



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

America's Redrock Wilderness

CLIMATE CHANGE AND UTAH WILDERNESS

The desert southwest has always been a place of extremes and variation in climate. That will be even more so because of global warming. The projections are for higher temperatures, less rain, changes in patterns of snowmelt, and consequent disruptions in wildlife habitats and ecosystem services such as water supply for humans.

The U.S. Geological Survey has cited the dust caused by off-road vehicle activity and developments associated with resource extraction as a key factor complicating the damage caused by climate change. The dust settles on the snow pack thus drawing more sunlight thus melting the snow earlier and leading to more rapid runoff which makes the water supply even less reliable.

Protecting the red rock wilderness would also protect drinking water for the citizens of the desert southwest.

In order to adjust to global warming caused habitat disruptions wildlife will need core areas of healthy landscapes each connected to the other. As much as 30% of plant and animal species could be a greater risk of extinction. Wilderness is the key to maximizing the ability of wild life to adjust because it is the healthy habitat required for survival.

In addition to protecting the land, developing sources of clean energy such as wind and solar will also be essential to preserving the health of red rock canyon lands of southern Utah.

You Can Help Protect Utah Wilderness

Utah wilderness advocates have developed and found broad support for the Redrock Wilderness Act, a proposal that truly reflects the full, diverse range of Utah's last remaining wilderness lands. The legislation, introduced by Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), would designate over nine million acres of stunning wildlands in Utah as official wilderness, forever protecting them from the energy and mineral development and ORV use that threaten to permanently destroy one of America's most unique natural treasures. As former Democratic



U.S. Representative Wayne Owens from Utah explained, "To paraphrase John Muir, anyone can destroy a wilderness... But only God can create a wilderness — and only wise government and wise laws can preserve it. What we now elect to save in Utah over the next few years of discussion, will always remain. What we neglect to protect can never be recovered."

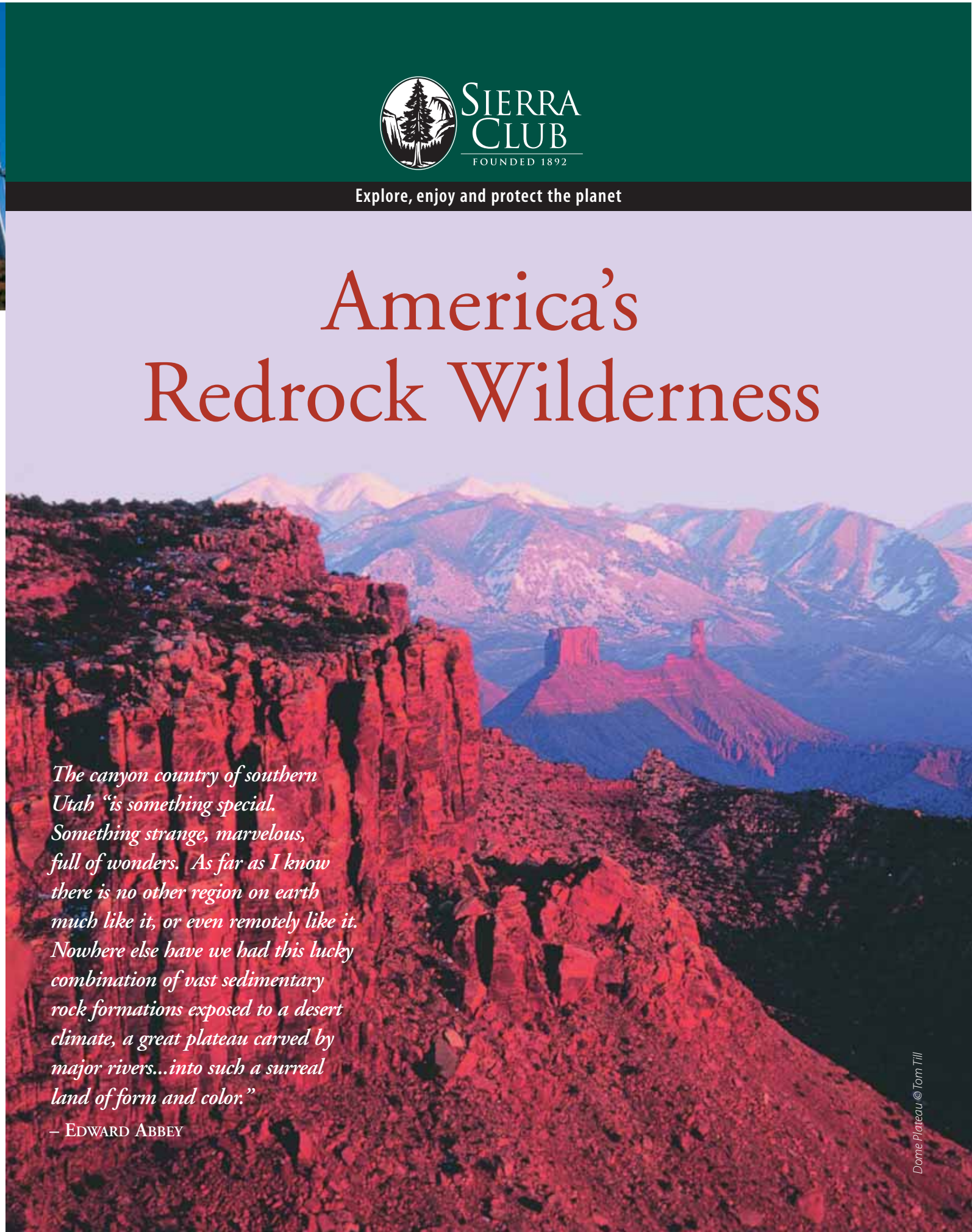
There are approximately 9.4 million acres of wilderness quality lands throughout southern Utah.

Map courtesy of Wild Utah Project



<http://www.sierraclub.org/ut/taskforce/>

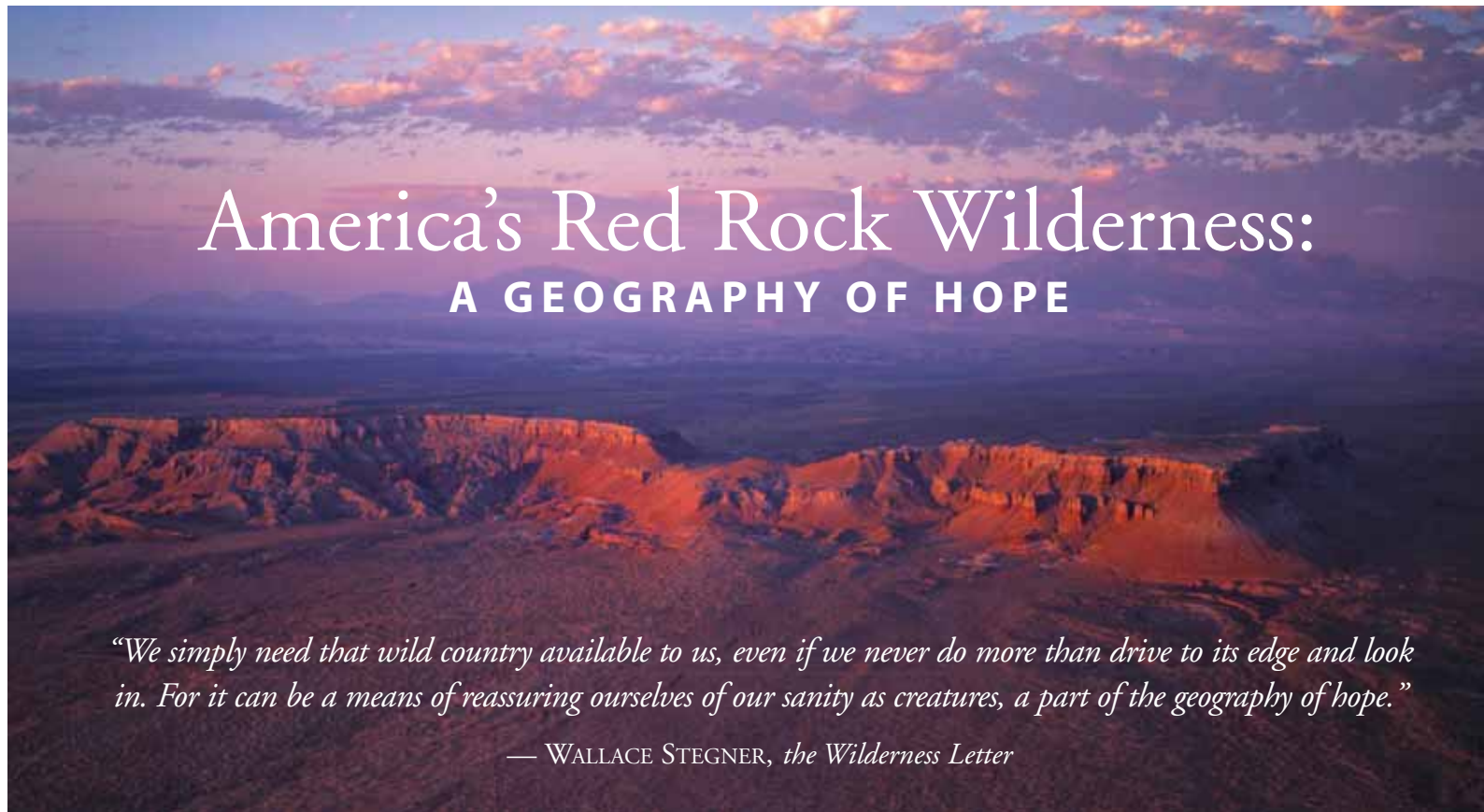
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The canyon country of southern Utah "is something special. Something strange, marvelous, full of wonders. As far as I know there is no other region on earth much like it, or even remotely like it. Nowhere else have we had this lucky combination of vast sedimentary rock formations exposed to a desert climate, a great plateau carved by major rivers...into such a surreal land of form and color."

— EDWARD ABBEY

Dome Plateau © Tom Till



America's Red Rock Wilderness: A GEOGRAPHY OF HOPE

"We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope."

— WALLACE STEGNER, *the Wilderness Letter*

Flat Tops, San Rafael Desert © Tom Till

The state of Utah abounds with wilderness. In fact, more than 9 million acres of public land in the state qualify as wilderness under federal law, and steps are being taken to make this designation a reality. Utah has one of the largest blocks of intact wilderness in the lower 48 states. Now more than ever, Americans are prioritizing protection of the vast and iconic landscapes of red rock country. This is a land of layer-cake sedimentary geology, where ancient sand dunes form massive cliffs and domes that range starkly in color, from white to deep, brick red. Here, the great Colorado and Green Rivers have sliced deep, broad canyons through the yielding sandstone. Ephemeral streams have cut slot canyons so narrow you can touch both sides with outstretched arms. The pliant sedimentary rock has eroded into fantastic shapes, and giant remnants of magma chambers have been uplifted through the overlying sedimentary layers to form tall, isolated mountain ranges.



Parunuweap Canyon © James Kay

Despite its rugged appearance, the wildlands of Utah are home to an array of sensitive wildlife species. Large mammals roam the landscape, including mountain lions, pronghorn antelope, elk, bison and bighorn sheep. The Utah wilderness hosts at least two dozen endangered or sensitive wildlife species that require specialized desert habitat. They include the Gila monster, chuckwalla and desert tortoise in the hot southwest corner of the state, and the bald

eagle, peregrine falcon and endangered fish species of the Colorado, Green, and Virgin Rivers. Scientists have classified roughly 180 of Utah's plant species as endangered, threatened, or sensitive.

Wilderness and the Economy

Utah's wilderness offers more than biological value. Because of its unique beauty and recreational opportunities, the state has become a hot spot for tourism and an attractive destination for those with "footloose" jobs that follow people to where they want to live. Utah's economy is among the strongest in the nation; technology and tourism are among the largest and most important economic activities, far exceeding extractive industries such as mining, oil and gas development, and timber production. Over the last few years, rural Utah's new jobs have been in the trade and service industries based on the tourism, travel and recreation economic base of the area. Rural counties in the West with a diverse tax base that is not dependent on the extractive industries are more sustainable and less at the whim of the boom-bust petroleum industry. Permanent protection of Utah's unique wilderness will help preserve the state's most special places, creating an even more attractive place to live, work, and vacation. At the same time, designating wilderness will help to protect the wilderness qualities of the land from the pressures of encroaching development.

THREATS TO UTAH'S WILD PLACES

Millions of acres of wilderness in Utah remain at risk from destructive extractive industries and sprawling development. Today, the two biggest threats to the wilderness character of Utah are the explosion of off road vehicle use (ORVs) and the dramatic increase in oil and gas exploration.

Illegal and inappropriate ORV use threatens the wilderness by pushing trails farther and farther into remote canyons and isolated mountain ranges. In some extreme instances, ORV groups have intentionally damaged pristine areas under consideration for wilderness designation in an attempt to disqualify them as wilderness.

Along with ORV abuses, oil and gas drilling looms over these remote lands. Destructive oil and gas exploration threatens the wildlife habitat and solitude offered by the vast red rock landscapes. Seismic exploration and exploratory drilling destroy fragile desert soils and pollute the scarce local water supplies.

Other threats to the wild integrity of the land include dams, power lines, road construction, and illegal woodcutting.



Kevin Walker

Pump jack in the midst of scenic redrock canyons

PERMANENTLY PROTECTING UTAH'S SPECIAL PLACES

Efforts to protect Utah's unique wild lands have been hindered by repeated attempts by wilderness opponents to support activities harming the land and to introduce disingenuous wilderness legislation.

The Bush administration had a long track record of promoting off-road vehicle activity in roadless areas, encouraging oil and gas development in special places, and undermining federal laws intended to protect America's natural heritage and resources. In 2008 President Bush's Bureau of Land Management rushed through a series of controversial management plans ignoring the law's multiple use mandate and seeking to institutionalize a long-term priority for exploitation and against conservation. Such efforts have left wilderness open to continued abuse and degradation.

In recent years, however, there has been some progress made on wilderness in Utah. Two separate bills, introduced by members of the Utah delegation, have designated small amounts of wilderness. The Cedar Mountains bill sponsored by Rep. Rob Bishop became law in 2006, and the Washington County bill sponsored by Sen. Robert Bennett which, though weak in other areas, protected half of the wilderness lands near Zion National Park and passed the Senate in early 2009.

The next few years are likely to see efforts to provide further protection for Utah's red rock canyonlands. President Obama will have the opportunity to reverse the previous administration's plans to lease wilderness quality lands for oil and gas development and to rein in illegal off-road vehicle abuses. Finally, "America's Red Rock Wilderness Act", which includes the largest network of undesignated wilderness lands in the lower 48 states will be reintroduced into Congress by Rep. Maurice Hinchey and Sen. Richard Durbin.



Death Hollow © SUWA



Dirty Devil River © James Kay