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Utah environmental group joins regional powerhouse

Environment » Utah Environmental Congress is latest merger with regional WildEarth Guardians.

By Brian Mafly
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The Utah Environmental Congress, a small nonprofit working to shield the state's national forests from extractive industries and motorized recreation, has merged with the regional WildEarth Guardians.

UEC's Salt Lake City office joins the Guardians' multi-city network, working to thwart coal mining in the Southern Rockies to bring back the gray wolf and other native denizens of the forests.

"Being a part of WildEarth Guardians creates many exciting possibilities," said UEC founder and board member Denise Boggs. "Together we can reach a larger audience, protect and restore more wild places and most importantly, increase our ability to implement our mission and achieve our mutual vision of national forest and wildlife protection in Utah."

UEC's campaigns against mining, drilling and logging have long frustrated Utah's rural counties, whose leaders see resource extraction as the basis for economic development.

"While UEC will no longer exist in name, the work will continue as strong as ever and that is what is most important," said Chad Hamblin, the group's board chair.

UEC's two-member staff is now part of Guardians' Wild Places program fighting for the ecological integrity of Western landscapes stretching from the Grand Canyon to the Northern Rockies on a variety of issues. Kevin Mueller, UEC's program director of 14 years, is now WildEarth's Utah-Southern Rockies conservation manager.

"We are not afraid of conflict and taking on a big fight," said WildEarth executive director John Horning. "We are willing to hold the Forest Service accountable and willing to use the courts."

WildEarth started in 1989 as Forest Guardians, with a focus on protecting New Mexico's Elk Mountains from cattle grazing and logging. It took its present name in 2008 after merging with the Colorado predator-conservation outfit Sinapu and later with Missoula-based Wildlands CPR, expanding its mission along the way.

With a paid staff now numbering 26 including three in-house attorneys, Guardians works out of main offices in Denver, Santa Fe, N.M. and Missoula, Mont., and satellites in San Diego, Tucson, Ariz., Portland and Eugene, Ore. and Laramie, Wyo. Its network includes 100,000 supporters throughout the country. It gets funding from 10,000 dues paying members and grants

from Wilburforce Foundation and other foundations. Horning hopes to recruit Utah conservationists to serve on his board.

bmaffly@strib.com