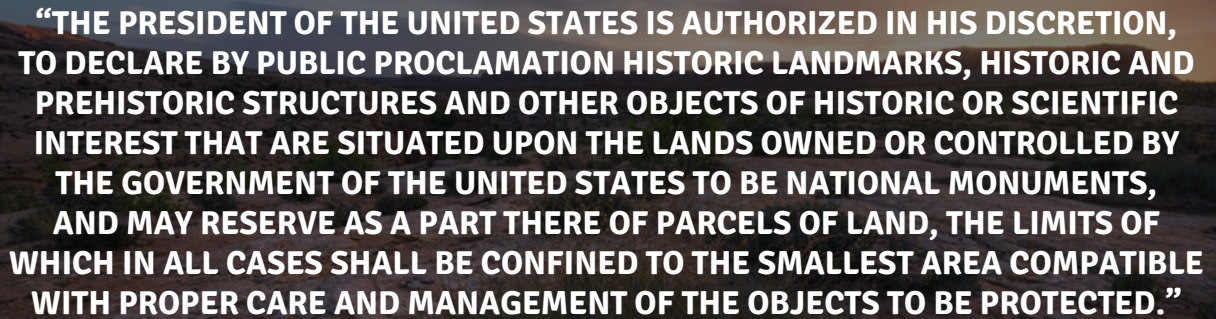




THE COALITION TO PROTECT
AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS
— VOICES OF EXPERIENCE —

**IN SUPPORT OF THE ANTIQUITIES ACT:
A CONTINUED LOOK AT THE LASTING IMPACT
OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS**





“THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IS AUTHORIZED IN HIS DISCRETION, TO DECLARE BY PUBLIC PROCLAMATION HISTORIC LANDMARKS, HISTORIC AND PREHISTORIC STRUCTURES AND OTHER OBJECTS OF HISTORIC OR SCIENTIFIC INTEREST THAT ARE SITUATED UPON THE LANDS OWNED OR CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO BE NATIONAL MONUMENTS, AND MAY RESERVE AS A PART THERE OF PARCELS OF LAND, THE LIMITS OF WHICH IN ALL CASES SHALL BE CONFINED TO THE SMALLEST AREA COMPATIBLE WITH PROPER CARE AND MANAGEMENT OF THE OBJECTS TO BE PROTECTED.”

~ ANTIQUITIES ACT OF 1906

Bears Ears National Monument; photo by Mason Cummings. Front page: Grand Canyon National Park; photo Gary E. Davis

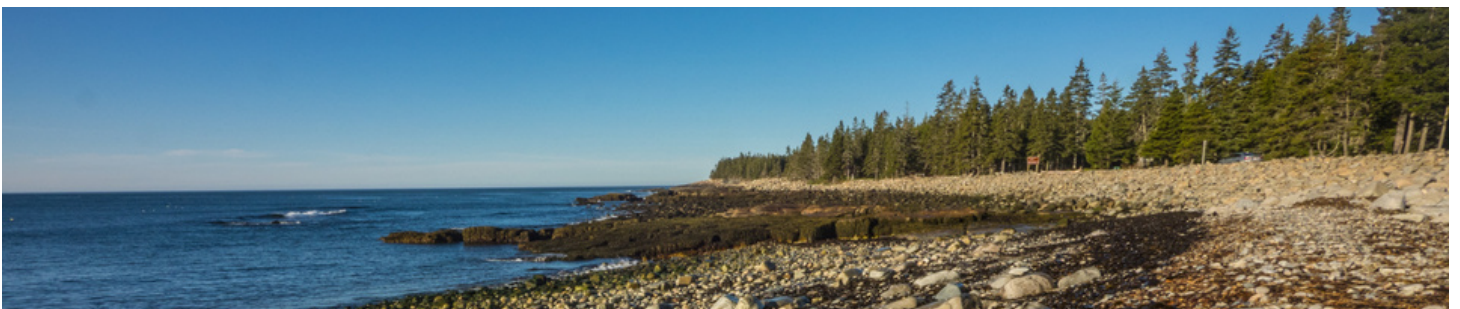
The protection and conservation of our lands and waters – including national parks and public lands - is critical to the health and well-being of our communities and our environment. While conservation can mean caring for the resources already under our protection, it can also mean protecting additional lands at risk.

The Antiquities Act is a powerful tool for preserving public lands at risk. It authorizes the President of the United States to proclaim national monuments on federal lands that contain historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, or other objects of historic or scientific interest.

Use of the Antiquities Act can help to protect irreplaceable resources for future generations. It allows a President to take prompt action to protect landscapes or sites that may be vulnerable. And designating a resource as a national monument not only preserves a landscape or structure, it also can provide recreational and economic benefits to the local community and visitors.

As of June 2023, there are [150 national monuments](#) in the United States that are managed by various federal agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The majority of national monuments are managed by the National Park Service (NPS).

Currently, there are more than [80 national monuments](#) within the National Park System, although the National Park Service manages over [100 parks](#) that got their start thanks to the Antiquities Act, including well-known national parks.



Acadia National Park; photo by Gary E. Davis

NATIONAL TREASURES IN NEED OF PROTECTION

In 2021, President Biden set our first-ever national conservation goal - to restore, connect and conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030- as part of the administration's [America the Beautiful Initiative](#). To help meet this goal, the President restored the boundaries of Bears Ears National Monument, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monument.

The [America the Beautiful 2022 Annual Report](#) summed up the investments, policies, initiatives, and conservation actions that were implemented by the Biden administration in the first two years in office. While there were many successes, one of the most notable victories of 2022 was the creation of the [Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument](#), which protects a World War II-era military training ground, as well as striking landscapes and wildlife habitat along the Continental Divide and the Tenmile Range in the Rocky Mountains.



Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument; photo by James and Jenny Tarpley

In 2023, the Biden administration has continued to support and advance locally-led conservation and restoration efforts surrounding national monument designations in order to help meet the goals laid out in the America the Beautiful Initiative. Tribal communities, elected officials, and the conservation community celebrated two additional national monument designations in early 2023.

The [Castner Range National Monument](#) in Texas will safeguard unspoiled land in the Franklin Mountains that is home to diverse vegetation and wildlife. This critical national monument designation help protect archaeological and historical resources that date back centuries and create more trails and recreational opportunities, which has the additional benefit of [stimulating economic growth](#) for the region.



Castner Range National Monument; photo courtesy Castner Range National Monument Act / Facebook

Similarly, in Nevada, the establishment of the [Avi Kwa Ame National Monument](#) was the result of years of advocacy work by a coalition of Tribes, community members, and elected officials. Avi Kwa Ame – which is the Mojave name for Spirit Mountain – sits at the center of the Yuman Tribes' creation story. The creation of this national monument is a critical contribution to the preservation of Native American ancestral lands, joining Bears Ears and Gold Butte National Monuments.

While we continue to celebrate these victories, there is still much work to be done. There are numerous campaigns throughout the country that are urging the Biden administration to designate important historical, cultural, and natural spaces as national monuments. For example:



The Highland Range at Avi Kwa Ame; photo by Justin McAfee and courtesy of NPCA

There is strong local and Congressional [support](#) to declare the site of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois, as a national monument.

This site is already part of the African American Civil Rights Network, and a monument designation would help to ensure the historic and nationally significant events that led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) are always remembered. The City of Springfield pledged to donate city property to establish the [1908 Springfield Race Riot National Monument](#), including the foundation of Black homes that were burned in the riot.

The local community and elected officials in Greenwood, Oklahoma, have launched a campaign to designate the [Black Wall Street National Monument](#). This national monument would mark the events of the Tulsa Race Massacre.



Rebuilt Black Wall Street in Tulsa, OK; photo courtesy of Oklahoma State University



Black Wall Street; photo by Susan Vineyard

In May 1921, the historic Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was home to a thriving Black community. It was burned to the ground by a white mob that killed hundreds, destroyed businesses and residences, and left thousands of people homeless. The designation of this national monument would ensure that the accomplishments of this Black community, the terrible violence inflicted upon them, and their successful efforts to rebuild will not be forgotten.

Both the Black Wall Street National Monument and the 1908 Springfield Race Riot National Monument would be important contributions to the diversity of stories that should be protected by the National Park System.

In addition, a coalition of Tribes has requested that President Biden designate the [Baaj Nwaavjo l'tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument](#). This designation would protect over one million acres of land surrounding Grand Canyon National Park. These federal public lands near and adjoining the Park protect thousands of archaeological artifacts, provide a home to incredible biological diversity and numerous threatened, endangered, and rare species, and offer outdoor recreation opportunities. A national monument designation would ensure the protection of these lands from threats such as new uranium mining, damage to cultural sites, and disruption of sensitive ecological systems by unmanaged use and development.

Finally, Tribal and community leaders, and Congressional representatives, have called on President Biden to expand [Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument](#) in Northern California. This expansion would safeguard public lands that are sacred to the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation and that are critically important to protect in the face of a changing climate. The proposed expansion area – Molok Luyuk – consists of public lands on the eastern edge of the existing monument.

President Biden has the opportunity to protect all of these irreplaceable landscapes and stories for our enjoyment today and the benefit of future generations. As advocates for our national parks and public lands – including national monuments - we urge the Biden administration to continue to make use of the Antiquities Act and set aside other critical landscapes as national monuments, thus ensuring their protection, and helping to meet the goals of the America the Beautiful initiative.



Molok Luyuk; photo by Tuleyome

ANTIQUITIES ACT SUCCESSES: HOW PRESIDENTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE USED THIS ACT FOR CONSERVATION

Here are the stories of five units of the National Park System that were initially designated as national monuments under the Antiquities Act. All of these sites contain important resources that contribute to understanding our nation's collective history and heritage. The national monument designations in the past continue to benefit their local communities and enrich the understanding of our national heritage. The story of our country is stronger thanks to the preservation of these incredible sites.



Grand Canyon National Park & Acadia National Park; photos Gary E. Davis.

Great Basin National Park; photo courtesy of NPS. Carlsbad Cavern National Park & Great Sand Dunes National Park; photos Gary E. Davis.

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, ARIZONA

Humans inhabited the area in and around what is now known as Grand Canyon National Park for thousands of years. Ancestral Puebloans lived there, and Paleo-Indians hunted there. Europeans first explored the area in the 1500s, although it wasn't until the 1800s that European-Americans began to settle in the region.

In 1893, President Benjamin Harrison protected the canyon as part of Grand Canyon Forest Reserve. And in 1903, Theodore Roosevelt visited the Grand Canyon for the first time and found himself awe-struck. "It is beyond comparison," [he said](#) "beyond description; absolutely unparalleled throughout the wide world... Let this great wonder of nature remain as it now is. Do nothing to mar its grandeur, sublimity and loveliness."

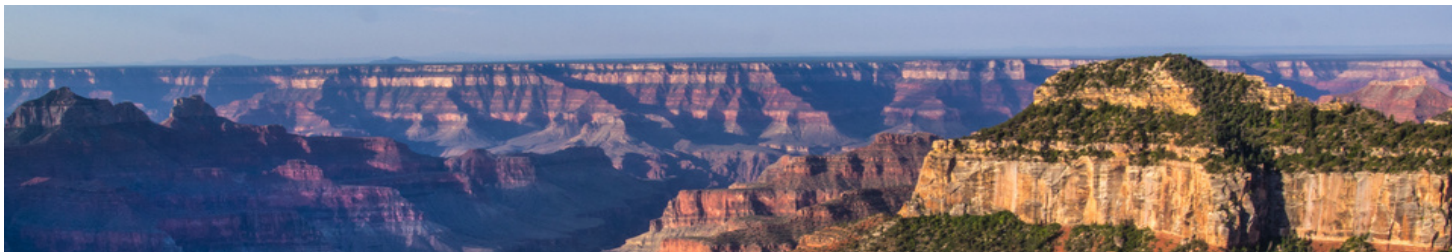
Theodore Roosevelt designated the site as Grand Canyon National Monument in 1908, just two years after he signed into legislation the Antiquities Act. Other protections for this incredible landscape followed in the years to come. President Woodrow Wilson made Grand Canyon a national park in 1919 and the United Nations declared the park a World Heritage Site in 1979.

While the national park was enlarged numerous times, there were still lands in need of protection. Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument was designated a national monument by Presidential Proclamation in January 2000, also under the authority of the Antiquities Act. It was [created](#) to protect, among other features, the area's wild and undeveloped characteristics, historical and archeological sites, ecological diversity, and recreation opportunities.

President Roosevelt's decision to declare Grand Canyon a national monument protected an irreplaceable resource that would eventually be recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site, or a space with outstanding universal value. Today, at least eleven Tribes maintain cultural connections to the Grand Canyon. In addition to protecting natural, historic, and cultural resources, Grand Canyon also provides a huge economic benefit to the region.

According to [figures](#) compiled by the National Park Service for 2021, 4.5 million park visitors spent an estimated \$710 million in local gateway regions while visiting Grand Canyon National Park. These expenditures supported a total of 9,390 jobs, \$324 million in labor income, \$539 million in value added, and \$945 million in economic output in local gateway economies surrounding Grand Canyon National Park.

While the resources within the boundaries of the national park have been protected for the enjoyment of future generations, the greater Grand Canyon region remains at risk from threats such as [uranium mining](#), damage to cultural sites, and disruption of sensitive ecological systems by unmanaged use and development. The proposed [Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument](#) would protect this landscape and also, over time, significantly protect Grand Canyon National Park.



Grand Canyon National Park; photo by Gary E. Davis

ACADIA NATIONAL PARK, MAINE

Acadia National Park has long been a place of relaxation and escape. Originally known as Mount Desert Island, this landscape was a prime location for New Englanders to summer in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

But the influx of visitors to the island was also a risk to the Acadian landscape. Increasing development of the Bar Harbor area brought about an uptick in private land ownership. In addition, the newly invented [gasoline-powered portable sawmill](#) was a threat to the scenic vistas of mountains, forests, and shorelines.



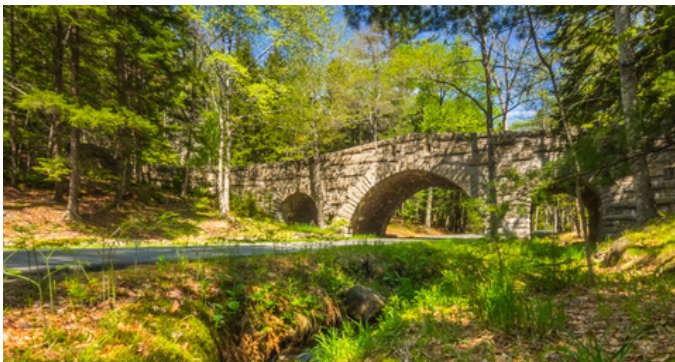
Acadia National Park; photo by Gary E. Davis

Several educated, affluent, and conservation minded men, including George Dorr and Charles Eliot, led the push to protect Mount Desert Island. The [Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations](#) was formed for the purpose of "... acquiring, owning, and holding lands and other property in Hancock County for free public use."

The Trustees slowly acquired tracts of land to be protected, including land on the western slope of Cadillac Mountain that was threatened by timber harvesting. Some owners donated land to ensure the protection of a viewshed while other land was purchased to protect lakes or ponds. However, a threat to the group's tax-exempt status – and the potential loss of the protected land – encouraged the Trustees to seek protections for the land at a higher level.

In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson created Sieur de Monts National Monument, which included thousands of acres of land donated by George Dorr. Two years later, this National Monument became Lafayette National Park (renamed Acadia National Park in 1929), the first national park east of the Mississippi River.

Without the protections afforded to this landscape, first as a national monument and later a national park, it's likely the timber would have been harvested and public access severely restricted (or curtailed entirely) due to private ownership. Instead, thanks to the use of the Antiquities Act decades earlier, the irreplaceable resources at Acadia National Park have been preserved and remain accessible to all Americans.



Acadia National Park; photo by Gary E. Davis

Acadia National Park is also an [economic benefit](#) to local communities and the state of Maine. In 2021, 4.1 million park visitors spent an estimated \$486 million in local gateway regions while visiting Acadia National Park. These expenditures supported a total of 6,840 jobs, \$236 million in labor income, \$401 million in value added, and \$702 million in economic output in local gateway economies surrounding Acadia National Park.

GREAT BASIN NATIONAL PARK, NEVADA



Great Basin National Park; photo by NPS.

Great Basin National Park is one of the most remote parks in the National Park System. Visitors who make the trip are rewarded by beautiful scenery and the darkest, clearest, and most stable dark skies in the lower 48 states. This unique combination of factors attracts astronomers and physicists from around the world. But when the area now known as Great Basin National Park was first set aside for protection, people were looking down, not up.

Humans have inhabited the Great Basin region for years. Paleoindians hunted the area, and it was settled by the Fremont and later the Pueblo peoples. Spanish explorers traveled the region in the 1700s and the Mormons settled in the area in the 1800s. In the 1880s, miner and rancher [Absalom Lehman](#) discovered an incredible cave system, and began offering cave tours in 1885.

Tourism to the caves gradually increased and to further facilitate public access (by improving not only the infrastructure of the cave itself but roads to the cave), it was recommended that Lehman Caves be declared a national monument.

In January 1922, President Warren G. Harding declared the site a national monument using the Antiquities Act. The [proclamation](#) stated that the caves were of “unusual scientific interest and importance,” and that the public interest would be served by the protection of as much of the land necessary to protect the caves. While the site was initially managed by the U.S. Forest Service, management of the site (and all national monuments at the time) was transferred to the National Park Service in 1933. Clean-up, rehabilitation, improvements, and expansion of the site followed over the decades.

President Harding’s use of the Antiquities Act was a critical step in assuring the protection of the caves for future generations. But over the years, a movement began to protect a broader – and no less remarkable – landscape of mountains and pines, to preserve the pristine air quality and dark night skies. In 1986, the national monument was abolished, and the site became known as Great Basin National Park, protecting not just what was below the ground but what was above it as well.

Despite its remote location, Great Basin has a sizeable impact on the [local economy](#). In 2021, 145 thousand park visitors spent an estimated \$9.1 million in local gateway regions while visiting Great Basin National Park. These expenditures supported a total of 122 jobs, \$2.6 million in labor income, \$4.8 million in value added, and \$9.6 million in economic output in local gateway economies surrounding Great Basin National Park.



Great Basin National Park; photo by NPS

CARLSBAD CAVERNS NATIONAL PARK, NEW MEXICO

Carlsbad Caverns National Park protects over 110 limestone caves, significant historic and cultural resources, and a designated wilderness area. It's not only a national park, but a UNESCO World Heritage Site. And it all started as a national monument nearly 100 years ago.

The present-day Carlsbad Caverns National Park was once home to [Indigenous peoples](#). The Mescalero Apache, Zuni Pueblo, and other groups were well acquainted with this piece of the Chihuahuan Desert. Pictographs and cooking sites can still be found in the park. The region later became a focus of Spanish and European exploration.



Carlsbad Caverns National Park; photo by Gary E. Davis

The famous caves were likely first explored by [Jim White](#) in 1898, when he noticed clouds of bats flying in and out of the cave. Many of the features and spaces found inside the cave still bear the names given to them by White. He began to give tours of the cave and publicize its existence to the public.

New Mexico became a state in 1912. In 1923, President Calvin Coolidge signed the legislation to designate Carlsbad Caverns a national monument. In the [proclamation](#), he calls Carlsbad Cave a place “of extraordinary proportions and of unusual beauty and variety of natural decoration” and states that, “the public interest would be promoted by reserving this natural wonder as a National Monument, together with as much land as may be needed for the protection.”

The site was redesignated as a national park in 1930. Today, it is a cave system of worldwide significance known for its size, diversity, and beauty. The National Park Service describes it as “one of the best preserved and most accessible cave complexes in the world available for scientific study and public access.”

In [2021](#), 349 thousand park visitors spent an estimated \$25.1 million in local gateway regions while visiting Carlsbad Caverns National Park. These expenditures supported a total of 312 jobs, \$8.7 million in labor income, \$14.9 million in value added, and \$27.4 million in economic output in local gateway economies surrounding Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

Although it was unknown at the time of its founding, Carlsbad Caverns sits at the convergence of the [Delaware and Permian Basins](#), one of our country's most active and profitable oil and gas fields. While the Coalition and other park advocacy groups [continue to fight against](#) energy development near the park, the initial national monument designation using the Antiquities Act was critically important in placing the landscape under protection.



Carlsbad Caverns National Park; photo by Gary E. Davis

GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE, COLORADO

Human history at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve dates back about 11,000 years. Nomadic hunters and gatherers passed through the site and several Indigenous tribes called the area home. European explorers arrived in the late 17th century and Zebulon Pike first documented the dunes in the early 1800s. African American Buffalo Soldiers patrolled the region in the late 1800s, homesteaders - Hispanic and European-American - built a life in the area, and thousands of gold miners searched the sand for treasure.

Great Sand Dunes is deeply tied to the history of the American experience. It tells the stories of exploration and expansion and highlights the diverse roots of our country. And it reminds us of the darker parts of our history; Indigenous tribes were removed from the land by the U.S. Government in the late 1800s.



Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve; photo by Gary E. Davis

The physical landscape of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is incredibly diverse as well. It includes nearly 150,000 acres of tundra, alpine lakes, grasslands, forest, wetlands, and the tallest sand dunes in North America.

Efforts to protect Great Sand Dunes started in the 1920s, as tourism to the site increased. The local [Ladies Philanthropic Educational Organization](#) (P.E.O) expressed concern about the protection of the dunes. People were removing sand for construction materials and miners were chemically removing gold from the sand. Water required to keep the dunes stable was being diverted for other purposes. Under the leadership of Elizabeth Spencer, the women formed the Sand Dunes Committee.

These local women reached out to other Ladies P.E.O. Chapters for help with their advocacy work. They lobbied local and state politicians and wrote letters to Washington, D.C. Finally, in March 1937, President Herbert Hoover used the Antiquities Act to designate Great Sand Dunes as the 36th national monument in the National Park System.

The park boundaries were expanded over the subsequent decades. In 1976, a portion of the monument was declared designated wilderness, banning motor vehicles from the dunes. The national monument became a national park and preserve in 2000 and the current Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve was solidified in 2004. It became a certified International Dark Sky Park in 2019.

Decades after the initial protections ensured through the Antiquities Act, visitors come from all over the world to stargaze, see the dunes, and recreate in this unique national park. In [2021](#), 603 thousand park visitors spent an estimated \$41.3 million in local gateway regions while visiting Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve. These expenditures supported a total of 536 jobs, \$17.0 million in labor income, \$29.1 million in value added, and \$52.4 million in economic output in local gateway economies surrounding the park. In addition, the park holds deep significance to [numerous tribes](#) that have maintained active cultural affiliation to the park and surrounding lands.

NOW IS THE TIME TO PROTECT MORE PUBLIC LAND

The Antiquities Act is a powerful tool for the protection and conservation of land. Presidents of both parties have used this authority for over a century to protect public lands at risk. [18 of 21 presidents have exercised their authority under the Antiquities Act since its passage in 1906.](#) They have created over 150 national monuments, including Grand Teton, Zion, Olympic, Statue of Liberty, and the Grand Canyon.

This Act has helped to protect landscapes that tell the story of the American experience, through their physical features or their histories. And often, it has bestowed initial protections on a site and paved the way for additional protections or modifications down the road. According to a [report](#) by the Congressional Research Service, approximately half of the current national parks were first designated as national monuments.

The Antiquities Act has played a pivotal role in our country's history, and in the history of the National Park Service; but there are still many precious landscapes and resources in need of protection. We urge President Biden to use the Antiquities Act to designate spaces like the 1908 Springfield Race Riot Site, Black Wall Street, and Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument, and other public lands across the United States, as national monuments, for the enjoyment of Americans today and for the benefit of future generations.



Grand Teton National Park; photo by Gary E. Davis



Grand Canyon National Park; photo by Gary E. Davis



The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks represents over 2,400 current, former, and retired employees and volunteers of the National Park Service, with over 40,000 collective years of stewardship of America's most precious natural and cultural resources. Recognized as the Voices of Experience, the Coalition educates, speaks, and acts for the preservation and protection of the National Park System, and mission-related programs of the National Park Service. More information can be found at <https://protectnps.org>.