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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4401
February 15, 2013

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
(ON LEAVE)

COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS

COMMITTEE ON RULES

CONGRESSIONAL WESTERN CAUCUS
IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIRMAN

10TH AMENDMENT TASKFORCE
CHAIRMAN

Utahns value their public lands. These lands support a range of uses, including recreation, solitude, wildlife habitat, and resource development. However, the history and management of the public lands in Utah is long on episodes of contention and conflict, and short on examples of compromise and consensus. For decades, unsettled land-use designations have fueled distrust and acrimony. Much of the debate has centered on a false choice between multiple-use or land conservation. I reject this either-or proposition. Conservation and multiple-use can coexist. They each have an important role in making Utah a healthy, inviting, and thriving state. The long-term success of Utah depends on both balanced conservation and responsible development.

The existing gridlock and land ownership pattern has created countless problems between state and federal interests. Nearly 120 years after statehood, most Utah landholdings (school trust lands) still exist as a checkerboard pattern of isolated square-mile sections surrounded by federal lands. The small size of the individual state school sections and their location within the federal estate preclude the state from effectively managing its lands or from realizing their full potential for the school trust, the purpose for which the lands were originally granted.

After observing and participating in the public lands debate for many years, I believe we are in the midst of a paradigm shift. There is a growing consensus that a more reasonable, balanced use of the public lands can be achieved in Utah. Through conversations with county and state officials, conservation groups, industry, and the public, I believe Utah is ready to move away from the tired arguments of the past. We have a unique window of opportunity to end the gridlock and bring resolution to some of the most challenging land disputes in the state. The time has come for a sensible reassessment of land management and ownership patterns in Utah.

In order to strike an appropriate balance between conservation and responsible development, and to create greater certainty for the citizens of Utah, I am pleased to announce that I am initiating a process to develop federal legislation that seeks to address many of the issues that have plagued public land management in eastern Utah. The intent of this letter is to formally request comments from interested parties on public lands issues that are important to their respective organizations in this region of the state.

In order for your organization to play a meaningful role in this process, I ask that you provide a written, prioritized list of public land designations it wishes addressed – including wilderness, other land designations, or other considerations. Priorities should not be limited to land designations: additional legislative proposals or priorities you would like to see addressed in the prospective bill should also be included. Given the significant scope of this process, each individual item that is submitted, whether it is wilderness or some other designation, must have a unique overall ranking to help my office understand your priorities.

The benefits of land conservation and multiple-use are well-known and obvious. Your organization's list of priorities will help inform and shape the discussion with our county partners as we attempt to craft legislation that will help accomplish the appropriate balance of conservation and multiple-use on Utah's public lands and help sustain and elevate our quality of life for generations to come.

Utah is blessed with unparalleled landscapes, recreational opportunities, and world-class natural resources. This effort will be both time-consuming and challenging – but it's worth it. I look forward to working with you as we move into the next phase of this critically important endeavor. I ask that you please provide your list of priorities via email to Fred Ferguson in my Washington, D.C. office (Fred.Ferguson@mail.house.gov) no later than March 15, 2013.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Bishop". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "B".

Rob Bishop
Member of Congress