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CANYON COUNTRY UPDATES

### A Wilderness Coal Mine?

The BLM recently approved rights-of-way (ROW) for a coal mining operation within the Desolation Canyon proposed wilderness—the largest block of unprotected roadless land in the lower 48 states. The proposed Lila Canyon Coal Mine of nearly 2,000 acres would overlap both an existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and newly inventoried BLM wilderness units. Specifically, Turtle Canyon WSA would suffer underground excavation and the surface of the WSA could one day be pocked with vent shafts and monitoring holes. The plan would also undermine over 900 acres of the new Desolation Canyon BLM wilderness inventory unit. Both of these areas are proposed for wilderness designation in America's Redrock Wilderness Act.

Imagine 550 coal trucks and 63 personal and delivery vehicles parading daily over a freshly bulldozed road and entering down the already overcrowded and dangerous highway 191; the construction of a 39-acre surface facility complete with ear-splitting mining equipment operating within the narrow and peaceful Lila Canyon; industrial encroachment on a Fremont tick shelter and other native cultural sites; and the de-watering of springs that are crucial to the survival of a unique band of desert bighorn sheep. These are just some of the consequences we can expect if the Lila Canyon Coal Mine Project is not stopped.

Lila Canyon supports between 15 and 25 bighorn sheep as yearlong residents due to its unique springs and other water sources. In its Environmental Assessment (EA), the BLM admitted that the mine would displace these bighorn sheep. However, the agency failed to acknowledge that such displacement would likely result in annihilation of the herd since the necessary steep and spring water rich cliff talus habitat in Lila Canyon are not found in the surrounding countryside. Similar concerns apply to other wildlife species.

The Fish and Wildlife Service even expressed the concern that impacts such as subsidence, altered hydrologic flows, and mining effluent may cause significant changes or losses in wildlife habitat, wetlands, riparian areas, stream flows, and water quality. Whether you are looking through the eyes of a bighorn sheep, a Colorado Squawfish, a horse packer, or a hiker, the proposed Lila Canyon Mine is bleak from every view.

And speaking of views, current BLM planning documents classify the area as a class III visual resource, meaning that visual changes are not permit-

ted to dominate the landscape. Without a doubt, the conversion of Lila Canyon and the surrounding area from a wilderness into an industrial coal-mining zone would result in just such a dominating visual change.

Despite these identified issues of concern, the EA failed to answer critical questions such as where the bighorn would be displaced to, and how water sources contaminated by the mine might be connected to other local water sources. Without such data, it would be impossible for the BLM to make an informed decision. Therefore, according to law, the agency must not proceed without preparing a full-blown Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which thoroughly analyzes the potential impacts of this ill-conceived mining operation.

SUWA will appeal the BLM's decision on Lila Canyon, and you can help by expressing your own concerns to: Acting BLM Director, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington DC 20240, fax (435)636-3657; and send a copy to Sally Wisely, BLM Utah State Director, P.O. Box 45155, Salt Lake City, Utah 84145-0155, fax (801)539-4013.

Side note for super activists: Although the BLM has approved the surface ROWs, the actual permit for the mine has not been approved. By law, the applicant must submit a permit request to the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) and the Utah Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining (UDOGM). Currently, UDOGM is in the process of reviewing this permit, and anticipates reaching a decision in the spring that will be available for public comment. To express your concerns to UDOGM, send a letter to: Dave Darby, Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining, 1594 W. North Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-5801.

### Grand Scheme for Grand Gulch

Protection for the world-class Native American cultural and archaeological resources in the Grand Gulch/Cedar Mesa area may be moving in the right direction, but we've got to keep the BLM on the right track. The Grand Gulch Plateau spans over 385,000 acres in southeastern Utah and encompasses Grand Gulch, a 52-mile-long canyon loaded with ancient cliff dwellings and other remains of prehistoric cultures. In 1996, the BLM issued a decision to build a visitor center on the site of the existing Kane Gulch Ranger Station as a "portal" to these resources.

SUWA appealed that decision, arguing that the agency failed to consider the impacts of increased visitor use on this environmentally and culturally sensitive

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