

Friends of Cedar Mesa was honored to participate in the Lands Council created by the San Juan County Commissioners. This diverse group of ranchers, ATV riders, miners, hunters, archaeological enthusiasts, and local access advocates provided hundreds of hours of volunteer time discussing, researching and debating public lands issues. The respectful, collaborative and open-minded spirit of these discussions are a credit to what our community can accomplish if we work together and find common ground.

As the only conservation group to attend all of the Lands Council meetings, Friends of Cedar Mesa often presented a different perspective on public lands policy than many of the other Lands Council stakeholders. Throughout the process, we have tried our best to understand the needs, opinions, and concerns of other Council members. Because of the willingness of other Council members to educate us in a kind and respectful manner, we learned a great deal about how we can better work together.

As a group, the Lands Council agreed that doing nothing is not a good path forward. The Council unanimously supported a consensus proposal (“Alternative A) that is significant and reasonable. While Friends of Cedar Mesa urges San Juan County residents to support protecting more lands (and therefore more archaeological sites) by supporting Alternative C, we see the consensus alternative as a strong show of support by the local community for protecting lands and archaeology in our county. The consensus alternative shows how much common ground many of us share and demonstrates that our community is committed to stewardship of the treasure we have in our back yard.

By being proactive, we have a much better chance to guide the future than if we just allow things to happen. Working in good faith to protect lands we all cherish, we can create a better alternative than more restrictive and less flexible possibilities, such as a National Monument designation.

Our community can work together to steward our incredible public lands in a collaborative way that protects archaeological and natural resources, while preserving access and freedom to enjoy wild places. We believe the most practical and flexible way to achieve protection is via the creation of National Conservation Areas, which give local people a strong voice in the management process, while allowing for continuing traditional uses, such as ranching, hunting, and motorized recreation.

As a local conservation group, Friends of Cedar Mesa is heavily invested in working with our neighbors to protect the landscape, archaeology, and beauty that make our area special. We believe local people have a particular responsibility and ability to provide stewardship of public lands, while understanding the importance of access to our quality of life. We hope we can all work together in this process in a respectful and collaborative way. If we do, I think we will all be surprised about how much we can accomplish.