The Year in Review

As 2014 winds to a close, the Glen Canyon Group Executive Committee (Marc Thomas, Albey Reiner, Bill Rau, Tom Messenger, and Kay McLean) and active volunteers (Deb Walter, Mike Stringham, Rita Rumrill, Sarah Fields, Wayne Hoskisson, and Jean Binyon) want to thank our membership for another busy year of outings and conservation activities.

Following in John Muir’s tradition, this year we once again had an excellent, diverse, and well-attended outings program led by Tom Messenger. Our conservation efforts, led by Deb Walter, Bill Rau, Sarah Fields, and Marc Thomas have brought national, state, and local attention to some of our significant concerns about development impacts to our special landscapes.

The GCG ExCom met in January, April, and December to discuss, set, and direct Group activities. Our meetings are open to all members, so we encourage more of you to participate in them. The minutes of our meetings are available upon request.

Early in 2014, GCG members played a significant role in providing input to the Grand County Council on our preferred land uses alternatives for Congressman Bishop’s Utah Public Lands Bill Initiative. In addition to writing letters-to-the editor and attending council meetings and the sole public hearing, one out of every five comment letters sent to the council on the need for public lands protection came from our members. In case the Bishop Initiative is unsuccessful, we have continued working with the Greater Canyonlands National Monument Coalition to build support for creating the monument.

The Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club encouraged us to set goals that would honor the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. With guidance from our Chapter Delegate Marc Thomas, the goals chosen to work toward were:

1. Help prevent construction of a Book Cliffs highway used to transport dirty energy;

2. Endorse and help elect progressive candidates to the Grand County council;

3. Through our representative Marc Thomas, we are active participants in Trail Mix, the partnership in charge of planning, building, and maintaining non-motorized trails in the county. Marc reports that in conjunction with the BLM, as many as 50 miles of new hiking trails will be built in the next few years. Three trails-Jeep Arch, Sylvester, and Dinosaur Stomping Ground-were completed this year.

Sadly the Moab area was without an Earth Day Celebration this year as no one in the conservation community volunteered to organize one. However, May Day saw 22 GCG members hard at work cleaning up two miles of US Highway 191 south of Moab. (See photo) Besides collecting many bags of trash, we took recyclable materials to the Recycle Center as part of this semi-annual community service event.
3. Work with local decision members, public officials, and business people to find consensus on conservation issues that matter to us.

Club members Bill Rau, Bill Love, Deb Walter, and Marc Thomas have spent much of the year holding the BLM’s feet to the fire on the safety of the Dead Horse Lateral Pipeline as well as the need for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which analyzes the impacts from the new gathering lines and oil wells that will significantly affect the quality of the natural and human environment between Arches and Canyonlands National Parks. To that end, we have held mostly unfruitful meetings with the BLM, in addition to visiting the sites, taking photos, writing letters, giving presentations, and working with staff from the Environmental Law Program of the Sierra Club. As part of our education and outreach on these issues, Bill Rau represented us at a pipeline conference in Louisiana.

In late May, light rain showers failed to dampen spirits during a very successful pot luck fundraiser held in Chair Kay McLean’s backyard. All three Grand County Council candidates that we supported (Mary McGann, Chris Baird, and Jaylyn Hawks) attended and spoke to the group. The event not only raised money for the candidates, but also brought attention to how we could best help them win in the fall.

As the fall approached, many GCG members raised their voices in opposition to joining the 7 County Infrastructure Coalition (7CIC) by once more speaking out at council meetings and at a public hearing, while at the same time writing letters-to-the-editor and comments to the Grand County Council. All three candidates we supported came out against signing the 7CIC agreement, helping to make the general election a referendum on whether or not to join the coalition.

With the concurrence of the Chapter’s political committee, the Group officially endorsed Mary McGann and Jaylyn Hawks, both Sierra Club members, for county council seats. We sent post cards to all Grand County members about the endorsements and informed them that this was a first-time 100% vote-by-mail election. All through the election season, GCG members worked on the county council campaigns, donating money, hosting parties, getting people registered, going door to door, putting up yard signs, calling voters, and writing letters-to-the editor. With our help, 75% of registered voters in the county ended up voting, and all three council candidates we supported were elected.

In addition to our regular outings, we held spring and fall campouts at Hovenweep National Monument and the Needles section of Canyonlands National Park, respectively. A special educational campout took place in the Book Cliffs in June, led by John Weisheit of Living Rivers. We were able to see first hand what will be lost if tar sands and oil shale “dirty energy” extraction is allowed to clear-cut, strip mine, and frack in that area. Our Vice Chair, Bill Rau, had a dramatic photo of the Book Cliffs selected for showing in the Utah Wilderness 50 special exhibit at the Utah Natural History Museum through mid-December.

As a result of our increasing visibility on conservation issues, a local newspaper has offered us space for a periodically-appearing column on topics of our choosing. At year’s end, we had 169 paid members and a bankroll of just under $450. Hopefully in 2015, we will continue to see these members involved in our conservation efforts. It is the only way to ensure that we will have unspoiled special places to visit for our outings.

**Sierra Club Summit for a Nuclear Free Future**

The Glen Canyon Group, represented by Sarah Fields, GCG Nuclear Issues Chair, joined over 70 other leaders in the anti-nuclear movement for the Sierra Club’s Summit for a Nuclear Free Future in the nation’s capitol in mid-November. Participants represented many concerned Sierra Club Chapters, over 30 states, Canada, and Japan. They represented Sierra Club’s Nuclear Free Campaign, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, Beyond Nuclear, Nuclear Energy Information Service, Southwest Research and Information Center, Information Network for Responsible Mining (INFORM), San Obispo Mothers for Peace, Nation Resources Defense Council, and many others.

Activists discussed transitioning off of nuclear power, radioactive waste, fighting nuclear industry attacks on clean energy, uranium, and getting to a nuclear free and carbon free future. It was a chance to learn, share, strategize, lobby, and build friendships.

Sarah, who is also Program Director of Uranium Watch, has been working on nuclear issues with the Nuclear Free Campaign as part of the Core Group and Front End Working Group. The Summit addressed many local and national nuclear issues that relate to the nuclear fuel chain operations and issues in Utah. The Front End Group made presentations on uranium mining and milling in the 4-Corners area. Leona Morgan and Klee Benally of New Mexico and Arizona spoke of the historic and current uranium impacts on Diné (Navajo Tribal lands) and the Clean Up the Mines Campaign. The Campaign works for cleanup of thousands of abandoned uranium mines, at least a third of which are in Utah. Sarah and Jennifer Thurston of INFORM, met with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff to discuss issues related to the regulation of uranium mines on BLM land. They also met with nine Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) staff to discuss the problems with the EPA’s proposed revisions to the radon emission...
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Although not cairned, the trail makes an obvious right-hand turn up a stone and sand ramp, climbing shortly through another broken fence to a slick rock bench with great views of the Colorado River on your right. From this point on, the moderately-ascending trail is cairned all the way on the benches above the canyon floor, mostly on rock and packed sand. The cairns are sometimes placed far apart, but readily apparent as you pan the area in front of you.

At a little over a half mile in, the route curves to the left, as it crosses drainages and ascends more benches that are wedged between the slick rock walls to the left and the canyon floor bedrock to the right. Stay alert for the cairns that lead you in and out of the drainages.

As you hike up-canyon, enjoy ever improving views of the sandstone terraces and walls cascading down from the Gold Bar Rim, the high ridge, popular with both bikers and jeepers, to the west of Arches National Park.

New Jeep Arch Trail Designated by the BLM

The freshly-minted 4-mile roundtrip trail on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land up scenic Culvert Canyon replaces the many social trails already in place and leads to a striking jeep-shaped arch set in a long, connected sandstone wall. For the BLM, it helps address the imbalance between designated biking and hiking trails on public lands outside our two national parks. For those of us who live here, we now have another fully cairned route, like Corona Arch and Fisher Towers, to hike with our visitors.

The currently unmarked pullout for the trail up Culvert Canyon to Jeep Arch is on the north side of the Potash Road, a third of a mile past the Corona Arch trail parking lot. The close by Gold Bar campground provides additional parking, but much of the time, your vehicle may be the only one at the pullout, with only birds and other small creatures keeping you company. From the pullout, take the obvious path to the large culvert passing beneath the railroad spur that goes to the potash plant at the end of Potash Road. Walk through the lengthy culvert, and immediately look to your left for the Jeep Arch directional trail sign. Prior to building the new trail, social trails initially traveled the sandy wash to benches on the right that bypassed two large pools and pour offs. To mitigate further erosion on the sandy hills near the pour offs, the new trail sign directs you to the left out of the wash, sending you through a dilapidated metal fence and up to railroad tracks overlooking the Colorado River.

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Just after a mile from the trailhead, views open on the left to a saddle between a sandstone fin and an impressive stone spire that some Sierra Club hikers have taken to calling Botched Circumcision Rock. A little later, the trail comes to a junction below the spire, splitting into upper and lower routes that give it a lollipop shape. Both branches will get you to Jeep Arch, but I much prefer the route that climbs into the saddle next to the spire. Although this is the steepest part of the hike, the expansive views, rest, and shade that await you as you plop down against the spire more than make up for it. Furthermore, it is a much easier walk the rest of the way across scrub flats from the spire to Jeep Arch. The lower route continues on the benches below sandstone fins until you approach Jeep Arch from its backside. While it may be more private, it is also more primitive, and you need to keep a sharp eye out for where the cairns are placed.

After resting and enjoying the panoramic views stretching across Culvert Canyon, follow the cairns down the slick rock slope left of the spire into the well-vegetated flats below it. What was once a hard-to-notice social trail heading slightly northwest has been augmented by an easily followed cairned route that gradually ascends the flats for nearly a half-mile. Looking to the right shortly before crossing a small drainage, picturesque Jeep Arch will come into view. Follow the cairned route out of the drainage and onto benches leading toward the arch. Social trails used to approach the base of the arch from its right, but the new cairned route heads more directly to it. Finally, two miles from your canyon culvert doorway finds you standing beneath the arch, gazing around for a way to climb into its now substantial window.

As you approach the arch, it seems all but impossible to climb into it, but access is provided by a fluted stone ramp just to its left. Oftentimes, the wind rushes through arch’s high window, cooling you on a hot day and causing you to reach for a jacket on a cooler one. While resting or eating, enjoy the panoramic canyon country views that unfold in front or behind you. When your reverie is over, you can close the lollipop by hiking down the slippery backside of the arch and traversing right on rock-strewn benches, following cairns until you’re once again standing beneath the spire where you first rested.

Or just turn around and take the easier walk back across the flats to this same landmark spire. After reaching the loop junction again, retrace your steps on the benches above Culvert Canyon, noticing first the social trails below you that the new route replaces and then the views ahead of you of the Colorado River and Behind the Rocks. As you finish, if you run into people, as I did, who’ve never found Jeep Arch before, you can let them know that the route is now entirely marked by cairns.