

Grand Staircase Team Takes Its First Steps

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CEDAR CITY -- The team assigned to create the long-term management plan for Utah's newest national monument has set up shop here.

“We have a mandate from the president to have the monument set up and running by September of 1999,” said Ken Sizemore, a member of the Bureau of Land Management planning team for the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in south-central Utah.

Sizemore now works with a county association of governments in southern Utah and will coordinate planning issues with area governments.

One of 15 members that eventually will comprise the team of experts, Sizemore says the way President Clinton announced the monument's creation last fall from Arizona has rubbed many Utahns the wrong way.

“We recognize that there is opposition,” Sizemore said. “But it's there now, and we have to deal with it.”

Sizemore points out that the team still is four members short. However, once assembled, it will study the physical aspects of the monument including animal and plant life and geology, as well as the impact the monument will have on surrounding communities and residents.

“Our responsibilities are not to get things ready for this season; our major focus is the next 50 years,” he said.

Planning members that already have been appointed in archaeology, outdoor recreation, botany, realty, geology, paleontology, wildlife biology and community planning.

While many tourists are expected to make the monument their summer vacation destination, Sizemore warns that hikers, bikers and the like should visit at their own risk.

“This isn't a national park, it's a monument,” Sizemore said. “People should not expect the same services that they would receive in a national park.”

While signs will be posted on major roads throughout the monument, identifying trails and boundaries, backcountry hikers that get lost and require a rescue will be responsible for reimbursing any costs incurred by their rescue.