Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

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WILLIAM J. CLINTON

42nd President of the United States: 1993 - 2001

Proclamation 6920—Establishment of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

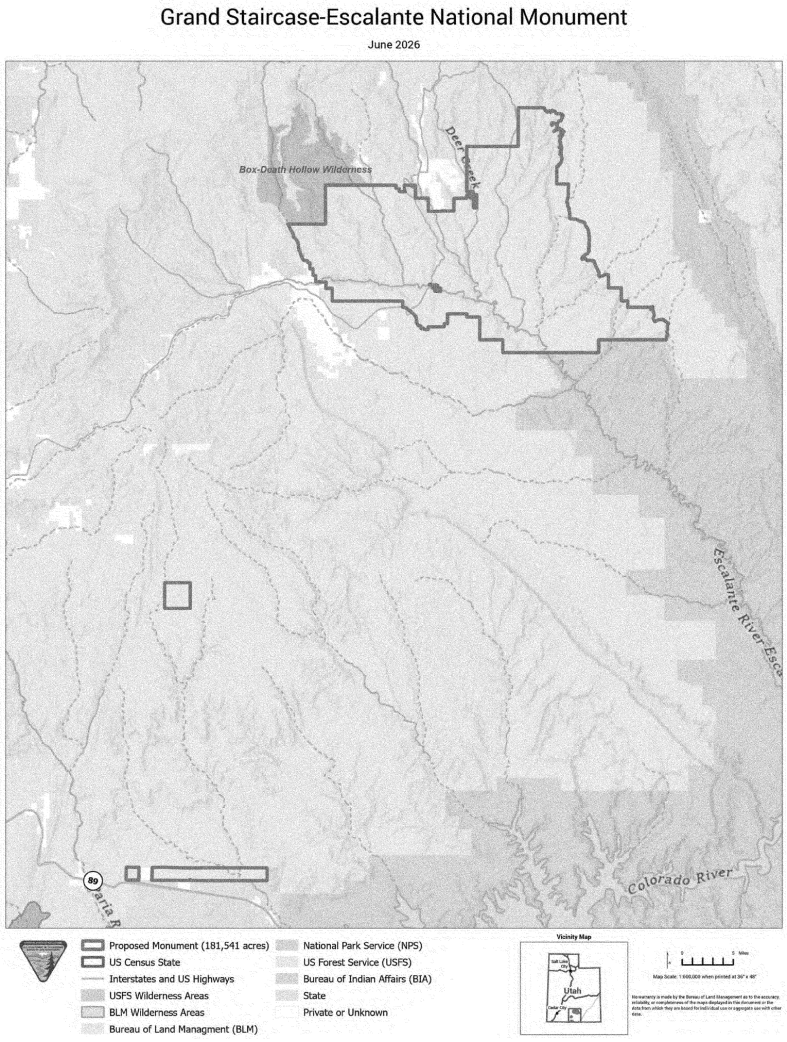
September 18, 1996

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument's vast and austere landscape embraces a spectacular array of scientific and historic resources. This high, rugged, and remote region, where bold

Proclamation 6920: Establishment of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, September 18, 1996 (retrieved from The American Presidency Project)



[Proclamation 11044](): Modifying the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, July 13, 2026 (retrieved from the Federal Register)

Contextual Paragraph

A national monument for the area known as Escalante was initially proposed in 1934, but the project floundered until several decades later. It was on September 18, 1996, at the height of the presidential election campaign of that year by President Bill Clinton, that the national monument was declared by Proclamation #6920 and was controversial from the moment of creation. The declaration ceremony was held at Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona, rather than in Utah.

Local officials from Utah objected to the designation of the national monument, questioning whether the Antiquities Act allowed such vast amounts of land to be designated. However, United States Supreme Court decisions have long established

the president's discretion to protect land under the Antiquities Act, and several lawsuits filed in an effort to overturn the designation were dismissed by federal courts.The area's designation as a monument also nixed the Andalex Coal Mine that was proposed for a remote location on the Kaiparowits Plateau. Wilderness designation for the lands in the monument had long been sought by environmental groups; however, the designation of a monument is not the same as wilderness designation, as activities such as motorized vehicle and mountain bike use are allowed in National Monuments.

On December 4, 2017, by President Trump issued Proclamation #9682, which ordered that the monument's size be reduced by nearly 47% to 1,003,863 acres. Conservation, angling, hunting, and outdoor recreation groups filed suit to block any reduction in the national monument, arguing that the president has no legal authority to materially shrink a national monument.

On his first day in office, President Joe Biden signed an executive order calling for a review of Grand Staircase–Escalante monument. On October 8, 2021, he restored the original boundaries to the monument with proclamation #10286.

On July 13, 2026, president Donald Trump issued proclamation #11044 modifying the boundaries of Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument, reducing the monument from 1.87 million acres to 181,541 acres. It eliminated the Grand Staircase Unit, reduced the former Kaiparowits Unit to an approximately 8,900-acre area named the Kaiparowits Horizons Unit, and retained parts of the Canyons of the Escalante Unit. The proclamation superseded the boundaries restored by President Joe Biden in 2021. Leadership of the Utah Republican Party, including Utah governor Spencer Cox and Utah senator Mike Lee, had lobbied to reopen the land for mining.

Key Questions

1. Why do you think President Clinton designated Escalante National Monument during his presidential re-election campaign?
2. What was President Trump’s rationale in reducing the size of the monument?
3. What effect do you think the changing size of the monument has had on local citizens in Utah that live near the monument?
4. What do you think will happen to the monument after President Trump is out of office? Why?
5. What is the impact of local citizens, including politicians on the protection of public lands? Should citizens of the states impacted by land designations have more of a say than other Americans over our nation’s public lands?
6. The courts have weighed in several times that presidential action under the Antiquities Act is constitutional; however, they have yet to decide if a president

has the same power to reduce lands designated by other presidents. If you were a federal judge, what would you decide and why?

Assessment

1. Federal Land Protection and the Purpose of National Monuments. Using document #1, explain why President Clinton established the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. What evidence from the document shows the goals of creating this protected area? Consider:
    a. The scientific, historical, and cultural value of the land
    b. The reasons for preserving natural resources
    c. The role of the federal government in protecting public lands
2. Environmental Preservation vs. Land Use. How does the creation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument demonstrate a conflict between environmental preservation and other possible uses of public land? Consider:
    a. The restrictions placed on federal lands in the document
    b. The meaning of “withdrawn from entry, location, selection, sale, leasing, or other disposition”
    c. Why some groups might support or oppose these protections
3. The Role of the President and the Antiquities Act. What do these documents reveal about the power of the president to protect natural and historic resources in the United States? Consider:
    a. The authority granted through the Antiquities Act of 1906
    b. The actions taken by President Clinton (document #1)
    c. The actions taken by President Trump (document #2)
    d. How executive decisions can affect the management of public lands
4. Changing Priorities in Public Land Management. According to document #2, why did the president decide to revise the boundaries of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument? Use evidence from document #2 to explain how the proclamation balances resource protection with economic interests. Consider:
    a. The importance of natural resources such as minerals
    b. The role of jobs, industry, and national security in the decision
    c. The continued protection of certain areas within the monument
5. Competing Views of Public Land Use. How do these documents illustrate the debate over how public lands should be used in the United States? Consider:
    a. Arguments for preserving land for scientific, historic, and cultural purposes
    b. Arguments for allowing access to resources that support the economy
    c. How the document describes the relationship between conservation and resource development