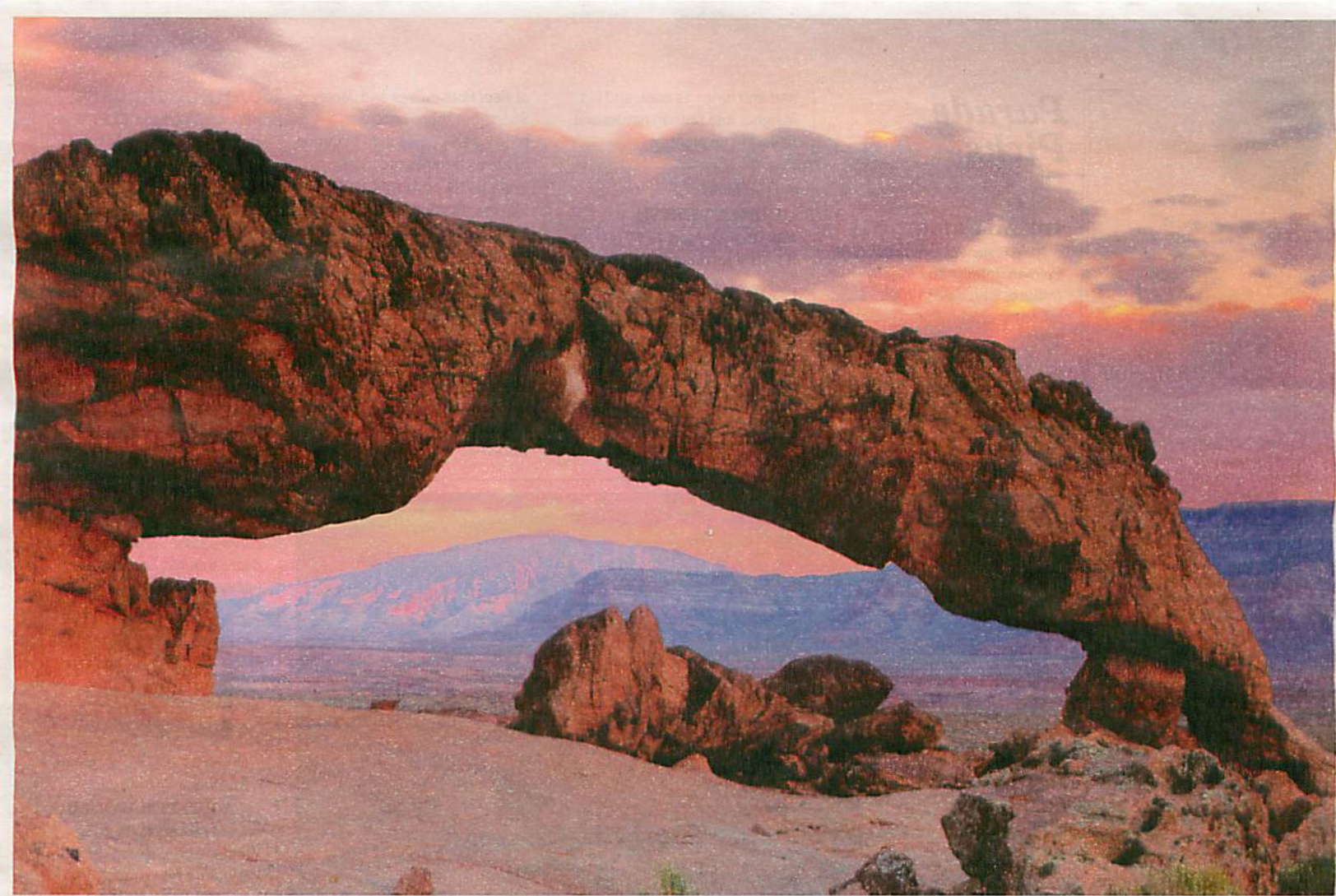


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*America's hidden treasures—and
what you can do to help save them*

Visitors at Utah's
Grand Staircase-Escalante
National Monument,
one of nearly a thousand
conservation sites



Saving Our National Treasures

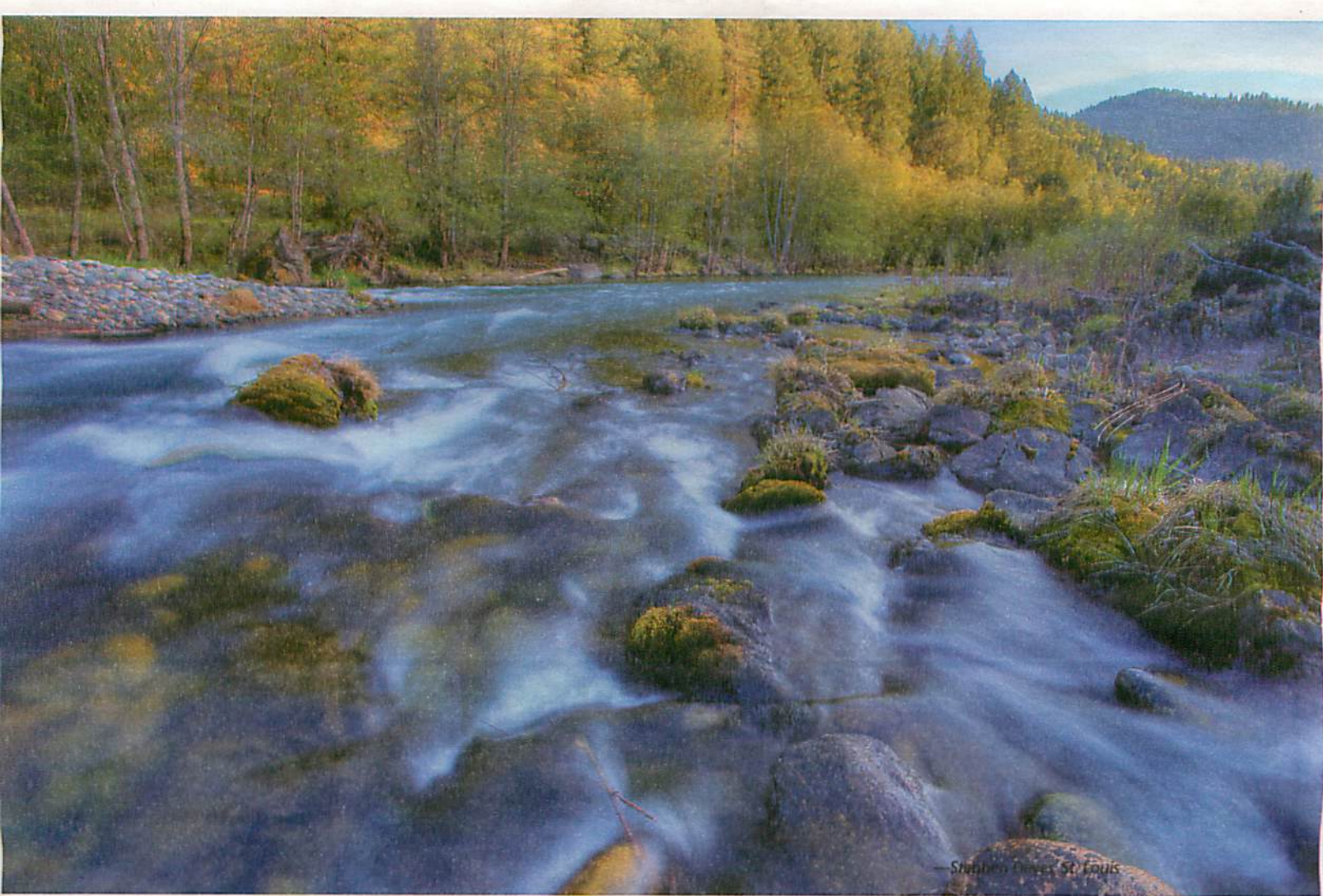
Learn about the monuments, trails, and forests Americans are working to preserve—and how you can, too ▲ **By MICHELLE NIJHUIS**

AT 8 A.M. ON A RECENT SATURDAY, 30 volunteers gathered at the visitor center for the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument, armed with weapons for that day's battle: trash bags, work gloves, and wheelbarrows. They'd spent the rest of the week being college students, medical assistants, or retired schoolteachers. But not this morning.

Today they were monument caretakers.

Tucked into the southwestern corner of Colorado, Canyons of the Ancients, a 170,000-acre high-desert landscape, has no restaurants and few trail markers. But its canyons teem with riches of the past: 13th-century towers, rocks painted with images of ghostly hands, and other vestiges of the 1,000-year-old Ancestral Puebloan civilization. "I hike in two miles every few months to check on one of the sites, make sure it hasn't been vandalized," says Harry Hance, 80. In the past decade, looters have stolen artifacts, pushed over walls, and even desecrated centuries-old graves in search of

COVER PHOTO BY TANYA MILLIGAN/ZIONNATIONAL-PARK.COM. THIS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: TOM TILL; BOB WICK/BLM



—Stanhope Jones, St. Louis

▲
THE APTLY NAMED
SUNSET ARCH (LEFT) IN UTAH'S GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT. THE TRINITY RIVER (ABOVE) TUMBLES THROUGH NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.

valuables. Today the volunteers pick up trash and close a stretch of road that's been used to intrude on monument land. The work is hard and dirty, but no one minds.

Canyons of the Ancients is one of the 886 properties that make up the little-known National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), created in 2000 and formally signed into law by President Obama just two years ago. These undeveloped wildernesses, historic trails, expansive monuments, scenic rivers, and other sites cover 27 million acres, an area nearly the size of New York state. But the NLCS functions on a budget of \$67 million—acre for acre less than a tenth the amount allotted to the National Park Service. Since funds for rangers and other paid caretakers are scarce, the landscapes are often neglected, if not violated. At Agua Fria Na-

tional Monument, in central Arizona, ATV drivers ride unchecked across riverbeds, home to such sensitive species as the yellow-billed cuckoo and lowland leopard frog. At Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, 17 miles—but a world away—from the hubbub of the Las Vegas Strip, vandals have scrawled graffiti on ancient pictographs and spray-painted rocks with

“
The more you come here, the more you realize it's just covered with history.”

—a Colorado volunteer

the names of local gang members.

Taking on the vandals are thousands of Americans who spend their time doing everything from carting away litter to mapping archaeological sites. “The more you come here, the more you realize it's just covered with history,” says Canyons of the Ancients volunteer Karen Bernhart, 66, who works in a chiropractor's office. “You can live here a long time and never see it all.”

In the past year or so, the NLCS volunteers have become more organized—and more forceful. Many have joined the “friends” groups supported by the Conservation Lands Foundation, a nonprofit that protects and restores NLCS sites. (To find out how you can help, visit conservationlands.org.) At a November summit, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar applauded

▲ **YAQUINA LIGHTHOUSE,** THE TALLEST IN OREGON. IN THE SURROUNDING PARKS YOU CAN SPOT COASTAL BIRDS, SEA LIONS, AND SEALS.



the monument volunteers, saying, "You are helping us...leave a lasting legacy of spectacular landscapes to future generations of Americans."

MONTANA RANCHER AND farmer Hugo Tureck, 73, estimates that he has spent hundreds of hours struggling to protect the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. Here, the vast plains of eastern Montana transition into the White Cliffs of the upper Missouri River. "I look at my time on this landscape as temporary," he says. "It's going to be here long after me. My job is to protect it. Whether it's public land or private, I think that should be our role."

The National Landscape Conservation System hopes to attract more volunteers like Tureck to preserve the monuments.



A) Upper Missouri River Breaks
MONTANA

What you'll see: The best-preserved section of the Lewis and Clark Trail, with fantastic rock formations.
What you can do: Assist with campsite cleanup and monitor historic sites.



B) Red Rock Canyon NEVADA

What you'll see: Rock art, wild burros, and more than 30 miles of hiking trails.
What you can do: Remove graffiti, pick up trash, and maintain trails.

This Land Is Our Land

There are 886 sites in the National Landscape Conservation System, including these four marvels.



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C) Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail MARYLAND

What you'll see: One of the last undeveloped areas on the Potomac, featuring beautiful hardwood forests and a Colonial-era homesite.
What you can do: Maintain trails and signs.



D) Jupiter Inlet Natural Area FLORIDA

What you'll see: Remnants of an ancient coastal dune system and a 150-year-old active lighthouse.
What you can do: Help guide tours of the area and the lighthouse.

The NLCS is administered by the Bureau of Land Management, an agency better known for overseeing grazing and mining than safeguarding landscapes. While many agency employees have embraced their new mission, change is not easy. With few tourist amenities, these sites require effort to experience—but the rewards are rich. Actor Edward Norton, who serves on the Conservation Lands Foundation board, became intrigued by the Carrizo Plain National Monument in Southern California when he spotted it while piloting his plane overhead. The carpets of desert wildflowers were “really magical,” Norton says. “Having a better sense of where you live, of your intimate connection to these natural systems, is important.”

For Norton and other supporters, the sites are like “outdoor



▲ **STAIRWAY TO DISCOVERY** CANYONS OF THE ANCIENTS NATIONAL MONUMENT IN COLORADO IS ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S RICHEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES. MULTIROOMED DWELLINGS WERE THE CENTER OF COMMUNITY LIFE FOR THE ANCESTRAL PUEBLOAN PEOPLE, WHO LIVED IN THE AREA 1,000 YEARS AGO.

“**You become so personally attached to a place.**”

—a Nevada volunteer

museums.” But they’re museums that need volunteers to fight for them—such as Nancy Hall, 49, who leads the Friends of Gold Butte in Mesquite, Nev. In this 345,000-acre chunk of the Mojave Desert, which Hall and her allies want to make the newest member of the conservation lands system, vandals have dragged 200-year-old Joshua trees into fire pits. “When you become so personally attached to a place, it’s kind of heartbreaking,” Hall says. “But we can make a difference.” ■



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