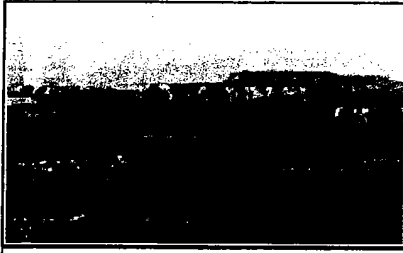


Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument

Places

Introduction



View to the northwest across the Sanup and Shivwits Plateaus toward the Virgin Mountains. (Smog by Las Vegas). Photo by Kelly Burke.

On January 11, 2000, in Toroweap Valley on the north rim of Grand Canyon, President Clinton signed proclamations creating three new national monuments and expanding a fourth. The most extensive of these is Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument, a million acres of land on the Arizona Strip, including much of the Shivwits Plateau and Grand Wash at the western end of Grand Canyon. From an environmental history perspective the region records climate change, human use, and paleoecological transformations over the past 50,000 years. It is also a locus for ecological restoration of forests, springs and wildlife such as desert bighorn, pronghorn and California condor. The new monument essentially doubles the area of Grand Canyon National Park, protecting a vast area of northern Arizona from development, urban sprawl, and extractive land uses [[map](#)].

Like the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, created in September of 1996, Grand Canyon-Parashant was created under the Antiquities Act which allows presidential proclamation of national monuments but does not require public discussion, drafting of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or approval by state lawmakers.

This designation of Grand Canyon-Parashant is somewhat unusual in that much of the northeastern and northern boundary follows the drainage divide of the Virgin River, an ecological rather than a political boundary. In addition, it is the first protected area to be jointly managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service (NPS).

"This is not about locking lands up. It is about freeing them up from the pressures of development and the threat of sprawl for all Americans, for all time."

--President William Clinton, January, 2000

"The empty spaces are filling up in the West. We have to imagine what the western landscape is going to look like in 50 years and try to anticipate, rather than wait for conflicts to happen."

--Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, December, 1999

The recent use of this act to set aside large areas has raised the ire of local lawmakers and renewed the longstanding conflict over local versus federal control on western lands. Arizona governor Jane Hull and the seven Republicans in the state's

eight-member congressional delegation strongly criticized the monument's creation as a "unilateral federal action" that did not "allow the public a voice in the process." However, a statewide poll found that a bipartisan 76% of Arizona voters supported the move. Critics have called the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument a land grab despite the fact that 97% of the monument lands were already controlled by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.

--*Researched and written by Shannon Kelly*

The following is a description of Grand-Canyon Parashant region prepared by the Grand Canyon Wildlands Council, courtesy of authors Kelly Burke and Dr. Lawrence Stevens.

The Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument is bounded on the west by the Arizona/Nevada border, on the south by Grand Canyon National Park, and on the north and northeast by the drainage divide of the Virgin River [[map](#)]. The one million acre proposal covers over half of the Shivwits Plateau (the southwestern and western portions), and the entire Grand Wash drainage in Arizona. To the east it includes

the Mt. Trumbull/Mt. Logan area and Toroweap Valley. These lands are largely federally managed by Lake Mead National Recreation Area (National Park Service) to the south and the Bureau of Land Management to the north. The Arizona Game and Fish Department manages wildlife, and a few private in-holdings exist, particularly at the town of Mount Trumbull.

The Shivwits Plateau is a vast tableland lying north of western Grand Canyon. Its western edge forms a dramatic escarpment, and one of the nation's most remarkable ecotones (ecological transition zones). Most of the Shivwits Plateau lies at elevations of 6,000' to 7,000', with a capping veneer of basalt flows and volcanic peaks that rise above 8,000'. The Grand Wash Cliffs and the middle elevation Sanup Plateau down to Grand Wash form a dramatic ecotonal step between the eastern Mohave Desert and the Colorado Plateau. These lands encompass long escarpments and desert spring ecosystems, as well as desert tortoise, California condor, desert bighorn sheep, and pronghorn habitat.

Nine important characteristics of the monument area are:

- 1) its position encompassing the continentally significant boundary between the Basin and Range and the Colorado Plateau Geologic Provinces
- 2) its little explored but significant archeological and other cultural resources
- 3) its value as a refuge for species of concern
- 4) its paleoecological significance as a landscape showing vegetation responses to global climate change over 50,000 years, resulting in a world-class stepped ecotone along the Grand Wash Cliffs
- 5) its scientific and management value in wildlife population and landscape restoration
- 6) its colorful human history since the first Spanish expeditions
- 7) its biological hotspots with rare species
- 8) its large north-south escarpments, which may serve as a migratory corridor for raptors and other migrating species
- 9) its vast, rarely-visited and little-developed character with tremendous scenic value.

A Remarkable Geologic Boundary: This area bridges one of the most profound geological boundaries in the United States, separating the Basin and Range Geologic Province from the Colorado Plateau to the east. Recent crustal extension of the Basin and Range has stretched the western margin of the 144,000 mi² Colorado Plateau, creating a series of long parallel, curvilinear faults and associated cliffs that slice north to south through the Shivwits Plateau region. Along its western edge, the Grand Wash fault juxtaposes the colorful, lava-capped Precambrian and Paleozoic strata of the Grand Canyon against highly faulted terrain, recent lake beds, and desert volcanic peaks in the downdropped Grand Wash trough. This region holds the key to the geological mysteries of the transition between these two great geologic provinces and the development of Grand Canyon.

Archeology: Archeologists have discovered prehistoric quarries, campsites and chipping areas dating to the Archaic period (ca. 2500 to 300 BC), as well as numerous crescent-shaped pueblos with 12-20 rooms, field houses, check dams, other agricultural features, *Agave* roasting pits of the Basketmaker II to Pueblo III periods (ca. AD500-1150), and Southern Paiute occupation (ca. AD1250-1880). In addition, pictograph sites, caves (including some with feathered arrow shafts, sandals, and woven baskets) and rockshelters with elaborate rock art have been discovered. Extensive evidence of Puebloan agricultural activities and permanent habitations exist. Conservation and further research on these sites and remains will elucidate the complex relationships between early humans in the Shivwits Plateau and Grand Canyon regions. These sites and remains are considered significant cultural properties by both archeologists and contemporary American Indians.

A Refuge for Species of Concern: The region supports at least 232 plant species, at least one fish species, numerous but poorly documented amphibian and reptile species, 115 bird species, and 49 mammal species.

A total of 59 (>5%) species that may occur in the region are recognized as rare and sensitive species of concern to the State of Arizona, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other agencies. The extent of migratory and upland species using the Shivwits Plateau and its western periphery as winter range is presently unknown, but may be substantial. The northwestern portion of the Shivwits is managed as desert tortoise habitat. Game populations include wild turkey, desert mule deer, desert bighorn sheep, and pronghorn.

Climate Change and Ecotone Ecology in a Natural Laboratory: A remarkable paleoecological transformation of the Grand Wash/Shivwits Plateau ecotone has occurred over the past 50,000 years. The western margin of the Shivwits Plateau marks the boundary between the Sonoran/ Mojave/Great Basin desert ecological provinces to the west and the Intermountain province to the northeast. Ancient packrat middens and cave deposits demonstrate that the pinyon-juniper treeline rose 3,000 feet upslope in just 4,000 years during the Pleistocene-Holocene transition, as warmer, drier climate prevailed. Climate change and early humans resulted in the extinction of the Pleistocene megafauna – elephants, camels, mountain goats, large predators, and giant birds that dominated the plateaus and lowlands prior to natural desertification. This dramatic story of environmental change is reflected today in the mixing of plant species from several ecosystems and biomes. The proposed monument provides a unique natural laboratory in which to study and understand prehistoric and future ecological changes.

Population and Landscape Restoration Ecology: The region of the monument proposal has become a proving ground for restoration ecology. a) The Mt. Trumbull Resource Conservation Area is being used by W.W. Covington from Northern Arizona University to scientifically test forest restoration practices after a century of fire suppression and logging. b) Endangered California condors have been released into the wild on the Hurricane Cliffs. c) A pronghorn population restoration program has been so successful that the Arizona Game Fish Department has issued hunting permits there in recent years d) Desert bighorn sheep population is being successfully restored. e) The National Park Service and the BLM have removed non-native tamarisk, an invasive woody tree, from desert springs along Grand Wash. f) Several desert tortoise habitat conservation areas have been established and are being monitored by the BLM.

Exploration and Settlement History: The history of the Shivwits region is as colorful as its landscape. The Escalante-Dominguez Expedition (1776) followed the Hurricane Cliffs and made first contact with the Uinkaret Paiute Indians. Jedediah Smith (1826, 1827), Antonio Armijo (1829) and William Wolfskill (1830) helped establish the Old Spanish Trail, which was a primary route for settlement of California and lies just north of the proposed monument. Jacob Hamblin, the "Buckskin Apostle", explored routes across the region, beginning in 1858. After exploring the Grand Canyon, John Wesley Powell provided information on the region's Indians to the federal government in 1872-1874. Cattle barons, such as B.F. Saunders and Preston Nutter, took over the land in the 1880s. The stately ponderosa pine forests of Mt. Trumbull provided lumber for the Mormon Temple in St. George, Utah. The only lasting settlement in the region was the town of Mt. Trumbull, which once numbered nearly 300 residents, and lasted for five decades before the residents finally abandoned the harsh, waterless land.

Biological Hotspots: Desert springs and other unique habitats are regionally important biological hot spots that protect rare species. The BLM manages at least 43 springs on the southern half of the Shivwits Plateau. More than half of these sites has been greatly altered by human activities, and in many cases, flow has been diverted. Aquatic and land snails, pillbugs, amphipods and various amphibians commonly exist as isolated populations in such habitats. For example, Tassi, Grapevine and Whiskey springs on Grand Wash support populations of numerous summer resident Neotropical song bird species, as well as Gila woodpecker, Gambel quail and endemic Grand Wash springsnail.

An Important Migratory Corridor?: Long, north-south aligned escarpments define the Shivwits Plateau, with the Grand Wash Cliffs to the west and the Hurricane Cliffs to the east. Long escarpments such as

these commonly provide a pathway for migratory hawks and other species. Raptors that migrate through southern Nevada use upwardly rising air currents that develop along cliff lines. The Shivwits region also may contain corridors for large mammals, such as desert mule deer, desert bighorn sheep, and mountain lion.

A Vast, Scenic Landscape: The Shivwits Plateau region is a truly vast and largely undeveloped landscape. It is one of the least visited parts of the United States. The Hurricane Cliffs are one of the longest individual escarpments in North America, extending far north and south of the Shivwits region. Off the dramatic Grand Wash Cliffs to the west, the Sanup Plateau and Mohave Desert create a world-class stepped ecotone. The Shivwits Plateau, its escarpment margins, and the surrounding lands, have exceptional regional and global scenic value, and are among the most remote lands remaining in the coterminous United States.

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See also, [The Arizona Strip](#), and its [References](#).