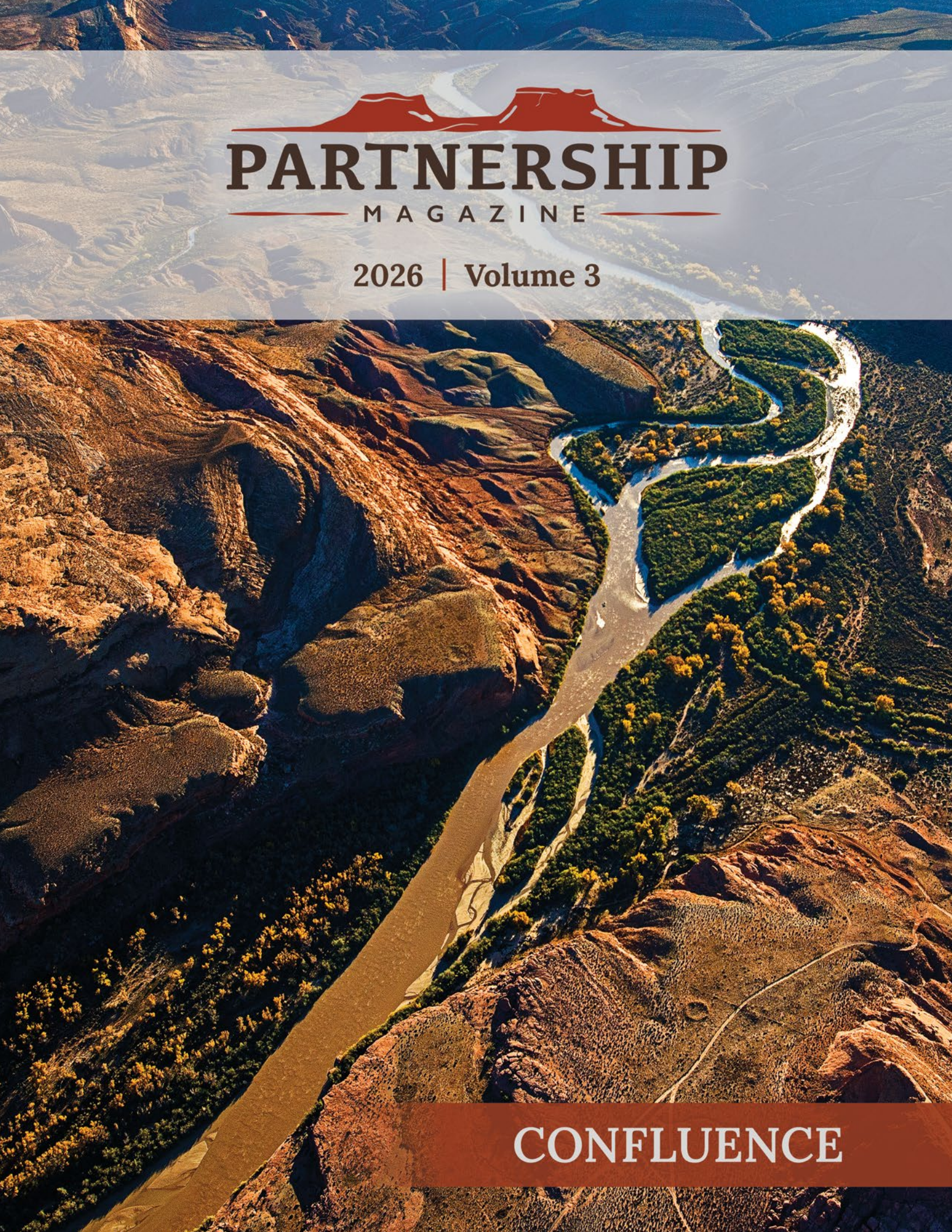


An aerial photograph of a river confluence in a desert canyon. The river, with a light-colored, sandy or silty flow, winds through the canyon. On the left, the river flows through a deep, rugged canyon with steep, eroded walls of reddish-brown rock. On the right, the river flows through a flatter, more vegetated area with green shrubs and trees. The river's path is marked by sharp turns and meanders. The overall scene is a dramatic landscape of natural erosion and vegetation.

PARTNERSHIP

M A G A Z I N E

2026 | Volume 3

CONFLUENCE

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About Bears Ears Partnership

Bears Ears Partnership (BEP) is a nonprofit organization working within the Bears Ears cultural landscape of the Four Corners region with programs reaching Tribal, federal and state, as well as private lands.

Our mission is to cultivate durable and effective partnerships to protect the cultural and ecological resources of the Bears Ears region.

With Tribes, land management agencies, nonprofits and regional communities, we lead **on-the-ground conservation, education, and research programs** to care for this region.

BEP operates **two physical locations** in Southeastern Utah: the Bears Ears Education Center in Bluff (the only visitor center for Bears Ears National Monument) and the North Campus at the Canyon Country Discovery Center in Monticello.

Bears Ears Partnership recognizes our work is carried out on traditional lands taken from the Diné, Hopi, Ute, Zuni, and other Tribes and Pueblos. We aspire to honor and learn from the long history of stewardship and connection to this sacred landscape.



THE LAND CAN'T WAIT

A Letter from Joe Neuhofer, Chief Executive Officer of Bears Ears Partnership

We often get some version of the same question when discussing our work at Bears Ears Partnership (BEP) – how does BEP effectively work across so many cultural and geographic divides? The answer has been the same for the past several years: “We move at the speed of trust.”

What this means in practice is our path is continually guided by the collective wisdom of our partners, and we remain adaptable along the way in our programs. As BEP enters its 14th year and we celebrate the 10th anniversary of Bears Ears National Monument, our vision presses forward with on-the-ground efforts throughout the Four Corners region.

Despite policy uncertainty and federal funding freezes, BEP continues to grow. Our partners understand clearly that **the land can't wait**; it needs our care and stewardship now. BEP remains focused on tangible and measurable work, making a permanent difference conserving these cultural landscapes. BEP is steadfast in our commitment to implementing the Bears Ears Resource Management Plan and in supporting Tribal leadership to protect the "Lands Between."

After months of collaborative planning, our partnership is proud to announce **our vision for the next three years – a new strategic plan**. This plan outlines three areas of focus: conserving and protecting the cultural and ecological landscape of the Bears Ears region; partnering to create a vibrant second campus in Monticello; and ensuring Tribal perspectives continue to inform our work along the way. A few features of our expanded programs include:

- A fully permitted and outfitted **river education and stewardship** program on the San Juan River with dedicated full-time staffing.
- Partnering to **scale up our night sky program into a future Dark Sky Campus** in Monticello, representing the first signature program of many as we look to the future of that campus.
- Canyon Country Youth Corps is a vital partner in the largest **watershed restoration** project in Southeast Utah, and continues to work with Tribes and other partners to carry out our **infrastructure and interpretation** projects at Sand Island in Bears Ears.

None of this is possible without you. So, as you read the 2026 *Partnership Magazine* highlighting the people, programs, and places of our work, please consider supporting us in whatever way you can.



Background: Josh Ewing; right: Anne Keller





Visit with Respect CELEBRATING A DECADE



In the greater Bears Ears region, visitors from all walks of life interact with cultural sites every day. The launch of Visit With Respect in 2016 helped to set the precedent for respectful behavior to protect these irreplaceable cultural resources. With trained Ambassadors educating visitors about our shared responsibility to follow these guidelines, **the Visit With Respect program has transformed how people view the entirety as a living landscape.** Weaving western science with Traditional Knowledge, these guidelines encourage cultural sensitivity to preserve these sacred spaces for generations.

This year marks 10 years of Visit With Respect – **a visionary program that has grown to 20 guidelines**, expanded beyond the borders of Bears Ears National Monument, and become standard on signage throughout the region. Visit With Respect messaging recently expanded to Mesa Verde National Park, marking the first time a national park has used our guidelines.

Here's to the next decade!

“When The Wildlands Conservancy began work at Speaking Springs in Cottonwood Wash, it was immediately clear that this landscape demanded more than standard visitation guidelines. We were stepping into a place shaped by thousands of years of Indigenous presence, story, and relationship, a cultural landscape that asks for humility before it asks for anything else. The Visit With Respect program resonates with us precisely because it **blends Tribal cultural values and archaeological best practice ethics with visitor-friendly messaging** that helps people move through these places with intention and care. The program supports our work by helping to bridge the gap between access and responsibility, ensuring that **the privilege of visiting these ancestral places is matched with the responsibility to safeguard them.**

– Dave Herrero, Four Corners Regional Director,
The Wildlands Conservancy



Jeremy Youst



 Above: Molly Stack

Visit With Respect Ambassadors volunteer their time to talk with visitors on the trails about our 20 respectful visitation guidelines, safety tips, and the history of the Monument. They also monitor the sites and trails to make sure they stay in good condition. **To our over 50 Ambassadors, we thank you** and appreciate the work you continue to do to protect this living landscape.



To join the Ambassador program, scan the QR code or visit BearsEarsPartnership.org/get-involved/ambassadors

“**Bears Ears is a hallowed landscape.** Every rock, pool of water, and raven feather is steeped in the shared consciousness of Indigenous People who call this place home. While visiting archaeological sites on this sacred ground, we can strive to experience them differently than we would many hiking trails or mountain tops elsewhere – with reverence and respect. As a ranger, I can’t be everywhere to meet people on the trails. This is what makes the Visit With Respect messaging such a great set of guidelines for people to honor the historical landscape they are visiting. Visit With Respect invites visitors to be more than casual observers. **It invites us all to become stewards, not only of cultural sites, but the landscape as a whole.** By following these guidelines, we all become caretakers. Stewardship is contagious.

– Jeremy Martin, Monticello
Bureau of Land Management



Remember That Ancestral Landscapes Are Sacred



Dogs & Archaeology Don't Mix



Historic Artifacts Aren't Trash



GPS Reveals Too Much



Stay on Established Trails



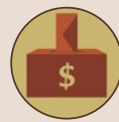
Leave Cultural Belongings Where They Are



Use Rubber-Tipped Poles



Leave Fossils & Bones Undisturbed



Pay Your Fees



Pack Out Your Poop



Don't Touch Rock Imagery or Make Your Own



Stay on Designated Roads



Avoid Building Cairns



Enjoy Cultural Sites Without Ropes



Steer Clear of Ancestral Structures



Camp & Eat Away From Archaeology



Guide Children Through Sites



Use a Fire Pan



View Sites From a Distance



Refrain From Grinding Ancestral Slicks



WEAVING

Past AND Present

After teaching himself weaving in high school, Chris Lewis has since dedicated himself to revitalizing Zuni basket weaving traditions, a process that relies on seasonal harvesting of native plants like yucca and willow.

Lewis lends his expertise as a **Native Scholar for the Cedar Mesa Perishables Project** (CMPP), a team dedicated to documenting archaeological baskets and other perishable cultural items that were recovered from dry caves in the Bears Ears National Monument and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area regions in the 1890s. Being able to study these items – associated with the Basketmaker (200 BC-700 AD) and Ancestral Pueblo (700-1300 AD) archaeological cultures – has helped Lewis improve his hands-on knowledge of weaving.

“Having a weaving background, it was easier to pick out what techniques they were using,” he said of looking at collections around the country. “Seeing that they go back in our history, it’s mind-boggling that they continued this long with that same craft.”

Now, Lewis’s original pieces help other scholars and weavers better understand the continuity between ancestral knowledge and contemporary artistry. Lewis was one of eight Indigenous consulting curators invited to design an exhibit at the Penn Museum in Philadelphia – an opportunity that came about because of his work with CMPP. The 10-year exhibit *Native North America* opened this past fall, featuring more than 250 pieces of the museum’s collection alongside contemporary pieces, including two baskets created by Lewis, which he donated to the museum.

Looking ahead, Lewis will be returning to the Penn Museum to give guest lectures, as well as continue to present his research and teach weaving across the Four Corners region.

“The knowledge of actually making baskets is lost,” he said. “We need to revitalize and bring these things back to Zuni.”

“Baskets play a vital role in Pueblo life. **A basket is representative of a person, a being.** That middle of the basket, the spot of the basket is the belly button, and it coils out, indicating the life road of a person, beginning to an end. It’s there when you’re born, it’s there when you die, and it’s there for everything important in between.

– Chris Lewis (Zuni, Badger Clan, Corn Clan), Board Member of Bears Ears Partnership

 Laura Brown



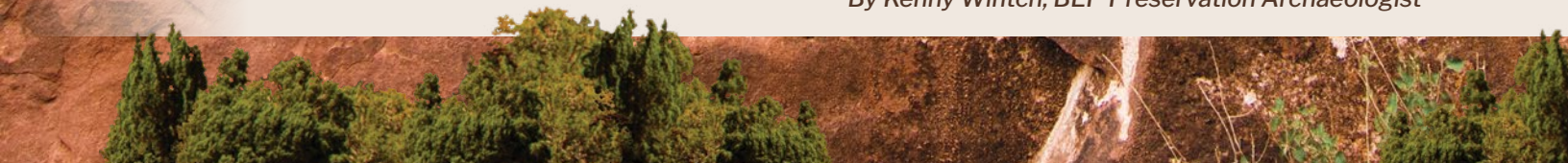
Learn more about the Cedar Mesa Perishables Project & how you can support.

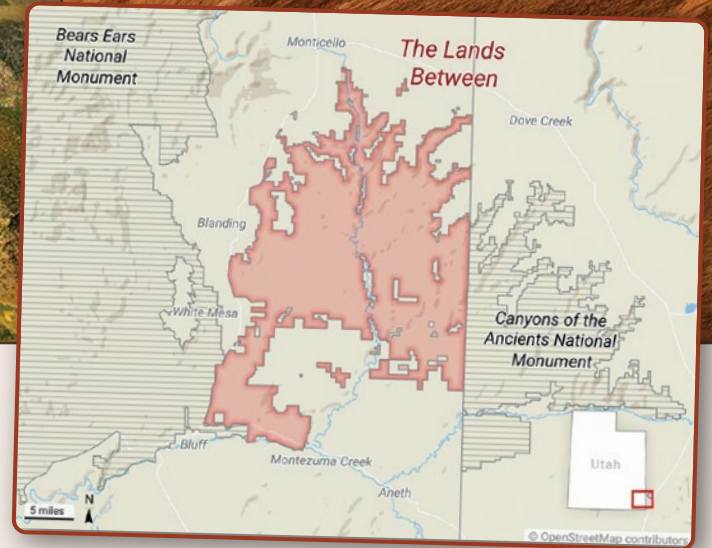


Bringing Tribes, Technology, & Partners Together to Advocate for

PROTECTION OF THE “LANDS BETWEEN”

By Kenny Wintch, BEP Preservation Archaeologist





What we are temporarily (and imperfectly) calling the “Lands Between” is a swath of about 325,000 acres of public lands located between Bears Ears and Canyons of the Ancients National Monuments.

These public lands form the western core of what we archaeologists call the Central Mesa Verde Region – a cultural landscape covering the central part of the northern half of the San Juan River drainage (Noble 2006:ix). This region has been recognized as having a higher density of Ancestral Puebloan population between 1200-1250 CE than any other part of the American Southwest, save for the Phoenix Basin of Arizona (Hill et al. 2004:Fig.3). The Clinton administration gave the public lands in the eastern core of the Central Mesa Verde Region lasting, durable federal protection as Canyons of the Ancients National Monument in 2000. The “Lands Between” were recognized in 1904 as being an important region in “urgent need of immediate action” by the federal government (Hewett 1904:11), but no such recognition has ever been forthcoming.

I argue that the “Lands Between,” combined with Canyons of the Ancients and the rest of the Central Mesa Verde Region, is a cultural landscape that holds outsized importance to the history of Pueblo culture. The “Lands Between” is a core part of a landscape where Pueblo culture evolved, grew and formed prior to the great Pueblo migrations out of the San Juan River drainage (and into the Rio Grande and Little Colorado River drainages farther south) during the 13th Century CE.

Archaeologists familiar with this region always knew it was a cultural landscape filled to the brim with tens of thousands of cultural sites big and small. Incremental gains in method and theory over the years have helped us recognize that this was an extensive cultural landscape that was likely organized into communities, each with its own community center – one, often

large, site with communal and monumental architecture that was likely the social and political center of each community during a given time period. We also came to recognize long, linear “roads” – monumental constructions in their own right that were most recognizable in association with certain community centers. But the recent availability of publicly available, regional-scale LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) remote sensing data have allowed us to see not only the breadth and depth of those linear roads as they swept across the landscape, but two other types of cultural landscape phenomena equally impressive in conveying the ancestral richness of this region: “loop” roads of various size that strongly associate with community centers, and thousands of acres of highly manipulated berm-swale landscapes that the Bureau of Land Management has termed “Berm-Swale Field Systems” (cf. Carleton Bowekaty’s description of these phenomena in last year’s *Partnership Magazine*). **LiDAR imagery has allowed us to recognize this as a landscape once full of people organized into geographically based communities.**

In October 2025, the Hopi Tribe, with strong support from Bears Ears Partnership, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) and Crow Canyon Archaeological Center (Crow Canyon), hosted the **5th Annual Tribal Gathering for the “Lands Between”** at Crow Canyon’s campus near Cortez, Colorado. The focus of this year’s gathering was on LiDAR – both its benefits and challenges, particularly for Tribes and other partners in protecting their heritage resources back at home as well as across the public domain. Attendees included Tribes, Tribal scholars familiar



with LiDAR technology, conservation nonprofit partners and, importantly, Crow Canyon Research Institute's LiDAR Working Group. Tribes were introduced to LiDAR, how it works, what it has revealed in the Central Mesa Verde and elsewhere, and the challenges it presents to Tribal data sovereignty and cultural resource management. A trip to a large, very late-dating Ancestral Pueblo village and nearby berm-and-swale features allowed for some extensive, detailed discussions among the participants. As we parted ways – and home was a long ways away for some – it was clear this gathering planted the seeds for ongoing collaboration and future progress on this important topic.

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All landscapes: Josh Ewing
Map: Ben Katz (created with Datawrapper)



Restoration of the GREATER BEARS EARS WATERSHEDS

BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Alongside the Tribal, Federal land manager, nonprofit, and community collaborators who make up the Bears Ears Conservation Partnership (BEP), **BEP is helping to implement the largest watershed restoration project in the history of the Manti-La Sal National Forest.**

The BECP's holistic watershed restoration plan pairs Traditional Indigenous Knowledge with multiple uses and western science to improve watershed conditions at degraded sites and reinforce the climate resiliency of this landscape.

During the 2025 season, BEP's Canyon Country Youth Corps (CCYC) restored 2,000 acres of watershed and improved 2,560 acres of rangeland. Looking ahead, the BECP has identified 25 spring developments, four wetland meadows, and four stream systems to be restored by CCYC through 2031.

Legend

Meadows



Springs



Streams and Rivers



Wetlands



2025 Projects



2026 - 2031 Projects



NATURAL BRIDGES NATIONAL MONUMENT

MANTI-LA SAL

 Map: Joe Tehan, Pointe Strategies

Indian Creek Stream Restoration - 2025-2027

In 2025, **more than 20 low-tech, process-based restoration structures** were constructed in Indian Creek, mimicking the natural accumulation of large woody debris with the goals of increasing channel complexity, elevating water tables, maintaining/enhancing channel-floodplain connectivity, increasing riparian areas, attenuating peak flows and elevating baseflow, and increasing sediment retention.

Monticello

Fenceline Trough Restoration - Summer 2025

This project **exclosed the spring and adjacent meadow, protecting the surrounding habitat** and repairing channelization, post holing, and hummocking created by trailing cattle, deer and elk. CCYC crews **installed a new trough** designed to allow bats and other animals that need an unimpeded flight path to hydrate; all troughs are now constructed with at least one wildlife ramp to allow for animals to escape if they accidentally fall in.

San Juan River

BEP continues to develop our vision for a **five-year, multimillion dollar river health and cultural stewardship program** along the banks of the San Juan River. Our River Program and CCYC crews, working with Tribes and Bureau of Land Management, will remove invasive weeds, monitor ecological health and cultural sites along the stretch of the river running through Bears Ears National Monument. Our work on the San Juan kicked off in spring 2025, with invasive weed removal, updated cultural interpretation, and trail improvement at the Upper Sand Island Trail and Petroglyph Panel.

Blanding



Bluff is 26 miles south of Blanding

How Low-Tech, Process-Based Restoration Supports WATERSHED HEALTH

By Juli Scamardo

Rivers and streams cover less than 2% of the Southwest U.S., yet they form some of the region's most vital ecosystems. Along their banks, bands of vegetation flourish, creating ribbons of green curling across the arid landscape providing shade, shelter, and forage for desert wildlife.

Although perennial, year-round flow is increasingly rare – **more than 80% of streams are expected to dry for at least part of the year** – the imprint of water remains a powerful force on the environment. Even ephemeral streams, which flow only briefly after storms, serve as critical corridors of movement and refuge for the plants and animals that rely on their temporary flow.

Desert streams across the Four Corners region are naturally dynamic systems, constantly adjusting to sporadic pulses of water, sediment, and large wood. **Historically, ecosystem engineers such as beavers also helped shape the form and function of these waterways.** Although beavers were long assumed to be absent from the desert Southwest, Indigenous knowledge and paleo-ecological evidence show they are native to the region. Even in non-perennial streams, beavers historically built dams that slowed water movement, trapped sediment, and increased groundwater recharge: processes that helped create complex, heterogeneous habitats.



 Anne Keller



Over the past few centuries, however, these dynamic, high-storage streams have undergone substantial change. Beaver populations, and thus beaver dam densities, have declined sharply due to historical over-trapping and subsequent degradation of the habitats that once sustained them. At the same time, water diversions, land-use change, and climate change have altered the frequency, timing, and magnitude of water and sediment pulses that traditionally fueled the dynamism inherent to these systems. Together, these pressures have transformed many streams into simplified and incised channels, disconnected from their floodplains and flowing for shorter periods throughout the year.

In response to the widespread and longstanding alteration of desert streams, The Nature Conservancy and Bears Ears Partnership are working together to implement low-tech, process-based restoration techniques to revive healthy, dynamic stream ecosystems across the greater Bears Ears region. **Low-Tech, Process-Based Restoration (LTPBR) focuses on restoring natural stream processes using natural materials and minimal machinery.** To regain many of the processes lost with the decline of beaver populations – such as temporary water and sediment storage – common LTPBR practices include installing beaver dam analogues, engineered log jams (also called post-assisted log structures), and rock-based structures. These structures are meant to slow and pond water, trap sediment, and help reconnect streams to their floodplains, gradually recovering the dynamic, complex habitats that desert streams once supported. Although LTPBR has gained momentum over the past decade, many of these techniques mimic Indigenous practices of using wood and rocks to reduce erosion, an approach which has been used for thousands of years.

Dozens of scientific studies across the Western U.S. have examined whether LTPBR is achieving the goals set by these projects. The results are promising: **LTPBR structures effectively pond water, increase temporary water storage on the landscape, and capture excess fine sediment.** This enhanced storage supports healthier riparian vegetation, making the elusive ribbons of green along desert streams even lusher and more resilient to drought. In some cases, these structures also help cool streams and reduce flood impacts, providing critical refuges for aquatic species and boosting ecosystem resilience to extreme events.

While the documented benefits are encouraging, every river is unique. Each new LTPBR project offers an opportunity to learn, adapt, and become better stewards of the land and waterways. Partnerships such as the Bears Ears Conservation Partnership that combine science, thoughtful management, and community engagement can help ensure that rivers and streams across the West remain healthy, dynamic, and resilient for generations to come.

Juli Scamardo is an Assistant Professor of Watershed Science at Utah State University and a member of the Science Advisory Committee for The Nature Conservancy's Canyonlands Research Center.

Going with the Flow: LAUNCHING OUR NEW RIVER PROGRAM

We are delighted to introduce **Bears Ears Partnership's River Education & Conservation Program, on the San Juan River!** With our new river permit, a boathouse full of rafts, camp stoves, and sleeping pads – and River Program staff to make it all possible – we are ready to actualize our vision and take BEP's on-the-ground education and conservation programming to a new level.

The San Juan River anchors the ecosystem of the greater Bears Ears region, forming a vital tributary of the mighty Colorado River. Our new River Program aims to **connect visitors of all walks of life to the watersheds that sustain this sacred living landscape**, providing opportunities for meaningful experiences rooted in education and conservation. Many of these trips will be offered free-of-cost to ensure these valuable trips are more accessible.

During our **Spring and Summer Camps and field trips for regional youth**, the San Juan River becomes an outdoor classroom, where they can learn anything from STEM curriculum and Visit With Respect principles to paddling an inflatable kayak. When we host **youth-Elder trips for Tribal partners**, participants have the opportunity to connect with an ancestral landscape, while engaging in the intergenerational sharing of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge. And for a Canyon Country Youth Corps crew member, removing invasive species as part of our future San Juan River restoration programming, they are gaining vital experience that could propel them into a career in conservation or land management.

As we push off from the boat ramp at Swinging Bridge, Sand Island, or Mexican Hat, and launch ourselves into the waters of the San Juan, we are honored to deepen our commitment to this river and the communities and ecosystems that are tied to it.

*We invite our community to
paddle along with us!*



The Confluence of GENERATIONS

By Carleton Bowekaty, BEP Senior Policy Director

This past autumn, I spent several days floating down the San Juan River with Ute Mountain Ute Elders. Being on the river is always a reminder that the greater Bears Ears cultural landscape has many facets.

From the stark beauty of Valley of the Gods, up the dizzying Moki Dugway, to the all too familiar elements of Cedar Mesa: red clay sand mixed with hardscrabble, the pinyon pines and twisted junipers cropping the fields of sagebrush – all mixing into a heady scent of the essential southwest.

Water is a scarce but powerful force on this landscape, shaping everything you see, and the perspective you get while on the water is unlike any other.

One image from this meaningful trip will stick with me forever: smoke from the fire playing along with Aldean's flute melodies, rising to meet the clouds overhead, where sparks blended in with the first glimpses of the Milky Way. This scene followed conversations that spanned as many facets of humanity as the Bears Ears landscape does in its features. The river's constant movement beside us served as an equalizer as we shared stories from our lives, reminding us of our collective humanity and connection to place. The river provided a safe space to share.

As we enjoyed our meals together and watched the canyon walls float by, **Ute Mountain Ute Elders voiced their shared concerns about the impact of visitation on the landscape and the need for younger generations to understand their past.** Many other Tribal leaders express

that same concern to not leave children behind. It is heartbreaking to learn that many of the local Tribal youth have never experienced the joys of paddling down the San Juan River, following its sandy current and cooling off in the water.

Time spent on the river can provide a unique and necessary opportunity for this vital intergenerational sharing of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge. Bears Ears Partnership's (BEP) River Program aims to address this gap, providing local and Tribal youth the opportunity to float down the river from Sand Island to Mexican Hat with cultural knowledge holders, while highlighting Visit With Respect principles.

I have witnessed the personal growth of both Tribal youth and Elders while on the river, building connections across Tribes and generations. Having both youth and Elders on the trip is beneficial, and I am eager to see this program grow in that direction. **Connecting people with the waterways that sustain this cultural landscape is a vital piece** of BEP and our partners' long term goals to co-manage this landscape. BEP is committed to engaging youth and Elders for the intergenerational sharing of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge.

 Anne Keller





Why I Became a **DARK SKY** AMBASSADOR

By Eirene Hamilton

As a child, my spirit and ears were blessed by rich cultural stories, one being of how Coyote stole fire. In his escape, with flaming torch in mouth, he sprinted across the heavens, leaving a trail of sparkling embers we now call the Milky Way. Growing up in the Southwest, the sky and stars have always held a poetic magic for me.

In July 2025, the town of **Bluff, Utah** was finally **designated an International Dark Sky Community, after years of organizing and collaboration** between residents, business owners, and town officials. To celebrate our now-famous dark skies and the community that protects them, Bluff held an **inaugural Dark Sky Festival** in November. This two-day multicultural educational event included lectures by astronomy scholars, a walkabout at a Puebloan Great House site, and two multi-telescopes star parties. After the nightly lectures, participants were reminded to protect their night vision by using red spectrum flashlights to navigate their way amongst an array of telescopes set up outside the Bluff Community Center. There, our eyeballs were pierced by the amplified distant light of binary stars, planets, galaxies, and other celestial bodies. Some minds were boggled imagining interstellar distances of light years.

Being of Diné heritage, I can say that **Navajo people still meet each new day with acknowledgment of one's location in the cosmos**, feet planted on *Nihimá Nahasdzáán*, Mother Earth, under the cover of Father Sky, *Nihitaa' Yádíthil*. Even our commonly known greeting, *Yá'át'ééh*, alludes to the wonderment of each new day! Doorways of homes and ceremonial gathering places are often aligned with a Solstice sunrise. Living on the Colorado Plateau amidst Indigenous communities, current and ancestral, one becomes aware of the importance of terrestrial and celestial perspectives. In the dark skies of winter, spring, summer, and autumn, the constellations establish

order and present a suitable calendar that dictates daily and seasonal activities. The setting of the Pleiades, *Dilyéhé*, determined the planting of life sustaining crops: corn, squash, and beans. Other Tribes have their own names and stories of star groups, all different from those of Euro-Americans. Americans have inherited names for constellations imbued with reference to Greek, Roman, and other European gods and characters.

The celestial sphere has always inspired humans, but light pollution prevents a view of the stars for at least a third of the world's population. Since only a fraction of the world's population can view the Milky Way, a Dark Sky Community designation is a meaningful resource.

Enter astrotourism. **Bear Ears Partnership has established a citizen-scientist volunteer vanguard of Dark Sky Ambassadors** who are trained in basic astronomy, as well as the mechanics of setting up a telescope and using a viewfinder scope to spot a celestial target, be it a single star, constellation, nebula, or star cluster of a far-flung galaxy. Star gazing is an uplifting hobby to be enjoyed by all, reminding us that our skies must be protected from light pollution.



Ta'neeszahnii nilj. Bit'ahnii yáshchíín. Tábaahá dabicheii. Naakaiidine'é dabináí. Utah Diné Eirene Nakai Hamilton is a retired language teacher in the San Juan River Valley.



Background: Josh Ewing
Bottom right: Paul Martini

A Message from Michael Rymer, Community Program Manager at DarkSky International

Bluff's certification as an International Dark Sky Community not only furthers DarkSky International's mission to protect the natural nighttime environment, but it also adds further protections in **a special part of the country that consists of unique landscapes and wildlife**. The Four Corners region of the United States is filled with places that have committed to using outdoor lighting responsibly, striking a balance between people's need for light at night and the need to conserve as much of the nighttime environment as possible. Doing so benefits nocturnal creatures' ability to continue living the way they have for millions of years. It also allows us to **commune with nature by seeing the same night sky our ancestors once saw**.

Each year, the number of certified International Dark Sky Communities increases. These locations, including Bluff, Utah, are central to efforts to combat light pollution, since developed areas – where people live and work – are also the primary source of excess artificial light. Bluff and other International Dark Sky Communities are significant in that they have adopted responsible outdoor lighting policies to achieve certification. These policies guide towns in how to manage outdoor lighting so that it is only used where and when needed, and reduces negative impacts while maintaining usefulness and safety. **Towns also serve as educators for dark skies and good lighting practices** for both residents and visitors alike, so that folks can feel encouraged to participate in addressing bad outdoor lighting and celebrate the night.



Interested in becoming a Dark Sky Ambassador?
Contact Education Director Sarah Burak at
sarah@BearsEarsPartnership.org

The Intersection of Art & Conservation

MEET KATE AITCHISON



View from Hesperus





4 Pass Loop

Both pieces

38"x50" | 2025

*Monotype on
handmade paper
(paper made by the
artist from recycled
textiles & invasive
plant species)*

If you've spent any time in Bluff, Utah over the past few years, you've probably seen **Kate Aitchison's vivid, ecologically inspired artwork.** Since joining the community in 2019, Aitchison has been inspired to cultivate opportunities for artists in rural spaces, while creating work exploring the relationships between people and place, history and nature. **Her unique way of distilling layers embedded in landscape makes her work a fitting companion to conservation.** The donor wall welcoming visitors on the front of the Bears Ears Education Center was designed by her and her husband, and we chose one of her pieces to help promote the 2026 Celebrate Bears Ears event. Aitchison also runs a small gallery in town, and led the 2025 Bluff Arts Festival. Currently, she's the Artist in Residence at The Nature Conservancy's Dugout Ranch.

*Read an interview with Aitchison
on our website to learn more
about her artistic process,
and how she is influenced by
the Bears Ears landscape.*





Front cover: Tim Peterson
Back cover: Anne Keller



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