# FOR $ALE!!!: THE GRAND CANYON

## (TERMS: NEGOTIABLE)

BY DAVID M. BROWN

Photo courtesy of AOT

Author Stephen Nash says the price tags are clearly displayed in various markets. The lowest cost in any of them is too high for us and our children, he argues. His recently published Grand Canyon for Sale: Public Lands versus Private Interests in the Era of Climate Change examines this experientially, cogently and eloquently, exhorting us to engage our leaders regarding the preservation of our national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, monuments and other public lands.

First, the Native American Seventh Generation Principle: "In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

Echoing this, from Kenya, is a watchword on a framed picture depicting a whale returning into the sea – "Respect" – given to me by my children 20-plus years ago: "Treat the Earth well . . . It was not given to us by our parents . . . It was lent to us by our children." I keep this on my desk, at eyesight two feet from where I keystroke daily.

Similarly, Teddy Roosevelt's (T.R.) words spoken at the Grand Canyon South Rim, May 1903: "Keep it for your children, your children's children, and for all who come after you. . . . Leave it as it is. You cannot improve upon it. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it."

Nash says, though, that we have disimproved it and marred it.

"In the 103 years since our national parks were established, our national promise has been that they be maintained unimpaired for future generations," he says. And, he writes, "Perhaps this would be a discreet time to say that the parks' natural systems are, in the estimation of many scientists, falling apart. . . . We're on a precipice, both politically and biologically" (p. 9).

Some of this is a natural tension in a free society between public interest and private interests. "While free enterprise isn't hostile to public service, there are some who look at the public interest as a private piggy bank," says Nash, a Virginia resident who formulated the book 10 years ago while backpacking with his nephew in the Grand Canyon.

Central to the destruction is human-created climate change. "We live in an era where all public lands, not just our national parks, wilderness areas, and refuges, are of crucial importance because of climate change," he says. "The life within the national parks is more fragile than the rocks. The animals and the ecosystems, which we all enjoy to our delight, are all at risk now as climate change gallops forward."

The namesake great trees at Sequoia National Park in California, for example, are threatened by drought and heat, and glaciers are melting at Glacier National Park in Montana.

Because of climate change, animals in Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP) will need other habitats at higher latitudes or higher, cooler elevations to survive, perhaps even to avoid extinction, he argues. However, because hundreds of thousands of square miles of adjacent public lands are not being used optimally, that may not be possible here and elsewhere. A central thesis Nash develops is to consolidate the national parks and other publicly owned areas into one protective system.

Our national treasure, where humans have lived for thousands of years, and six million of us visit each year, is threatened. Some 25 plant and animal species, for example, are gone from the Grand Canyon that T.R. visited. Climate change is the major predator, backed by a militia of 200 or so invasive flora that we've brought or allowed in, known by appropriately gritty nomenclature: toadflax, skeletonweed, puncturevine, houndstongue, bull–thistle, cheatgrass.

Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year as a national park, with Zion in Utah, GCNP is not alone. In Washington, Olympic National Park has unwelcome international visitors that have slipped by the gate: Himalayan blackberry, English ivy and holly, Japanese knotweed. And, the Everglades in Florida is now home to ambrosia beetles, lionfish, sharp-tooth tegu lizards and Burmese pythons.

Animals that T.R. may have seen at the Grand Canyon are gone, too, locally extinct, including the jaguar, now very rarely seen north of the Arizona border with Mexico. Nash cites the work of biologist William Newmark: "The Grand Canyon . . . has lost one in five of its mammals" (p.39).

He discusses in dedicated chapters other assaults on our sacred parks and public lands such as Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service acreage, much of this leased to cattle ranchers, resulting in ecologically destructive overgrazing, he says.

Drilling and mining on sensitive lands near the parks are also a continuing peril. Of concern, too, is the growth of park gateway towns, such as Tusayan at Grand Canyon, the second most visited of our national parks; Gatlinburg, Tennessee, outside our most visited Great Smoky Mountains; and Jackson Hole, adjacent to Yellowstone, the first national park, and the majestic Grand Tetons. Are development constraints necessary simply because they neighbor sacred national lands?

In Arizona, the noise and solitude disruption of overflights by airplanes and helicopters above the Grand Canyon is a loud challenge. "A river of aircraft flows out over the Canyon: some fifty thousand flights a year just from this location and double that number of low-altitude aircraft from Las Vegas and other points of origin, ferrying more than 423,000 tourists and an unknown number of others," he writes (p. 178). Some of the threats to our public lands are difficult to counter, such as climate change, he says. Overflights can be stopped or curtailed. "Quiet technology, such as silent helicopters," he says, "would provide much less reason to object to their presence and would be a new entry into that conversation."

## PUBLIC LANDS, PUBLIC HANDS

The Grand Canyon and other public lands are intimately connected with Washington, D.C., lobbyists and campaign finance donations; a few of our elected representatives and unelected appointees want to privatize some areas and further commoditize them.

Other public officials have shown courage in protecting the parks, even though they are embedded in a federal bureaucracy. One, a former superintendent of GCNP, told Nash, "People don't realize how threatened their national parks are, and they also don't realize how powerful their voices are with their congressional delegation. There's a need to be raising hell." And a chief science administrator told him, "The public voice has to rise to a level even deaf ears can hear."

Fortunately, bipartisan support for national parks is enormous. "If we can make the connection between the future of the national park system and the future of those other public lands, then the political conversation can change, as it often has," Nash says.

Photo courtesy of AOT

How about the politically disengaged neighbors, the Smiths, who work hard, raising their family – why should they care about parks and public lands?

"Tell the Smiths that about 20 percent of freshwater comes from our national forests and those public lands we are taking too many chunks out of," Nash says. "Tell them that excessive heat and drought can put so much pressure on our national lands they will begin to fail."

Better leadership to educate the public and respond to these issues and threats is needed. "We did it for World War II, when restructuring American industry and rationing were necessary," Nash explains. "Today, we don't need any more of an apocalypse than we are already facing. People can see it; you don't need binoculars."

*David M. Brown is an Arizona-based writer (www.azwriter.com).*