

A MONUMENTAL CONCERN

During the past year, five new monuments were declared in Arizona encompassing an estimated 2.0 million acres of federal, state and private land. Of these monuments, four of them (Grand Canyon-Parashant, Ironwoods, Vermilion and Sonoran) contain significant areas of desert bighorn sheep habitat.

All of these monuments were established by Presidential Proclamation under the Antiquities Act of 1906 with virtually no public review process. Stimulated solely by environmental groups the planning for these monuments occurred almost exclusively in Washington D.C., and not in Arizona. Contrary to news reports, very little public involvement was solicited in the formation of these monuments and more disturbingly, neither the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) nor any of the state or regional offices of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) were ever consulted. The only sign that an area was ever under consideration for monument status was an unannounced visit to the state by the former secretary for a short hike through the area with supporters and selected members of the news media.

Despite the manner in which these monuments were created many groups were, at first, supportive of the concept of permanently setting these lands aside. There is little argument that land and habitat preservation can be a benefit to wildlife. In this day and age, however, the benefits of preservation can only be realized when balanced with sound conservation efforts. Few ecosystems remain intact which allow for the luxury of pure preservation without a detrimental effect on its wildlife.

Any initial optimism over these monuments was lost shortly after the establishment of the first monument (Grand Canyon-Parashant) when a previously approved cooperative wildlife habitat enhancement project for mule deer was curtailed indefinitely. The AGFD then reported difficulty and encountered obstinate attitudes towards wildlife conservation during the management planning process for this monument. From that point forward it became obvious that monument management was going to be focused on preservation, with little attention or credit given to wildlife conservation efforts. Fearing the worst, the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society (ADBSS) argued with each subsequent monument that clearer language was needed in the actual wording of the proclamation to ensure that wildlife management and wildlife conservation activities would be allowed. Because this simple request was repeatedly ignored during the establishment of the final three monuments, suspicions have mounted and a grave and monumental concern for all sportsmen and true conservationists has arisen.

The wording of the Presidential Proclamation for each of the monuments contains an identical and generic phrase that only prescribes that the jurisdiction for wildlife rests with the State of Arizona. There is no mention of hunting, wildlife management, wildlife conservation or wildlife dependent recreation written anywhere in the Proclamation. Apparently we are to assume that these activities fall under the jurisdictional umbrella of the State of Arizona. Seems like we have heard this before. This lack of specific wording is a major concern for when an impasse is reached during any future monument planning process the amateur armchair lawyers will look at the Proclamation language with a magnifying glass for guidance.

The BLM's Interim Management Policy (IMP) for these monuments was established on January 11, 2000 by the Washington D.C. office, again, with no public process or State level involvement. The

IMP will be used to manage the monuments until a final management plan is established and which could easily take years to accomplish. Fortunately, the IMP reiterates the State's jurisdiction with regard to wildlife management to also include hunting. The IMP does not, however, prescribe or identify wildlife conservation as being part of the wildlife management equation. Without the ability to properly manage, maintain and enhance wildlife populations the loss of hunting opportunities and other forms of wildlife dependent recreation is certain. This deficiency in the IMP is even more disturbing when it is realized that mitigation efforts will likely be necessary to offset the negative impacts to wildlife populations from increased visitation. Like it or not, monument status will draw attention and increased visitation, along with its associated problems, to these previously unknown and little used areas.

The new monuments are to be managed by a new branch of the BLM called the National Landscape Conservation System. This new branch will manage all monuments, preserves, conservation areas and wildernesses administrated by the BLM. Very little is known about this new branch but it appears to be akin to having a Park Service within BLM. We need to be certain that these monuments don't become national parks nor that they adopt the no management philosophy typical of a park.

Consequently, with these concerns we need to work with the Governor's Office, the Arizona Congressional Delegation and the U.S. Department of Interior to ensure that the language contained in both the Proclamation and IMP is amended to provide allowances for the full spectrum of wildlife management and conservation activities as deemed necessary by the AGFD in the fulfillment of their trust responsibilities. Wildlife conservation in this state and throughout the nation has been an unprecedented success. There is no compelling reason to now fix something that isn't broken by errantly adopting a preservation only land ethic. Our wildlife deserves better treatment than this.

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