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ENGL 2010

March 4, 2026

Utah's Ecological State

In this modern society, nature is often looked over. Ecosystems are a fragile chain that surrounds all of life. Between allowing humans to thrive by providing food, shelter, clothes and more, many researchers see it as very important that it is protected and maintained. This means there are discussions of maintaining and protecting them, and the importance that comes with that. Some researchers believe it would cost too many resources, as it values a lot to try and revert damage that has already spread. Diving into 3 excerpts, being "Preserving Great Landscapes of the American West: Hispanics and Native Americans Lend Wisdom To, Advocacy for National Conservation Lands," by Andrew Gulliford, "Mojave Desert Tortoise Mortality and Injury Following the Cottonwood Trail Fire in Red Cliffs National Conservation Area, Utah." by John O. Kellam, and "Do Fence Me in: Cattle Enlisted in the Great Basin to Reverse the Cheatgrass/Wildfire Cycle." by Christopher Call, Nora Devoe, Joel Diamond, Jan Schade. While some argue the ecological state of Utah should be preserved, like the success from Bear Ear Monument, and the devastation of Mojave Desert Tortoises, some researchers believe we do not have the resources to maintain this much environmental control, like cheatgrass infestation.

Considering these issues, and our first source by Andrew Gulliford, the author goes on to state "What remained after decades of mismanagement, extraction, and exploitation amounted to a whopping 270 million acres" (pg. 307). There were many state offered protection for this land

to be preserved for these species that have abruptly and secretly discredited. Due to the misuse of this government protected land, they developed BLM to stop the back alley secretism in the selling and misuse of the land. This ties into the larger issue, not only to the ecological processes that are tarnished in this process but the animals and people who have inhabited this land for centuries. Just the same as Desert Tortoises, similarly, "estimated that 15% of the adult tortoise population died."(pg. 301) I can agree that is a massive devastation, if 15% of a species dies, it is a mass devastation. This can show how the loss and mismanagement of land can destroy even one species. This author uses the Bear Ear Monument in southern Utah for a great example of their success with proper management. He goes on to say "The monument, with its permanent withdrawal from mining and oil and gas leasing, will protect a natural and cultural landscape only lightly settled over thousands of years." (pg.310) As the years of fighting for preservation prevails, they state the natural landscape has successfully been preserved. Black bears are considered a very successful conservation effort, alongside the work provided in this notion, even though the study on cheatgrass disagrees there will never be enough resources to manage this much land.

Another great excerpt that is pertaining to these outlasting issues is "Mojave Desert Tortoise Mortality and Injury Following the Cottonwood Trail Fire in Red Cliffs National Conservation Area, Utah." by John O. Kellam. This article is especially pertinent because it talks about the mortality rates due to a man-made wildfire. Whether these fires are man-made or contributed to other sources like cheatgrass fires, they are both detrimental. According to the article, " From 19 to 21 July 2020, a 660-ha human-caused wildfire named the ''Cottonwood Trail Fire'' burned 572 ha of public land, including 533 ha of desert tortoise habitat" (pg. 298) … "We encountered 14 tortoise remains attributed to fire, one fire-injured tortoise, and three live

tortoises within a 250-ha area of burned tortoise habitat." (pg. 298) This fire was not only man-made, but could have easily been prevented if there were mindful actions towards this protected land. This shows the similarities between how man-made mismanagement can devastate species, while Bear Ear Monument was re-claimed and successful due to the land management processes. On the other hand, other scientific studies disagree and believe some things may cost too many resources. Due to this, the already declining state of Utah's great ecosystems, not only do they have disruptions due to human failure, but the declining state of their protected land.

The final article that pertains to the importance of Utah's ecosystems is by multiple authors, all of which are credible and reliable authors. This is relevant to how invasive species can actually benefit Utah, and even without those benefits there isn't much there can be done to control certain aspects of the ecological processes in Utah. Cheatgrass is a great example, as it burns easily and the only species that can properly maintain the outbreak of these crops are also not native. The article goes on to state "Cheatgrass is generally palatable and nutritious for cattle in spring, but dries quickly in the hot, dry summers typical of the Great Basin, becoming a fl ashy fuel that carries fire quickly." (pg. 1) This jumps back to the same issue from the former paragraph, and how wildfires can greatly impact ecosystems and cause major loss. "When the fires died down, 1.7 million acres had burned… There will never be resources to treat every single acre." (pg.3) If the ecosystem is so far gone that there will never be enough resources, some scientists believe there must be actions to perform care in a more efficient, creative way. These scientists tried everything from overgrazing to outcompetition. In this paper they find that, "Repeated targeted grazing followed by prescribed burning is indicated as a control of cheatgrass…burning strips may be strategically deployed to slow or prevent the spread of

wildfire." (pg.5) Even though there will always be persisting issues with these important pieces of land, at least there is recognition to how we can help prevent devastation similarly to the loss of Mojave Tortoises. Even though there was success with conservation at Bear Ear Monument, this author disagrees it would cost too many resources we may not have in the first place.

Overall, the ecological state of Utah is important, as much as it is sensitive. From wildfires to preservation, many overlook the natural ecosystems that are so special and unique to this state. Between successful conservational efforts of Bear Ear National Monument, all the way to the devastation and loss of a protected species due to a man-made fire, these ecosystems are more important than ever. Even the smallest issue can deal fatalities, just like cheatgrass and its impactful tragedies of continuous wildfires and our endangered tortoises. Ecosystems are constantly changing, and always will. From a walk on the beach to a beautiful hike on a mountain range, it is the job of humans to watch these ecosystems closely and make sure there is continuous success and not persistent devastation. I agree the efforts on Mojave Desert Tortoises bring up amazing points on how wildfires can impact life, as well as Cheatgrass giving great insights to how something so simple can cause a catastrophe. With misused land, it can give us good ties to how not only this land is important to the life it inhabits, but also the tie to how mismanaged land can lead to devastation. Even though the land was misused, they were able to turn it around and show how managed wildlife control can be successful if properly monitored.

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