

Habitat Conservation Showcase - the Colorado Plateau

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The state of Utah is home to most of the region known as the Colorado Plateau – a vast and magical land of deep labyrinthine canyons and tall mesas carved in ancient mineral-rich sandstone – a unique and mythical desert landscape like no other.

Most readers are likely familiar with Utah's world-famous national parks – Canyonlands, Arches, Capitol Reef, Zion, and Bryce Canyon are practically household names for nature photographers anywhere. Accompanied by numerous state and regional parks, many of the region's natural treasures are protected by law to varying extents. What few people outside the state of Utah realize is that most of the Colorado Plateau's wild expanses are not similarly protected. Some portion is held in trust for the local Native American population, but most is public land managed by the US Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the National Park Service (NPS) and sold or leased for a variety of uses, mostly commercial interests. If you can imagine it – millions of acres of sublime scenery like no other on Earth may be lost forever without anyone ever knowing the natural, historical, and spiritual treasures they hold.

For you political activists it may be interesting to note that the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) set out to preserve these lands in a proposal titled [America's Redrock Wilderness Act](#). In this article I would like to depart from the political debate and describe what these places mean to me personally, in the hope that some of you may find your own way into them.

In a previous life I ran across a book titled *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey. The circumstances at the time made it especially fascinating to me. I was trying to make sense of life in a country ravaged by war and where the natural places I loved were rapidly disappearing before my eyes. Abbey's writing touched a chord in me and ignited a yearning for these places that at the time I had never seen, nor ever expected to. As more years went by I kept returning to *Desert Solitaire* and finally decided I had to experience them for myself. Some fifteen years later I made my home in the state of Utah. To be precise, I own a house in the state of Utah and made a home in the Colorado Plateau. I have been exploring these magnificent deserts for several years now, far beyond the national parks, deep into what is surely some of America's last wild places. Having lost many of the places I loved in my youth, going into these canyons feels like going back home.

Of particular interest to me are the areas known as Grand-Staircase Escalante National Monument (spanning 1.9 million acres, managed by the BLM), the adjacent Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (covering 1.25 million acres, managed by the NPS), and the San Rafael Swell (about 750,000 acres, mostly managed by the BLM). These areas are partly protected from development for the time being (these protections are constantly challenged) and in my opinion cover some of the planet's most spectacular scenery, not to mention countless historical artifacts, and sensitive habitats to a myriad of native species.

Over the years I tried to explore more and more of these places, and have led friends and clients into their wild expanses. Not one person I know who had been there will ever forget the experience.

To me, this is the true value of preserving these wild lands – we are not just protecting nature, we are protecting a treasure for the human spirit.

For more inspiration and information, you may refer to these selected books and web sites:

Photography:



- [The Place No One Knew](#) by Eliot Porter
- [Stone Canyons of the Colorado Plateau](#) by Jack Dykinga
- [Plateau Light](#) by David Muench

Writing:

- [Desert Solitaire](#) by Edward Abbey
- [Red](#) by Terry Tempest Williams
- [Soul of Nowhere](#) by Craig Childs

Internet:

- [The Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance](#)
- [The Glen Canyon Institute](#)

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Guy Tal resides in Utah, where most of the Colorado Plateau's breathtaking grandeur can be found, and where issues of preservation and land-use are among the most prominent on the political agenda. Guy's large format photography can be viewed on his website at <http://scenicwild.com>.

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