

Battle over cattle... Controversy at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

A longtime battle rages between ranchers and conservationists over cattle grazing at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, a national monument signed into being by President Bill Clinton in 1996 that covers land in Garfield and Kane counties, Utah. At the heart of the matter, both ranchers and environmentalists say they want wise stewardship at the monument, as well as preservation and restoration of the land's health. They also desire collaborative decision-making when it comes to changes at the Monument. But the similarities end when it comes to assigning blame for degraded conditions at the monument and what should be done to fix problems there.

Hal Hamblin of Kanab, Utah, is a fifth-generation rancher. Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is one of the locations where he grazes his cattle. Hamblin said restrictions associated with a national monument designation have made it very difficult for ranchers to do business effectively and have tied ranchers' hands when it comes to taking care of their grazing allotments. "The rules and regulations that they've put in are destroying the land," he said. Because of monument restrictions, Hamblin said, ranchers can't extend or move water lines within their allotments to bring water to the traveling cattle; they can't fence riparian areas; they can't bring in foreign material, such as rock or gravel, to slow down ero-

sion in washes, and they can't take other erosion controlling measures; they can't cut cedar posts to repair fencing; they can't maintain roads; they can't bring in mechanical equipment in many areas; and they can't implement brush control measures.

But how can this be? Senators Udall and Heinrich assured everyone that a monument designation would NOT harm grazing. In a 2013 joint

statement, Udall and Heinrich said their legislative proposal for a monument "preserves existing grazing rights" and "maintains existing grazing allotments under the current rangeland management guidelines." Shortly after the monument was designated, Udall and Heinrich penned a piece for the Sun-News where they wrote: "The monument lands will continue to be managed

by the Bureau of Land Management, as they are now. That means that grazing will operate under the same rules as it does today." ...

That leaves us with two unwelcome alternatives: either 1) the Senators don't have the mental capacity to understand the issue, or 2) the Senators have deliberately misled the public about grazing in national monuments.

- By Frank DuBois