OUR NATIONAL MONUMENTS
As a childhood immigrant to the United States, my family developed a deep appreciation of nature through exploring the towering forests and dazzling waters of our new home in the Pacific Northwest. In the six-plus decades since, I have witnessed population growth and development alter these landscapes, making it clear that without sensible protections, everything is vulnerable. In serving as US Secretary of the Interior under President Barack Obama, I came to further understand the irrereplaceable value and uniqueness of America’s public lands and waters and the importance of listening to the collective knowledge of the original stewards of these natural gifts—indigenous communities whose ancestors lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years. With each passing year, modern science blends with traditional knowledge to evolve our understanding of what is needed to shape a sustainable future for all life on land and sea.

We now know that the unique biodiversity, habitat, and culture of the United States cannot be sustained through a patchwork of protected areas that lack the interconnectivity needed to sustain healthy plant and animal life, especially at this time of climate change. US presidents and members of Congress, dating back to President Abraham Lincoln, have heard from caring citizens across the nation about the importance of protecting natural, cultural, and historic places that have irreplaceable treasures under threat from a multitude of human activities. Our understanding of these threats has evolved by witnessing the long-term impacts of unnatural disturbance, from unsustainable extraction of resources to roads, development, and destructive recreational uses in areas we now recognize as important to preserve.

Each of the twenty-seven examples in this book is introduced by people on the ground, in the local communities, who have advocated tirelessly for the protection of these landscapes they know so well. Through his stunning photography of national monuments, coupled with the words of these contemporary advocates, QT Luong captivates us all, making a compelling case for protecting a rich diversity of public lands and waters by recent presidents. Subsequent studies reflect the wisdom of this approach, such as the discovery of over a dozen new dinosaur species in Grand Staircase- Escalante National Monument in an area that was slated for mining. In expanded marine national monuments in the Pacific, apex predators are returning, restoring healthy ocean ecosystems previously at risk from un sustainable commercial fishing. The creation of Bears Ears National Monument was shaped by five American Indian tribes that urged protection of lands deeply important to sustaining their diverse cultures, deepening our understanding of the importance of habitat, native species, and the protection of cultural sites on lands discovered by looting, unsustainable recreational use, and development. Each national monument in this book illustrates the importance of the Antiquities Act of 1906, providing presidents with the power to immediately protect our nation’s treasures that are under threat. Using this same Act to undermine protections makes no sense, despite efforts to the contrary initiated in mid-2017.

Humanity is awakening to the importance of intact lands, waters, and ecosystems to our health and well-being, and the stresses we have placed on them through our actions. Before settlement by newcomers, American public lands were shared common resources of indigenous communities who understood the importance of taking only what was needed. With the protections chronicled in this book, and others being studied and advocated for by a wide array of citizens, I am hopeful our grandchildren and the generations to follow will be thankful that these lands and waters were protected, and their curiosity nurtured by a deeper understanding of nature’s capacity to provide all living beings with a sustainable future.

Utah, May 2021
INTRODUCTION

QT Luong

Our National Monuments

National Park, National Monument, Wilderness Study Area, Wild and Scenic—America’s public lands and waters have a variety of designations that don’t necessarily mean much to many, but these are some of the most beloved destinations for people here in the States and around the world. They serve as places of discovery, adventure, and worship. These landscapes are vital for understanding how people have lived and interacted with the land for millennia. They serve as refuge for people, plants, and animals. Preserving millions of years of the earth’s history, they safeguard scientific discoveries both past and future. Since 1906, America’s boldest efforts in conservation have been through the presidential declaration of national monuments.

In the early days of the twentieth century, as the western frontier was closing, preservation of archaeological sites in the Southwest gained national attention. While Congress was debating, looting of indigenous artifacts escalated. Recognizing the legislative process could be too slow to prevent permanent damage, Edgar Hewett and John Lacey created the Antiquities Act to enable a quicker executive response. Consistent with the Progressive Era’s vision of common long-term ideals served by a competent and forceful government, the Antiquities Act used broad language in a modest-looking bill to entrust vast powers to the president, who can swiftly give federal protections to an area by proclaiming it a national monument:

The President of the United States is hereby 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 part of thereof parcels of lands, 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.

What distinguishes a national monument from a national park? National Park Portfolio (1917), the National Park Service’s first publication, acknowledges that “the name monument is clumsy and misleading.” Indeed, small archaeological and historical sites alluded to by the term antiquities constitute the minority of today’s approximately 130 national monuments. Many are large and diverse landscapes. The difference resides not in the lands themselves but rather in the way they are protected.

Congress designates national parks (and national monuments) through legislation that presidents have to sign. Presidents cannot designate a national park on their own, but thanks to the Antiquities Act, they can do so for a national monument. National parks, established for “the benefit and the enjoyment of the people” and for preservation receive yearly funding from Congress to maintain and develop infrastructure. National monuments are for conservation. Their proclamation generally lacks funding, resulting in a scarcity of facilities, information, and publicity needed to put them on the map for the general public.

In 1906, less than a month after the passage of the Antiquities Act, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed Devil’s Tower as the first national monument in Wyoming. Congress had been debating over the Grand Canyon since 1882, but even as commercialism was running unchecked, by 1908, it had not yet acted to protect the quintessential American wonder. President Roosevelt did, by proclaiming Grand Canyon National Monument, an area over 800,000 acres. Politicians in Arizona howled at the designation. The controversy went all the way to the Supreme Court—which fortunately found that the smallest area compatible with preservation can be quite large and at the discretion of the president. Arizona now officially calls itself the Grand Canyon State. The pattern repeated itself time and time again: controversy and local outrage over new national monuments, eventually turning into near-universal approval. History has always proved the proclamations wise, and local opposition has often reversed itself.

2. Yard, R.S., National Parks Portfolio, Department of the Interior (1917).
Wyoming governor and US senator Cliff Hansen, who fiercely opposed the 1943 proclamation of Jackson Hole National Monument stated in 1962, “I’m glad I lost, because I now know I was wrong.” In 1978, President Jimmy Carter made the most substantial use of the Antiquities Act by proclaiming fifteen national monuments totaling 56 million acres in Alaska, the largest expansion of protected lands in history. Several dwarfed the Grand Canyon in size. In the twenty-first century, even larger marine areas received protections as national monuments. Grand Canyon would, of course, become a national park. Jackson Hole National Monument would be the basis for a major extension of Grand Teton National Park. Six of the Alaskan national monuments from the 1978 proclamation, when redesignated national parks, would double the acreage of National Park Service lands. Proclaiming a place as a national monument in response to immediate threats and then later establishing it as a national park would repeat itself thirty times; almost half of our treasured national parks started as national monuments.

New Models for Conservation

The National Park Service (NPS) manages all the national parks and, until 1978, all the national monuments. Historically, the NPS could dedicate their lands only for preservation and compatible recreational uses because they were empty, or were emptied by relocating natives or settlers. Per the Antiquities Act, presidents can create national monuments only from existing federal lands—not from state or private lands, so they are not land grabs. Until 1978, after proclamation, management had been transferred to the NPS from another federal agency. That agency was often the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM administers more surface land than any other federal agency, one in every ten acres of land in the United States. Those lands were considered leftovers without clear guidelines for use. Not until the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 were BLM lands recognized to have a public value and actively managed with a multiuse framework. Reflecting the alignment of the BLM with rural land users, all traditional activities are authorized by default on BLM lands: logging, drilling, mining, cattle grazing, hunting, off-road driving. That policy contrasts sharply with the mandate of the NPS.

In the mid-1990s, President Bill Clinton and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt envisioned a new conservation role for the BLM that would later be formalized with the creation of the National Landscape Conservation System (now referred to as National Conservation Lands). It can become the greatest modern American land management agency of the one that sets the standard for protecting landscapes, applying evolving knowledge and social standards, and bringing people together to live in harmony with the land.

In that new model of conservation, with protections provided by national monument status, the BLM would emphasize collaboration with local communities and support a range of traditional activities as long as they were compatible with the proclamation’s conservation objectives. Two national monuments, in particular, exemplify innovative approaches to land management: Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument and Bears Ears National Monument. Proclaimed by President Barack Obama in 2016, Bears Ears National Monument is one of the most recent BLM national monuments. It protects a cultural landscape populated millennia before there was a state of Utah. The Hopi, Navajo, Mountain Ute, Zuni, and Ute hold the land sacred because it is their ancestors’ burial site and a continual source of physical and spiritual healing. They agreed to set generations-old differences apart to petition President Obama to establish Bears Ears as the first native-led national monument initiative. For the first time, its proclamation assigned shared management responsibilities between the tribes and the federal government, with guaranteed access for native traditional uses. As such, Bears Ears National Monument was a significant step in social and racial justice, shielding and healing wrongs stemming from the American West’s settlement, broken treaties, and abuse. The native and environmental communities held hopes for a new conservation model converging national park ideals with the indigenous respect and worship for the land.
T he conservation progress was all spd on April 26, 2017, when President Donald Trump signed an unprecedented executive order to reverse all the national monuments created since 1996, larger than 100,000 acres, and established using the presidential authority bestowed on the president by the Antiquities Act. The review's objective was to determine if former presidents had abused their power and if the protections cur- railed essential economic growth, eying removing protections towards industrial development. Conservatives worried not only about the land but also about the future of land preservation, as the promising ideas embodied by these monuments are under fire.

Targeting twenty-seven out of the thirty-five larger protected areas, targeted for review were 152 land-based national monuments and twenty marine national monuments. Twenty-one of all the larger protected areas totaling about 11 million acres. For comparison, the fifty-one national parks, mostly managed by the BLM and some by the US Forest Service, from deserts to lush river habitats. The twenty-two land national monuments, mostly managed by the BLM and one by the US Forest Service, cover a significant portion of the American landscape, totaling about 11 million acres. For comparison, the fifty-one national parks in the contiguous United States total about 19 million acres. The national monuments are another order of magnitude, totaling 218 million acres.

Although one is expected not to enter ancient ruins out of respect, there are no such fences on national monuments. They offer more subtle landscapes of national monuments invite exploration to get more of a feel for the natural heritage. The often starker and more abrupt boundaries of national parks become ever more popular, the BLM and USFS national monuments become icons of our natural and cultural heritage. The often starker and more abrupt boundaries of national parks become ever more popular, the BLM and USFS national monuments become icons of our natural and cultural heritage.

Monuments at Risk

\[\text{Source: Stephen Trimble, New England photographs (n.d.), stephentrimble.net.}\]

Monument located in Maine. But as writer Stephen Trimble quipped, "Maine is really part of the Western wilderness; it's just misplaced."

America's Hidden Gems

The debate of the past persists. Should local voices have priority over the nation's interests? Does an economy based on resource extraction, it can be easy to assume that the fight to protect our national heritage is a lost cause. However, land protection is an endless struggle, where the outcome is never guaranteed.

The debates of the past persist. Should local voices have priority over the nation's interests? Does an economy based on resource extraction, it can be easy to assume that the fight to protect our national heritage is a lost cause. However, land protection is an endless struggle, where the outcome is never guaranteed.

Our national monuments are unique places with different rules of engagement. The heavy visitation of national parks led to the necessity of strict rules, fences around champion sequoia trees, and scenic overlooks. Although one is expected to rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle several times to access some of them. Even then, it still ended with flat tires over three years, sometimes in incredibly remote areas. Edward Abbey once wrote, "If I could wander amid an array of rock formations like the Wave, which has become world-famous. There is no national park where one can wander amid an array of petroglyphs as numerous as in Gold Butte National Monument or Basin and Range National Monument. The enriching experience increased my motivation to help preserve our natural and cultural heritage. The often starker and more abrupt boundaries of national parks become ever more popular, the BLM and USFS national monuments become icons of our natural and cultural heritage.

By the time I photographed three of the most famous natural arcs in Grand Staircase Escalante, I had the entire place to myself: I find the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors. At Capitol Gneiss Wilderness in nearby Meager Trails National Monument, I found the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors. At Capitol Gneiss Wilderness in nearby Meager Trails National Monument, I found the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors. At Capitol Gneiss Wilderness in nearby Meager Trails National Monument, I found the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors. At Capitol Gneiss Wilderness in nearby Meager Trails National Monument, I found the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors. At Capitol Gneiss Wilderness in nearby Meager Trails National Monument, I found the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors. At Capitol Gneiss Wilderness in nearby Meager Trails National Monument, I found the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors. At Capitol Gneiss Wilderness in nearby Meager Trails National Monument, I found the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors.