

Vermillion Cliffs National Monument, located in northern Arizona, contains the Paria Canyon-Vermillion Cliffs Wilderness, which supports numerous wildlife species, including the reintroduced California condor.

*I*n the year 2010, Americans will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Bureau of Land Management's National Landscape Conservation System — our National Conservation Lands.

Certainly the creation, the existence, of this magnificent and truly unique system of public lands is worth marking. Even more important will be a renewed and focused dedication by the Department of the Interior, by national conservation organizations and by local citizens and local organizations to achieving the vision and full potential of the National Conservation Lands. We have much to celebrate, and we have much to do.

What have we accomplished? What must we do for the future to ensure that these National Conservation Lands are a part of our legacy? The National Landscape Conservation System represents America's first new system of conservation lands in more than 50 years, and although these places stand equal in every way, they are in many respects hidden treasures and not nearly as well known and appreciated as our national parks, national forests and national wildlife refuges. Thus, some background and history are in order.

The National Landscape Conservation System

*America's Newest
National Conservation Lands*

by EDWARD M. NORTON

America's Newest Public Lands System

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers approximately 264 million acres of public land, more than any other federal agency. Generally, BLM manages lands under its jurisdiction—the federal public land remaining after creation of national parks, forests and wildlife refuges. Sometimes called “the lands nobody wanted,” they were established for multiple use and sustained yield. Historically, BLM management has emphasized oil and gas leasing, mining, grazing and other commodity production.

Over the years, Congress has designated BLM areas for special protection and conservation management — national conservation areas, wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers and national historic trails. Presidents also have used executive orders and proclamations under the Antiquities Act to designate national monuments. Thus, over the years, BLM has acquired responsibility for managing some of the most ecologically sensitive and culturally significant lands and water in the federal government's estate.

In 2000, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt created the National Landscape Conservation System by administrative designation. Babbitt's goal was to bring together under unified mission and management within the Department of the Interior and the BLM all of those lands with a special conservation designation, whether mandated by an act of Congress (a national conservation area, a wilderness area or a wild and scenic river)

or by executive order — for example, a national monument. Babbitt's rationale was clear and straightforward: “If we want BLM to do good things, we should give BLM good things to do.”

In 2009, recognizing the need “to conserve, protect and restore nationally significant landscapes that have outstanding cultural, ecological and scientific values for the benefit of current and future generations,” Congress gave permanent legislative



Lasting Voices

by Cornelia Hutt

For many people, the symbol of wild nature is the wolf, an elusive and mysterious predator roaming free and unfettered in endless expanses of untamed wilderness. Such places are all but gone. And the truth is that wolves can live almost anywhere they can find food, including developed areas inhabited by humans—that is, if people will tolerate their presence.

But wolves do best where contact with humans is minimal or absent. Thus, the International Wolf Center's mission advances the survival of wolf populations by teaching about the relationship of wolves to wildlands and to the ecosystems that sustain them and their principal prey species.

With this in mind, Edward M. Norton, chair of the National Landscape Conservation Foundation's Board of Directors, wrote about the National Landscape Con-

servation System, another of America's best ideas, but one that many Americans know little or nothing about.

What do these lands mean for the myriad species of wildlife that thrive best in pristine habitat? What will they mean for the long-term sustainability of wild wolf populations?

As Ed Norton said recently, “The history and wild beauty of the West are America's conservation legacy and therefore deserve to be protected, restored and expanded for future generations to enjoy.” And if, as Norton said, “long-term protection results from the constant presence and persistent pressure by active and engaged citizens and organizations at the local level,” how then should the International Wolf Center respond to that challenge? And how can all of us as individuals be active stewards of this legacy to become lasting voices for land conservation? ■

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“Put down whatever you are doing and go visit these places. It might take a bit of work on your part—there won’t be an entrance gate or ranger to guide you—but these are fabulous places.”

— Bruce Babbitt,
Secretary of the Interior
1993 to 2001

status and a strong conservation mandate to the National Landscape Conservation System, directing the Secretary of the Interior to manage the system in a manner that “protects the values for which the components of the system were designated.” What a legacy!

Today, the National Conservation Lands cover some 27 million acres of federal land in 886 units: 16 national monuments; 21 national conservation areas; 775 wilderness areas and wilderness study areas encompassing more than 21.5 million acres of wildlands; 38 wild and scenic rivers flowing more than 2,400 miles; and 6,000 miles of national scenic and historic trails. The BLM National Conservation Lands embrace mountains, deserts, forests, grasslands, wetlands, rivers and streams. The National Conservation Lands protect watersheds, wildlife habitats and migration routes, the highest known density of Native American archeological sites in the United States and countless historical sites. Moreover, these lands provide a great variety of opportunities for recreation and enjoyment.

Read aloud from a list of the individual areas that make up the National Conservation Lands, and the names of these places evoke the full richness and complexity of our natural and cultural heritage: Canyons of the Ancients in Colorado; Grand Staircase–Escalante in Utah; Red Rock Canyon and Pony Express Trail in Nevada; Upper Missouri River Breaks and the Lewis and Clark Trail in Montana; Snake River Birds of Prey and Craters of the Moon in Idaho; the King Range and Lost Coast in Northern California and the California Desert in Southern California; Cascade–Siskiyou and the John Day River in Oregon; the Sonoran Desert and the Vermillion Cliffs in Arizona; El Malpais in New Mexico; and many, many more.

The BLM National Conservation Lands sustain an ecological function particularly important to wide-ranging wildlife such as wolves and their prey. Wilderness study areas in Idaho and the Steese National Conservation Area in Alaska provide habitat for existing wolf populations. National Conservation System Lands have been utilized by wolves as they seek out new ranges in the interior West. In addition, many of the prey species that wolves rely on, primarily ungulates, are found in, and migrate across, numerous units of the National Conservation Lands. If wolves are to maintain healthy populations and expand to more of their historical range in North America, the National Conservation Lands will be of even greater importance in providing connectivity with surrounding landscapes and resilience in the face of climate change.

Realizing the Vision— The Future of the BLM National Conservation Lands

The history of conservation in this country has shown that real and long-term protection of our natural and cultural heritage rests on two pillars. Individual places must be part of a larger system of protection such as our National Park System and now

our National Landscape Conservation System. Equally fundamental, long-term protection results from the constant presence and persistent pressure by active and engaged citizens and organizations at the local level, relentlessly focusing their knowledge, time, and energy on ensuring that these places are well managed.

In the case of many of the individual units of the BLM National Conservation Lands, local organizations provided the initial grassroots support and advocacy for the Congressional or Presidential designation. Now these organizations engage in the development of conservation based on Resource Management Plans for individual units. They provide volunteers to contribute thousands of hours to support BLM by maintaining trails, clearing invasive species, monitoring resource conditions and conducting educational programs and similar activities. As it now stands, the National Landscape Conservation System encompasses only about 10 percent of the BLM lands. Many additional areas qualify in every respect for inclusion in the National Conservation Lands. Local organizations will play a critical role in expanding the system to its full potential.

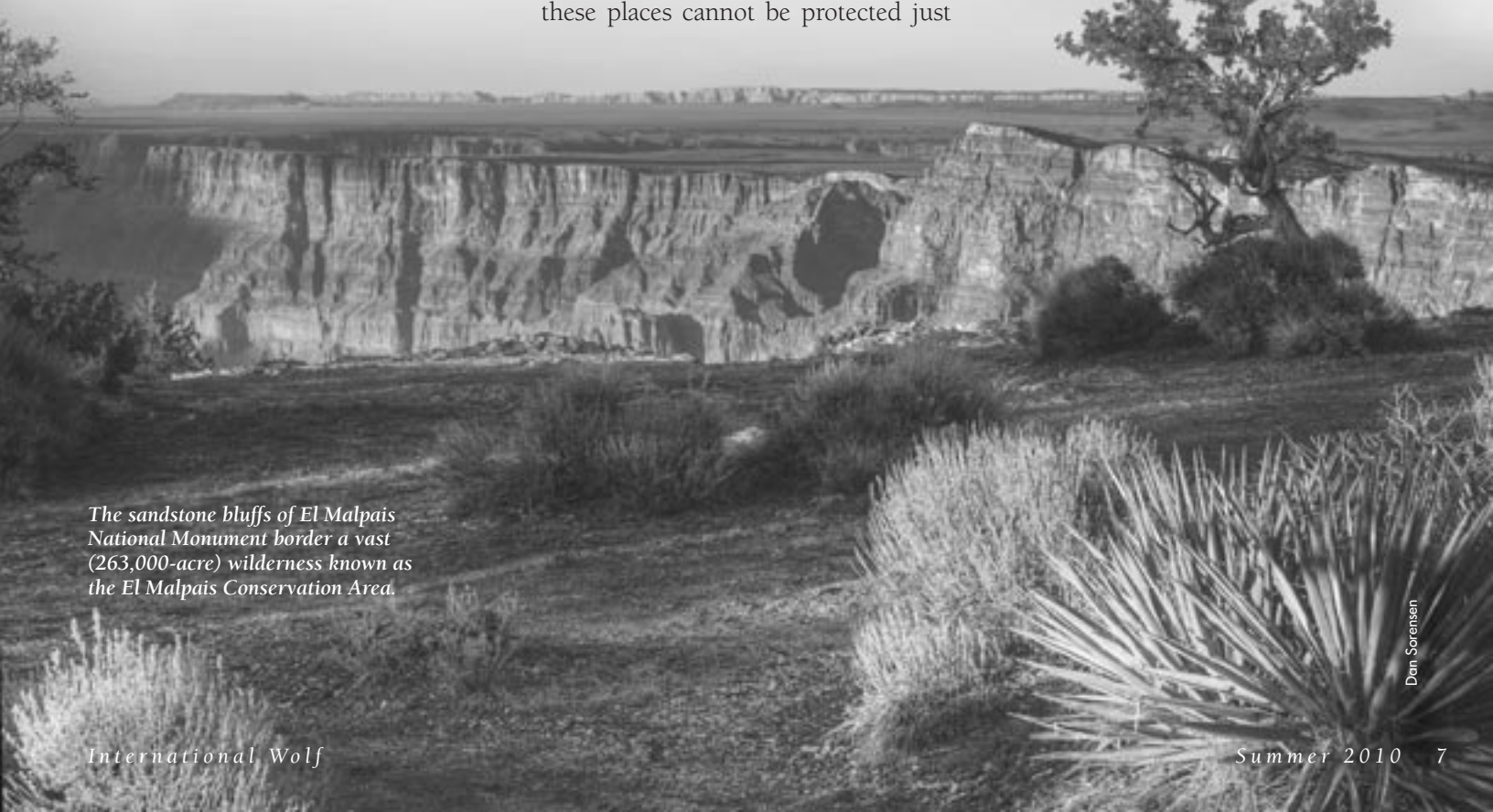
These local organizations are part of a national network of the Conservation Lands Foundation. This foundation provides program grants, training and capacity building and advocacy support to local citizen organizations working to protect units of the National Landscape Conservation System. The Foundation also works in Washington D.C., with Congress and the BLM to secure adequate funding and help shape the future of the National Conservation Lands and to build a broader awareness of the system and its vision and goals.

Like the national parks, forests and wildlife refuges, the BLM National Landscape Conservation System represents what President Theodore Roosevelt called essential democracy. "The movement for the conservation of wildlife and the large movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method" Roosevelt wrote.

Roosevelt understood the value of these places to all Americans as well as the importance of a "prophylactic dose of nature" and "the strenuous life"—hiking, fishing and hunting and enjoying wildlife and wild places. He also understood that these places cannot be protected just

one time for all time, but rather require vigilance, engagement, investment and action by each generation. Roosevelt did not view that obligation as a burden, but as an expression of each American's civic responsibility. That is what we really have to celebrate and commit to on the 10th anniversary of the National Landscape Conservation System. ■

Edward M. Norton is the chair of the National Conservation System Foundation. He was founding president of the Grand Canyon Trust and founding chair of The Rails-To-Trails Conservancy. For information on National Landscape Conservation System 10th Anniversary events, go to www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm_spec_areas/NLCS.html. To view two short films about the National Landscape Conservation System, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Jd7k1V-RbY>. To view a short film about the National Landscape Conservation System narrated by actor Edward Norton, go to <http://www.youtube.com/user/rscottjones>. For more on the Foundation's mission, see <http://www.ourconservationlegacy.org>; <http://www.crowdrise.com/conservationlands>.



The sandstone bluffs of El Malpais National Monument border a vast (263,000-acre) wilderness known as the El Malpais Conservation Area.