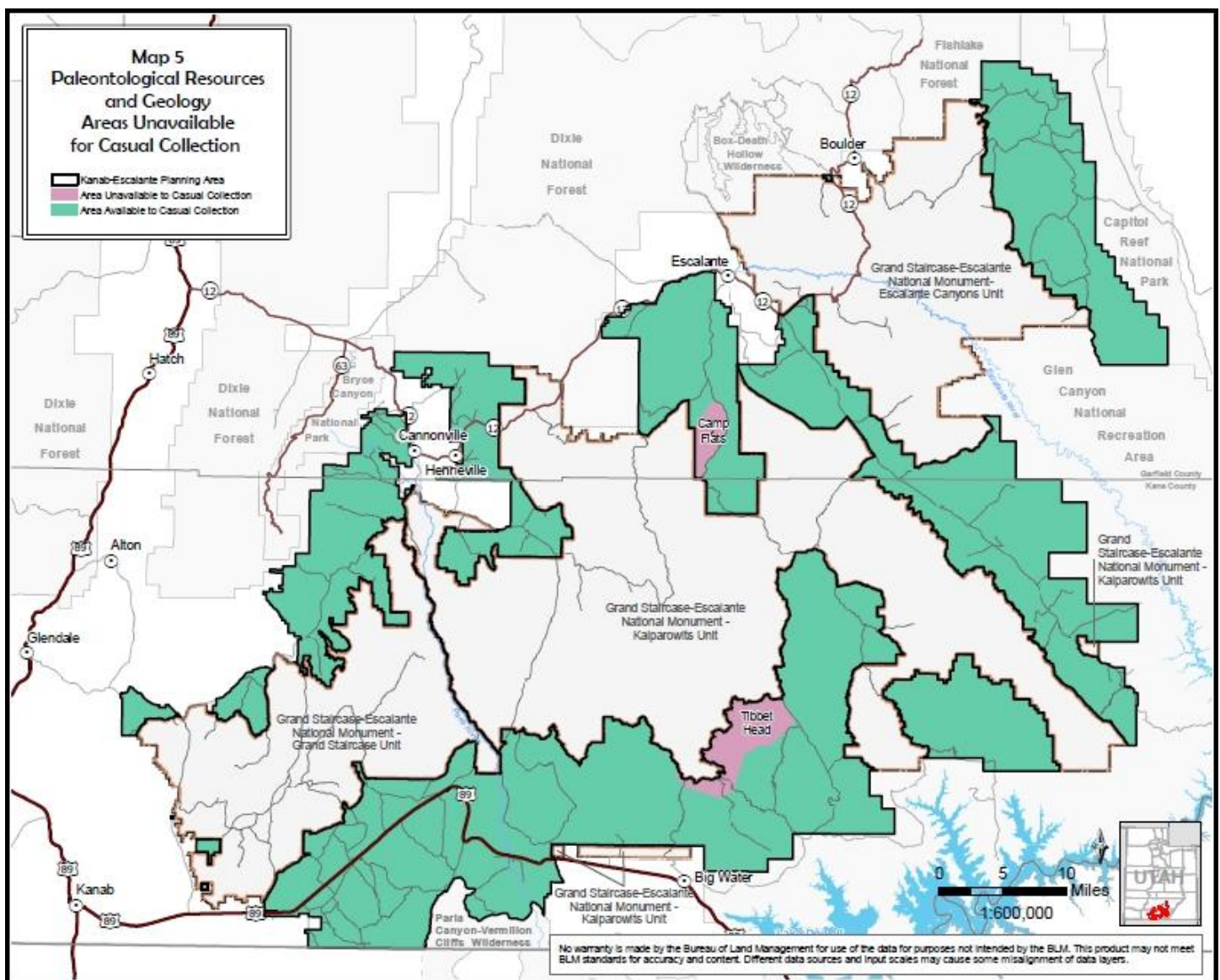


ROCK COLLECTING RESTORED TO MORE THAN 840,000 ACRES IN SOUTHERN UTAH

On February 6th, 2020, with the signing of a [Record of Decision](#), new BLM management policies for the Kanab-Escalante Planning Area took effect. The KEPA consists of the land removed from the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by Presidential Proclamation and resultant BLM action. Rock collecting had been banned in this area ever since the GSENM was declared in 1996. Provisions of the new management plan for the KEPA that affect rock hounds include:

Allow casual collection of rocks, minerals, and petrified wood except where prohibited and posted.

Allow casual surface collection of common invertebrate and plant paleontological resources for personal (non-commercial) use without permits unless such resources are of critical scientific or recreational value and need to be protected, or where collection is incompatible with other resource protection. Close the following areas to casual collection: Camp Flats; Tibbet Head.



The KEPA is administered by the [Paria River District](#) office of the BLM, located in Kanab, Utah.

Map of the GSENM/KEPA: https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/Utah_GSENM_New2018.pdf

Rocks and minerals that can be found within the KEPA include selenite, alabaster, agate, and concretions and fossils legal to collect within the KEPA include petrified wood from the Triassic Chinle and the Jurassic Morrison formations, and marine invertebrate fossils, including ammonites, from the Cretaceous Tropic Shale.

Keep in mind that that the provisions for recreational collecting might eventually be overturned by either court injunction, legislation, or action by a new administration in Washington, D.C.

The BLM deserves credit for including recreational collecting in their “preferred alternative” when public comments were solicited in 2018. During the comment period, media sources and well-funded interest groups with paid professional staff and wide public membership vigorously opposed the restoration of recreational collecting. The BLM received 2,535 unique comment documents, 20,811 duplicate comment documents, and 133,353 form letters. The Southern California Paleontological Society drafted and submitted a [comment letter](#), which was [co-signed by 37 other organizations from across the country](#), and by a number of individuals.

Rock collecting is still banned in what remains of the Grand Staircase-Escalante NM. The BLM had proposed allowing recreational collecting within two small areas within the GSENM as part of their “preferred alternative,” but this was not included in the final plan. No law or rule prohibits recreational rock or fossil collecting within BLM administered national monuments, but, to date, all BLM management plans have banned “casual collecting” in monuments. This will be a critical issue for the Mojave Trails National Monument, because many so popular rock collecting sites are located within the MTNM, as are the trilobites at the Marble Mountains.

- By Andrew Hoekstra

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