

# THE CANYON COUNTRY WATCHDOG

By Doug Meyer  
From Flagstaff to the Book Cliffs.  
AND BEYOND  
Facts & Opinions

## David vs. Goliath update

Do you remember Cecil Garland's impassioned tale last year in the Zephyr about a few hundred rural folks against the Las Vegas growth monster? Cecil ranches in western Utah's Snake Valley, above an aquifer that straddles the state line with Nevada and thus into the 285-mile long arms of Patty Mulroy's Southern Nevada Water Authority. Let's review the latest salvos in this all-too-classic Western water war.



The economic downturn's "stunning impact", according to Mulroy, on SNWA's finances is maybe the best news for Cecil and his friends this year. There's also been a hearing delay until 2011 on the Snake Valley part of the project, along with several Utah counties and the Utah legislature getting involved. But maybe that last part isn't so great after all because it threatens to leave behind the good guys and their desire to just live quietly in a remote desert valley. As one might guess, this is shaping up as a typical fight pitting growth over here vs. growth over there.

At the center of it all is the outspoken Patty Mulroy, the most flamboyant water bureaucrat since Floyd Dominy. At least she's up front in her statements, honestly pointing out the 800-pound growth

gorilla that pays her salary while daring you to stop her from feeding it. And there's this fatalism about her (who wouldn't get that way, trying to provide water to 2 million people in a desert) that seems to know Vegas' days are numbered, but damned if she won't be there presiding over its ruins as the West's giant reservoirs finally reach dead pool. I have to smile, thinking of Abbey's "Good News".

Here's a sampling of Mulroy-isms from the past year: "More people work in a single Las Vegas casino than live in all of Snake Valley." But at the same time, "The project won't hurt the



ranchers." And regarding Utah's plans to build its own water pipeline from Lake Powell to St. George, Mulroy felt that it would take an act of Congress (because it would transfer water from the Upper to the Lower Basin.) She labeled Utah's pipeline as "unreasonable", in effect arguing that Las Vegas is bigger than Washington County and should win out because its people are already there.

When Utah wouldn't budge, Mulroy pulled out the big guns. If Utah stops her pipeline, then Nevada's agreement not to make a compact call on the Upper Basin when shortages occur on the Colorado River is dead. She claims Nevada's pipeline was implicit in the December 2007 agreement between the seven states. It's not an idle threat she said, because "you cannot say to a community, 'You have to come to an end,' and that is what will happen if Lake Mead drops below 1,000 (feet above sea level)."

All this happened against the backdrop of the Scripps Institution report that gave even odds for Lake Mead going dry by 2021. So hang in there Cecil, with any luck, it's just 12 more years 'til the growth monster is dead.

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## Desert Rock and the follies of Democrats

In spite of the wishes of the Navajo Nation's political leaders, President Obama's EPA retracted the proposed coal-fired power plant's air permit in late April. Bush's EPA had approved the permit last July. So OK, I'm supposed to say something about how I'm glad we've got new leadership in the White House this year. But if Desert Rock never gets built, we can thank bad economics, rather than some brave Democrat riding herd on those nasty capitalists. The Blackstone Group, the private-equity firm that has an 80% stake in the plant's developer, lost \$1.2 billion last year in the financial crisis, which is after all, a crisis of financing. With California faltering and prospects for growth in US energy demand uncertain right now, my guess is that the developers are not really unhappy with this delay.

Meanwhile, the Democrats' cap and trade bill moves carefully towards "debate", a law that would give away carbon permits long after Obama leaves office. The whole thing's on the honor system: industry monitors its own emissions and reports to the EPA which gives out more free permits if needed. And the serious carbon reductions won't come until 2050, because by then they're hoping somebody else will have figured out how to make lots of energy without carbon fuels. So yes, global warming does mean that time is running out for coal-fired power plants (and pretty much everything else), but that's no thanks to the Democrats.

### THE BACKBONE #3

WHAT? DID I PAY \$100 TO BE IN THE BACKBONE?  
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**MIKE WILTSHIRE**  
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CANADA

**DON BAUMGARDT**  
El Paso, TX

**ALAN JOSLYN**  
Eden, UT

**JIM CASE**  
Flagstaff

**CHUCK MILLER**  
Huntley, IL

**Navajos, amenities, and revenge**

Over on the western part of the rez, Indians and white folks have been having fun making fun of each other, and the only people who don't seem to get it are the progressives. Revenge has been a long time coming for the Natives, and they're loving every minute of it. Whether it's a coal-fired power plant or wind farms, "sustainable retail", casinos, or "cultural tourism", the Navajos are catching up fast in the white man's ancient game of money making at the expense of the land.

I've no doubt that Dook'ooosliid, the Navajos' sacred mountain of the West is truly sacred to the Dine. But their legal challenge on that basis to the ski area's proposed use of reclaimed wastewater to make artificial snow (and lots of money) sure looks like hypocrisy now on the Indian side of the fight. They say all's fair in love and war, and I trust the Navajos' motivation is deeper: just a little pay back for 200 years of cultural genocide.

And what better way to hurt the bad guys than attack their sacred money shrine at the Grand Canyon. A long-simmering territorial dispute has resurfaced in the Navajo claim out to the center of the Colorado River in Marble Canyon, the spectacular and ultimately 3,000 ft deep gorge that makes up the first 60 miles of Grand Canyon river trips. So, after all these years, the Navajo Nation has applied to Grand Canyon National Park for permission to run one-day motorized sport-boat trips with passenger and boat exit by helicopter at the confluence with the Little Colorado. You can hear the laughter in the hogans from very far away these days.

The indignation of the canyon elite was predictable, especially from the commercial boaters. Objecting to more people on the river now, they apparently don't remember forcing the Park Service to add more user-days just three years ago, against all the science saying the carrying capacity had already been reached.

The lesson we are learning from the Navajo is deliciously ironic: live by the sword of economic growth, and you'll die by it as well. Perhaps Wendell Berry hit closest to the mark when he wrote simply, "We are living even now amongst punishments and ruins."

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**New wilderness in Utah! But for how long?**

And back again, to brightest Utah, home of my heart. Gotta talk now about those eternally naive progressives and their undying faith in the US government. Yes, new wilderness areas were designated as part of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009, but this late in the game, what does that mean? The bill also established the National Landscape Conservation System, a collection of all of the national monuments, conservation areas, wilderness study areas, national trails, wild and scenic rivers, and wilderness managed by the BLM. While making clear not to change anything regarding laws that already established those areas, it allows BLM to "conserve protect and restore nationally significant landscapes that have outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values for the benefit of current and future generations".

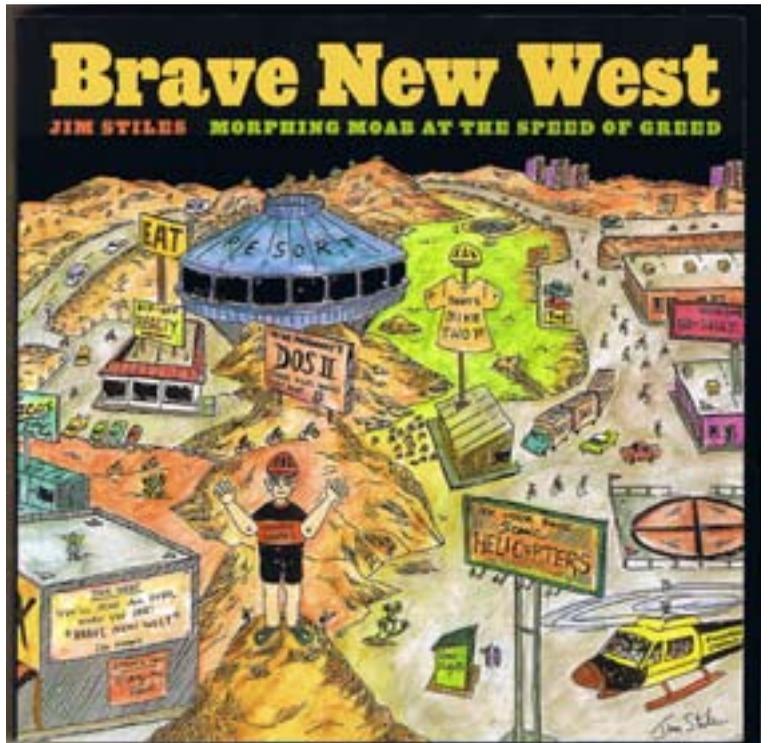
It's that future generations part that got me wondering what these people are thinking. Most likely, this bill has been on the shelf gathering dust for eight years. It has a Clintonesque ring to it, don't you agree? But that was before 9/11, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the financial meltdown. Now the states are broke, China doesn't want to loan us money anymore, and the weight of our moral bankruptcy is more unbearable every day. Still, people somehow think BLM rangers will be out there ("on our side") writing tickets to ATV'ers 50 years from now. I kinda doubt it.

In April, after spending millions pursuing its case, Kane County lost a federal appeals court ruling on specific "roads" in wilderness study areas in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Word spread quickly in Kanab that the BLM's nine-year-old management plan would finally be law in the Paria-Hackberry WSA, which includes the Paria riverbed upstream of the site of early 20th century town of Pahreah. History suggests John D. Lee himself used the river as a route to move cattle to Lee's Ferry 150 years ago, and the locals know their history, if not today's federal law. So three-hundred of them took to the stream in their ATVs. The BLM took pictures.

What will the US Attorney in St. George do about it? The politics in southwest Utah means he'll probably do nothing at all. And that brings up the contrast with another case of civil disobedience, that of Tim DeChristopher, the disrupter of a BLM auction of parcels for oil and gas drilling near Arches N.P. He's being prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

No, it won't be a good day for wild lands in Utah if and when the US falls apart. But the moral of the story for environmentalists should be this: don't put your money on an evil empire in the first place. The insurgents always win in the end.

---Doug Meyer



**"Jim Stiles holds up a mirror to those of us living in the American West, exposing issues we may not want to face. We are all complicit in the shadow side of growth. His words are born not so much out of anger but a broken heart. He says he writes elegies for the landscape he loves, that he is "hopelessly clinging to the past." I would call Stiles a writer from the future. Brave New West is a book of import because of what it chooses to expose."**

--Terry Tempest Williams,  
author of RED -

Passion and Patience in the Desert

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