

Make Colorado National Monument our 60th National Park

by Ginny McBride

What would John do? Should the Colorado National Monument become America's 60th national park or remain as it is? □□

Those of us fully versed in John Otto's story know his dream was to see the canyons west of Grand Junction recognized by Congress as a national park. Instead, in 1911 President Taft created what is now Colorado National Monument. □□

One hundred years later, the Colorado National Monument Association is determined to make Otto's very real dream come true. □□ Grand Valley residents may know CNMA exists to support Colorado National Monument and its scientific, educational and interpretive programs, with the goal of helping visitors better connect to this rich geologic and recreational gem in western Colorado. You could say CNMA's mission is to fulfill John Otto's dream — to share the monument's splendor with the world. □□

The association believes national park status is the right thing for the monument and the Grand Valley. Here's why: □□

- National parks and monuments are operated under the same set of laws, regulations and policies. The federal government (not state or local governments, as some erroneously believe) has successfully managed the monument for 101 years and will continue to do so in the future. □□

- Changing the monument's status to a national park will *not* drive changes in air or water quality standards. The monument is a Class II area under the Clean Air Act. Class I areas include national parks with more than 6,000 acres, wilderness areas over 5,000 acres and international parks that existed in 1977. For example, although Great Sand Dunes and Black Canyon of the Gunnison were monuments-turned national parks, only the wilderness areas that existed in 1977 in those parks classify as Class I areas. □□

- The monument's current boundaries will not change because of park status. Glade Park residents will retain the court-adjudicated right of way to the four-mile stretch of Rim Rock Drive from the east entrance to DS Road. □□

- Currently, the majority of Rim Rock Drive traffic represents non-recreational users accessing Glade Park. If changing the monument to a national park causes a 10 percent increase in recreational use,

summer traffic would increase by approximately 52 cars, less than a 4 percent increase in total traffic. □□

□ The monument is not too small to be considered a national park. There are several national parks the same size, or even smaller, than our monument. □□ These are just some of the facts related to the monument becoming a national park. □□

Last week, National Geographic published its Top 10 List of underappreciated parks. Colorado National Monument was No. 4. While CNMA is pleased the monument is recognized for its “spectacular canyons, buttes, spires and other sandstone formations,” we regret it continues to be overshadowed by other nearby national parks such as Arches and Canyonlands.

By achieving national park status, the monument will be recognized by entities like the Rand McNally National Parks Guide and by tour companies currently bypassing this incredible jewel situated in the center of a vibrant community and next to a fine regional airport. □□

Some wonder why the monument deserves to be a national park, given its small size as compared to Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon. Here is why: □□

- The monument has one of the last remaining intact pinyon-juniper woodlands along the Colorado Plateau, with trees over 1,000 years old. □□
- Within its boundaries are endemic plants, hanging gardens, biological soil crust, riparian ecosystems, native grasslands, sagebrush and shrublands. □□
- The monument’s geologic features include Precambrian basement rocks (1.75 billion years old). □□
- The monument is a prime example of “hanging canyons,” originating not from glaciers, but from faulting that elevated a block of tough Precambrian rock. □□
- Rim Rock Drive, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is one of the most spectacular drives in the United States. It was constructed using manual labor by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration. It is a historically significant Depression– era project. □□

Colorado National Monument is entirely worthy of national park status. Yet the most important reason is so we may fulfill our roles as stewards and hosts for this landscape and meet our obligation to share the monument with the world. A national park will be a source

of pride for our community and for a nation that cherishes its park system. □ □

The first National Park Service Superintendent, Stephen Mather, could have been speaking to each of us when he said:

“The parks do not belong to one state or to one section ... The Yosemite, the Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon are national properties in which every citizen has a vested interest; they belong as much to the man of Massachusetts, of Michigan, of Florida, as they do to the people of California, of Wyoming, and of Arizona ... A visit inspires love of country; begets contentment; engenders pride of possession; contains the antidote for national restlessness ... He is a better citizen with a keener appreciation of the privilege of living here who has toured the national parks.” □

Join CNMA in supporting the change to park status to fulfill John Otto’s dream. □ □ Visit our website, www.coloradonma.org, or gjforparkstatus.com. Send a letter of support to your congressional representatives. Let’s be No. 60! □ □

Ginny McBride is chairwoman of the Colorado National Monument Association. She wrote this column on behalf of the association’s board of directors. □ □