

**THE WAY FORWARD**  
**Working with Local Communities for the Future of**  
**Colorado National Monument**  
**From the Office of Congressman Scott Tipton**

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Colorado National Monument was established on May 24, 1911 after having been initially explored by Grand Junction founder, John Otto. Since that time, Grand Junction and other surrounding communities have maintained a productive and cooperative relationship with Monument operators. Colorado National Monument has served as a treasured asset in the area providing recreational, scenic, and economic benefits for those who are privileged to visit its towering monoliths and deep canyons.

Recently there has been some advocacy at the local level to designate Colorado National Monument as a National Park. This effort has been supported by the Superintendent of the Monument and a number of advocacy groups. The primary arguments put forth by for this change are:

- Increased tourism
  - The current Monument designation is confusing to tourists who assume that it is a roadside stone marker to commemorate something related to Colorado
  - The National Park Service administers tours of National Parks and Colorado National Monument does not appear on the list of available tours because it is not listed as a national park
  - Colorado National Monument will not appear in a Google search for “park” making it more difficult to get on the travel plans of visitors
- Colorado National Monument meets the criteria for being an area of national significance as defined by National Park Service Criteria for Parkland

Among those in support of this proposed designation change are:

- The National Tour Association
- The U.S. Travel Association

On February 23, 2011 Senator Mark Udall held a meeting with community members and representatives from Congressman Scott Tipton's staff. At this meeting, there was wide recognition that the Monument be protected, but local consensus primarily emphasized the need for increased attendance. While some suggest changing the Monument to a National Park as a method for achieving this result, statistics show that the National Park designation does not increase visitation, and that instead, extraneous economic factors and community efforts to facilitate activity in the area have greater bearing on visitation numbers.

Other National Monuments in Colorado and throughout the nation which have undergone subsequent National Park designations saw little to no increase in attendance as a result of the designation change. In most cases attendance has increased gradually over the years in the aggregate, but has seen considerable fluctuations from year to year, uninfluenced by the legislative status of the land itself. The Black Canyon of the Gunnison existed as a National Monument from 1934 until 1999 when it was designated as a National Park by an act of Congress. In the 30 years prior to the designation the Monument saw an annual average of 263,452 visitors per year, while only receiving 179,833 after its designation as a National Park in 1999. Similarly, the Great Sand Dunes National Monument received an annual average of 284,600 visitors in the decade prior designation as National Park, and 276,816 visitors per year on average in the years since<sup>i</sup>.

It is also worth noting that Colorado National Monument regularly receives more visitors annually than a large number of National Parks across the nation, including Black Canyon and the Sand Dunes National Parks in Colorado. It is also among the more highly visited National Monuments in the country.

As a result of these considerations, we believe that protection of the Monument and increased attendance does not necessarily require the use of this designation. Local communities such as Fruita and Grand Junction are in extremely close proximity to the Monument, and as such, they are particularly impacted by policy guiding the use and treatment of these lands. For many years this close community relationship has thrived and has allowed for protection of the natural environment, cooperative use of the public lands, and economic benefit through job

creation. Legislation designating a National Park acts in perpetuity and would drastically and permanently change the dynamic of this relationship. Legislative initiatives to designate National Parks can, in some cases, result in increased costs to provide for additional staff, park signage, maintenance, and can result in inhibitive regulations when attached to designation legislation. In many cases, legislative restrictions on the use of National Parks can prove to be significant impediments to job creation and the stability of local economies. In these tough economic times, the potential economic impacts raise concerns about the viability of National Park designation as a method of achieving community goals and objectives.

Moving forward, we will continue to work with the local communities and all parties involved to ensure implementation of policies designed to increase attendance, protect the natural environment, and create jobs. In this effort, we recommend the organization of a committee of community members to discuss the available options. Members of the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce, Club 20, and local community leaders will be encouraged to participate on the committee.

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<sup>i</sup> Statistics provided by the National Parks Service 5 Year Annual Recreation Visits Report and the National Park Service Annual Visitation Reports for Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and The Great Sand Dunes National Park