

# RED ROCK TESTIMONY

***For Immediate Release: Thirty-four writers donate their work to Red Rock Testimony to speak for Utah's public lands and advocate for Bears Ears***

A remarkable collection of essays and poems called *Red Rock Testimony: Three Generations of Writers Speak on Behalf of Utah's Public Lands* will arrive on the desks of Washington D.C. officials this week as they make crucial decisions about the future of southern Utah's public lands. Editor Stephen Trimble, Kirsten Johanna Allen of the non-profit Torrey House Press, and contributor Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe will present this collection at a press conference to be held at the **National Press Club's Murrow Room at 9:00 a.m. (Eastern Time) on Thursday, June 23** (13<sup>th</sup> floor, 529 14th Street, NW, Washington D.C.).

The 88-page book conveys the spiritual, cultural, and scientific values of Utah's canyon country as captured in the work of 34 passionate and heartfelt writers whose births span seven decades. With their words alone, they seek to influence the Obama administration and Congress to protect America's public lands.

This isn't your standard Congressional testimony filled with bureaucratese, graphs, and charts. This self-published limited edition booklet gathers impassioned "testimony" from prominent American writers whose backgrounds bridge generations and geography, race and culture. They speak to the threats and the wonders, and, especially, to the threat posed by Representatives Rob Bishop's and Jason Chaffetz's Public Lands Initiative and the wondrous importance of protecting the proposed Bears Ears National Monument.

The book includes works by current Navajo Poet Laureate Luci Tapahonso and Utah's first poet laureate David Lee; MacArthur Fellow Gary Paul Nabhan and writer-philosopher Kathleen Dean Moore; former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and former Utah state archaeologist Kevin Jones; Millennial essayists Anne Terashima and Brooke Larsen; Ute

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Mountain Ute tribal councilwoman Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk; former members of Congress Mark Udall and Karen Shepherd; bestselling essayists David Gessner and Lauret Savoy; recent Utah Bureau of Land Management Director Juan Palma; and award-winning writer-scholars who teach at universities from North Carolina to Arizona.

These writers explore the fierce beauty and the dangers to ecological and archaeological integrity that define the issues in this politically embattled corner of our country. The writers and designer of *Red Rock Testimony* donated their work for this chapbook, with printing funded by individual contributions from Utah citizens. Just 1500 copies were printed. Stephen Trimble, an award-winning writer from Salt Lake City, edited the book. Kirsten Johanna Allen, publisher and editorial director at the non-profit Torrey House Press, co-coordinated production and eventually will expand this self-published chapbook into a trade edition. All royalties from that future for-sale edition will go to the Utah Wilderness Coalition.

The book forms the keystone for [www.redrockstories.org](http://www.redrockstories.org), a website that will include these pieces as well as a wide variety of stories, photographs, art, video, and audio from all citizens who wish to share their celebrations of redrock country.

From high mesas to deep canyons, the redrock canyon country has sustained and inspired people for centuries. And yet special interests demand that these irreplaceable natural treasures be industrialized and privatized for the short-term benefit of too few. This beautiful art-as-advocacy book engages imagination and empathy in poetry and prose to show a newer, older way to love one of America's last wild places.

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**Background:** *Red Rock Testimony: Three Generations of Writers Speak on Behalf of Utah's Public Lands* grew from the writing community in Salt Lake City, whose members began meeting in December 2015, concerned about a confluence of threats and opportunities affecting western wildlands. The greatest opportunity arrived with the proposal in October 2015 by five southwestern Native nations to establish a [Bears Ears National Monument](#) in southern Utah. The threats accelerated in January 2016 with the Bundys' takeover of Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and the release of Reps. Rob Bishop's and Jason Chaffetz's [Public Land Initiative](#)—draft legislation intended to address the big issues on BLM land in most of eastern Utah that is both woefully inadequate as conservation and dangerously precedent-setting in its promotion of fossil fuels. Meanwhile, The Utah state legislature continues to insist that “we the people” turn over nearly all of Utah's federal lands for ownership and development by the state.

How can writers participate in these conversations and affect these decisions? The concerned citizen-writers meeting in Utah this winter had a powerful model. In 1995, a similar group of writers created a limited edition chapbook called [Testimony: Writers of the West Speak on Behalf of Utah Wilderness](#). Co-compiled by Utah writers Stephen Trimble and Terry Tempest Williams, the book gathered short pieces from twenty writers to counter an anti-wilderness bill being considered by Congress. When Senators Bill Bradley (NJ) and Russ Feingold (WI) successfully led the filibuster to defeat the bill, they read essays from *Testimony* on the floor of the Senate. When President Bill Clinton proclaimed Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in 1996, he told Terry Tempest Williams that *Testimony* influenced his decision.

With a bow toward the original *Testimony*, today's writers concerned about threats to southern Utah's public lands called this new book, *Red Rock Testimony*. They have extended the reach of a conventional print book by creating an interactive multimedia website, [www.redrockstories.org](http://www.redrockstories.org), to gather work from everyone concerned about the

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future of southern Utah's redrock wildlands.

This community of writers acted quickly to respond to these recent fast-changing events. Utah writer/photographer [Stephen Trimble](#), who has published more than 20 books and co-compiled the original *Testimony*, volunteered to edit *Red Rock Testimony*. Kirsten Johanna Allen, publisher & editorial director at the non-profit [Torrey House Press](#), worked with Trimble to coordinate the chapbook; Torrey House Press will publish a trade edition later this year. Timothy Ross Lee, Salt Lake City, donated his skills to design the book.

In early April, Trimble and Allen invited nearly 60 writers to submit pieces. Within weeks, they received more submissions than they could fit into 88 pages. The final *Red Rock Testimony* includes writing from 34 authors, nearly all original pieces written for this book. These redrock writers have created a community chorus, a montage of heartfelt words that includes Native and Hispanic voices, warnings from elders and challenges from millennials, personal emotional journeys, and lyrical nature writing. These pieces address historical context, natural history and archaeology, energy threats, faith, and politics. Together, they offer a remarkable case for restraint and respect in the incomparable redrock landscape of southern Utah.

## **Quotes from *Red Rock Testimony*:**

The eyes of young people are closely watching. The spirits of future generations are pleading. The deep time of the red rock inspires hope. It's not revolutionary to say my generation needs wilderness more than ever.

*–Brooke Larsen*

If you know Cedar Mesa, you feel the many curvy canyons cutting down each side, red rock canyons so wild and exquisite, and so rich with the work of the Old People, that they leave you with no adequate words. *–Charles Wilkinson*

Here freedom becomes more than a jingoistic word used to wage war and sell trucks. *–David Gessner*

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Ancient sites, artifacts, petroglyphs and pictographs are memory traces of ancestral pasts that are part of the land itself. *–Lauret Savoy*

This is personal healing like nothing else can be. It is also healing for the land and its precious resources. This is why healing forms the inner core of our Bears Ears movement. *–Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk*

Inclusion of Native peoples representing the source of local indigenous knowledge will be the keystone of a collaboratively managed Bears Ears National Monument. *–Jim Enote*

Bears Ears will always be a significant healing space for young Navajos like me, who live in the concrete jungle that is New York City. *–Alastair Bitsoi*

It is important that young Latinos come and partake of this wild country not only to connect with their heritage but to commune with nature. *–Juan Palma*

Our beliefs might differ, but our values harmonize on this essential point: wilderness teaches us humility, wonder, respect, and gratitude for the Creator. *–George Handley*

And the Voice said, “Moses did not go to an oil well derrick to receive the Law and the Tablets, and Jesus did not go to a fracking site to give The Sermon, and Buddha most certainly did not sit under a pumpjack to experience the vision that changed the world forever. Sacred Place is required to receive Sacred Epiphany, and without that epiphany, wisdom cannot be achieved.” *–David Lee*

Whatever is left of the world when the extractive industries get done with it, that’s the world our children will live in. *–Kathleen Dean Moore*

What will be our legacy for those who have no voice to shape their own destinies—what chance of gladness, what landscapes of enduring, bedrock value? *–Kathleen Dean Moore*

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Millennials, as my generation has come to be called, need what this wilderness brings. *–Anne Terashima*

For me to have a story that traces my origins, my identity to the goddess's own body through my mother, to her mother and on back to that ancient time when we were first made gives me a place in the story of this land.

*–Jacqueline Keeler*

For complex reasons of history, habit, and hard-headedness, official Utah remains bound to the old clenched-fist conviction that all conservation is wrong and that unfettered mining and ranching is right. *–Charles Wilkinson*

They peddle the protection of culture and custom like snake oil. I am sixth generation Utahn, the daughter of a Utah cattle rancher and the granddaughter of a Utah shepherd. And I'm not buying it. *–Jana Richman*

None of us, BLM scientist or Ute rancher or urban pilgrim, can hold up our end of our lifelong relationship with the redrock wildlands unless we remember to listen to all, to be tender and aware, to watch for unseen wounds. *–Stephen Trimble*

Most of the locals I've met prefer to speak for themselves. They're old-timers and newcomers, Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals. They're scientists, tribal members, ranchers, and telecommuters, often more than one of the above. *–Michelle Nijhuis*

I hold dear these canyons and mesas surrounding the Bears Ears. I hope we preserve this land forever, so that others can have the same exhilarating walkabouts in wilderness that I have been so lucky to have.

*–Mark Udall*

We must find the ribbon of surefooting through the slickrock that leads to a secure future for the redrock canyonlands. *–Stephen Trimble*

The President has the power, the responsibility and the public support to stand up to those who would destroy our heritage. The best way to defend the Antiquities Act is for the President to use it. *–Bruce Babbitt*