

BIKE BORG MOVES SOUTH

(continued)

And there's the problem the way Korenblat and company see it; there are plenty of natural "assets" for recreationists to enjoy, but not the business infrastructure to take advantage of it.

Korenblat explained, "You've got to advertise to get people to come and to encourage people to start the businesses, but unless the business is there. (sic) Unless the restaurants and grocery stores and hotels are there, then you don't really see the revenue. It's hard to see the benefit of the advertising. So it's sort of this thing that has to evolve... Like, it's just pure entrepreneurship. Like, people that want to start businesses, and want to bring people here. And what we're seeing is, there are a bunch of entrepreneurs in San Juan County that are working on it. That are starting different outfitting businesses and restaurants and really look at, gee, this is a beautiful place. Lots of people want to come here. I want to live here. How can I make a living here. so there's a whole bunch of dots. Its' definitely not a linear process."

At the end of the day and regardless of the contradictions or the artful dodging, Korenblat and her friends are clear about one thing. As she said, "It's just pure entrepreneurship." What does that mean for San Juan County? All you have to do is look 55 miles north. Because what Korenblat and others are proposing is straight out of the New Moab playbook.

Korenblat proposed one way to cash in on the popular climbing destination in Indian Creek... "The problem," she explained, "is San Juan County is seeing the impacts but it's not capturing any of those dollars down there, that drive right through your county and use your world class landscapes. I think that's a big challenge. If there were some incentive for them to stop here in Monticello and buy their groceries... You ought to open a convenience store there at Church Rock. I think he would seasonally, make it hand over fist."

The county commissioners asked the group if they supported a proposal to create Greater Canyonlands National Monument." Korenblat answered, "No."

But then she dissembled :

"The outdoor industry, nationally, is concerned about this area. Part of it is, every product that those companies make can be found around here being used, pretty much everyday. So they have an interest in the area and the way that they usually function with regard to public land has been to just do whatever the conservation community says. So as a business person you're doing your job,...the conservation community says hey, did you know there was a threat to the landscape? You're like, no, what's going on? They say, well, you've got to sign this letter, or go to this meeting, or write a check, or whatever. And you're pretty much like, ok... you haven't had time to research it. So the purpose of the Utah Outdoor Business Network is to make it possible for business owners to know what's going on, and for the businesses to speak with their own voice. There may be overlap with the conservation community. There may be overlap with other groups. But that voice, of the pure business voice, hasn't really been there."

A couple months later, in an interview with Greg Hanscom for a story in 'High Country News' called 'Stakeholders,' Korenblat stated, "Wilderness is a good tool for protecting that land in its natural state."

None of us can have it both ways. And her support for Greater Canyonlands was enough to generate a rebuttal from Grand County Council commissioner Lynn Jackson. In the HCN story Korenblat explained, "Folks in the rural West see kids in Grand Junction driving trucks for Halliburton making \$80,000 a year. They see these jobs as good jobs, but they aren't going to last. (Utah Republican Rep. Jason) Chaffetz has said, 'We wouldn't want to do anything now that would prevent us from getting high-paid extraction jobs in the future.' Actually, you might. Look at the loads of people leaving Salt Lake City to move to Moab."

(A Rebuttal to the OIA / Ashley Korenblat Statement on the Proposed Greater Canyonlands NM.

<http://sagebrushcoalition.com/2012/12/07/a-rebuttal-to-the-oia-ashley-korenblat-statement-on-the-proposed-greater-canyonlands-nm/>)

At the end of the day and regardless of the contradictions or the artful dodging, Korenblat and her friends are clear about one thing. As she said, "It's just pure entrepreneurship."

What does that mean for San Juan County? All you have to do is look 55 miles north. Because what Korenblat and others are proposing is straight out of the New Moab playbook. Those "loads of people" moving to Moab that she refers to have been making the pilgrimage for 20 years. And hardly any of them had or has an interest in the town before they got there.

Moab didn't become the town it is today because the people who lived and worked there decades ago wanted it this way. Few in Moab had the capital and the resources to transform the community so drastically in such a relatively short time. Money (and the power that goes with it) came from elsewhere. From Park City and Telluride and from California. From just about everywhere but itself... Moab's future was decided while most of its residents sat on the sidelines and watched.

Whether Monticello and San Juan County face a similar fate is anybody's guess. But at least this time around, you should know what might be coming...

In this episode: "Totes Awesome Monticello?"

When Ashley Korenblat and the Utah Outdoor Business Network appeared before the San Juan County Commission last summer to pitch a dramatically expanded tourist/recreation economy, she explained it was "all about entrepreneurship." She talked about lost tourist dollars in San Juan County and lamented, if only "there were some incentive for them to stop here in Monticello..."

And there's the rub.

Why DO tourists prefer to drive all the way back to Moab for the evening rather than stay or stop or even slow down when they zip through Monticello? We all know the answer to that—it's the amenities Moab has that Monticello doesn't. It's the plethora of motels and bed & breakfasts and restaurants and cafes and brew pubs and yupster bars and bike shops and bike rentals and zipline companies and climbing gear stores and BASE jumping guides and slackline parks and river companies and canyoneering companies and Adventure tours and Adventure motels and Adventure stores and curio shops and T-shirt shops and yoga shops and massage therapists and aquatic centers and private gyms and personal trainers and life coaches and nightly condo rentals and wineries and spas.

As the marketing people might say: "...and SO MUCH MORE."

Monticello has a nice little grocery, perfectly suited for the population that now lives there, a fine mercantile store and a good drug store and several reasonably priced places to eat. It has a (relatively) new Maverik Store that serves soft-serve frozen yogurt. And its biggest tourist draw is the LDS mini-Temple.

In fact, Monticello lacks almost all of the 'amenities' that makes Moab, well, Moab.

To use the vernacular and marginalize a once significant and meaningful word, Moab is "Epic." Monticello is not. It is Epic-less. Monticello is Epic-free. It lacks Epic-ness.



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The question is, how badly does Monticello (and Blanding and all of San Juan County) want to be the next Totes Awesome New West town? Does it long to be Epic? Because when Ashley Korenblat talks about a more vibrant recreation economy in San Juan County, when she enthuses about the kinds of businesses that would encourage climbers from Indian Creek to turn south instead of north at the end of a thrill-packed day, this is what she means. It's about transforming a rural Utah Mormon town into something more palatable to the same people who now make Moab their real "base camp to adventure."

Like Moab, if Monticello is to change, it will be pushed by outside money. For the most part, its citizens don't have the resources and capital to make huge investments in a massive make-over. For example, the soon to be constructed multi-million dollar Four Corners School 'Canyon Country Discovery Center' was an idea first embraced by local citizens. But the money to make it happen

won't come from the local citizens.

Bill Boyle, one of the architects and supporters of the CCDC (and the editor of the SJR), and I have had some lively conversations over the project these past few years. I've come to regard Bill as one of my best friends and to appreciate the fact that he and I can have differences of opinion, express them freely, and without fear of the argument turning rancorous.

What most proponents fail to grasp, until it's too late, is that these kinds of economic infusions rarely help the citizens they are intended for.

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Chambers of Commerce should first and foremost be looking after their own, not seeking new competitors for their own members.

Years ago, Bill saw the Discovery Center as a way to help a floundering economy and add some diversification to the town's business community. It's a sentiment and an economic strategy often embraced in small rural western towns with shrinking populations and sliding economies. What most proponents fail to grasp, until it's too late, is that these kinds of economic infusions rarely help the citizens they are intended for. Economic development should primarily assist the people who already live in that town. Chambers of Commerce should first and foremost be looking after their own, not seeking new competitors for their own members.

When a local debate broke out about the CCDC in 2012, some wondered if there weren't a hidden agenda and questioned the motives of its executive director, Janet Ross. After all, she was once a SUWA board member herself. Some insisted that her secret plan is to push a wilderness agenda that would restrict access to more public land. The San Juan Record's Buckley Jensen responded, "Janet Ross is far more the shrewd fundraiser and businesswoman than she is the wild-eyed environmentalist bent on shutting down everything in San Juan County."

Buckley is absolutely right. What few residents of southeast Utah realize, whether they are pro-wilderness or anti-wilderness, is that the issue of legislative 'wilderness' itself, in 2014, has little to do with some passionately held 'cause.' "Restricting access" is no longer a moral issue; it's not an honest attempt to protect what remains of southeast Utah's wildlands in order to spare it from future development and destruction. Wilderness is now about how it can make money for the people savvy enough to "invest" in it. It's about replacing one kind of extractive economy with another. Wilderness IS money now and has little meaning to anyone beyond that.

As Ross said in 2012, the CCDC will, "produce an estimated potential Social Return on Investment of \$9.8 MIL annually (based on the monetized social value of all teacher retention and renewal programs, student education/motivation programs, professional certification programs, workforce development/youth employment programs, and scientific research for San Juan County & the Colorado Plateau."

Not much "wild-eyed" wilderness poetry in that statement.

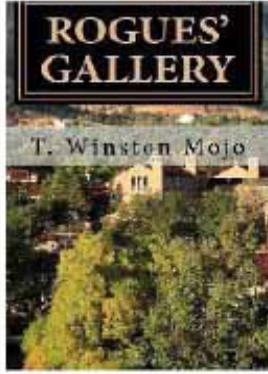
"Clearly," she concluded, "this facility will draw visitors to the City of Monticello and its businesses, and is meant to be an economic driver for all of us."



Janet Ross, executive director of the Four Corners School in Monticello, Utah.

In other words, Ross offers the Discovery Center as a financial opportunity to anyone who wants to climb aboard the fast-moving engine of a tourist/amenities economy. It's an engine that could be an integral part of transforming Monticello and San Juan County. But whether it will benefit "all of us" is questionable. There is an assumption that visitors to the Discovery Center will require many more 'amenities' than Monticello can currently provide. The reality that goes with it is, if the local citizenry can't provide them, the new amenities must predominantly come from elsewhere. And they will.

next page...



ROGUES' GALLERY

My 27 years at Rocky Mountain University...

T. WINSTON MOJO

In the tradition of literary bureaucrats Kafka, Bukowski and Miller, T. Winston Mojo takes the reader on a journey into the abyss of institutional smallness. Everybody knows that politics at the university are so vicious because the stakes are so small. Mojo's real-life gauntlet of villains at Rocky Mountain University in Big Rock, Colorado, is an exploration into just how small those stakes can be.



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