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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE JULY 22, 2005

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CONSERVATION GROUPS SUE TO PROTECT GLEN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA FROM ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE CAUSED BY LIVESTOCK GRAZING

Great Old Broads for Wilderness and the Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit today in federal district court in the District of Columbia to compel Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton to protect the fragile resources of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area from damage caused by livestock grazing. The groups challenge Secretary Norton's failure to conduct a legally-required analysis of the impacts of grazing on the environment and archeological resources of the recreation area, as well as her failure to involve the public in the decision making process.

Congress recognized Glen Canyon in southern Utah and northern Arizona as a national treasure and named it a National Recreation Area in 1972. Encompassing and surrounding Lake Powell, Glen Canyon contains over a million acres that typify the beauty and diversity of the Colorado Plateau. The area includes an incredible diversity of plant and wildlife species, riparian areas that are critically important in such an arid environment, breathtaking vistas that attract visitors from around the world, and a rich deposit of cultural resources from the Ancestral Puebloan and Fremont cultures. The Secretary has authorized livestock grazing within Glen Canyon that is damaging these resources.

"Glen Canyon National Recreation Area contains important cultural resources that present unique opportunities to study approximately 7,000 years of hunter-gatherer occupation and the subsequent transition to low scale agriculture that lasted another 1,500 years. The extreme variation in elevation and resulting ecological diversity of the area is an ideal setting for the study of early human adaptation to the environment," commented Lew Matis, an archeological educator, who has studied Glen Canyon. "Preservation of these very fragile cultural resources should be of the highest priority for the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management."

Glen Canyon is managed by the National Park Service, an agency within the Department of the Interior. In 1999, the Park Service developed a Grazing Management Plan that recognized that livestock grazing was damaging to vegetation, riparian areas, archeological sites, and recreation, and the Grazing Plan established specific actions designed to prevent this damage. However, over the past six years, the Park Service has failed to implement the plan.

"The Grazing Plan was at least a start towards mitigating livestock impacts in the recreation area," said Greta Anderson, Grazing Reform Program Coordinator for the Center for Biological Diversity. "However, because the Park Service has essentially shelved the plan, its recommendations are not being implemented on the ground, and the ecological impacts continue."

Veronica Egan, Executive Director of Great Old Broads, has been traveling the canyons and mesas of the recreation area since the flooding of the main canyon when Glen Canyon dam was closed in 1963. "I've seen livestock degrade streams and springs, their banks trampled into mud, vegetation cut down to the nub, live soils crushed into dust, and cultural sites covered in cowpies. We tried several times, with letters and discussions, to get the Secretary to live up to her obligations, but the necessary changes have not been made."

Although the Park Service manages Glen Canyon, the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) is responsible for issuing grazing permits. The BLM is held to high standards at Glen Canyon: it must protect Glen Canyon natural and archeological resources and leave them unimpaired for future generations in accordance with the Park Service’s Organic Statute. In spite of this, BLM has continued to authorize grazing within Glen Canyon without considering the Park Service’s Grazing Plan, without conducting environmental analysis as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, and without considering the impacts to archeological and cultural resources as required by the National Historic Preservation Act.

“The National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act are important statutes because they allow the public to have a say in the management of their public lands,” said attorney Robin Cooley of the Environmental Law Clinic at University of Denver College of Law. “Because the agencies are not complying with these laws, the public has been shut out of the process.”

Case # 05-CV-1433 (ESH) Judge Ellen Huvelle

Great Old Broads for Wilderness is a non-profit environmental organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the wildlands, public lands, wildlife, and other natural resources of the United States. www.greatoldbroads.org

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national non-profit conservation organization whose 15,000 members are concerned with protecting imperiled species and their habitats. www.biologicaldiversity.org

The Environmental Law Clinical Partnership at University of Denver Sturm College of Law provides legal representation to environmental non-profits with the help of DU law students. <http://www.law.du.edu/envclinic>

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