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Subject: article - After Trump shrinks Bears Ears, it will still be larger than Zion and Bryce combined, says Interior secretary
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This was from the interview Saturday

Salt Lake City Tribune

After Trump shrinks Bears Ears, it will still be larger than Zion and Bryce combined, says Interior secretary

Washington • Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke says he believes President Donald Trump will trim Utah's Bears Ears National Monument as he recommended but it will still be larger than Zion and Bryce national parks combined.

That could mean a dramatic reduction from the current 1.35 million acres to somewhere north of 180,000 acres. Zion covers 147,000 acres and Bryce nearly 36,000 acres. State leaders had asked Trump to cut Bears Ears down to 120,000 acres.

"Monuments should protect rather than prevent," Zinke told The Salt Lake Tribune, explaining his approach in reviewing 27 monuments created since 1996 as ordered by Trump. Zinke recommended trimming six monuments but has not publicly said by how much their sizes would be reduced.

He did not recommend rescinding any monuments.

Trump is expected to visit Utah in early December to make the formal announcement to reduce the boundaries of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante monuments, a move that is expected to bring immediate lawsuits by environmental groups.

Zinke said the monument designations in some cases were an overreach by past presidents and an abuse of the Antiquities Act to preserve areas not because of actual cultural, historic or scientific needs but because there might be such sites not yet identified in the area. In explaining, Zinke said sarcastically: "If there's a potential for an arrowhead over here, you should protect from Manhattan, west."

The Interior secretary noted that he believes Trump will follow his recommendations, which in the case of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase, would return hundreds of thousands of acres back to land managed by the Bureau of Land Management or the Forest Service and open access for oil and gas exploration and other uses that are blocked by the monument status.

"The president understands that I have become the resident expert in this area and I have dedicated an enormous amount of time and staff to make sure the local state voice was heard in the confines of following the law and making sure we protect the objects," Zinke said.

Part of the move will include asking Congress to step in and ensure tribal nations — which had pushed for Bears Ears protections — have a say in how the area is managed.

In naming Bears Ears a monument last December, then-President Barack Obama created an advisory board of tribal leaders to offer their thoughts on managing the wide swath of land in southeastern Utah, but Zinke said it has no decision-making role and “very little power.”

The environmental community, which had sought for decades to protect the Bears Ears area, countered Zinke, noting that even if the monument is larger than 180,000 acres it’s still a far cry from the designation needed to preserve the landscape and its artifacts and ruins.

“Zinke is playing a shell game by claiming what’s left of Bears Ears will be bigger than Bryce and Zion combined,” said Scott Groene, executive director of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. “The reality is that they are removing protections at Bears Ears for an area larger than all five of Utah’s national parks combined, and asking Americans to be happy with it. And then they’re doing it again at Grand Staircase.”

Josh Ewing, executive director of the Friends of Cedar Mesa, which pushed for Bears Ears to become a monument, said he doesn’t want to speculate on what Trump will do with the designation but that he’s still hopeful the administration will consult with experts or read the “extensive” materials the group has provided on why the protections are needed.

“With that said, it’s highly likely that this decision will be a purely political one, using spin like the ‘larger than Zion and Bryce combined’ to distract folks from seeing the huge cultural landscape they’re attempting to erase protections for,” Ewing said, noting that Zion and Bryce are different than Bears Ears because of their distinct geological wonders compared to the monument which holds a “staggering number of archaeological sites.”

“So even if they maintained protection for say 200,000 acres, they’d be erasing protections for more archaeological sites than contained in any other U.S. national park or monument,” Ewing said.

Meanwhile, more than 660 people, many in the areas around Bears Ears, wrote an open letter welcoming Trump’s visit and the reduction in the size of the monument.

“Bears Ears National Monument has proven to be an unneeded layer of federal bureaucracy of which our great Nation simply never needed,” the residents wrote. “The Antiquities Act demonstrates the abuse of federal power as well as being obsolete in its current form.”

For his part, Zinke says he tried to be fair to all voices in his review and gave deference to past presidents in their decisions. But the Interior secretary said the review was necessary to bring the monuments in line with the Antiquities Act’s goals.

He said he believes Trump’s decision to change the boundaries as expected will be welcomed by residents who felt shut out of Obama’s process to name the monument.