

# VERTICAL TIMES

NEWS FOR CLIMBING ADVOCATES

The National Publication of Access Fund  
Winter 19/Volume 116  
[www.accessfund.org](http://www.accessfund.org)

## 2020 Election Prep: Top 5 Threats to Public Lands

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Our community of climbers and outdoor enthusiasts is larger, more powerful, and more influential than ever before. We all see the growth in our numbers out at the crag, in the gyms, and reflected in the mainstream media as more and more people get access to the outdoors and experience the joys of adventure and recreation.

As we welcome more people into our community, we also boost our influence in Washington, D.C., and across the country with our elected leaders and policymakers. Stop to think for a minute how cool that is. One day, we can fall asleep in the desert or wake up on the walls of El Cap, and the next we can take our message about protecting public lands to our nation's capital.

Make no mistake—the climbing community is a powerful political force, and we must be strategic in how we flex our muscle. This issue of the Vertical Times is dedicated to inspiring and educating climbers to do just that. As we look forward to 2020, let's stop to appreciate what we have accomplished, and then let's get stoked on the work to come.

We kicked off 2019 by winning 1.3 million acres of new Wilderness and first-of-its-kind protections for Wilderness climbing through the passage of a landmark public lands bill. We carried that momentum into Climb the Hill this fall. In this issue of the Vertical Times, you can read how pro climbers like Alex Honnold, Tommy Caldwell, and Sasha DiGiulian were welcomed on Capitol Hill with open arms by congressional members on both sides of the aisle. We heard broad bipartisan support for protecting our public lands. Tommy said it best: "It was a great day. I feel like momentum is shifting."

Not only did we storm Capitol Hill with an amazing and diverse group of climbing and professional athletes, but our work was guided by a new task force on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Because of the work of these

dedicated volunteers, we were able to represent a much broader portion of our climbing community, and we spoke with a unified voice on the importance of protecting public lands. This work will continue to be critical if we want to maximize our influence in shaping policy and protecting our natural heritage. Our diversity is our strength, and when we work effectively together while embracing our different backgrounds and experiences, our collective voice is much more powerful in calling for change.

Looking forward to 2020, this might be the most important election of our generation, and the future of our public lands hangs in the balance. Between now and the election, Access Fund will be educating the climbing community on the issues impacting our public lands so that you can make an informed decision. We're kicking it off in this issue with the Top 5 Threats to Public Lands. In the months to come, sign up for our Policy Digest and connect with us over email and social media to learn more.

And when the time comes—VOTE! In many states, it's easier than ever before. You can vote from your van, from the crag, or from the pub. Heck, you can vote from the Nose of El Cap, regardless of which state you live in. Just get out and vote!

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris".

**Chris Winter**  
*Access Fund Executive Director*



## Become a Legacy Donor

Many of us will never develop a climbing route, put up a first ascent, write a guidebook, or climb at a high level. But there are many other ways to contribute to the story of climbing in America. Making a lasting gift to Access Fund can establish your own legacy of climbing access and conservation, and give back to the climbing experience you love. It can be as easy as putting a short phrase in your will or designating Access Fund as a beneficiary of your IRA, life insurance policy, or other financial instrument.

Learn more at [www.accessfund.org/plannedgift](http://www.accessfund.org/plannedgift)

# Climbers Ascend Capitol Hill to Advocate for Public Lands

This September, Access Fund and American Alpine Club brought over 60 professional athletes, top outdoor brands, nonprofit conservation partners, and community advocates together in Washington, D.C., to meet with lawmakers and agency officials to advocate on issues critical to the future of climbing. In just two days, we had over 60 meetings with lawmakers, hosted a Senate reception, and attended a congressional hearing on recreation.

“This is our fourth year back for Climb the Hill, and people anticipate our arrival now,” says pro climber and Access Fund Ambassador Tommy Caldwell. “They want to see us, and we’re talking about these issues enough that bills are starting to pass. It’s making a big difference.”

The Climb the Hill team—which included renowned climbers Alex Honnold, Sasha DiGiulian, and Tommy Caldwell—met with lawmakers and policymakers to advocate for increased recreational access, environmental protections, and balanced energy policies on public lands. We brought a strong agenda to Capitol Hill this year, representing the climbing community on issues that are absolutely critical to the future of our sport and our public lands. Here’s an overview of what we accomplished.

- **We pushed back on the Administration’s aggressive “energy dominance” agenda,** which is threatening our climbing areas, public lands, and surrounding communities. We met with congressional offices and made some great progress garnering

support for a new bill that aims to reform troubling new oil and gas leasing policies.

- **We spoke out about the lack of funding for public lands.** As climbers, we see firsthand how much our national parks and forests are suffering from crumbling infrastructure and overuse, as well as the ongoing public lands leadership crisis. We shared firsthand experiences and pushed Congress to support the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act, and support full funding for the Land & Water Conservation Fund.
- **We stood firm on protecting America’s exceptional landscapes through conservation designations,** like national monuments and Wilderness areas. We asked Congress to oppose initiatives that undermine the Antiquities Act (and the associated reduction of Bears Ears National Monument) and rallied their support on several bills that aim to protect exceptional landscapes through Wilderness and other conservation designations.
- **We pushed for action on climate change, which is adversely affecting our climbing environments and marginalized communities.** Climbers shared firsthand experiences of climate change on our public lands, and asked for regulations on carbon pollution, protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, fulfillment of the Paris Agreement on climate change, and funding for renewable energy research.



Quinn Brett and Alex Honnold meet with Rep. Joe Neguse (CO-2).

Photo courtesy of © Stephen Gosling

- **We worked together to amplify the voices of our diverse climbing community.** Together, we raised awareness on Capitol Hill of the unique challenges experienced by people of color, indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ folks, and people with disabilities in accessing and enjoying our public lands.

A huge thanks to all the advocates who showed up to help us elevate these critical issues and help secure the future of climbing on our public lands.

“Climbing is exploding in popularity, and this trend will continue into the future, with the Olympics on the horizon,” said Chris Winter, executive director of Access Fund. “Our growing community is increasingly diverse and passionate about recreational access, protecting public lands, and supporting our land management agencies. With Climb the Hill, we’re taking that message to policymakers in Washington, D.C., who hold in their hands the future of our public lands.” ■

# NEW TASK FORCE STRIVES FOR INCLUSION AT CLIMB THE HILL

Climbers descended on Washington, D.C., this past September for the fourth annual Climb the Hill event, cohosted by Access Fund and the American Alpine Club, to advocate for public lands. But this year, they brought with them a new justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) lens—thanks to the dedicated work of a group of advocates known as the JEDI Taskforce.

The Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) Taskforce was created to add a JEDI focus to the advocacy agenda of Climb the Hill and to provide training and resources to attendees—enabling them to speak about climbing access and public lands in a way that acknowledges the

experiences and challenges felt by many underrepresented groups in our community.

The JEDI Taskforce was co-chaired by Shelma Jun, Access Fund board director and founder of Flash Foxy, and Pete Ward, American Alpine Club Board Director. Rounding out the task force were Bethany Lebewitz of Brown Girls Climb, Kareemah Batts of the Adaptive Climbing Group, Access Fund’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fellow Taimur Ahmad, Mikhail Martin of Brothers of Climbing, Maricela Rosales of Latino Outdoors, and Len Necefer of NativesOutdoors.

“It’s been really amazing to have JEDI principles incorporated throughout the many aspects of Climb the Hill, be it the trainings, our meetings with



Shelma Jun speaks on inclusion at Senate reception. © Stephen Gosling

members of Congress, or the panel at the Senate reception. While we have by no means finished this work, we have been able to begin the process forward, and that’s very exciting,” says JEDI Taskforce Co-chair and Access Fund Board Director Shelma Jun.

## A LETTER FROM THE JEDI TASKFORCE

We believe that climbing and access to the outdoors can provide opportunities for personal growth, spur social change, and make our community strong. But many—including people of color, indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ folks, and people with disabilities—experience disparities in access to climbing and to conversations about climbing policy. As a result, they are not equal recipients of those benefits. Our JEDI Taskforce is committed to ensuring that the voices of all our community members are represented at this event.

To serve our community, we must know the community in its entirety. It is important for each of us to recognize and appreciate the values and experiences of the broad spectrum of individuals who make up our constituency, and to be (critically) aware when we can’t fully relate. To address and enhance that understanding is a crucial goal of the task force when it comes to decision-making, policy, and JEDI initiatives.

The task force is comprised of JEDI leaders in our outdoor community who have volunteered their time to create

change to this event in a meaningful and intentional way. In its first year, the goal of the task force is twofold:

- To incorporate JEDI-related issues and language into policy asks that climbers are bringing to members of Congress.
- To educate and train Climb the Hill advocates on why JEDI is important to climbing access and conservation; to show how to recognize language, stereotypes, and assumptions that can exclude or minimize an individual’s experience, as well as to offer alternative narratives that are more inclusive; and to provide tips and tools on how to speak for and represent our diverse community to congressional members and the public at large.

Tackling the issues of equity and inclusion requires commitment, respect, patience, determination, and flexibility. It also requires knowledge, and it is the goal of the JEDI Taskforce to share information and resources with those who will be representing our community this week. A work in progress, we hope that adjustments this year will serve as a first step in the many changes we need to see in the conservation and stewardship conversation. ■



# Climbers and Tribes Join Forces to Save Oak Flat

Climbing advocates showing opposition to mine at Oak Flat. Photo courtesy of © Michael Schennum

Last month, thousands of climbers joined forces with other conservationists and Native American tribes to save Oak Flat (Chi'chil Bildagoteel) outside Phoenix, Arizona. This exceptional area is squarely in the crosshairs of Resolution Copper, a foreign mining company that is set to take ownership of this public land through a shady land exchange deal.

Several Native American tribes consider Oak Flat sacred land, and it is also home to hundreds of sport climbing routes and thousands of bouldering problems. Resolution Copper intends to extract a large copper ore deposit from underneath Oak Flat using a “block caving” technique that would completely consume the surface and all its spiritually significant landmarks and recreational resources, creating a crater over 2 miles wide and 1,000 feet deep.

Climbers and local tribes share a common purpose in this fight, and Access Fund has been working closely with the San Carlos Apache and the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA) on strategies to oppose the mine.

Before the Oak Flat mine is allowed to move forward, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and evaluate anticipated impacts of the mining operation on the environment and other values of the land. The USFS released a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the mining project this fall, and it is both incomplete and based on faulty information. This NEPA assessment provided advocates with one of the last opportunities to weigh in and oppose this destructive mine—and climbers came forward in force.

Responding to an urgent action alert from Access Fund, more than 3,500 climbers from across the country submitted letters to the U.S. Forest Service opposing this destructive mine at Oak Flat, which would be the largest loss of climbing resources ever on America's public lands. These letters pointed out flaws in the Environmental Impact Statement

and asked the Forest Service to put the brakes on this project due to unacceptable impacts to Native American rights, recreational resources, and the environment.

If allowed to move forward, this mine will not only destroy the recreational value of Oak Flat, it will trample on the indigenous rights of the Native American tribes who regard Oak Flat as a sacred area. The mine will also consume between 15,000 and 40,000 acre-

feet of water per year in an area plagued by drought and lead to large-scale environmental pollution.

Access Fund has been fighting to save Oak Flat for over a decade, working alongside a broad coalition of tribes, conservation groups, recreation groups, and local citizens (learn more about the ongoing fight for Oak Flat at [www.accessfund.org/oakflat](http://www.accessfund.org/oakflat)).

Stay tuned to Access Fund news for updates on the fight to save Oak Flat. ■

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# Minimum-Impact Desert Climbing Trips

Photo courtesy of © Andrew Burr

**D**esert and canyon environments are home to iconic climbing destinations—from Red Rock Canyon in Nevada, to the majestic Joshua Tree in California, to the rugged landscape of Joe’s Valley Utah, and many more. These stark landscapes are uniquely fragile and full of life, and demand specific minimum-impact practices to protect the sensitive and historically significant terrain. As you’re planning your next desert adventure to climb splitter cracks and towers or wrestle beautifully shaped and colored boulders, keep these best practices in mind.

**Camp only in established sites or on durable surfaces.**

Why? Cryptobiotic soil is a dark, crumbly-looking soil that acts as a living biological crust on the desert floor, drawing nutrients in while protecting the landscape from erosion by wind and rain. This crust can be destroyed with a single step and takes decades to regenerate.

**Stick to existing roads and established paths.** Why? At first glance, the desert may seem like a barren landscape where it’s OK to forge your own path. But this fragile environment is, in fact, full of delicate plant life that is highly vulnerable to impacts. Limited moisture and intense sun exposure create difficult growing conditions, and driving or walking over these plants will kill them and compromise the sustainability of the landscape—making it much more susceptible to erosion.

**If there aren’t toilet facilities, pack out all human and pet waste.** Why? Desert soil lacks the microorganisms to biodegrade human and pet waste, meaning that poo you leave under a rock could be there for years, creating a biohazard and an unpleasant experience for other users. Even buried poop can’t decompose. We recommend the RESTOP bag, which is easy to use and seals the stink.

**If you encounter artifacts (rock art, pottery shards, historic caves, etc.), look but don’t touch.** Why? Not only does the Archaeological Resources Protection Act make it a federal crime to steal or destroy artifacts, but the oils on our fingers, the chalk on our hands, and the rubber on our shoes can ruin these remnants of human history. Many of these areas were frequented by earlier civilizations, who connected spiritually with the land and relied upon the canyon walls, boulder clusters, and limited plant life for food, shelter, and celebration.

As our sport continues to grow in popularity, we must be careful not to love our climbing areas to death. Join us in making a few minor adjustments to your climbing practice that will protect our outdoor landscapes and the climbing experience we love. The future of our sport depends on it. Learn more and sign The Climber’s Pact today at [www.accessfund.org/theclimberspact](http://www.accessfund.org/theclimberspact). ■

# OUR CAUSES: THE WORK OF PROTECTING AMERICA'S CLIMBING

**T**hreats to our climbing areas come in many forms, and it takes broad expertise and focus to protect these unique places. At Access Fund, we are a community of climbing advocates working in every corner of the country to keep climbing areas open and conserve the climbing environment. Here's how we do it.

## PROTECT PUBLIC LANDS

Nearly 60% of our climbing areas are located on federally managed public lands, and a growing movement of lawmakers and policymakers have launched a systematic attack on those lands. The best way to influence how our public climbing areas are managed is to have a seat at the table. Access Fund represents our collective voice and interests as climbers—working with officials in Washington, D.C., and land managers at parks and forests across the country to protect climbing.

## RESTORE OUR CLIMBING AREAS

From Maine to California, the story is the same: Our climbing areas are redlining, beat up and crumbling under the pressure of a growing climbing population. At Access Fund, our work doesn't stop once access is secured. We are committed to the long-term sustainability of our climbing areas, and our three Access Fund-Jeep Conservation Teams travel the country helping build sustainable climbing areas that can withstand the impacts of our growing sport.

## BUY THREATENED CLIMBING

Some of our most iconic climbing areas—from the Red River Gorge to Jailhouse Rock—are located on private land. And when a privately owned climbing area is put up for



Photo courtesy of © Chris Burkhard

sale, we must act quickly to ensure that access is not lost forever. Access Fund provides local climbing communities with the horsepower to swiftly protect threatened climbing areas—before they are lost. We provide loans, grants, and acquisition expertise to place threatened land in climber-friendly hands.

## INSPIRE CLIMBING ADVOCACY

When an access issue occurs in your backyard, who will be there to help? The first and best line of defense is almost always the local climbers who are familiar with the area and the issues. That's why a critical piece of Access Fund's work is organizing and empowering local climbers to join together into local climbing organizations and have the resources and knowledge to be as effective as possible.

## MENTOR RESPONSIBLE CLIMBERS

As climbers, we have a personal stake in the health and integrity of our outdoor landscapes—without them, we have no place to climb. But just loving our climbing areas is not enough. That's why Access Fund works to help you understand the sensitivities of

each unique climbing environment and give you the tools and knowledge to help reduce your impacts.

## ACCESS PRIVATE LAND

Risk. Liability. Lawsuits. The fear associated with these three little words prevents many landowners from opening their property to climbing. But the perception of risk associated with climbing is largely overstated and misunderstood. And risk can be easily managed when climbers and landowners work together. At Access Fund, we partner with private and public landowners on strategies to mitigate both real and perceived risks of climbing—giving them the confidence and protections they need to open their land to public access.

## REPLACE BAD BOLTS

As climbers, we largely breathe a sigh of relief after clipping a bolt on a route. Bolts give us the courage to keep pushing higher. But bolts can—and do—fail. As the huge number of bolts placed during the climbing revolution of the '80s and '90s reach their 20th or 30th birthdays, the stories of bolt failure are sure to increase. At Access Fund, we are on a mission to help locals replace aging bolts. ■

2020  
ELECTION  
PREP:

# TOP 5 THREATS TO PUBLIC LANDS

**T**he battle for America's public lands, home to nearly 60% of U.S. climbing areas, has evolved over the last several years, moving from outright attempts to sell off lands to more covert attempts to dismantle the regulations and systems that manage and protect them. This less obvious, more complex assault is easy to miss if you don't know where to look. But Access Fund policy analysts are in the weeds every day. We see the bigger picture, and it's not pretty.

The current Administration has made no secret of its agenda to establish America's "energy dominance." And when early attempts to outright sell public lands to private industry didn't work, they switched to more covert tactics, methodically removing the authority, regulations, and resources from our public lands system in order to pave the way for unmitigated energy development and commercial interests.

Not only does this "energy dominance" agenda threaten our climbing areas, it perpetuates the global climate crisis. Climate change is having a disproportionate effect on our nation's public lands and marginalized communities. Extreme temperatures, shifting seasons, and more prevalent wildfires and intense storms are threatening climbing areas and the ecological integrity of our public lands.

Here's how the "energy dominance" agenda is unfolding, in a collection of arcane rule changes, sneaky leadership appointments, subtle policy changes, and big budget cuts—a vicious combination that is leaving our public lands exposed to private interests.

## 1. The Use of "Acting Leaders" to Sidestep Democratic Process

**THE THREAT:** An astounding 60% of top leadership positions at our public land agencies have remained vacant under this Administration. These positions are supposed to be appointed by the president and confirmed by the elected members of the U.S. Senate, providing critical checks and balances that ensure America's public lands are being managed responsibly and not being used for political gain. Instead, the Administration has placed "acting administrators" who have not been vetted by the Senate. The Federal Vacancies Reform Act states that individuals are only allowed to serve in an acting capacity for a set period of time. However, in January of this year, Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary David Bernhardt amended a Secretarial Order to override the Federal Vacancies Reform Act and allow DOI's unconfirmed administrators to continue in their "acting" roles indefinitely. This action sidesteps America's democratic system and sets a precedent in which our public lands can be more easily controlled for politically motivated purposes.

**THE IMPLICATIONS:** Every day, these unconfirmed, acting administrators are making key decisions that will affect our country and planet for generations. And many of them are former advocates for the oil and gas industry or have advocated for the outright disposal of public lands. Take William Pendley, for example, who is acting administrator of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Before joining the BLM, Pendley advocated for the federal government to sell off millions of acres of



federal land across the American West. Pendley has a long history of outward hostility toward federal land management agencies and has argued that they should be dismantled—now he's leading the largest land management agency in the country.

## 2. Cuts to Environmental Regulations to Accommodate Energy Development

**THE THREAT:** Harvard and Columbia law schools have reported that as of September 2019, the current Administration had rolled back 85 environmental rules—paving the way for drilling, extraction, and industrial development on public lands. Congress has done little to stand in the way. These regulations are intended to protect the environment, air and water, wildlife, recreational resources, and cultural and traditional values. We depend on our elected leaders to stand up for the environmental laws that protect our natural heritage.

**THE IMPLICATIONS:** As climbers, we deeply appreciate the experience of climbing in protected landscapes that afford amazing opportunities to enjoy nature, clean air, and an incredibly rich cultural history. Removing environmental regulations will damage the climbing experience on our public lands and the sensitive ecosystems, imperiled species, traditional values, and recreational resources these lands support—not to mention the dire impact on marginalized communities and global climate. The systematic reduction of environmental rules is expected to significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions and lead to thousands of additional deaths from poor air quality each year, according to a recent report prepared by New York University Law School's State Energy & Environmental Impact Center.

## 3. Limits on Public Participation and Transparency That Silence the Public Voice

**THE THREAT:** Under the guise of “streamlining government,” this Administration has made sweeping changes to the way public land agencies comply with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Public comment periods for land management decisions have been cut from 30+ days down to a mere 10 days, and the number of “categorical exclusions” that are allowed to bypass NEPA entirely has been dramatically increased. The Department of the Interior also set limits on FOIA requests, preventing Americans from obtaining information from the government about its land management decisions.

**THE IMPLICATIONS:** The public comment opportunities guaranteed under NEPA are intended to ensure a fair and balanced review of land management decisions and give us—the American public—the opportunity to voice concerns or opposition. Reducing the public comment period to only 10 days doesn't give the American public time to notice, research, and respond. Watchdog advocacy groups like Access Fund barely have time to flag an issue, research implications, and draft a public comment letter—let alone rally our constituents to submit their own public comments. And, by increasing the number of “categorical exclusions,” these agencies are now allowed to bypass NEPA and public comment periods altogether, allowing more energy development projects to sail through uncontested. We're all for streamlined government, but not at the expense of environmental review and public participation. These changes are blatant attempts to silence opposition from the American public. And, given the changes to the way the Department of the Interior implements FOIA, we are unlikely to get information about land management decisions even after the fact.

## 4. Cuts to Public Lands Budget That Hamstring Access and Conservation

**THE THREAT:** America's public lands are notoriously underfunded. The National Park Service alone has nearly \$12 billion in deferred maintenance backlogs, to say nothing of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Despite bipartisan support for our public lands, the current Administration has proposed a budget for 2020 that would slash funding for the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service, as well as cut funding for critical conservation programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). And while the recent passage of the Dingell Act (aka “public lands package”) this spring permanently reauthorized the LWCF, Congress still hasn't actually funded the LWCF. At the same time, agencies are proposing fee increases to the American public.

**THE IMPLICATIONS:** Proposed cuts to agency budgets would force land managers to lay off rangers, resource specialists, and many other stewards of our public lands. Climate science research and environmental standards would also suffer. And history has shown that when our land management agencies are short-staffed and under-resourced, they propose entrance fee increases and err on the side of broader and longer closures, both of which threaten access for all. We need elected leaders who understand that we must fully fund our land management

agencies in order to protect access to our public lands. The Restore Our Parks bill that is currently making its way through Congress is a good start to address the maintenance backlog, but we also need a commitment from Congress to appropriate enough funds to keep our public land agencies operating each year.

### 5. Attacks on the Antiquities Act to Open National Monuments to Development

**THE THREAT:** Over the last several years, the president and some members of Congress have attempted to dismantle the Antiquities Act, a law that gives sitting presidents the ability to declare new national monuments. President Theodore Roosevelt established the Antiquities Act in 1906 to protect significant cultural or scientific features on America's public lands. The act is a fundamental conservation law that allows the president to protect federal lands when Congress is unable or unwilling to do so. It has been used by both Republican and Democratic administrations to shape our national system of parks and public lands. In the spring of 2017, President Trump issued an executive order demanding a review of all national monuments designated over the last 21 years. Later that same year, some members of Congress attempted to pass a bill that dismantles the Antiquities Act, which was defeated. And in his boldest move yet, President Trump issued an executive order in December of 2017 reducing Bears Ears National Monument, home to world-class climbing, by more than 80% in order to open the monument up

to oil and gas leasing. Access Fund is engaged in an ongoing lawsuit to defend the original boundaries of Bears Ears and the Antiquities Act itself.

**THE IMPLICATIONS:** No president has the authority to significantly shrink an existing national monument—only Congress has that power. If the 2017 executive order to reduce Bears Ears stands, it undermines the Antiquities Act itself and threatens the very foundation of our public lands system. Several classic climbing areas—including Devils Tower, Grand Teton, and Joshua Tree—were originally protected by national monument designations through the Antiquities Act (Grand Teton and Joshua Tree are now national parks). Our public lands in this country would look very different today without the Antiquities Act, which has been used by 16 presidents to designate and protect 157 national monuments. We must protect the integrity of this bedrock conservation law.

### PREPARE FOR 2020

While the fight for America's public lands is constantly evolving, the one constant is that the front line is in Washington, D.C., among our elected officials—which means we all have the ability to make an impact with our votes. As you prepare to exercise your vote next November, our commitment to you is that we'll keep you informed of the greatest threats to our public lands. We hope you'll get out and vote, and encourage your friends and climbing partners to do the same. The climbing community is a passionate and powerful force—and we can make a difference. ■

## ★ ★ ★ VOTE FOR PUBLIC LANDS ★ ★ ★

The battle for America's public lands is being waged both in Congress and in the White House, and we must vote for leaders who take a balanced approach to managing our public lands, not leaders who exploit loopholes for the benefit of private interests. **Look for leaders who:**

- ✓ Talk about the importance of outdoor recreation and conservation.
- ✓ Value the role of public participation and scientific data.
- ✓ Advocate for more resources for land managers.
- ✓ Defend and uphold our bedrock environmental laws like the Antiquities Act.
- ✓ Share concrete plans for addressing climate change.
- ✓ Respect Native American rights.



## CLIMBERS PARTNER WITH PARK SERVICE TO PROTECT ZION'S PEREGRINE FALCONS

Zion National Park in southwest Utah is a premier destination for sandstone big wall climbing, with classic routes that draw climbers from around the world. Zion's big walls are also home to a large population of peregrine falcons, which breed on the cliffs each spring and summer. To help protect these magnificent birds of prey, climbers have teamed up with the National Park Service to monitor nesting raptors to ensure a thriving population.

Peregrine falcons were listed as an endangered species in 1970, after a sharp decline due primarily to DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane), an insecticide that caused the birds to produce thin-shelled eggs that were easily broken, killing the developing embryo inside. The U.S. government banned DDT in 1972, and North American peregrine populations began to rebound, thanks in part to the success of captive breeding programs and peregrine conservation efforts by the climbing community. The species was

removed from the endangered species list in 1999, but remains a species of concern for federal and state agencies. Zion National Park has been and continues to be an important sanctuary for peregrines and many other wildlife species.

Each year, park staff implement seasonal climbing closures to prevent disturbances to breeding pairs, based on historical data of when peregrines typically arrive and which cliffs they tend to establish nests on. Those cliffs

are then monitored to determine if active nest sites are established, and those cliffs without active nesting sites are reopened, typically by late April or early May. Cliffs that have active nest sites are monitored until the chicks fledge, usually in late July, after which the cliffs are reopened to climbing.

The park actively works to monitor and reopen climbing areas as soon as possible; however, they are limited in staff time and resources to conduct frequent surveys. To help fill this need, local climbers have stepped up to monitor peregrine falcon nests and provide more eyes on the rocks.

"The climber-biologist partnership in Zion has demonstrated that conservation and climbing can be closely integrated, with results that are beneficial to both parties," says Janice Stroud-Settles, Zion National Park Wildlife Program manager. "The local rock climbers of Zion had a tremendous impact on improving the efficiency of our 2019 peregrine falcon nesting surveys, lending more eyes to

search the sky and cliff faces for those fast-flying falcons. The climbers who participated showed great patience, determination, and diligence during these surveys."

Public land managers often lack staff time and resources to adequately monitor and collect data on raptor activity, relying instead on longer and larger closures to ensure raptors are adequately protected. More and more, climbers and avid birders across the United States are stepping up as citizen



Photo courtesy of © Steffan Gregory

scientists to support land managers with raptor monitoring, helping to provide real-time data that allows refined closure areas, quicker reopening of areas without active nest sites, and better information to help in future management planning.

"Access Fund partners with land managers and biologists to develop basic guidelines and forms to help climbers get started with raptor monitoring programs at their home crags," says Katie Goodwin, California regional director at Access Fund. "These types of partnerships create stronger relationships between land managers and local climbers, as they work together to protect our public lands and the wildlife that find sanctuary there." ■

**"The climber-biologist partnership in Zion has demonstrated that conservation and climbing can be closely integrated."**

## GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

### Welcome, Cheat Canyon Climber's Coalition

We're excited to welcome a new affiliate local climbing organization to our network: Cheat Canyon Climber's Coalition (CCCC) in northern West Virginia. CCCC seeks to preserve recreational and natural resources, build positive relationships between climbers and land managers, and promote sustainable climbing throughout the region. The new group is already building a partnership with Coopers Rock State Park to address trail and fixed-anchor concerns.



### Advocates Form Zion Climbers Coalition

The world-class Zion National Park has a new LCO, the Zion Climbers Coalition (ZCC). ZCC is partnering with the park and supporting climbing access, management, and conservation. As a chapter of the Southern Utah Climbers Alliance, the new group will host community events, replace aging bolts, and support stewardship work. Members also teamed up with park biologists to help monitor and protect the park's peregrine falcons (see full story on Page 11).

### Southern Nevada Climbers Coalition Preventing POOPS

Southern Nevada Climbers Coalition (SNCC) is on a roll. In August, SNCC removed graffiti in the popular Icebox Canyon. In September, they educated climbers on low-impact crag etiquette at the local gym. And, their Waste Management Team is fearlessly promoting sustainable climber pooping and beating back the dog and human waste problem by restocking poop bag stations and removing offending dog poo. By providing poop bags they've successfully prevented 2,400 POOPS (Poor Offensive Outdoor Poop Situations).



## LCO 101: PROTECT YOUR 501(C)(3) STATUS

The foundation of our work as nonprofits is to provide public benefit. In order to keep doing the great work of climbing conservation and advocacy, we must maintain and protect our 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Here's a list of reminders, straight from the IRS, on how to maintain your nonprofit status:

**PRIVATE BENEFIT.** Your work must be for tax-exempt purposes, for the benefit of the public. Any activity that substantially benefits private interests or individuals jeopardizes your nonprofit status.

**INSIDER BENEFIT.** Your group's income or assets cannot be used to benefit insiders, such as board members or employees. If you don't have a conflict of interest policy, your board should adopt one.

**LOBBYING.** Lobbying means advocating for particular legislation. It's OK to do a limited amount, but that activity must be insubstantial relative to your organization's other activities. If you do it, you must report this insubstantial amount annually.

**POLITICAL ACTIVITY.** Participating in a political campaign on behalf of any candidate running for public office is prohibited, at every level of government. As a 501(c)(3), you simply can't do it.

**UNRELATED BUSINESS INCOME.** This one's tricky, with exceptions and thresholds, so you may want an attorney or accountant to help you review. This rule refers to income your organization receives that's not directly related to your mission and work—for example, leasing or renting property you own, or selling merchandise. These instances may result in tax liability for your organization.

**ANNUAL REPORTING.** State and federal filings—you have to do it, every year. For the IRS, we're talking Form 990. This discloses basic financial information and ensures you continue to qualify for your tax-exempt status. For transparency and member and donor confidence, it's even better if you post these filings publicly, on your website.

**B**ased in Boulder, Colorado, The Vansmith designs and builds custom vans for people seeking adventure, freedom, and the comforts of home. The Vansmith understands the need to protect our public lands, and has generously partnered with Access Fund and Omaze to offer a customized 4x4 Sprinter Van to one lucky Access Fund donor.



**T**hese partners are businesses that put their money where their mouth is to support the future of climbing. Please consider the important contribution these partners make to your climbing future. They support Access Fund and you. We encourage you to support them!

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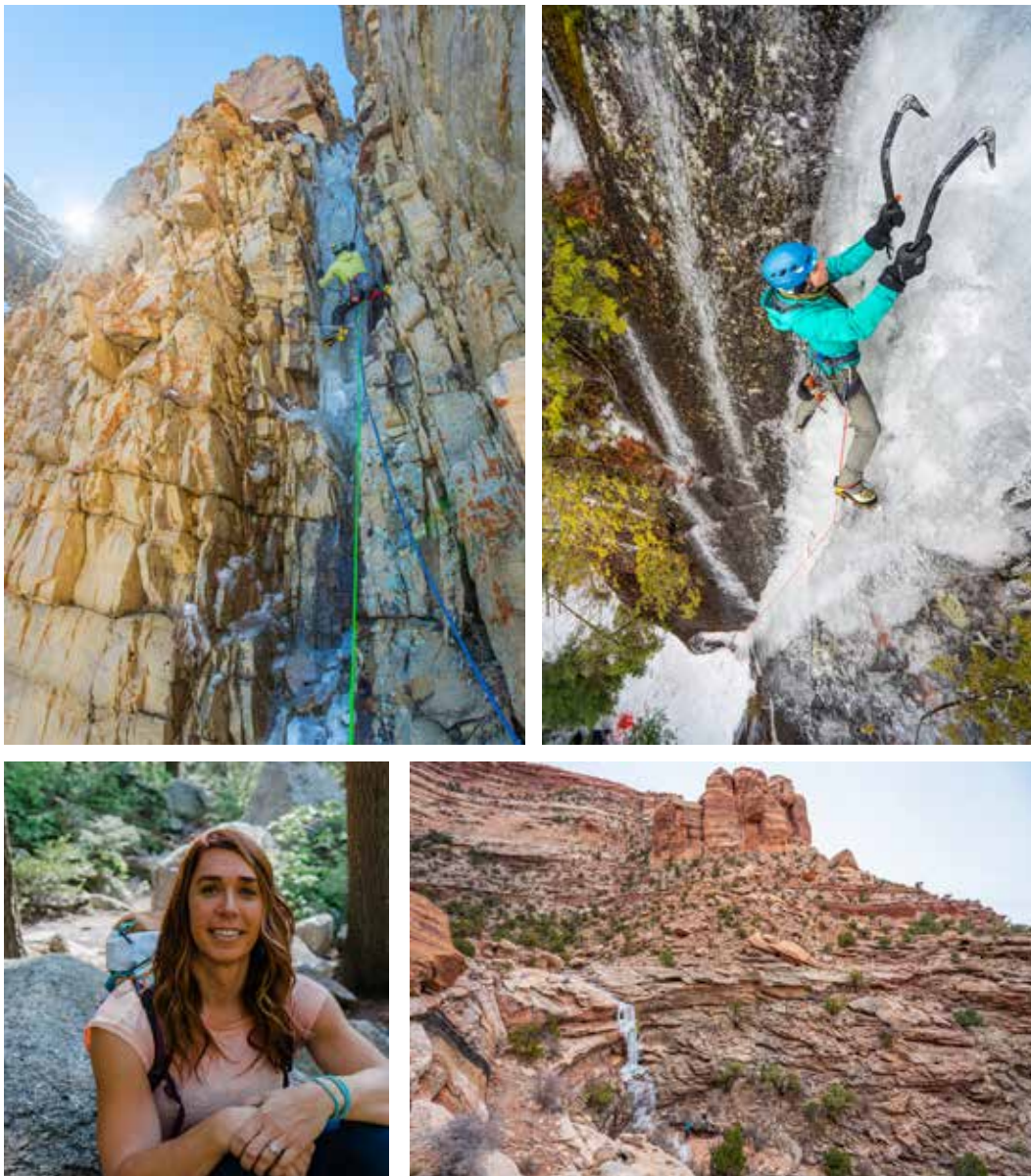
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## Featured Artist



Clockwise, from top left: Angela Van Wiemeersch during the first ascent of The One Who Knocks, Reid's Peak, Uintas, Utah | Emily Schwartz on Seldom Scene, Chapel Pond, Keene Valley, Adirondacks, New York | Camille Fiducia on Fools Cold, Buckhorn Wash, San Rafael Swell, Utah © Nikki Smith | The photographer, Nikki Smith © Laura Hughes

# Nikki Smith

**N**ikki Smith's photography has been used to document climbers and the outdoor world for close to 20 years. Her stunning imagery is the result of her personal involvement in climbing. While she loves all aspects of climbing, her passion is backcountry alpine ice and mixed routes. To learn more about Nikki's work, visit [www.pullphotography.com](http://www.pullphotography.com). ■

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