

Such Lamenting

*By Pete Clark*

The Continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii and external possessions contain many magnificent natural, cultural and scientific areas, unique unto themselves and very fragile, in need of a strong system of National Parks and Monuments. We have a good system in place to conserve these beautiful but very sensitive places, which are not just marks on a map but we could do much better or we could fail completely.

During his years in office, President Obama, under the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906, created thirty-three national monuments, many of them dedicated to great Americans who did much to shape our country thereby assisting in creating what our nation is today. These National Monuments are not contentious at this time, as they do not envelope thousands of acres of developable land. Those National Monuments that are made up of ruggedly beautiful wind carved rock faces and colorful piles extending from bedrock hundreds of feet into the air, like tombstones for a distant past, hoping for a future. The Bear Ears Region of Southeastern Utah and Gold Butte in Nevada provide beauty, recreation and the preservation of Native American artifacts, pictographs and ruins.

The Browns Canyon National Monument in Colorado is composed of 11,836 acres from the San Isabel National Forest and 9,750 acres of BLM land. The National Monument contains the headwaters of the Arkansas River and provides clean water and habitat for a variety of wildlife including frail populations of Big Horn Sheep and American Pine Martens. Rafting, hiking, bicycling, fishing and stargazing are some of the activities available in Browns Canyon. Native Americans left traces of their occupation of the area 13,000 years ago, another reason the area deserves protection.

I wholeheartedly support the sites that have received protection and preservation under the auspices of the Antiquities Act of 1906, but I must admit I am not one to access their beauty and excitement. I may not trek back into places like the pristine headwaters of the Arkansas River but that does not mean I do not appreciate the area. Through words and pictures, I travel the world with special emphasis on localities like Bear Ears, hoping my great grandchildren will be able to enjoy them in person if they so desire. I have been privileged to experience many facets and actions of nature, from blinding thunder storms and whiteout blizzards to a wall of snow boiling toward me like Saharan Sandstorm, the smell of ozone and lightning running, for miles, along the rims of box canyons, whose rocks contained iron, a doe antelope trying to lure me away from her hidden fawn.

Congress is considering repealing the Antiquities Act of 1906. The majority party in this Congress feels that repeal of the Act will open great tracts of land for development, taking them from the people and giving them to multinational corporations for exploitation. These natural wonders will quickly disappear and the enablers in Congress will cry crocodile tears with their passing.