

[http://www.telluridenews.com/news/article\\_e676a500-4a1a-11e7-917d-b3826a5eaf73.html](http://www.telluridenews.com/news/article_e676a500-4a1a-11e7-917d-b3826a5eaf73.html)

FEATURED

## Local support for Bears Ears

Artists, officials make a statement

By Jessica Kutz, Staff Reporter Jun 5, 2017



Joanna Spindler sits in front of her work currently on display at Ghost Town Grocer. Spindler and Clarissa Fortier used paintings and photographs to document Indian Creek, a section of the Bears Ears National Monument. (Photo by Jessica Kutz/Telluride Daily Planet)

A hobby archaeologist and a local artist have poured their talents into an art exhibit that serves as a tribute to Utah's Bears Ears National Monument.

Joanna Spindler and Clarissa Fortier, who are also avid rock climbers, centered their project on Indian Creek — a climbing area located in the northern part of the national monument — which is currently on display at Ghost Town Grocer.

While their love for “the creek” (as some desert frequenters call it) started four years ago on various camping and climbing expeditions, their inspiration for the exhibit was to raise awareness and discussion for the land that is currently in danger of losing its protected status.

In February, Utah Governor Gary Herbert signed a resolution asking President Trump to rescind the designation of Bears Ears as a national monument, receiving a lot of backlash from environmental groups in the process.

In April, President Trump announced a review of 22 national monuments, one of them being Bears Ears.

It is unclear what will happen to the national monument, but one thing is for certain, supporters like Spindler and Fortier are doing everything they can to place their weight on the decision.

The duo has participated in letter writing campaigns and called senators, with Spindler taking it another step further, recently driving 150 miles to Blanding, Utah to meet Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke during his visit to Bears Ears as part of his review of the national monuments.

Spindler said the trip was eye-opening.

"It did not give me very much hope about the future of some of our monuments," she said, citing the fact that Zinke did not invest much time speaking with tribal leaders, whose ancestry is tied to the land, and was "very elusive" when it came to meeting with activists.

Spindler was there when the now-famous video was captured of Zinke pointing his finger at an indigenous activist, telling her to "be nice" while she questioned him about his apparent lack of interest in meeting with tribal leaders.

"I saw him being so violent and so hateful towards indigenous leaders," said Spindler, who had been holding signs in support of the monument during the visit.

Political motivations aside, the art on display is all about the colors and varying perspectives of the area's ancient rock formations and outcroppings, as captured through Fortier's bold plein air paintings.

Fortier "hiked or schlepped all her painting stuff," Spindler explained, to the viewpoints.

While the large paintings offer a broad depiction of the landscapes, Spindler's photography brings the art to a micro-level, capturing the "little details" of the area through her pictures that tell a story of the history and culture of the creek.

Spindler has spent about two years studying the archaeological aspects of the place and said people have inhabited the land for at least 12,000 years. Evidence of Puebloans, Basketmakers and Fremont peoples has been found, with traces of their lifestyles scattered throughout the desert.

Following what she calls ancient sight lines, Spindler has found remnants of those eras.

"Through that I've stumbled upon a lot of beautiful ruins and stone tools, pottery and weaving and petroglyphs," she said. "I've just seen Indian Creek in different lights and different seasons, and have fallen in love with its details and flora and fauna."

Through her "Indiana Jonesing," as she put it, Spindler has dodged rattle snakes, stepped on cacti, and suffered a sun burn or two, all for the magic of finding artifacts from times past.

The art exhibit is just one noticeable show of support for the Bears Ears Monument; San Miguel County Commissioners have also used their position of power to advocate for the protection of the land.

At their last meeting, the commissioners signed a resolution expressing support for all monuments protected under the Antiquities Act.

Commissioner Hilary Cooper said the resolution is the second one officials have signed in relation to the Bears Ears National Monument.

The first was created during a Ute reconciliation process started by former commissioner Art Goodtimes.

"Through that process we as a community were asked to support Bears Ears," Cooper said. "That is their land now, that is their spiritual and cultural lands, and they very much wanted to see it protected."

"Now that Bears Ears is being questioned by this administration it made complete sense for us to reiterate that resolution, not only for Bears Ears, but for all the monuments in Colorado."

