

On-Site Policy Analysis:
Zion National Park
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A Balancing Act: Is it possible to truly achieve a Sustainable Tourism Industry?

Reference to Rural Stakeholders in Garfield County

Perhaps there is something to the zodiac after all, and not simply an embarrassing way to start an essay, but something that actually provides some insight. Ever since childhood it was always to my chagrin that my friends would be a Scorpio, or Taurus, or some kind of really cool animal...even Gemini the twins would've been more exciting than some stupid scales. I've always dismissed being a Libra as anything more than a fun game, flipping pages in the newspaper to see the day's predictions. The seriousness of its practice is illogical and I simply saw it as a sign of being a boring individual...a symbol weighing out the possibilities and decisions to painstaking precision. I already have a hard time being decisive!

However, the sign of the scales and thoughts of balance came into my head more than ever during our policy class. Logically, you can boil it down to the fact that every stakeholder brought it up, always in a sentence that ended with something like, "it's going to be a tough decision but we need to find some way to balance out [blank]." I took it in a more emotional direction, realizing that perhaps my potential has been brought to light; being a balance-minded individual in a field that is in desperate need of balancing. All week I thought of bringing justice to the tourism industry by trying to sort truth from falsehood in ideologies and in complex relationships.

Now this tourism balance already exists in theory but rarely transitions into reality, and I had already found this avenue without relying on my astronomical sign, and that is Sustainable Tourism (aka Ecotourism). Ecotourism is defined as the "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people." In it's very definition

it is talking about the most important type of balance, our beautiful natural world and our fellow man and women who are equally as complex and diverse. In society this type of balance is completely severed, falling into two distinct directions. Either you are pro-environment or pro-economy, because human interest is normally simplified down to a flourishing economy and it's accompanying benefits.

The main focus of my paper is on balance, particularly in regards to ecotourism and federally designated conservation land. I will mainly reference the rural stakeholders of Garfield County, including Brian Bremner, a public works employee who we spoke to in our Kane County meeting. I will also make reference to the BLM and their management of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument that partially resides in Garfield County, as well as their multi-use mission and their own inherently balanced nature of operations in regards to land preservation and management.

The mission of the BLM is to balance a similar concept of “multi-use” for many different people and interest groups. They place serious value on “*strengthening existing and forging new partnerships with stakeholders...[to] ensure that the nation's public lands are managed and conserved for future generations of Americans to use and enjoy.*” In our class interview, they touched on one of their main challenges, dealing with radical conservation groups. A lot of people in these groups don't bother to educate themselves on the regional natural systems and just aggressively advocate for policy change. The BLM team in Kane County was incredibly patient and willing to inform the public and anyone who simply took the time to ask questions, helping to work out their difficult questions and biases calmly and thoughtfully.

Despite aiming for a balance, there is a deep imbalance in Southern Utah, mostly in counties: Kane, Washington, and Garfield. However, this is not new to our nation and is in fact

built into our very foundation. A mainly western pursuit, is this collection of land under an umbrella of “protected space,” that is usually accompanied with displacement of locals or displacement in their quality of life, often referred to as “conservation refugees.” Now, I am not trying to compare local Southern Utahans’ struggles to those of the Native Americans, I am simply trying to prove that such a trend has been established since our nation’s early history. It has tarnished our pursuit and creation of national lands in the form of parks, monuments, and forests that is fundamentally based in environmental racism and Western privilege.

Now the imbalance I speak of in Southern Utah is a substantial decrease in the quality of life of local residents. They have found themselves in a place where over 90% of their land is federally owned and managed. The straw that broke the camel’s back came in 1996 when President Clinton declared a huge parcel of land a national monument and held a ceremony in Arizona...not Utah. Many local managers, residents, and state politicians weren’t even aware of this new designation of federal land until a day or two beforehand. There was hardly any local input and the sheer size of the monument (as big as the state of Delaware) has prohibited the flow of state tax revenue into public programs like school and healthcare.

The implications of this event and the overwhelming majority of federal land to private land in counties in Southern Utah can be demonstrated through some of the system variables. The designation of road maintenance and travel for local residents have been impeded by federal restrictions. Their inability to pursue generations-old work in logging and grazing with higher pay than entry-level tourism jobs. Their lack of political voice in Washington D.C. to discuss regional problems and concerns. Reduced access to resources located within these protected areas to utilize for recreation, transportation, and capital. A dissolution of solid communities as

their home becomes harder to raise families in as public school funding is decreased and good teachers and doctors are hard to find because incentivize is low to move there.

These variables of the system in place regarding federal lands and decision-making processes and power are hurting the quality of life for residents in Garfield County. They also end up paying higher costs to the tourists than they are receiving, making the imbalance even greater. This is particularly evident in Garfield's local Search and Rescue, a nonprofit agency comprised of local individuals providing their own vehicle, equipment, money and time to help those in need. They spend thousands of dollars and time away from their families to provide this much needed service. However, these costs are hurting more and more as tourists are going out in the national parks or monuments unprepared and getting lost, injured, or immobilized by heat or exhaustion. The sometimes careless and lack of premeditation of tourists is costing locals more money than ever to help them when they are in need, a common occurrence in outdoor recreation and travel.

In our interview with Roxie Sherwin, she made us aware of how the perception of Southern Utah has changed over time. The first pioneers thought it was a wasteland because it was a desert that was tough to farm, dangerous to live in, and not economically viable. Lieutenant Joseph Ives described it in 1857 saying, "*The region...is, of course, altogether valueless...after entering it, there is nothing to do but leave.*" Tourism didn't exist and travel wasn't a coveted experience because it was dangerous. People couldn't rely much on agriculture, so in order to make a living people raised livestock, grazed the 'wasteland' and logged the forests, building up a rich heritage of family history and connection to their land. We can see that values change over relatively short periods of time and adjustment is necessary.

However, just because change is impending and vital doesn't mean that decisions should be made exclusively in Washington D.C.

The concerns of the rest of the world are valid in thinking that if given control over their own lands, Utah will sell out quickly to the highest bidder, probably resulting in destructive mining, logging, and unrestricted grazing. Economic interest is at the heart of every community and state, which isn't bad it just needs to be checked and balanced. Brian referred to these concerns as merely "scare tactics" and that if given back control, they wouldn't destroy their own land because they love it equally, if not more, than tourists do. After all, this is where their ancestry is, their current family, and their life's work that many tend to pass down to their children, ensuring an equal amount of interest in preserving the land with sustainability in mind.

While some herald state control more than federal control, both have their strengths and weaknesses. The biggest challenge associated with national management of these lands is the sheer landmass of the United States and its endless differences in physical landscape, local culture, and unique sets of problems. It is challenging because a one-size-fits-all approach only succeeds in creating local resentment, ineffective policy, an uninformed public, and political gridlock. Yet purely state control results in environmental concerns coming in second place to economic expansion. Balance between the two is ultimately the solution.

A nation as large as the United States is going to have to narrow their scope to a more regional focus. Situations need to be assessed in accordance with the local conditions in order to be truly effective and long-lasting. While I believe that strict national land standards should be individually assessed for the unique place in which they are located, I do think some kind of umbrella agency is necessary to set a baseline standard, check and balance, and act as a unifying agent to other common interests and stakeholders. Whether this is going to be the national parks

service, with updated individual policies and regulations, or the BLM with their history of compromise and balance, I do not know.

From what we've seen and discussed so far, tourism is far from being balanced in Garfield County. We can look at Brian Bremner's story of the tourist dollar and where it ends up as a good and quick example. Think of setting up a road trip with your partner and friends...destination somewhere in Garfield. Paying no mind to which gas station and why and simply filling up the tank when necessary along the way, gear already bought and packed, and food already stored in a cooler in the trunk. In my case, I would most likely visit a local coffee shop on my way out for the drive home. Therefore, only maybe \$20 of my total trip expenses would be spent in Garfield County, my travel friends likely in the same position. This scenario hits home with me because I've done the weekender trip without filling up or even buying a sandwich in my final destination because of the quick nature of the trip.

Finding ways for Garfield to funnel more dollars from tourism into their economy is needed if we want to promote "healthier" industries as opposed to resource extraction industries. If we continue along this path people will continue to be at odds with the environment and those who unwaveringly support conservation over people. This ultimately sounds like an ironic twist of support being leached out of environmental causes from local populations who are suffering because of it. I want to see tourism as a leader in local economies, but if it is failing to provide its citizens with financial support, then it is essential to bring in other industries as well that could be monitored and regulated.

Brian touched on the job market within tourism and a big challenge is its lack of high-paying, steady jobs. Personally, I feel confident in finding a higher paying job in the tourism field because I got a degree in that field from a great University. Most people don't have this

option and are forced to be seasonal workers in hospitality industries, like summer hotels. Oftentimes seasonal workers come from abroad or other states and the money they make isn't going to go back into the county, it's going to be taken back home with them when they leave.

In our meeting with Superintendent Bradybaugh, he said that Zions National Park tries to employ as many locals as possible, but it isn't that feasible because a lot of the higher-paying jobs are more specialized and technical, like a wildlife technician for example. Many locals in surrounding rural areas do not have that kind of training or experience. If jobs are unable to be provided to locals, then another avenue needs to be looked at that can somehow exist in harmony with federal land restrictions.

Based on all this information and speaking with people who challenged my beliefs that nature is a cure for every personal woe, I have realized that much more cooperation needs to exist between local power, land management and the federal government. I agreed with Brian on almost all of his points, including his advice to be wary of the media who use spin and private interests to distort information they are relaying to the public. Knowledge is best obtained through active listening, open discussion and multiple viewpoints and situations.

Our class talked a lot about the energy and presence of our speakers and would use that as the main criteria for judgment on character and I think this idea is flawed. Anyone who is smart enough can master the art of body language and how to talk and manipulate people through emotional responses. Well-spoken and calm doesn't automatically mean trustworthy. Personally, I'd trust a man who can't articulate as gracefully as a man like Tom Dansie, who is at the fingertips of local politicians. There are always people behind the scenes running the show and throwing money around and I am very cautious as to who I trust. I'm very excited to enter the field of ecotourism and work to make communities and tourism flourish symbiotically.