

## **Wilderness: The Great Debate**

**ROBERT REDFORD**

Is the west going to be reduced to just photos and films to show young people how it used to be, or are there going to be places where they can go and see the way it used to be, like wilderness.

**NARRATOR**

The allure of wilderness has inspired many, such as Thoreau, John Muir and Wallace Stegner. Wilderness is a state of mind; far more important than the legal definition. A debate over wilderness and public land issues is raging throughout the American West.

**MARK HABBESHAW**

This is a war for rural people, for state and local sovereignty, to protect what little sovereignty we have left as a rural people.

**HEIDI MCINTOSH**

Wilderness is in danger right now, and the past eight years have been particularly rough.

**NARRATOR**

It started years ago.

Into the wilderness.

The expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark explored the west in 1804 through 1806. They found a vast wilderness extending to the Pacific Ocean. Lewis and Clark encountered a thriving Native American population. Herds of buffalo covered the landscape on seemingly endless grassland prairies.

**RON HIS HORSE IS THUNDER**

The Lewis and Clark expedition meant many different things to different tribes but ultimately if you really think about it, it was the really was the beginning of the end for tribal culture, a tribal way of life.

**NARRATOR**

This wilderness became the west of the imagination; an almost mythical place attracting adventurers looking for a new life. Changes to this wilderness came with increased population. Buffalo herds were slaughtered to near extinction. Only remnants survived on the remote areas of the west. Native people of the southwest were also challenged by the increase in settlers. Cries of manifest destiny were heard. The United States expanded its reach coast to coast. Some felt an urgency to protect a rapidly disappearing wilderness. Theodore Roosevelt became the United States' twenty-sixth president in 1901. He traveled to Yellowstone and Grand Canyon and hoped to preserve them. Teddy Roosevelt's conservation legacy became one of America's most important.

**KEN SALAZAR**

It's important for the people of this country to connect to the landscapes of America. Wilderness does that because it shows us the grandeur of our planet, and it's important to preserve that not only because it's important for economic engines, but also it's also important for the way that it refuels the American spirit.

NARRATOR

This heritage was defined by the creation of National Parks. Conservationist and writer Wallace Stegner called the National Parks “America’s best idea”. Wallace Stegner wrote the Wilderness Letter in 1960.

SANDRA DAY O’CONNOR

Wallace Stegner at the very end of his life was very disillusioned with how the west had allowed development to overtake its natural beauties and its natural bounty in favor of development.

NARRATOR

Wallace Stegner described a concept called “the geography of hope”. He believed wilderness was necessary even if one never traveled to it. It’s important just to know its there.

ROBERT REDFORD

He saw the wilderness and preservation of the wilderness, and I agree with this, as the reason to preserve it because it told us who we are as a people, and as a nation.

PAGE STEGNER

It generated a lot of activity, which lead, ultimately, to the passage of the wilderness act.

NARRATOR

The wilderness act was created by congress in 1964.

SENATOR ROBERT BENNETT

The wilderness designation is, perhaps, the most severe designation that Congress can put on a piece of land in terms of anybody using it, or accessing it.

WILLIAM MEADOWS

People who say we're locking up wilderness are not thinking about the opportunities that wilderness provides for our society. In fact, the places that are locked up are the places that are being used for mining, for logging, for oil and gas exploration. Those are the places you can't go.

NARRATOR

Stewart Udall was President Kennedy’s and President Johnson’s Secretary of the Interior Form 1961 to 1969. The former Arizona congressman continued Teddy Roosevelt’s conservation legacy in the west. Four national parks including Canyonlands National Park were added in his time in national office.

## STEWART UDALL

I had spotted it on a flight I made over that area and I looked down and I said “My God! That’s a National Park!” And I went through the National Park Service and I said, “What is this area? What is its status?” And so that became one of our major initiatives; to establish a national park in what became the Canyonlands area of Southern Utah.

## NARRATOR

As population and energy needs increase, wilderness preservation has become an issue of global importance. The world’s population is projected to be 9 billion by 2043. The debate concerns much more than the legal definition of creating wilderness. Much of the debate is about access to public land and competition for it. The discussion concerns how public land should be used. Issues include the creation of national monuments, National wildlife refuges and parks, energy development, off-road access and ranching.

The role of government is questioned regarding federal versus local control.

This debate is taking place from the east coast to the redwoods of California to the desert sands of the American west.

Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is symbolic of preservation versus national energy issues.

Herds of caribou migrate in timeless fashion. Beneath the arctic tundra is the black gold called oil. A nation dependent on foreign energy questions its future.

Teddy Roosevelt traveled to the Amazon in 1913 after surviving an assassin’s bullet and a failed presidential election bid. He found an untamed wilderness. The Amazon River basin faces change in this current age of instant communication and global travel.

Remoteness is no longer protection.

Views from space show a connected mutually dependent planet.

These crucial issues are focused dramatically on the American west.

## MARK HABBESHAW

The wilderness advocates say that we need to protect those lands for future generations. What they're actually doing is locking those lands up from future generations and there are other designations that can keep those lands open and still protect them from abuse.

## ROBERT REDFORD

I think that the beauty of wilderness is so powerful when left alone that it does go into that new realm of magic. I mean it, particularly when you weigh it against development and what development looks like in this country, even though it's brought benefits to people economically. The fact is if you weigh a developed area against a natural area, there is no

comparison.

NARRATOR

Mike Swenson heads Utah's shared access alliance,

MIKE SWENSON

The power lies in the people. And the ability to manage land and to say how land should be managed lies with the people, but we forget that because there's a separation between us and Washington, but it really is with us. I would add the caveat that local people should have a little more say.

PAGE STEGNER

They forget sometimes that it isn't just their land; it is all of our lands.

NARRATOR

Robert Redford is an actor, director and environmentalist. On this fall day, he helps release a hawk back to the wild at Sundance, Utah.

ROBERT REDFORD

I think the greatest argument to be foisted now, or to be dealt with right now, is an argument that's been there since I became active in the environment, and that is it goes back to what are we going to preserve, and what are we going to develop, considering we are development oriented society. You're probably not going to take that away, but the question is what are you going to have left to develop if you don't preserve something, and also what are you going to preserve for the dignity and the stature of your country in terms of it's heritage?

NARRATOR

Mike Noel is a rancher and state representative from Kanab, Utah.

MIKE NOEL

They want to string me up and throw me out of office and we're nothing but a bunch of hillbillies and rednecks. You know, redneck is really a term of honor. That red on the back of your neck means you've been out in the sun. You've been working. You grab hold of my hand and you'll see it's got a lot of calluses and because I don't mind working with my hands. I don't begrudge anybody else, but for people to look at you with disdain because you're out and you're working and you're sweating, and you're putting protein back into the economy and feeding people, putting out bales of hay and taking care of God's creation here, I think that's wrong. That's hypocrisy and rural people are some of the best people in the World.

You get a lot of backpackers in here that come down. They bring a twenty-dollar bill and a pair of shorts and stay here for a week and they don't change either one of them. I'm being facetious, but you don't get a lot of money out of wilderness. It really doesn't create a lot of jobs.

NARRATOR

Much of the debate concerns the Colorado Plateau and the unique landscapes of southern Utah.

PAGE STEGNER

There's no place like it on Earth, I think. The Colorado Plateau is absolutely unique--bony, flinty, hard, sometimes inhospitable, but absolutely the landscape of God.

BRUCE BABBITT

The empty spaces in the west are filling up. It's no longer a remote, rural area, these vast urban areas are now coming up all over the west, and either we learn to plan our presence in a compact form, or this kind of sprawling, metastasis of roads and development will just continue to creep outward and kind of ultimately threaten and quite possibly destroy much of what's left.

NARRATOR

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was created by President Clinton in 1996.

MIKE NOEL

Back in '96 people were very upset by the creation of the monument and the way that it was done under the Clinton-Gore administration. Kind of done in the dark of night, in Arizona with no input from Utah congressional delegation or the Governor's office. So we were very unhappy with that.

NARRATOR

This area in southern Utah encompasses almost 200 million acres.

SENATOR ROBERT BENNETT

The folks who live there felt abused by people who did not live there, who, nonetheless, wanted to come into their backyard and say, we're going to take this land and we're going to lock it off from you and for any activity that you might want to undertake--and, you shouldn't be living there. Actually, there was a situation where some people in Congress said to the people from southern Utah, "You should move. You should not be living on this land." And, of course, that created a tremendous kind of resistance on the part of the folks who live there.

ROBERT REDFORD

Some of these areas need to be protected by somebody. Clinton, first of all the past administrations were I think a disgrace to the environment, I think that's pretty clear. They saw the environment as something to be wiped out, and that was the greatest disservice and disrespect they could do to the American people--particularly new generations of young people.

NARRATOR

Grand Canyon was designated a National Monument by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 before receiving national park status in 1919.

Grand Canyon's protection was controversial at the time. Senate bills creating Grand Canyon National Park were defeated in 1910 and 1911. Arizona ranchers and miners fought the park.

President Theodore Roosevelt wrote:

"Let this great wonder of nature remain as it now is. Do nothing to mar its grandeur, sublimity and loveliness. You cannot improve on it. But what you can do is to keep it for your children, your children's children, and all who come after you, as the one great sight which every American should see."

BRUCE BABBITT

Every time a president has set aside a conservation area, the reaction from the West has been negative. There's always been controversy.

NARRATOR

A six-mile roundtrip hike leads to one of the crown jewels of the grand staircase-Escalante national monument. Calf creek tumbles in torrents to pools below.

Potential coal mining on the Kaiparowits Plateau in the monument had been debated for years. Protection was controversial.

MARK HABBESHAW

You know, the environmentalists invested in some studies that say tourism is all we need. And if we have a 9/11 tourism is a problem. With high gas taxes tourism is a problem. We need energy in America. We can safely extract energy and so an economy that is based on multiple use and multiple use of our public land resources is appropriate and it's frankly a war to make federal government accountable to our local needs. And our local rights as an American people.

ROBERT REDFORD

My response to that way of thinking is that they should come into the twenty first century. They're speaking about yesterday; they're speaking about a time when there was something called manifest destiny, when the west was wide open for the taking. Those days are gone, and what was the west isn't any longer.

NARRATOR

Shawna Cox helped organize a protest rally at Paria canyon in grand staircase national monument. At issue, is the closing of the road through Paria Canyon. Protestors gathered for speeches and petitions.

SHAWNA COX

Those few people that scream and holler that it's being torn up? It isn't being torn up. Come and see for yourself. It's, it's a great country. Its beautiful land and we've shared it. We just don't want people taking it away from us.

MIKE NOEL (To protesters)

How many veterans do we have? Let's give them a big hand! Did you guy's fight to have the federal government take over the sovereign state of Utah? You're here today to say that's not right.

NARRATOR

They drove the road in protest of its closure. Law enforcement and supporters of the other side of the issue were also present.

MIKE NOEL

So, the people looked at that as the first shot across the bow of shutting down all the roads. We got together. There were about five hundred of us that went down the canyon. This canyon's been open for road use from Cannonville to Pariah for over 150 years. We went down the canyon and pretty much mobilized and said, you know, no resource damage, make a statement. We think this canyon needs to be open. It's a beautiful area. All Americans should have the right to see it. You shouldn't have to hike twenty-six, twenty-seven miles when there's a road going down there.

HEIDI MCINTOSH

it was a violation of the law. BLM, again, did not enforce it, did not attempt to stop the ride, which they should have done, so BLM is now left in the position of having to protect this area. So, a very tough situation, but you know, emblematic of a lot of the controversy in southern Utah over roads, and off-road vehicle trails.

NARRATOR

Mike Swenson of Utah's Shared Access Alliance leads off-road riders deep in Utah's San Rafael Swell.

MIKE SWENSON

I want the public to really understand that these people are not out here tearing the land up. There's that story that's been told that we are a bunch of uneducated rednecks out here tearing stuff up and it's just not true. These are good folks who love the land. Some of them actually make their living off the land and, as long as they do it responsibly, they should have access as much as they want.

WILLIAM MEADOWS

Wilderness continues to have numerous threats. I think in the last eight years we've seen threats from oil and gas development, but the constant threat that we have seen over the last ten years is the proliferation of off-road vehicles. The off-trail use of off-road vehicles is just really extraordinary.

NARRATOR

Access for all is discussed in the wilderness debate. The issue was part of the protest ride in Paria Canyon.

RICK DRANEY

How many people in my situation or just amongst the able bodied community would never be able to see some of the vistas or some of the scenery and some of the beauty, if we had no place to go to be able to do it. Looking at a postcard, looking at a photograph that somebody else took doesn't do it justice. You need to be able to see it with your own eyes and feel it your self to able to appreciate how great and wonderful this earth is.

NARRATOR

Pilot Rob Hunter flies to a remote airstrip in the San Rafael swell.

ROB HUNTER

We always try to be environmentally conscious. All back country pilots, we consider these to be airstrip country trailheads.

MIKE SWENSON

If wilderness were created around those, it is an issue that would have to be addressed. Would those airstrips be closed? Very possibly.

NARRATOR

A protest event called "Take Back Utah" was held at Utah's state capitol. The theme was similar to "Tea Party" protests throughout the nation. Off-road vehicles were driven in protest; filling the streets.

MIKE NOEL

They've taken a lot away from us in terms of being able to develop these resources, the jobs that are available, and I think we've had enough of it in southern Utah. Maurice Hinchey from New York City, and Dick Durbin from Illinois, clean up your own state first before you come to Utah and tell us how to manage these public lands.

NARRATOR

The protest ride ended in a rally on the capitol steps. The creation of wilderness, access to public lands, and the role of the federal government were debated.

MIKE SWENSON (To protestors)

There is a new war in the western US. It's not being fought with guns and bombs. If it was it would be short, and surely we'd win. We are taking back our land. This is government for the people, by the people.

NARRATOR

The Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance or SUWA was a target.

MIKE SWENSON

You environmental organizations, you radical groups. I want you to know I have a message for you. You guys who love rocks and trees more than human lives, you have awakened a sleeping giant.

HEIDI MCINTOSH

There was a lot of fire-breathing rhetoric about the federal government and what they're doing to squelch Utahans rights so, not looking at it from the perspective of protecting something, but being very upset about the limitations.

SENATOR ORRIN HATCH

We're going to keep fighting and protect our state, our lands, our issues. Let's get that Sagebrush Rebellion going again. God Bless All of You! I appreciate you!

KEN SALAZAR

I simply would say to them 'Chill. Chill'. You know, it is important that we recognize your uses of our public lands, but it has to be done in a way where--there are places where it is appropriate for us to have ATV's. There are places where it is not.

NARRATOR

The west has always attracted individuals looking for freedom. Iconic figures like the American cowboy represent independence. Cowboys still exist on the ranches of the west. It's a hard, but satisfying life under open skies that's come to define the spirit of the west.

ROBERT REDFORD

I think that if we go back and to look as to how ranchers and farmers lived when they had to live this way, where they grew the food that they ate, and they used the land that needed to be used, they didn't place buildings and highways on land that didn't need it. We should go back to that; we should go back to more of a community neighborhood kind of living.

NARRATOR

Heidi Redd operates the dugout ranch near Canyonlands National Park. She entered a partnership with the Nature Conservancy to preserve the land and her family's ranching heritage.

Ranchers and environmental organizations are sometimes at odds.

HEIDI REDD

Well, I think they misunderstand each other. I'm very thankful for the environmental movement and I think that if it hadn't come along, I don't know where we would be in America. They awakened us all to the dangers and the folly that we were committing in the, just the every day--I can remember in the 50's. We'd throw garbage out the window, and they awakened our consciousness to this. We do have a limited amount of beauty in the country, and if we don't husband it, and if we don't take care of it, it will be gone.

NARRATOR

Near the end of his term the administration of President George W. Bush approved oil and natural gas leases in Utah. President Barack Obama's administration postponed some of these leases calling for more study.

BRUCE BABBITT

The Bush administration, you know, absolutely indifferent to the environmental issues on public lands, had a single focus: energy.

KATHLEEN SGAMMA

Leading up to that lease sale, contrary to the rhetoric, was a seven year process costing the government over thirty five million dollars where they analyzed lands over the course of six resource management plans.

NARRATOR

Tim DeChristopher was a University of Utah student in December 2008. He attended an oil and gas lease sale. He bid on leases with the intent of disrupting the process.

Tim DeChristopher was federally prosecuted on felony charges. He could potentially receive substantial prison time and hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines if he's found guilty.

TIM DECHRISTOPHER

If I'm convicted I won't necessarily be surprised. I mean, I made the decision going in that, that this was something worth going to prison for, and I still stand by that, and will accept any consequences that I have to deal with for this, but I think it, I think this trial will be kind of a key indicator of where we're really at as a society and whether we're willing to justify the continued exploitation of not only our natural world, but our younger generations, and whether we're willing, as a society, to start standing up against that kind of exploitation.

KEN SALAZAR

It's inappropriate for people to break the law, and in that particular case there are laws that don't allow for the disruption of oil and gas leases, and other laws that may have been broken.

KATHLEEN SGAMMA

Well I think it's unfortunate that he felt compelled to take a drastic action. I think if he had realized that natural gas and oil development is a small and temporary impact on the land he might not have taken the action to, and he's now facing jail time and a fairly substantial fine potentially because of that action. So, I don't think it was appropriate in that first of all, he broke the law; I mean you can't go into a livestock auction or an art auction and bid and then just say, "Oh, I didn't really mean it".

ROBERT REDFORD

Well, I think first of all, he represents the voice of a young person, which I think is wonderful because I think young people are going to inherit what we've done with this land.

NARRATOR

Passions run hot on all sides of the conservation issue. Some have drawn comparisons between Tim DeChristopher's actions and the protest ride at Paria Canyon.

MIKE NOEL

No one took anything from anybody on that ride. Mr. DeChristopher, on the other hand, took millions of dollars out of the pockets of the taxpayers, and monkey-wrenched a lease sale that cost the taxpayers millions of dollars, including the input from the state of Utah, and here's the environmental community parading him around as if he's a hero. That's the wrong message to give.

TIM DECHRISTOPHER

They called what they were doing civil disobedience, and then I found it very interesting that when law enforcement officials were just taking pictures of them and collecting the evidence, that they were outraged at that and said that they had no right to be doing that, and they didn't seem very willing to accept the consequences of their action.

NARRATOR

Vernal, Utah depends on the oil and gas industry. United States Assistant Secretary of the Interior David Hayes came to Vernal. He met an unhappy, vocal community worried about jobs and dependence on foreign oil.

BILL HALL

So when people pull up to the gas pump they need to think in their mind, you know what, where does this really come from? It doesn't come from that gas pump, it comes from under the ground, and without oil and gas leases, and drilling, and production, and completion, we're not going to have this, and this is going to weaken our country.

HEIDI MCINTOSH

People are coming to realize that we're never going to drill our way into energy independence in this country. Our resources are much, much too meager.

NARRATOR

Trucker Bill Hall of Vernal feels his way of life is threatened by the failing economy.

BILL HALL

I personally, I don't want no severance package; I don't want any handouts from the government. I just want my job back, I just want to go to work, and I can honestly say I speak for thousands of other people.

KEN SALAZAR

I would say to that man that I understand his pain, and that we are doing things to develop our conventional fuel resources, but also that the future of our planet, the future for his own economic well being and that of his children and grandchildren will depend very much on how we sustain our treasured landscapes so that those treasured landscapes can continue to be economic engines of our country.

KATHLEEN SGAMMA

I think its results from this misleading of the public that it's an either or question, either we sacrifice the land to energy development or we have natural gas and oil. In reality, that's a false choice. We can develop our natural gas and oil and at the same time protecting the lands that we love.

ROBERT REDFORD

That, to me, is where the long view comes in, and I think this way of thinking about oil and gas leases trying to put them on public lands that belong to the public, they don't belong to energy corporations, they don't belong to people in congress either, they don't belong to legislatures. They belong to the public, and they should be preserved for the public.

NARRATOR

Tim DeChristopher initiated his action partially motivated by another of the west's most hotly debated topics: climate change.

TIM DECHRISTOPHER

I'm guided by most of our best scientists who are seeing this threat to our very civilization, and beyond that I'm guided by my sense of responsibility for protecting not only my own future, but the future of other generations.

NARRATOR

Former Vice President Al Gore won the Nobel Peace prize for his work on climate change.

MIKE NOEL

The Chinese are building power plants. The Indians in India are building power plants. We can't just crush our economy and take jobs out of our economy to meet a very minimal amount of increased climate in our country.

JAYNE BELNAP

The western U.S. is warming much more quickly than the rest of the country. In fact, the bull's eye is about on the Four Corners area of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Arizona.

SENATOR ROBERT BENNETT

I think we need to take some time looking at the question of emissions and, if possible, do everything we can to cut down the emissions, but I'm not one who says it's inevitable that the climate is going to be destroyed in the next fifty to one hundred years.

NARRATOR

Small towns of the west struggle with boom and bust economy. Many search for an economic engine that will preserve a rural way of life.

Sigurd, Utah, like a number of small towns, is caught in the middle. It's a farming town and gateway to Utah's National Parks.

A coal-fired power plant is proposed. Some want the economy and jobs energy production could bring. Others worry about the cost to the environment and their way of life.

RODNEY CLARK

The United States is the Saudi Arabia of coal. We have more coal reserves than other countries. We have enough coal for two or three, probably three hundred years, and probably more if we look for it.

BRUCE BABBITT

There's presently no such thing as clean coal. In the ads that you read and the propaganda that you see from the industry advertising clean coal is patently false.

NARRATOR

The Torgerson Timber mill in Bicknell, Utah is silent on most days. The family business is run by brothers Ryan and John Torgerson.

JOHN TORGERSON

We figured this would be our, what we'd just do for the rest of our lives. Just like my dad did. It's what he did.

NARRATOR

They say their business is enduring hard times due to too many regulations.

RYAN TORGERSON

Well it's, like I say, it's pretty tough to work with the environmental community. They, they don't support logging. They file, you know, appeals against Forest Service timber sales and tie it up in litigation making it so you can't, you can't log the timber, and it's pretty tough.

HEIDI MCINTOSH

I think that wilderness gets controversial because it is about not just the land sometimes, but it's about the cultural divide between the people who live near the wilderness areas.

NARRATOR

The conservation debate is focused by a logging mill in a small town. On one side, is

what some view as preservation of forests. On the other, is an historic way of life.

If national parks are a gauge of interest, America seems to crave the outdoors. Wilderness and National Parks are managed by different standards and laws.

It's a summer day in Yellowstone National Park; the nation's first national park. Gateway cities like west Yellowstone bustle.

Traffic snarls Yellowstone roads as if a major city.

The park resembles anything but the tranquility being sought. Animals that make a brief appearance find an adoring crowd.

They are the rock stars of the national park world.

Rocky mountain bighorn sheep walk precarious cliffs oblivious to crowds below.

Yellowstone's elk are accustomed to traffic. They blend in as if just another tourist themselves.

Scenic wonders like artist's point are crowded with tourists. Natural beauty is the attraction.

Early leaders of the wilderness movement saw development of the national parks as commercialization.

Is this conservation or is access simply a part of American democracy? It's an enduring question of the great debate.

Wilderness wouldn't be wilderness without the animals of the west.

Controversy continues regarding the endangered species act and specifically grizzly bears and wolves.

Wolves are the most controversial animals in the wilderness war.

Wolves were re-introduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1995.

Wolves were largely extinct in the lower 48 states by the early 1900s.

Bruce Babbitt was President Clinton's Secretary of the Interior. He was instrumental in returning wolves to Yellowstone.

BRUCE BABBITT

It was a statement that says, there's room for grazing on the western landscape, but ranchers do not have a right to cleanse the landscape of all other forms of wildlife that, in any way, interfere with cattle and sheep.

NARRATOR

Martin Davis runs a ranch near the banks of the Yellowstone River. The ranch has been in his family for forty-five years. The land is worth significant money; probably far more than can ever be made from ranching. It's a life he is reluctant to give up.

MARTIN DAVIS

The decision is being made elsewhere, be it East Coast-Washington, or wherever, and it-it's just like the gators down in Florida. I know nothing about gators, and why should I tell Floridians what to do with their gators, and it's the same thing here. Why should someone out of our neck of the woods be telling us what we do with our country here?

For some, the return of the wolves symbolized wilderness and an animal that rightly belonged in Yellowstone.

For many ranchers, it was the return of an historic adversary.

Wildlife of the west compete for a sometimes fragile resource; the land.

A roundup of wild horses takes place in the high desert of Utah. A helicopter chases them to a hidden trap.

Wild horses compete with cattle and native species like deer and antelope. Their numbers are considered too high by agencies, which manage them.

The result is surplus horses that become wards of the government.

Protection is given by the 1971 wild horse and burro act.

Adoptable wild horses outnumber demand. Many wild horses remain in holding facilities.

New proposals call for sanctuaries for surplus horses.

Wild horses represent a choice. Some see an enduring symbol of the freedom of the west. Others see a feral pest to be eradicated.

An uncertain future waits.

Senator Robert Bennett was instrumental in passing the Washington County Lands Bill in 2009. It protects the Red Cliffs in Southern Utah near Saint George. It's considered a model of compromise for competing interests.

SENATOR ROBERT BENNETT

Bill Meadows of the Wilderness Society came in to see me. We were very frank with each other, and that was a breakthrough, because many of the times earlier when I've talked with members of the environmental community, they frankly were not up front with me.

#### WILLIAM MEADOWS

Congress has to pass the bills to designate wilderness, and we need to find support locally. So when I sit down with local people, I find that they love the land as much as I do. They're afraid of designations or something that is permanent. But once you sit down and talk about the natural values that need to be protected, and if you can do that in the context of what's necessary for economic development, how do you honor social and cultural values in those communities? You can find a way to come to common ground.

#### NARRATOR

A resident of the Red Cliffs is getting special attention. The endangered Desert Tortoise is protected. Biologist Ann McLuckie conducts research on desert tortoises. A mirror is used to look inside a tortoise's den.

#### ANN MCLUCKIE

Increasing recreation, increasing human populations, increasing roads and fragmentation will all impact tortoises negatively. So we need additional protection.

#### NARRATOR

The Virgin River was granted wild and scenic status in the Washington county lands bill; the first so designated in Utah. The Virgin River and its tributaries flow through Zion national park.

The Colorado's main tributary, the green, is being considered for wild and scenic status. The green river's still canyons offer solitude and tranquility before meeting the Colorado at their confluence in Canyonlands national park.

Cataract canyon offers some of North America's most challenging white water in high runoff years.

The Colorado provides great economic benefit to expanding cities and agriculture. It comes at a price.

The Colorado rarely reaches its historic rendezvous with the Gulf of California in Mexico. It runs dry in the burning sands of Mexico before reaching its delta in most years; a delta where jaguars once roamed green, lush wetlands.

#### ROBERT REDFORD

There are too many dams, you should take dams out, let the water flow naturally the way it used to. If something isn't done pretty quick that takes us back to where we were in a more natural state, then we're going to have a really serious problem, we've already got a problem, which we can see. Water is a huge problem, because it's a reflection of global warming and out of control development, and that has to be brought back into order.

A refuge lies in the great salt lake of the American west.

The Great Salt Lake is an anomaly; a body of salt water far from the shores of an ocean.

Gunnison Island is a visit to sanctuary; nestled in the security of an inland sea. It is home to colonies of American white pelicans.

White beaches of encrusted salt are ringed by magenta water; so-colored by algae and salinity

Biologists hope to learn more about threats to American White Pelicans; including those, which are man-made.

JOHN NEILL

There is concern that the mercury in the lake, although its salt water and there are no fish in the Great Salt Lake, there is concern that mercury is getting into the surrounding wetlands either through precipitation from the atmosphere or historic use, such as mining or other industrial activity.

Evasive feelings of the wild define Gunnison Island. It's the same emotion and beauty, which inspired countless writers to describe a cherished, memorable wilderness.

The moment is elusive in a modern world yet an inspiration for wilderness. The sounds are a symphony of birds.

New wilderness bills are debated such as the red rock wilderness bill. It could encompass 9.4 million acres. This proposal continues a discussion of some twenty years.

MIKE SWENSON

That is more acreage than a lot of eastern states that we would be essentially locking up and throwing away the key. Really, the access to wilderness is next to none, and the ability to manage the land and resource within those wilderness boundaries is very difficult. It is unacceptable.

ROBERT REDFORD

If we don't start thinking about what we're going to preserve on our planet, there'll be nothing to live on or buy. So, to me that short-term thinking is the greatest threat to wilderness. I think wilderness stands as a symbol of what are we going to preserve for our own dignity, our own heritage, our own state of being and mind.

NARRATOR

Early explorers to the west found their footprints quickly blown away by the wind.

The wild places of the world now face competing interests and ever-increasing population.

That single footprint is now multiplied several billion-fold.

ROBERT REDFORD

I can't predict the future, nobody can. I can only say that there'll be people like myself, and I'm just one person that will continue to fight for preserving something that I think is a great symbol of what-why America is great, and it's a physical symbol, and it's a natural symbol, and we're so lucky to have it. If we take it away, to me it would almost be criminal.

MIKE SWENSON

It's because we love it that we will continue to protect it. If we turn it into wilderness, and we lock it up and throw away the key and all we ever get to do is look at pretty pictures on the wall of what wilderness is, you know, in a few generations, will we continue to protect it? Will we continue to love it like we have? I don't think so.

NARRATOR

Can anything wild survive overwhelming population?

Powerful forces, all of who think right is on their side, compete for the land.

The right of stewardship is questioned as to who loves the land most and to whom should it be entrusted.

MIKE NOEL

It seems to be in their best interest to create controversy and to really squash down local communities, to pile on industry, even though the industry is creating jobs and not harming the environment. They don't seem to want common ground.

TIM DECHRISTOPHER

The environmental movement has always been defensive. It's always been where someone wants to destroy this much and the environmental community convinces them only to destroy this much.

NARRATOR

Ultimately, wilderness of the west belongs to the American people who should control its fate.

Rick Draney

I understand that they are just as passionate about their views and their opinions and their perspectives. But I think there are still plenty of room and plenty of space to have some meaningful dialogue and find some common ground, somewhere in the middle.

ROBERT REDFORD

I think the greatest point to be made, to be brought around, is think about your children, and theirs and theirs, and those yet to come.

The great debate is about planet Earth.

The answers will determine its future.

