

Help With Rose and Mark's Legal Defense Fund



Rose Chilcoat and Mark Franklin, Organizers

Our Story

Colorado Conservationist Faces Criminal Charges for being near a Rancher's Corral on Public Lands in San Juan County, Utah

I am a conservationist who cares about, and has made it my [life's work](#) to protect public lands and wild places. I live in Durango, Colorado with my husband of 29 years, Mark, a former Forest Service Interpretive Specialist and now small business owner of Interpretive Design. I am a former National Park Service ranger, and for the past 15 years was associate director of a small but effective national organization, [Great Old Broads for Wilderness](#) (Broads). This grassroots organization of conservation advocates is led by older women who fiercely protect our beloved wild public lands through work based in education, advocacy, and stewardship, with a healthy dose of humor. I have worked within the systems our nation has in place to ensure future generations have protected wild places, clean air, clean water, and a livable climate. I also am a founding board member of Bluff, Utah based [Friends of Cedar Mesa](#) that has successfully worked to gain permanent protection for the cultural and natural resources of San Juan County, Utah. **Now we need help.**

By standing up effectively and consistently, especially in southern Utah, [Broads and I have attracted enemies](#). Ranchers, ATV enthusiasts, county commissioners, and others who oppose wilderness and national monument designations are intent on making conservationists suffer for our successes in recent years. As one person posted recently posted online, “Ranchers have been trying to catch you for years.”

I am not an extremist. I do not believe in violence or rudeness. I believe we can accomplish more by finding common ground, civil dialogue, and focusing more on what we are FOR than what we are against. I have participated in a number of collaborative and consulting processes regarding public lands grazing management. I have never participated in actions of civil disobedience. Over the years I have been effective in campaigns and efforts to win greater protections for our shared environment, stopping bad proposals on our public lands, and standing up for public lands, especially in southern Utah.

In early April 2017, my husband and I met friends and camped in the Valley of the Gods in San Juan County, UT. We explored and hiked in this amazing landscape. As we were leaving the area, a group of ranchers blocked our vehicle from continuing down a county road. The sheriff’s deputy, who responded, talked to the three ranchers and my husband about accusations of blocking livestock’s access to water. The officer did not think any crimes had been committed and we were allowed to leave. He did not get a statement from me. We left Utah and returned to our home in Colorado.

On April 5th, [I sent the BLM information](#) and photos regarding observations of bulldozing of livestock “improvements” within a wilderness study area boundary and elsewhere near Valley of the Gods.

On April 10th the BLM issued a final decision for the controversial closure of the heart of Recapture Canyon to ATVs.

Two days later, on April 12th, criminal charges were filed against me and my husband. A week and a half after our camping trip in San Juan County, my husband and I were facing multiple [misdemeanor and felony criminal charges](#) alleging trespass on State Institutional Trust Lands, and that we took actions to deprive livestock of water and more. At no time did we do anything to harass or endanger livestock. We are animal lovers who would never hurt a living creature. We are innocent of these seemingly politically motivated charges that smack of retaliation for my years of successful conservation work in San Juan County. Neither of us has any prior arrests nor criminal record. The San Juan County attorney has filed these politically motivated frivolous criminal charges against me and my husband and now we are forced to defend ourselves in Utah.

In December 2017, [Mark voluntarily took a polygraph test](#) that confirmed the charges of “Attempted Wanton Destruction of Livestock” are unfounded.

Neither of us took any action to harm livestock. The ranchers and San Juan County are trying to extract their pound of flesh, retaliating for my years of successful environmental activism. The facts of the situation will be revealed showing our innocence.

Why I'm not Popular in San Juan County (A Bit of Background):

- When ATV riders, the local ATV club (SPEAR) and San Juan County began building miles of illegal ATV trails on our public lands without working with the BLM, I and several Broads documented the routes and pressured the BLM to enforce their rules and regulations; and, to do the proper planning and analysis to protect the irreplaceable archaeological resources of places such as Recapture Canyon. Fragile riparian areas and many archaeological sites were damaged by these illegally constructed ATV routes. I helped organize the conservation community to fight back. We won [that battle](#)—but the larger campaigns go on. The BLM decision angered many of the people (and their friends) who built the illegal trails. They knew I was involved and perhaps saw an opportunity for revenge.
- President Obama used the Antiquities Act [to designate the Bears Ears National Monument](#) in December 2016 at the request of a coalition of Native American tribes and the conservation community. I have long been part of that protection campaign. A number of locals were enraged by the designation and successfully petitioned [President Trump to significantly reduce the monument](#). Both Friends of Cedar Mesa and Broads have joined lawsuits challenging the reduction.
- The recent [Bundy family criminal behavior](#) in Oregon and Nevada illustrates the entitlement mentality of many public lands ranchers who profit from taxpayer subsidized destruction of fragile desert ecosystems. Advocacy for proper public lands ranching management has become volatile and potentially dangerous work. Now they are using local courts to intimidate conservation advocates.

This isn't the first time a conservation activist has faced excessively punitive criminal charges in Utah. [Tim DeChristopher](#) was sentenced to 2 years in federal prison for raising a bidder's paddle at an illegal BLM oil and gas lease auction. Powerful corporate and local interests, who don't represent the public interest, can push public prosecutors to punitive overreach with criminal charges.

The Petroglyph, an online Facebook page and website, has posted many inaccurate and inflammatory articles inciting locals to hatred against me, my husband, and Great Old Broads. Reader comments, posted on this site or my personal Facebook page, have included:

“Stupid ass tree huggers think they are above the law! Damn Zeb, you should have put a 40 cal right between their eyes right before the sheriff shows up.”

“This woman is part of a known anti-anything group of nut cases, in my opinion, that is also messing around in my sandbox.”

“Should punish her, hanging, no?”

"Ranchers have been trying to catch you for years.”

“Hang the bitch.”

I don't plan to let San Juan County falsely accuse me and deprive me of my [inalienable rights](#) including liberty and the Freedom of Speech. I stand up for what I believe in, for clean air and water, healthy lands, and permanent protections for the public lands that belong to all Americans not just those in the local community that would prefer to use and abuse the land for their personal gain.

Please help our defense against these criminal charges that amount to retaliation for my many years of conservation work.

PLEASE SHARE THIS CROWD FUNDING APPEAL

My husband and I are working with great counsel who will help us make our case in court. I believe that if the law prevails then we will. But defending ourselves against these frivolous and false charges is time consuming and very expensive, and so I turn to the [“crowd.”](#)

Your contribution of any amount is most appreciated. A win for us is a win for activism and free speech, and a black eye for the questionable tactics of creating and trumping up criminal charges against conservationists for speaking out.

ABOUT YOUR CONTRIBUTION

I ask that those who are inclined and able to do so, to please contribute what you can to this defense fund to make sure that San Juan County and the ranching community do not prevail in their efforts to bully and intimidate a conservation advocate. Please consider sharing our case with your social networks.

Funds will be deposited in a dedicated account and used to offset costs associated with defending against the criminal charges. After final disposition of the case, any remaining funds will be donated to nonprofits working to protect southern Utah public lands for future generations.

PLEASE SHARE THIS CROWD FUNDING APPEAL

Encourage like-minded friends and colleagues to kick in a little or a lot. A strong grassroots response will send a message of its own: that pursuing trumped up criminal charges against conservationists cannot stop conservation efforts nor silence those who take appropriate actions to protect public lands and the environment.

Read the [Updates to our Campaign](#) to learn the history of our criminal situation. Current updates can be found on the YouCaring website.

Media

[Activist, spouse criminally charged for closing a gate](#) Maffly, Salt Lake Tribune 4/17/2017

[Grazing tension erupts in criminal charges in San Juan County](#)
O'Donoghue, Deseret News 4/12/2017

[Colorado environmentalists charged in Utah grazing dispute](#) The Associated Press, The Denver Post 4/16/2017

[Tape reveals cows had access to water](#) Romeo, The Durango Herald, 7/30/2017

[Charges advance against Durango woman accused of endangering cattle](#) Romeo, The Durango Herald, 11/3/2017

[Broad allegations](#) Chamberlin, Durango Telegraph, 2/15/2018