



Ride with Respect
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2023 Year In Review

2023 was another eventful year for Ride with Respect (RwR). While continuing to promote responsible recreation practices and assist effective management, we stepped up our protection of access by off-highway vehicles (OHVs). In Labyrinth Rims, the recent closure of 317 miles of routes included several that RwR has spent hundreds of hours improving, and now we're challenging these closures at great expense. If you haven't already made a tax-deductible donation in 2023, there's still time to do so, and to encourage donations from others who enjoy OHV riding in Moab and elsewhere in Utah. Just send a check to Ride with Respect (395 McGill Ave, Moab, UT 84532) and indicate if you'd like the receipt to be in 2023.

We appreciate the monetary donations and volunteer time from many people who care about the trails and their surroundings. Thanks to the following for contributing over a thousand dollars this past year:

1. Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation
2. Rocky Mountain ATV/MC
3. Trails Preservation Alliance (TPA)
4. Peter Lawson
5. Balance Resources
6. Grand County Recreation Special Service District
7. KMAC Corporation
8. Moab Friends For Wheelin'
9. Anonymous
10. John Borg
11. Rob Stickler
12. Timberline Trailriders
13. Bonneville Equipment Company
14. Xtreme 4x4 Tours
15. Dave McEuen, CPA for HEB Business Solutions

Trail Work

This past year, in conjunction with state and federal land managers, RwR spent another couple-hundred hours preparing for and performing trail maintenance. For example we built a trailer to haul several-thousand pounds on 4WD roads. The maintenance itself included clearing brush from the Upper Twomile trail system, blocking braids of Sovereign Trail, and repainting the blazes at Dubinky (see photos). Trail work is a key ingredient to keep trails fun, sustainable, and legally accessible, especially as use levels increase. There's much more to do next year, and we encourage anyone who enjoys Moab trails to contact RwR, as we can surely find a few hours that you're available to pitch in.



Education

Especially in the canyon country, it's truly crucial to "tread lightly," which is as simple as staying precisely on the trail and slowing down upon encounters with people or other animals, not to mention running a relatively quiet muffler. Most of RWR's education this past year involved partnering with other entities. I was proud to help NOHVCC bring its annual conference to Utah, which was a great opportunity to showcase this state while learning from all the other states that were represented. At the Utah Outdoor Recreation Summit, I joined a panel presentation to discuss the state's required adult OHV education course. On a volunteer basis, I also attended the BLM's Utah RAC meetings and field trips, the Big Ride that convenes Utah's OHV clubs, the Utah Off-Roaders Alliance meetings along with SLOREX, and American Motorcyclist Association board meetings along with the AIMExpo and AMA Motorcycle Hall Of Fame Induction Ceremony. Finally I continued assisting the Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation to refine its incredible grant programs, all of which are eligible for projects on motorized trails, as described in [this grant workshop](#).

Motorized Trails Committee

Since 2019, I have chaired Grand County's Motorized Trails Committee (MTC), which is comprised of dedicated OHV enthusiasts along with land managers and county staff. In 2023, the enthusiasts volunteered another few-hundred hours of trail work, and they offered valuable guidance about many aspects of management. They helped the county secure a state OHV grant that will fund \$256,531 for a Motorized Trail Ambassador program, while the county will contribute \$90,996, with both entities providing expertise in education. The county has hired ambassadors with a strong background in OHVs, and it has been responsive to the MTC's feedback on the development of educational materials thus far. It's encouraging to see the state's investment, the county staff's commitment to working with OHV enthusiasts, and especially the enthusiasts themselves for volunteering on the trails and in meetings every month.

Moab Camping Management Plans (CMPs)

In 2022 the BLM drafted CMPs in three areas to require that dispersed camping be done in designated sites. As RWR explained in [our 2022 YIR](#), we partnered with the TPA, COHVCO, and CORE to ensure thorough planning so that valuable campsites are not short-changed. In 2023 the BLM released an updated draft CMP for the Labyrinth Rims / Gemini Bridges Area that showed its inventory of sites just as we requested, so [RwR and its partners submitted additional comments](#) urging the agency to go another few steps in improving the process.

In July the BLM released a final plan that acknowledged additional campsites inventoried primarily by BRC. It also affirmed that, to access campsites, routes could be added to the travel management plan (TMP) in future. Of course the existing access routes shouldn't have been closed by the 2023 TMP in the first place because the value of the campsites wasn't analyzed by the 2023 TMP nor the 2023 CMP, so route closure was premature. Nevertheless, in the context of the CMP, acknowledging the potential to add access routes is helpful.

Most importantly, the CMP committed to do subsequent Environmental Assessments before actually limiting camping to designated sites so the public can review and comment on the BLM's proposal for each site. The BLM made this commitment for Labyrinth Rims / Gemini Bridges, and not for Utah Rims or Two Rivers, but we hope the BLM sees the value in providing for site-specific public review and comment for all three areas. Groups seeking to

vastly expand the designation of wilderness (which prohibits mechanized use including chainsaws and hand carts) actually discouraged additional public participation, so we appreciate the BLM for taking many of our suggestions, and look forward to the next steps in managing dispersed camping.

Labyrinth Rims / Gemini Bridges TMP

This past year, RWR has continued to partner with the TPA, COHVCO, and CORE in the Labyrinth Rims / Gemini Bridges TMP, currently appealing the BLM's decision to close 317 miles of route, many of which have great recreational value and no significant impact upon natural or cultural resources. As RWR explained in [our 2022 YIR](#), we have contributed several-thousand hours implementing and refining the 2008 TMP that closed half of the existing routes, including construction of a couple dozen reroutes away from sensitive resources. In a few cases, this work and our 2022 comments convinced the BLM not to close routes that were targeted by Alternative C (which appeared to be the agency's preferred alternative), such as Brian's Trail and the Enduro Loop below Big Drop.

However overall the BLM's 2023 TMP decision is closest to Alternative B, the one that Grand County had convinced the BLM to make far more restrictive than what the agency had originally planned. To name a few, the 2023 TMP closes the Dead Cow motorcycle loop, parts of several Easter Jeep Safari routes including all of Hey Joe, virtually all motorized routes in Labyrinth Canyon and its tributaries other than graded roads, and most Labyrinth Canyon overlooks despite being hundreds of feet above the river. Some of the closures weren't proposed or analyzed by any of the alternatives, which is one just one aspect of the 2023 TMP that contradicts existing policy.

If you're wondering why the BLM would close so many routes on such tenuous grounds, it may be useful to know that the Moab Field Office drafted a more reasonable decision a half-year earlier. It got held up at higher levels, and the obvious conclusion is that administrative appointees dictated many more closures, leaving the Moab Field Office scrambling to rationalize this decision. Nationwide the BLM and USFS were designed to be decentralized so they could better understand the local land, uses, and communities. They were also designed to professionalize land management to effectively implement FLPMA and NFMA as congress directed. Yet, in RWR's twenty-two years of experience, the agencies have become increasingly politicized by the executive branch, leaving local knowledge and managerial expertise in its wake. This trend has greatly accelerated under the current administration, which ultimately does no service for the integrity of the agencies or the pursuit of their missions, and which inadvertently bolsters the case for transferring the management from federal to state agencies.

Presumably the solution involves all three branches of government but, in Labyrinth Rims, the immediate work is to challenge the 2023 TMP. Along with RWR and its partners, the 2023 TMP has been challenged by the State of Utah, BRC et al., and ORBA et al. The approaches differ, such as exhausting an administrative appeal or going to federal court, which provides diversity in the common effort. Plus each group brings different skills, such as RWR's twenty-two-year history of assisting managers in Labyrinth Rims, as exhibited in [our petition for a stay of the closures](#) while the IBLA reviews our appeal.

As is typical of the IBLA, our petition for a stay was denied, denying that RWR and its partners would be irreversibly harmed by closing the routes while the appeal is reviewed. Further the BLM argued that many other routes remain open, yet many of those routes are graded roads that don't provide a trail-like experience, or they no longer

connect for looping opportunities, or they provide no substitute for the quality of experience that could be enjoyed on primitive routes in unique settings like Labyrinth Canyon and its tributaries.

Our petition merely previews our challenge of the 2023 TMP, itself, yet it already demonstrates the solid merit of our case. If you'd like more details about the 2023 TMP and its broader context, check out [this audio update from CORE](#).

To maintain public access, all groups challenging the 2023 TMP are consistent, yet each one is providing unique value that warrants your support. If you care about motorized trails between Moab and Green River, support national groups like BRC, statewide groups like TPA, and local groups like RWR. RWR depends on the support of Moab trail enthusiasts who visit from all over the world, and we need it now more than ever.

Ashley National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP)

This past year, the Ashley National Forest released its Proposed LMP that establishes the guardrails for travel management planning over the coming decades. As RWR explained in [our 2022 YIR](#), the Draft LMP went too far in effectively making half the forest off-limits for recreation planners to even consider adding a motorized route. Adding routes is already unlikely to survive the NEPA process of an Environmental Assessment, so planners need a wider area to start with, and there's no compelling reason for the agency to eliminate half the acreage at the outset.

This year, when the Proposed LMP didn't significantly improve the previous draft, [RWR / TPA / COHVCO objected](#) and attended the agency's "resolution" meeting. Unfortunately the agency dismissed our objection since the Proposed LMP actually increases the acreage to be zoned as motorized (specifically a motorized class of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)). First of all, an increase of 1% is insignificant. Second, the current LMP and its resulting TMP fail to meet the current needs of motorized recreationists ranging from e-bike riders to campers, so the status quo is inadequate. Third, nothing in the current LMP from 1986 makes the non-motorized zones exclusively non-motorized, but the Proposed LMP does so by establishing a desired condition that non-motorized zones be "free of motorized recreation travel." Fourth, not only do the non-motorized zones cover the more desirable half of the forest, but they create long walls that prevent connectivity. For example, multiple non-motorized zones stretch from the High Uintas Wilderness to the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, preventing any east-west travel. They also stretch for twenty miles along the Daggett and Uintah county line, preventing north-south travel for a loop west of US-191. Fifth, they preemptively prohibit motorized trails that were carefully proposed by the trails master plans of Daggett, Uintah, and Duchesne counties. The Proposed LMP even expands non-motorized zones to cover old roads that all three of the county trails master plans proposed to reopen. We hope the agency will come to its senses and approve an LMP that allows the county trails master plans and other proposals in the coming decades to get a fair shake.

Manti-La Sal National Forest LMP

This past year, the Manti-La Sal National Forest released its Draft LMP that, like the Ashley LMP, establishes the guardrails for travel management planning over the coming decades. As RWR explained in [our 2021 YIR](#), the

preliminary Draft LMP was far too restrictive and, in the 2023 Draft LMP, none of the action alternatives are significantly better. In fact, they're all worse than the Proposed LMP for the Ashley, as the Draft LMP for the Manti-La Sal makes non-motorized ROS zoning more severe and recommends many areas to be designated as wilderness to boot. All of the action alternatives add ROS standards and guidelines that make non-motorized zones entirely non-motorized, which might be fine if they didn't also zone as non-motorized virtually everything above 9,000' in the La Sal Mountains southeast of Moab other than narrow corridors for the currently-designated roads. All action alternatives of the Draft LMP zone as non-motorized even larger swaths including lower elevations elsewhere, such as the northern Manti north of Fairview, and the northern San Pitch southeast of Nephi. The Draft LMP proposes a less dramatic expansion of non-motorized zones in the southern Manti and Abajo Mountains, but most of the Abajo Mountains are currently designated as part of the 1.36 million-acre Bears Ears National Monument, which seems likely to be extremely restrictive if the draft plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is any indication. Such restrictions would displace many forest uses to the remainder of the Abajos, making it far more difficult to sustainably provide for an ample quantity, quality, and variety of trails.

On top of the ROS zoning for summer recreation, the new ROS zoning for winter recreation would prohibit over-snow vehicles (OSVs) from traveling across huge parts of the high country in all three action alternatives. Setting aside individual basins such as Gold Basin and individual cross-country ski trail systems such as the one east of Geyser Pass is perfectly appropriate, but there's simply no present or future need to close anywhere near half the terrain above 9,000' (which OSV travel depends upon for consistent snowpack), especially when winter non-motorized zones prevent connectivity of winter motorized zones as outlined in [local news coverage](#).

Alternative D and even Alternative B (that appears to be the agency's preferred alternative) propose many Recommended Wilderness Areas (RWAs), which these alternatives propose to manage much like designated wilderness unless and until Congress designates them as wilderness or releases them. RWAs generally prohibit OSV recreation, mechanized recreation like mountain biking, and even more developed forms of non-mechanized recreation. RWAs generally make it more difficult to effectively manage for water resources, forest health, and fuels to prevent wildfire of catastrophic intensity.

RwR and the TPA submitted [extensive comments to the USFS](#), with the guidance of Balance Resources as well as great input from Scott Jones of Land Access Consulting. Fortunately all three counties that have the most area in Manti-La Sal National Forest (Sanpete, Emery, and San Juan) commented in support of all forms of recreation by suggesting that new restrictions to motorized access be scaled back.

The Grand County Commission drafted a letter that implied support of the most restrictive ROS zones and expansive RWAs, so many residents expressed their concerns at both rounds of [Citizens To Be Heard, including me \(Clif\)](#) for five minutes. Then the [commissioners discussed the LMP](#) for half an hour.

The following week, the majority of the commission voted in favor of a letter that still pushed for non-motorized ROS zones to cover at least half the forest in summer, and for analysis of the wilderness expansion groups' "conservation alternative," which would in fact be more of a re-wilding alternative. Nevertheless Grand County's final letter was slightly more accommodating of managerial flexibility for summer motorized recreation, significantly more accommodating of winter motorized recreation, and more neutral about RWAs. While the county had every reason to support ROS zones more similar to the current LMP so the USFS can effectively manage all forms of recreation, we appreciate the commissioners' increasing contemplation, resulting in a letter that's

more reasonable than the one from 2021. Hopefully the USFS will respond to the majority of counties and recreation groups by proposing an LMP that's based on Alternative A and Alternative C to best achieve the agency's mission of multiple use and sustained yield rather than acting like it's a national park.

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM)

In 1996 nearly two-million acres of southwest Utah was proclaimed as GSENM by the president at the objection of the entire congressional delegation from Utah. The proclamation was pushed by wilderness expansion groups, particularly those funded by a Swiss billionaire, yet it promised to be managed much differently than a national park. This promise was never kept, although the 2017 scaling back of the monument boundaries and new management plans both inside and outside of the monument came closer to providing the proactive management that would be needed to achieve a more inclusive conservation.

These legitimate improvements to management plans were discarded when the scaling back of boundaries was reversed in 2021. This past year, the BLM released a Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) that would restrict diverse recreation opportunities far more than any RMP since the monument's proclamation in 1996. [RwR and its partners submitted our concerns](#) that all action alternatives of the Draft RMP would make motorized access of GSENM as sparse as it is in Canyonlands National Park. A Nixon executive order directs federal land managers to designate areas as open to cross-country travel, limited to existing / designated routes, or closed to OHVs. The "limited" OHV area designation typically limits motorized travel to less than 1% of the area, so the "closed" designation is only appropriate where agencies are certain that motorized travel (including all types of e-bikes) should occur in 0% of the area for decades to come. For this reason, currently just a few-thousand acres of GSENM have a "closed" OHV area designation.

However now all the action alternatives would apply this designation to the majority of the monument, straitjacketing some routes by running "closed" area boundaries to the route's edge while outright closing other routes despite decades of work by the counties and local OHV clubs. None of these ramifications are acknowledged, let alone analyzed, by the Draft RMP. Even in most areas where no route is currently designated open, a "closed" area designation is uncalled for because motorized travel shouldn't be prohibited categorically, however rare additions to the TMP may be.

Clearly the widespread "closed" area designations are laying the foundation to manage most of the monument as wilderness. The wilderness expansion groups that pushed for monument proclamation didn't want to deal with congress for legitimate designation of wilderness, and the current administration seems more willing than any of its predecessors to bypass congress in creating de facto wilderness, which naturally erodes the legitimacy of proclaiming the monument in the first place. Wilderness expansion groups spend millions of dollars on PR campaigns that tout wilderness designation as the solution to virtually all problems that arise but, in the long run, this type of management across massive portions of public lands is not the most effective way to protect the "objects" that monument proclamations espoused.

Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument (BNIKAFGCNM)

While the Draft RMP for GSENM proposes to severely limit access to recreation, another nearly one-million acres immediately south of there is proclaimed to be another national monument, and its supporters deny that this proclamation will limit access to recreation. In other words, the new monument on the Arizona side of the state line is billed as no threat to recreation access while the old monument of the Utah side of the state line is imminently threatening some current and all future motorized access across nearly one-million acres of GSENM.

The proverbial traveling salesman moves to another town so the truth won't catch up to him, but the BNIKAFGCNM is just a couple miles away from GSENM, so the rhetoric of monuments is running into the reality of them. BNIKAFGCNM surrounds Grand Canyon National Park as a buffer, but so did previous monuments, resulting in buffers of buffers. BNIKAFGCNM also extends northeast to Vermillion Cliffs NM, which was proclaimed as a buffer of GSENM, so the buffer of one "protected" area is bumping into the buffer of another "protected" area, and the Arizona Strip is stripped of nearly any land to be managed by the apparently old-fashioned form of conservation in which land can be enjoyed by a wide variety of recreation, and in which other resources can actually be used to whatever degree is sustainable.

In the latest round of monument proclamations, the northern Kaibab Plateau was spared because new mining has already been banned there, while areas east and west of there are now proclaimed as BNIKAFGCNM primarily to prevent uranium mining. Perhaps mining operations should be further reformed, but the wilderness expansion groups' goal of prohibiting mining across millions of acres in northern Arizona (and southern Utah alike) is ironic because power sources like small-scale nuclear plants are apparently the most viable alternatives to fossil fuels. The president said that proclaiming BNIKAFGCNM will help combat climate change, yet it appears to be doing the opposite.

Another Orwellian selling point of BNIKAFGCNM is that it will advance indigenous access and tribal sovereignty by implying co-management, although such an offer actually requires congress, and expanding reservation boundaries would be more straightforward. In proclaiming BNIKAFGCNM, the president correctly pointed out that tribes had been kicked out of Grand Canyon National Park, but then he claimed that the new proclamation will enable them to come back. Actually the proclamation will reduce access and, even if tribal members are granted more access than others, it'll still be less than the current level of access. Further, even if the tribes achieved co-management, the decision space for management is greatly shrunk by the proclamation. Monuments aren't just limiting to the public, they're limiting to managers. Being co-managers of an area that's tied up like wilderness actually provides less sovereignty than being one of several partners for an area that allows more managerial flexibility. In this way, BNIKAFGCNM and Bears Ears National Monument just make more empty promises to indigenous communities. Alternatively, enabling land management to improve its efficiency and productivity could truly help all Americans thrive.

I had the privilege of working on the North Rim of Grand Canyon for a couple seasons, and enjoyed recreating in areas now proclaimed as BNIKAFGCNM, riding old roads like the one from the ranch at Cane Canyon up to Telephone Hill (i.e. climbing from House Rock Valley up the monocline onto the Kaibab Plateau). So long as it's a national monument, the dream of future generations riding electric motorcycles up primitive routes like that one seems like nothing more than a mirage.

Conclusion

The remaining "unprotected" areas are actually "protected" in many ways but, even if making them all monuments were justified, it's undeniable that acting by presidential proclamation fuels partisanship and unilateral land management, as nothing is more unilateral than executive fiat. To maintain perspective, it's important to be guided by ideals like democracy and truth, recognizing that "we" have not always been entirely right and "they" have not always been entirely wrong. While advocating for recreation access that's vital to our well-being, in turn we must advocate respect for the natural and cultural resources that are equally vital, thereby promoting stewardship. As challenges mount, we're encouraged by the potential support that comes with the rising popularity of outdoor recreation. Many thanks to the many folks who support RWR, and may everyone have a happy ride into the new year.

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