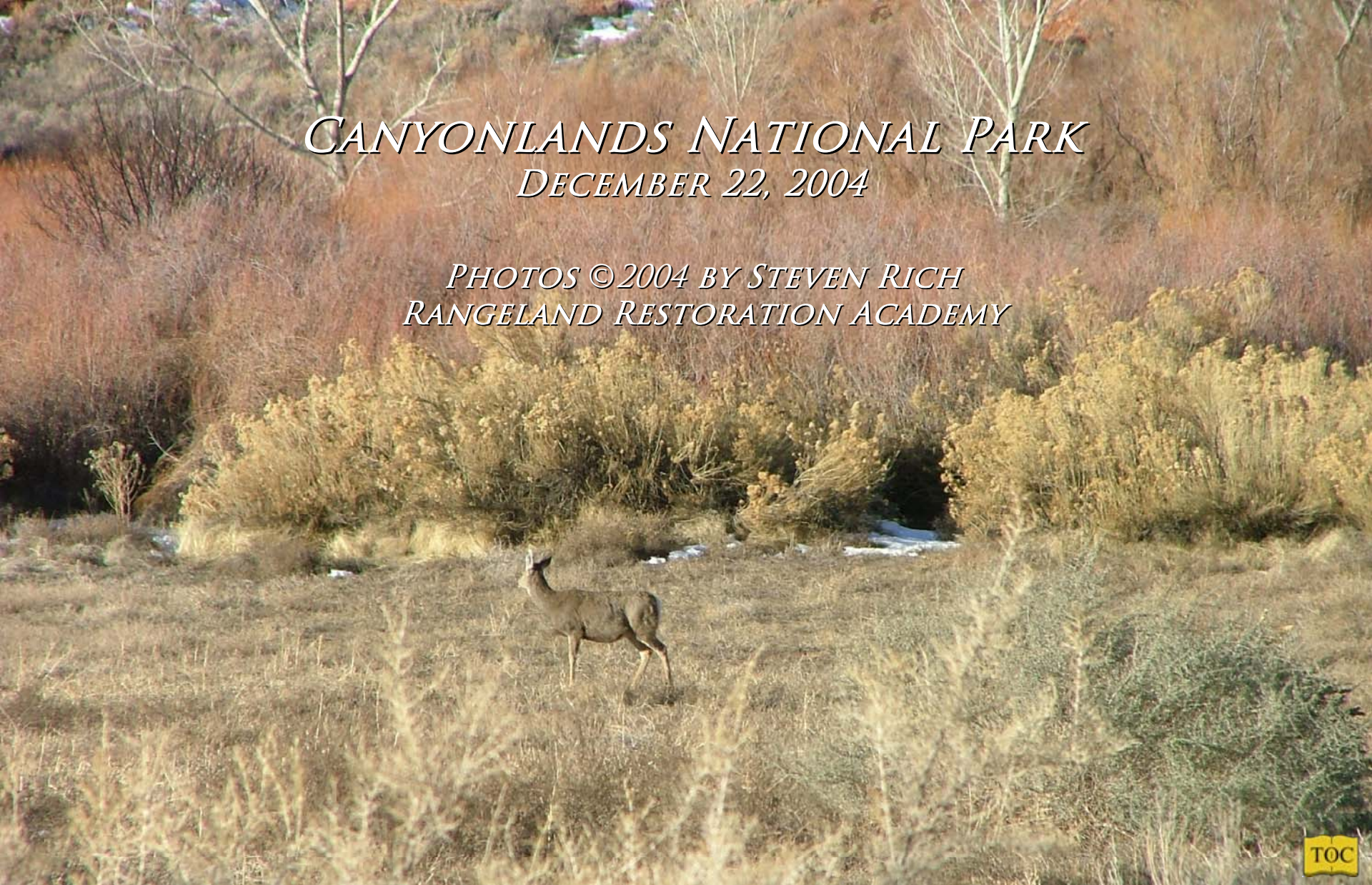


CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK
DECEMBER 22, 2004

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RANGELAND RESTORATION ACADEMY



Sorry, this is not Canyonlands National Park; this is grazing land **outside** the park (where there's at least *some* food for wildlife). This picture book will be a little longer than the one for Zion to give you a sense of the scale of the disaster that the "natural regulation" policy of the National Parks has induced, and what this current Federal and international policy portends for us as it is replicated throughout State and local agencies.



This is grazing land in late December, consisting of perennial grasses and salt brush. We are looking to the North just after dawn. The area gets 6-9 inches of rain per year.



Please note the various rock formations in the background.
They will be useful in other photos to give you a sense of relative location.



Native grasses and black-brush, an important forage for browsers such as deer and elk.



Native grasses, Piñon Juniper in the backdrop, and the La Sal Mountains in the distance



And more of the same. Note the effect of cattle and deer rubbing on the bottom of the pinion juniper.

WELCOME TO CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK



Cryptogamic crust, dried out salt brush, a few dying grasses, and Russian thistle.



Russian thistle, a few scraggly perennial grasses, and bare ground. This is typical of Canyonlands.



More "typical."



The gray sub-shrub is Russian thistle. There is plenty of soil here. The mineral nutrients are adequate.



This is the Needles District Headquarters of Canyonlands National Park, surrounded with Russian thistle. The important thing to know about the field inside the yellow line is that this area underwent a “restoration project.” Proposals were written and reviewed, there was a “negative declaration” of environmental impact, budgets were allocated, contractors were hired, there was billing, there were payroll taxes, accountants reviewed the books, there were probably even solicitations for volunteers, web pages, promotional pamphlets... They ripped it, sowed it, added organic matter, and... it looks no different than the rest of it.



This is the same field. Can you imagine working here, looking out a window every day, having spent your entire education and young life hoping to “save the environment,” knowing that despite all that money and effort, all you can see is weeds? Could you make yourself bite your cheek when a tourist announces, “Oh how beautiful!”? How would you feel facing a bitter rancher protesting another destructive edict that threatens his existence?



Besides "The Needles," this is almost all Russian thistle and cheat grass.



The ground.



More Needles. More thistles. Can it get worse?



You bet. This is cryptogamic crust in all its glory. Well???

Yeah, one can screw their head into thinking it's an odd kind of pretty, but I don't think any rational person would confuse it for, "productive" or, "healthy." Oh, but it is "Natural."



So, if a cryptogamic crust “preserves moisture” in the soil, why do so many plants with roots that extend *below* the crust look so dry?



In the background is the spire we noted from the grassland outside the park. Here, inside the park, there is a lot of Russian thistle but almost no grass.



I try not to get bitter, but you see, when I was a young person, I believed everything was just dandy in “Our” Socialized Land Entertainment Developments. I joined the Sierra Club. I went backpacking. I cleaned oil off rocks. I demonstrated. So you see, I feel complicit for this mess, and betrayed by the people who sold me a pack of lies.



Crust, up close.

Nobody in his right mind would confuse this land with anything that would support burgeoning wildlife.



In the 275 some odd Canyonlands photos I examined to put this together, I did not see a single living animal inside the Park. Note the spire again in the background. This is no “cherry-picked” photo; this is huge.



More huge.

More crust too, and Russian thistle, and some black-brush... Those are the La Sal Mountains in the distance. But shouldn't we expect as much? After all, it *is* a desert. Wasn't it always this way?



No. The former tenants had a very different style of management. This is "Newspaper Rock," but 30 miles from where the Park Service is growing Russian thistle, cheat, and crust. As you scan the rock, you will see that the Indians hunted buffalo, antelope, sheep, elk, and deer. There is one key critter on this rock that proves it is not ancient and that this difference in animal life is due to management, not "climate change": HORSES, introduced by the Spanish in the 16th Century. This was a savannah, and it could be yet again but for the management...



The La Sal Mountains are in the distance. Let's get closer.





Did you just feel a sense of relief?



Or awe?

WELCOME TO THE ISLAND IN THE SKY



A ranch, where people grow food for animals, just outside Canyonlands National Park. How?



Remember the photos of Newspaper Rock, where there were heavy animals such as bison and sheep to break the crust, graze the thatch, process urea, inoculate the soil, and plant the seed? Remember the hunters?



It's just what you learned in high school biology: grazing animals and their feed have a symbiotic relationship. The animals disturb the soil, thatch the plants, and introduce nitrogen fixing bacteria which breaks down the organic matter (which is why the soil here is gray). Their hooves stamp in water pockets that trap blown seeds and collect water for germination. People are part of that relationship. Without people to manage the animals they overgraze, go elsewhere, or predators get out of hand, and the system crashes. People balance nature. "Nature" has no idea and not a care as to what a "balance" even is. Meanwhile...



Activists and Park Service people get to drive through the ranch every time they come to the Park, and go home...



...where they talk about ranchers as if they are harming "the environment."



Maybe it's because these results make them feel inadequate.



Somebody must have forgotten to tell the ranchers that this is supposed to be a desert, not a savannah.



Now, by no means are these ranches perfect; they're just a lot better than the park. If the public paid the cattle ranchers for wildlife management just as we do for beef (and just as we do for the Park Service), the contrast would be greater. Instead, the public expects that service from the ranchers or free because of the belief that if nothing is done, what they would get is a verdant plain running with wild animals.

It doesn't work that way. Without people managing and protecting grazing animals, this system turns to crust and weeds. So, at this point, the question isn't, "Which one is ideal?" The question in Zion was:

'Which would you prefer: a healthier system that makes money, or a broken system that costs you money?'

This contrast between public and private lands repeats from Mount Rainier to the Everglades, because every one of these parks is operated under the same paradigm: that if only we could remove the effects of people, "Nature" would thrive. The reality is that in most cases, "protecting" land from people is just as sure a way to kill it as is intentionally despoiling it. Land benefits from active management for virtually all the metrics the public desires.

The better question is: "Who is best equipped to deliver that product?" The urban public has chosen police power to control the men and women who work the land to make themselves feel better about their impacts on the wild with no real knowledge of what they want or accountability for the true outcomes.

There are outstanding examples out there of what private management can do, as you shall see next.

Notes:

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