

Proposed North Kaibab Wildlife Conservation Area

The Kaibab Plateau, the gigantic “mountain lying down” through which the Colorado River carves the Grand Canyon, rises over nine thousand feet above sea level. The Forest Service manages the North Kaibab Ranger District, the forest north of Grand Canyon National Park. Remnant, ancient conifer forests and grasslands cover much of its 925,000 acres. Ponderosa pine dominates the plateau, with lower elevations consisting of woodlands and semi-desert grassland. The Plateau and adjacent lowlands provides crucial habitat for unique species including the Kaibab tasseled-ear squirrel, as well as goshawks, mountain lions, pronghorn, mule deer and a full suite of forest and grassland-dependent wildlife.

The North Kaibab comprises the largest remaining relatively intact southwestern ponderosa pine old growth outside of the Gila Wilderness and Grand Canyon National Park. It also comprises critical wildlife linkages between Grand Canyon National Park and Grand Staircase-Escalante and Vermilion Cliffs national monuments.

Concerns over degradation of the northern Arizona Kaibab Plateau forest and grassland values led to the establishment of a forest reserve surrounding Grand Canyon in 1893. By 1905, Congress and President Theodore Roosevelt recognized that forests like the Kaibab should be set aside “*for the wild forest creatures*” ...[to] *afford perpetual protection to the native fauna and flora*” (U.S. Congress 1905). In 1906, and in accordance with earlier Congressional authorization, Theodore Roosevelt established the Grand Canyon National Game Preserve for “the protection of game animals... recognized as a breeding place therefore...”

In 1965, the Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall recognized that the Kaibab squirrel, found only on the Kaibab Plateau, represents “a classical example of the process of evolution through geographic isolation” and established the 200,000-acre Kaibab Squirrel National Natural Landmark. Unfortunately, both the Preserve and Natural Landmark designations have proven ineffective in preserving all native species and their habitat, especially large carnivores (wolves were extirpated) and the Plateau’s old growth forests and grasslands. *A fundamental shift in management priorities is essential to restore and protect the Kaibab Plateau’s diverse and spectacular forests, archeological treasures and native wildlife. Wildlife Conservation Area or National Monument designation, through Congressional legislation or Presidential proclamation, would establish the requisite conservation priorities and mandate the agencies to emphasize protecting this region’s unique natural values.*

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