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BLM again considering four-lane highway through the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area

Federal agencies previously rejected destructive highway proposal, safeguarding critical tortoise habitat and recreation access

St. George, UT – Friday, the [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) announced](#) it is reassessing a right-of-way application from the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) for the four-lane Northern Corridor Highway through the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area near St. George. The proposal has been rejected seven times, mostly recently in [December 2024](#) by the BLM and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Below is additional information and a quote from Holly Snow Canada at Conserve Southwest Utah.

“Despite years of failed attempts, Washington County officials have made it clear they are going to keep spending taxpayer dollars on a plan to ram a highway through a National Conservation Area,” said **Holly Snow Canada, Executive Director at Conserve Southwest Utah**. “Pursuing this unlawful and outdated idea would cause significant harm to the people, plants and wildlife of Washington County, even though better transportation solutions exist.”

Public comments are due on Monday, November 3, 2025. The BLM has previously considered this application in a 2020 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and 2024 Final Supplemental EIS. The December 2024 decision confirmed the federal agencies’ rejection of the Northern Corridor Highway project, which would tear through critical habitat for the imperiled Mojave desert tortoise, violate five bedrock environmental laws, damage iconic scenic vistas, disrupt treasured outdoor recreation opportunities and set a dangerous precedent for developing federally protected conservation areas across the U.S.

According to the final [Supplemental](#) EIS, the Northern Corridor Highway is a poor option for the St. George community, as it would increase fire probability and frequency, result in permanent loss to designated critical tortoise habitat, spread noxious weeds and invasive plants and adversely impact the highest number of cultural and historical resources of all considered alternatives. Friday’s announcement contradicts this decision.

A Decades-Long Community Fight for Red Cliffs

Since 2006, local residents and concerned citizens across the country have voiced opposition to the highway, pointing out transportation alternatives outside of Red Cliffs NCA that would do a

better job of relieving traffic congestion, supporting economic growth and protecting wildlife, scenic beauty and local access to trails.

Despite immense local opposition to the proposed highway, the BLM and FWS approved a right-of-way for the Northern Corridor Highway in the final days of the first Trump Administration, prompting local and national conservation organizations to [file a lawsuit](#) challenging the decision. The lawsuit argued that the highway violated multiple federal laws, including the Omnibus Public Land Management Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act and others. A [settlement agreement](#) was reached in November 2023, ultimately paving the way for federal agencies' rejection of the Northern Corridor Highway project. Shortly after, a U.S. District Court remanded the 2021 approval of the right-of-way, confirming that the highway would fragment sensitive wildlife habitat for threatened species, reduce outdoor recreation access to the area and set a dangerous precedent for protected public lands across the U.S.

Background on Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (NCA):

The 44,724-acre Red Cliffs NCA is part of the larger Red Cliffs Desert Reserve that is collaboratively managed by the BLM, the FWS, the State of Utah, Washington County and other municipalities. The Reserve was established under the 1995 Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) as part of a "grand compromise" to protect ~61,000 acres of public lands for the Mojave desert tortoise (listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act), while opening 300,000 acres of state and private lands for development. The Red Cliffs National Conservation Area was established in 2009 by Congress to "conserve, protect, and enhance...ecological, scenic, wildlife, recreational, cultural, historical, natural, educational, and scientific resources" of the public lands within the unit.

The region is home to important populations of the [threatened Mojave desert tortoise](#) and other at-risk plants and animals including the Gila monster, burrowing owl and kit fox. The Mojave desert tortoise is on a path to extinction according to leading researchers and its habitat in Southwest Utah, which houses some of the densest tortoise populations, is especially vulnerable given recent and anticipated growth in the region. The NCA is 45 miles from Zion National Park, and includes 130 miles of trails, two wilderness areas, heritage public use sites, Native American cultural artifacts, several threatened/endangered species and [one of Utah's most popular state parks](#), Snow Canyon State Park. People from all over the state, country and world visit to hike, mountain bike, rock climb, horseback ride, photograph and marvel at the expansive red rock landscape.

Additional Information and Resources:

1. [Decades-Long Highway Fight Ends with Victory for Red Cliffs NCA – December 20th, 2024](#)

2. Ask the State of Utah to Save Moe's Valley
3. Local and National Organizations Applaud Plan Signaling Denial of Highway Right-of-Way - November 7th, 2024
4. Conservation Organizations Respond to Washington County's Continued Attacks on Red Cliffs National Conservation Area - August 7th, 2024
5. Federal Agencies Release Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on a Highway Right-of-Way Through Red Cliffs National Conservation Area – May 9th, 2024
6. BLM and FWS Press Release, November 15th, 2023
7. [Report - Washington County at a Crossroads: An analysis of the proposed Northern Corridor Highway project in Southwest Utah](#)
8. [Summary of Desert Tortoise Study in Red Cliffs NCA: Population Trends, Threats to Persistence, and Conservation Significance](#)

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Contacts:

- Holly Snow Canada, Executive Director, Conserve Southwest Utah, 435-200-5838, holly@conserveswu.org
- Grant Stevens, Communications Director, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA); (319) 427-0260 (grant@suwa.org)
- Todd Tucci, Senior Attorney, Advocates for the West, 208-342-7024, ttucci@advocateswest.org