid turnabouts make public lands vulnerable to the whims of any given administration. While every government department experiences some policy shifts, the BLM’s entire intent, purpose, and priorities can be redefined overnight through the conscious choice of politicians to focus on those aspects of multiple use management that best meet their agenda. The legal language governing the BLM, while purposely left open to accommodate future changes, is problematically evasive. While this may seem a matter of semantics, the potential environmental consequences are dire.

These radical policy reversals make the fate of public lands far too volatile. They can also foster negative local and national sentiment, because citizens always stand to be caught off guard by the next public lands policy shift. An institutional solution is needed for the Canyonlands basin specifically and for public lands in general, and the time to act is now. These conflicts will only intensify as the number of people on the earth increases and resources become less available. The amount of land that we have to work with is finite. Until we find a long term solution, the controversies described above will erupt with increasing frequency.

**Recommendations**

There is no ideal solution that can eliminate the complex and nuanced tensions surrounding the concept of expanding or “completing” Canyonlands. As explained previously, Canyonlands completion refers to the science-based idea of managing whole ecosystems rather than “islands,” or isolated pockets of land. To do this, the boundaries of the managing agency’s jurisdiction must be ecological rather than political. The ecological border extends to the Wingate Sandstone rim, which most visitors mistake for the boundaries of Canyonlands National Park. The political border of the park, on the other hand, is squared-off far from this natural boundary. As with any highly complex issue, there are numerous possibilities for completing the Canyonlands ecosystem and altering the current land management dynamic. This paper concludes by offering three potential solutions that address the need for management of the ecosystem rather than political boundaries: 1) transfer of adjacent BLM lands to the NPS through an act of Congress; 2) have the President declare a new national monument; or 3) institutionalize greater inter-agency cooperation under the provisions of a National Conservation Area status.

**Completion by Transfer to NPS**

One widely touted option is the permanent transfer of the BLM lands surrounding Canyonlands to the NPS, through an act of Congress, for management based on NPS’s conservation and public enjoyment mandate. The transfer would address oil and gas claims as valid existing rights; such rights guarantee that leases obtained previous to a land transfer will be honored for the duration of the existing lease (K. Cannon, personal communication, October 14, 2008). Though these leases would still be managed by the BLM, the NPS would have the authority to determine what types of roads and infrastructure would be constructed for extraction purposes within the new park lands. Alternatively, the government may seek to “buy out” or exchange these leases for other areas with comparable energy development potential.

Concerns about preferential use—particularly OHVs—should also be addressed. Given its popularity, some level of OHV use might be continued. Trails may be left open with more stringent regulations. Or OHV roads might be phased out, primarily in areas that are determined to be highly sensitive, based on the land’s ecological health or nearby cultural artifacts. Put simply, from an environmental standpoint, transferring BLM lands to the NPS would significantly diminish the human threats to a healthy functioning ecosystem.

The transfer of BLM lands to NPS also presents some drawbacks. As discussed, the communities surrounding Canyonlands National Park are largely dependent on tourism, including recreation on BLM lands. Hiking, horseback riding, backpacking, mountain biking on established trails, and climbing are all activities that would continue under National Park status. However, an important part of the local economy is based on OHV use; if the OHVs were phased out of the area, the tourist economies of Moab and Monticello would feel the negative effects.

Another consideration is the effect that park completion by NPS transfer might have on local interaction with Canyonlands. The eventual prohibition of OHV use would negate the efforts that responsible organizations have made to promote responsible riding and better cooperation with the land agencies. A decision to ignore local sentiments may continue to polarize long standing residents of the area and conservationists, making it more difficult to address land management issues in the future.

Also, transferring BLM lands to the NPS does not address the core concern: the lack of inter-agency collaboration and communication. While expanding the park borders to match the topographical limits of the Canyonlands basin...
will help protect the Canyonlands ecosystem, it does not help the BLM and NPS negotiate the tensions that could arise at the new border.

**Completion by National Monument**

The second possible solution would be the declaration of a new National Monument by the President through the Antiquities Act. Under the Antiquities Act of 1906, the President is authorized to declare national monuments and historic landmarks at his or her discretion and in accordance with the smallest area that is compatible with proper care and management (Antiquities Act, 1906). In this situation, management of a new national monument could be transferred to the NPS or remain with the BLM. If the designated land is transferred to the NPS, the scenario would be similar to that described above, with the important difference that it would not require congressional approval.

An alternative option would be to create a National Monument in a similar fashion to the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, which was established during the Clinton administration in 1996. Under the direction of Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, the Grand Staircase-Escalante was left with the BLM to manage (Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, n.d.). The new monument, however, was met with a great deal of local resistance by residents who felt disenfranchised, and this concern would need to be addressed if the national monument option were pursued. If the Escalante model were followed, the BLM would continue to maintain jurisdiction over the designated land. Expansion by this route could broaden the BLM’s repertoire by requiring the agency to give conservation practices higher priority. And this, according to NPS Regional Superintendent Kate Cannon, might help to improve the current situation: “Ideally, changes need to occur in the way BLM operates and manages [the land], and in order to do that the BLM needs to have support from the public and government entities” (personal communication, February 22, 2009).

**Completion by National Preserve Designation**

The third recommendation is the congressional creation of a new National Preserve. A National Preserve is an open-ended designation made by Congress, which is tailored to fit the specific needs of the selected area. National Preserve designations have occasionally been used in Alaska and elsewhere on public lands adjacent to national parks, with management standards adjusted to accommodate hunting and motorized recreation traditions. Suggestions for appropriate management standards could come from a collaborative discussion between stakeholders. In this scenario, the NPS and BLM could continue to manage their respective lands. However, the National Preserve regulations would require institutionalized collaboration between the NPS and the BLM, who would set agreed upon management standards. Given the limited means available to each agency, this collaboration could help better address the existing uses through shared resources and mutual oversight.

A National Preserve may not resolve all of the land management conflicts, but it could offer greater ecological protections and encourage the BLM to focus more on conservation. In a 2009 interview, Kate Cannon, observed that the “BLM is the single most important agency because the land that the BLM manages is essentially the landscape of the West.” The creation of a National Preserve with inter-agency management might provide an opportunity for the BLM and NPS to build upon their existing relationship, setting a precedent of effective collaboration and mutual respect. From such an institutionalized inter-agency partnership, a more unified land policy could be articulated.

The geography of the Canyonlands erosion basin presents a unique challenge to this option, however. Because the proposed Canyonlands completion lands effectively surround the existing park, any designation that does not embrace all the land in the erosion basin within a single agency’s custodianship could create serious management inefficiencies. This is especially likely because the BLM often finds it difficult to manage distant or isolated land parcels. In this instance, moreover, management could fall to as many as three different BLM field offices, creating the potential for intra-agency communication problems on top of BLM-NPS cooperation challenges.

Given the jagged natural borders of the expansive donut-shaped completion area surrounding the park, this suggests that the national preserve or national monument designation may be most effective if, unlike the Grand Staircase – Escalante example, the lands in question were transferred to the National Park Service, which already has a management presence on the contiguous national park lands. This approach would also be in keeping with precedent, because most new national monuments or preserves have historically been placed with the Park Service.

**Conclusion**

Finding a way to better protect the entire Canyonlands ecosystem is vital if this world-renowned landscape is to survive future development pressures. National preserve or monument designation under NPS management would offer the chance for a more cohesive ecological approach, given the natural boundaries of the basin, while still allowing for dialogue about what kind of management stipulations would best serve the Canyonlands area. This solution must be qualified, however, with the recognition that lands cannot simply be transferred to the NPS whenever shared management borders threaten ecological protection. Too many new conservation areas, with less stringent conservation mandates, could overwhelm national park resources and erode the quality of NPS management while at the same time disempowering the BLM and leaving it with little impetus to improve or change
its management techniques. Not unlike Secretary Salazar’s suspension of the oil leases, this would offer only a short-term solution to a larger, long-term problem.

As a case study, Canyonlands offers solutions applicable in a special situation, but in a larger sense, it highlights the need for overall western land policy reform. The Canyonlands completion issue, with all of its legal and political complexities, touches on a larger concern of land as place and the relationship we choose to have with it. Wallace Stegner (1992), The Dean of Western Writers (as he is often called), helps us to understand the relationship of people to place: “I was shaped by the West and have lived most of a long life in it, and nothing would gratify me more than to see it, in all its subregions and subcultures, both prosperous and environmentally healthy, with a civilization to match its scenery. Stegner speaks of the possible marriage between the merits of a civilization and the sublimity of its scenery. This paper speaks of the merits of a land use policy that could yet reflect the simple beauty of the landscape it seeks to manage.