

**Public Comment Period Open NOW
for Southern Utah
BLM Management Plans
Comment Period Deadlines:
November 15 and 30, 2018**
by Andrew Hoekstra* and Lisbet Thoresen

HOBBY COLLECTING was banned in 1.86 million acres of Southern Utah in 1996 after **President Clinton** signed **Proclamation 6920** to create the **Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument (GSENM)**. In 2016, **President Obama** signed **Proclamation 9558** to create **Bears Ears National Monument (BENM)**, which encompassed about 1.35 million acres. Hobby collecting has not been banned in **Bears Ears** prior to a management plan being drafted. However, environmental groups opposed to the recreational activity are expected to lobby the **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)** to ban it when a final management plan is published.

In December 2017, **President Trump's Proclamations 9681** and **9682** downsized both Utah monuments – **Bears Ears** by about 85% to 202,000 acres and **Grand Staircase-Escalante** by about 47% to about 1 million acres.

Would you like to have the opportunity to collect rocks, minerals, and petrified wood and common invertebrate fossils on some of the lands that did and could yet put hobby collecting off limits in Southern Utah?

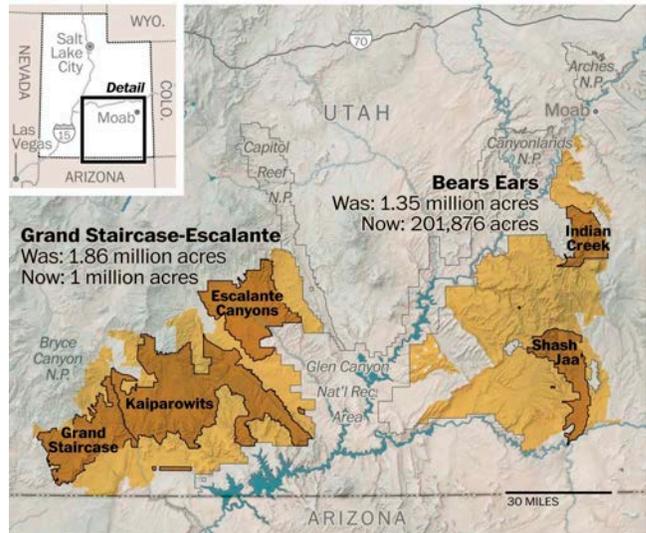
Now is your chance to let the BLM know. The agency is considering restoring hobby collecting in some areas and wants your input.

GSENM and Kanab-Escalante Planning Area

A November 30th deadline has been set for the public to submit comments on the **BLM's** proposed alternatives for the future management of the lands

Changes to declared national monuments in Utah

● Original boundary ● New delineation



Source: Department of Interior

excluded from **GSENM** – now called the **Kanab-Escalante Planning Area** – and in the management plan for the lands retained within the monument. Rockhounds encouraged by the rescissions should take note that lands removed from **Grand Staircase-Escalante** under **Presidential Proclamation 9682** will remain closed to hobby collecting until a new management plan is prepared – the excluded land has not reverted to its previous status.

For each management planning area, the **BLM** has prepared four alternative proposals. Public comments will influence the drafting of a final Resource Management Plan, which may include elements from any or all of the four proposals. Hobby rock collecting will be regulated in the same manner as hobby collecting of common invertebrate and botanical (petrified wood) fossils. Rockhounding will be allowed or prohibited in the same areas as described under the “Paleontological Resources” section of the plan alternatives (p. 3-44 in Draft RMP and EIS Vol. 1).

For the **Kanab-Escalante Planning Area**, the proposed alternative ‘D’, which is the **BLM's** Preferred Alternative, would allow hobby collecting of rocks,

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minerals, and common invertebrate and botanical fossils, including petrified wood, within almost the entire area excluded from the original **Grand Staircase-Escalante** monument. Alternative D also proposes to allow hobby collecting in two designated areas within **GSENM**.

Recommendation

Rockhounds are encouraged to support alternative ‘D’ regarding the Paleontological Resources provisions. (It is not necessary to support alternative D in its entirety or overall, but the Paleontological provision is important for rockhounds).

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BENM and

lands excluded by the monument rescission

To date, rockhounding has not been banned in lands excluded from the **Bears Ears** monument. Currently, a new management plan is not being proposed for the excluded area. For lands remaining inside the **BENM**, **BLM** has opened a public comment period on the draft alternative management plans now under consideration, with the deadline set for November 15, 2018.

Only the proposed alternative ‘A’ – the “No Change” alternative – would allow rockhounding in the monument. Rockhounds may want to comment on the Paleontological Resources provisions of the **BENM** proposals.

Policy and practice under the law

The **BLM** field offices in Southern California regard hobby collecting as a low-impact recreational activity and tend to be more accommodating of it than many of their **BLM** counterparts in other parts of the US. Elsewhere, including in Utah, the **BLM** exercises discretion to prohibit hobby collecting; although, existing federal statute allows for accommodation.

In 2009, the **Paleontological Resources Act (PRPA)** was enacted by Congress. This landmark legislation enables designation of **BLM** lands appropriate for hobby collecting. No other law exists that bans rockhounding within national monuments administered by the **BLM**. So, concerning public lands that are supposed to be managed to accommodate multiple uses, whether inside or outside a national monument, it is not legally mandated to prohibit all hobby collecting of rocks or common fossils to protect

**GSENM and
Kanab-Escalante Planning Area**
Comment period now open
Deadline: Nov 30, 2018

Submit comments via:

- **Mail:** 669 S Hwy 89
Kanab, UT 84741
Attn: Matt Betenson
- **ePlanning:** <https://goo.gl/EHvhbc>

BENM
Comment period now open
Deadline: Nov 15, 2018

Submit comments via:

- **Mail:** BLM, Canyon Country District Office
82 East Dogwood
Moab, Utah 84532
Attn: Lance Porter
- **eMail:** blm_ut_monticello_monuments@blm.gov

**In your comment for either the GSENM or BENM,
be sure to include a reference to a specific page
or section of the Draft EIS/Draft RMP.**

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Want to sign onto a joint comment letter?

Join SDMG’s mailing list at:
<https://goo.gl/KZqPsc>
select the “Utah public lands” list
OR email: ajhoekstra@yahoo.com

*Be sure to provide:
first and last name, city, state
if you’re a member or officer of a club, list the club,
city and your role (title)*

scientifically significant finds, notably fossils finds, i.e., dinosaur bones. In fact, it is well to remind the **BLM**, that it may be detrimental as a preservation measure, because rocks and common fossils left *in situ* near the earth’s surface often weather out and are irretrievably lost.

It is long overdue for multiple-use management plans to incorporate accommodation of hobby collecting, not least for the recreational and educational values thousands of enthusiasts enjoy. Hobbyists have experienced an alarming loss of access to collecting areas throughout the US in recent decades. They now need to seize the opportunity to reverse the trend.