

WORKING DRAFT

Presidents like to create national monuments, and creating those monuments are one of the few times president's don't have to work with congress to take direct action. The Antiquities Act gave Teddy Roosevelt authority to designate national monuments, a power he sought to preserve scientifically and culturally valuable sites. Every president since then, except Richard Nixon, has designated new monuments. Lame duck presidents especially like to create monuments.

President Obama has already designated one national monument (Chimney Rock). Chimney Rock National Monument is just 4726 acres, fits clearly within the intent of the Antiquities Act, and politicians at all levels and local citizens supported the designation.

The Administration is being urged to establish more national monuments—ones that cover thousands or even millions of acres and for which there is little local support. The pressure has been so intense that in 2010 the Department of the Interior prepared and then leaked a memo titled “Treasured Landscapes” that laid out a massive increase in National Monuments covering millions of acres. Included in the sites identified by this memo were many of the most controversial sites that environmental groups had long sought.

Cover for designating locally unpopular monuments is being provided by economic studies. These studies claim that local economies benefit when the government increases public lands protection from multiple use to more restricted designations such as national monuments.

We attempted to replicate those studies and failed. That is, using a careful methodology and making comparisons between counties through time, we find at best no effect on local economies and, more likely, negative effects.

President Clinton in 1996 created The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, one of the most controversial national monuments created in recent years. There were predictions by monument proponents of increased economic economy because of the designation. There has even been a recent study claiming those benefits have actually happened. That study also claimed that establishing wilderness increases economic activity.

We took a more in-depth look and discovered that there have been no positive economic effects from the Grand Staircase-Escalante. We also looked at all counties in the West that contain wilderness areas and found that those counties have less economic prosperity than counties without wilderness.

But Economic Development is not why National Monuments should be created.

State and local politicians ought to urge the President to back away from his plans to designate more monuments, unless, of course, they prefer those areas to end up with less personal income, lower economic activity and reduced tax receipts.