

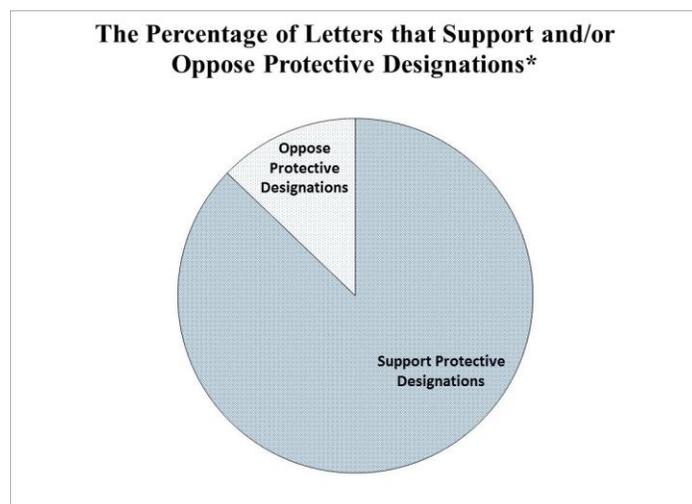


# A Citizens' Review of Public Lands Letters Grand County, Utah

March 2014

## Introduction

The Grand County Council invited county citizens to submit letters stating their views on the future use and disposition of public lands in the county. A total of 182 letters, with 253 signatures, were received as a part of the process to inform and guide Congressional decision making. It is important to note that letter writers were not guided or prompted to say certain things; there were no check lists or form letters. The only guidance from the County Council was for citizens to express their thoughts about public lands within the context of the Bishop initiative.



Our review of all of the letters (see methodology in Appendix 1) found that nearly 90% of county residents favored protective designations for public lands.<sup>1</sup> Their reasons varied, but usually involved deep appreciation of the benefits offered by public lands: clean air, protection of watersheds, major contributions to the local economy, the uniqueness of the land, and a legacy for future generations to enjoy. Even residents who voiced support for

multiple uses of the land argued in favor of designating certain protected areas.

The letters were written in a spirit of deep thoughtfulness, a passion for public lands within which we live and work, and the recreation opportunities afforded by wilderness. There was little support in the letters for further development of public lands for oil, gas, tar sands or potash extraction. The letters showed that Grand County citizens are very concerned that

"Grand County has some of the most spectacular scenery and sought after recreation areas in the country....If we lose these areas to extraction industries, Grand County's reputation for amazing wilderness will be forever damaged."

---from one of the letters

<sup>1</sup> The percent of the letters that indicate support for protective designations is 89.6% and the percentage that indicate opposition 13.2%. They add up to slightly more than 100% because some of the letters indicated both opposition and support for protective designations.

extractive industrialization will destroy public lands, undermine the recreation and tourism economy of the county, and contribute little to their economic livelihoods.

One of the outstanding features of the letters is the extent to which citizens know and visit the lands in Grand County. Residents noted over 100 areas they regularly visit for hiking, camping, biking, photography, and solitude, among other reasons. These are areas visited not just once, but over and over throughout the year and over the years. We expect that many visitors to the county also come to enjoy these areas. It is well-documented that the recreation and tourism sector of the economy accounts for \$140 million annual spending in the county. Recreation and tourism-based businesses provide over 80% of jobs in Grand County. By contrast, the extraction industries yield only 2% of the county's jobs.

### **What do citizens want protected?**

Grand County citizens voiced strong support for protecting large sections of the public lands in the county. By protection, people meant different things, but for the most part they included statements about designating lands as wilderness and other protective categories. About 100 large areas were specifically noted as worthy of protection, encompassing over 850,000 acres in Grand County. These include areas from the Book Cliffs region in the north of the county, to Labyrinth Canyon in the south. The areas include the Big Triangle and Dome Plateau areas in eastern Grand County and the Green River canyons to the west (a full list of areas mentioned for protection by letter writers is in Appendix 2).

In addition to the 2010 Grand County General Plan, the findings from these citizen letters constitute a powerful and authoritative statement on what people want for the lands within (and beyond) the county. There is broad dissatisfaction with the growing industrialization of the county. Some 50% of citizens explicitly said they wanted no new extraction or limits on extractive industries in the county. There are deep concerns that once land is opened to oil, potash, tar sands or other mining, those lands will never be the same again and any economic benefits will be short-lived or have unexpected impacts. Similarly, people say that their reasons for living in Grand County include access to and enjoyment of the lands across the county. A better quality of life and a sense of community in a special land have drawn people to the county; those values are why they stay. The legacy for the future if industrialization of the land continues apace will not be, as many people wrote, scenic, wild, and unique lands, but land damaged and without lasting intrinsic value. It is informative to read about the number of people who intentionally moved to Grand County because of the nature of the land and

“We must remember that our undeveloped public lands are like a savings account for the future.”  
---from one of the letters

opportunities to explore and find home in the canyons, plateaus, mesas, and slickrock across the landscape.

Just over 13 percent of the letters received expressed opposition to designating protection for public lands. However, within this group, opposition was not total; people nuanced their statements. For example, two writers wanted no new protected land designations, but felt that existing Wilderness Study Areas should be classified as Wilderness Areas. The two most cited reasons for opposing designating public lands were to keep a diverse economy, and maintain public access to roads and 4WD routes. Most

of the people opposed to protecting public lands supported multiple use, which we interpreted as broadly similar to the Bureau of Land Management's use of that term. But in saying multiple use, there was a realization that public lands needed to be buffered from

"We do not need to be lulled into thinking that this is a choice between development and protection. The fact is that both can occur, alongside other uses such as recreation and tourism."

---from one of the letters

extractive actions and that public lands provided numerous recreation and economic benefits. Some people felt that protected land designations would hurt the local economy by limiting other sources of revenue and jobs for the county. Other writers who opposed protective designation nevertheless noted the value of the public lands for the local economy.

## Why Designate Protected Lands?

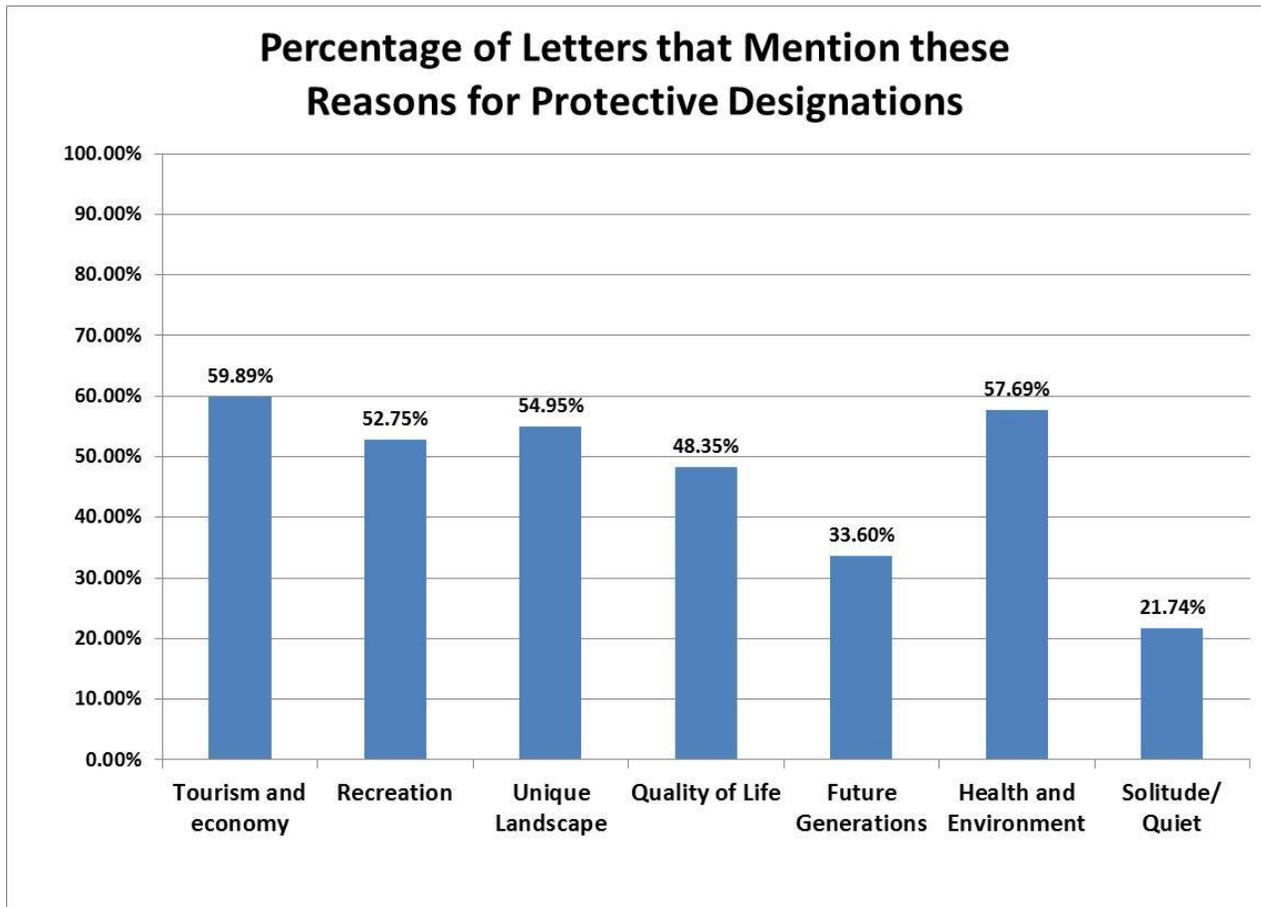
Protection of water supplies and sources (watershed), maintaining clean air and soils, preventing pollution of air and ground are key reasons why citizens support protecting the land.

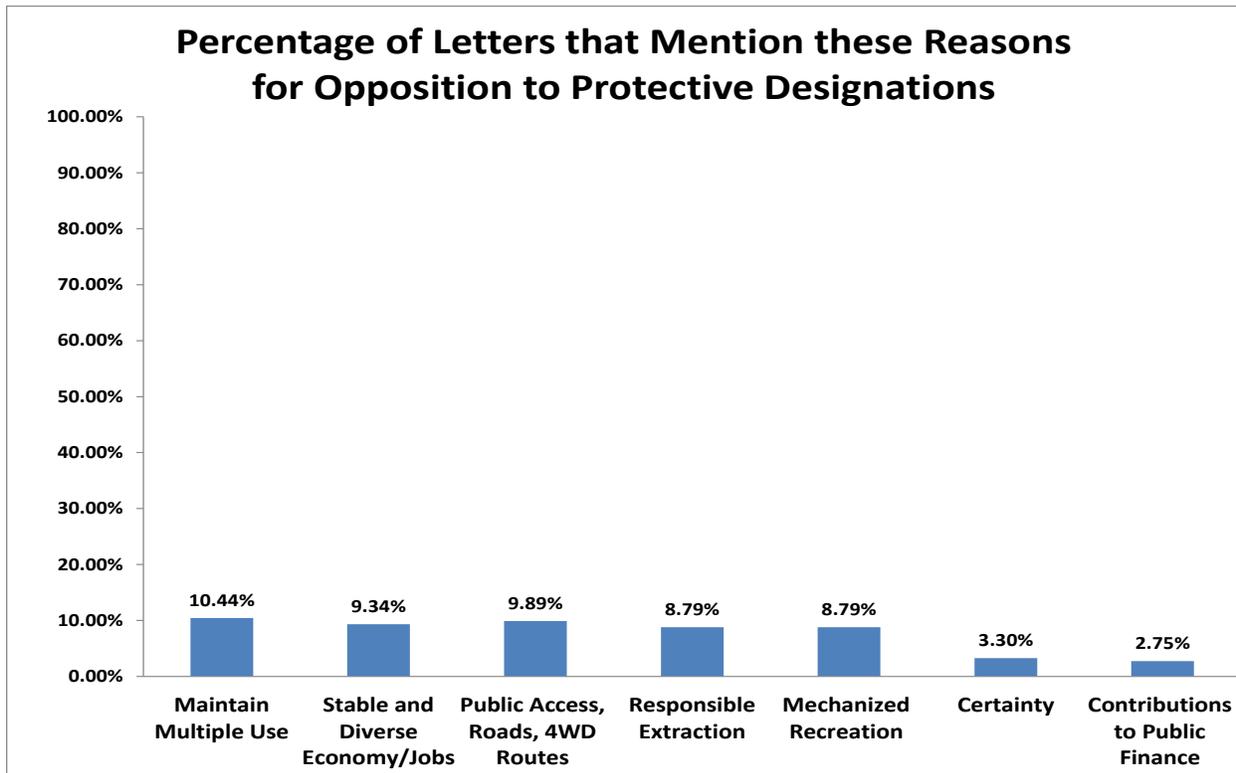
	By Letter Count	By Signer Count
Support Protective Designations	89.56%	91.70%
Oppose Protective Designations	13.19%	10.67%
<b>Reasons for supporting protective designations</b>		
Tourism and economy	59.89%	69.17%
Recreation	52.75%	62.45%
Unique Landscape	54.95%	61.26%
Quality of Life	48.35%	53.75%
Future Generations	33.60%	56.52%
Health and Environment	57.69%	46.64%
Solitude/ Quiet	21.74%	39.13%

All these reasons relate to what other letter writers referred to as public and environmental health. There is a recognition of the on-going impacts of a changing climate on our region.

There is widespread understanding that recreation and tourism are the mainstays of the economy of Grand

County. Over half of all writers mentioned tourism and the local recreation economy as reasons to protect public lands. A number of letter writers argued that without extensive protected lands, the strength of our tourism/recreation-based economy would be seriously compromised.





Recreation-based businesses derive their income from people coming to the county and enjoying the land and support facilities that are available. Motels and restaurants, numerous shops depend on tourism dollars. And, people visit Grand County because of the spectacular scenery, unique landscapes, and recreation opportunities. They leave the busyness of their own communities to sample what Grand County has to offer. As one local business owner said, and other residents concurred in their own letters, “When things change too much, and all you can see in Arches at night is a line of drill rigs at Dead Horse Point, they [visitors] will leave and not return.”

### **How to Achieve Protection for Public Lands**

Letter writers noted several existing initiatives to protect public lands. The American Red Rock Wilderness Act was mentioned explicitly by 20% of writers. Over 17% of writers noted the Grand Canyon Trust’s Forest Wilderness proposal as a way to protect public lands.

Most writers focused on how the existing use of public lands (for tourism and recreation) was the key element of Grand County’s economy, providing diversity and stability to the local economy. An estimated two million people visit the county every year to look at and play within the public lands. After the Wasatch Front counties, Grand County has the highest sales tax revenue and the highest transit tax revenue in the state. In 2012 tourists spent over \$140

million in Grand County. It is clear that county revenue is highly enhanced by tourism. In turn, tourism is determined by the open landscapes and recreation opportunities available across the county (mining and resource extraction

“Any proposal for legislation...should first consider wilderness or other protective designations for all primary watersheds and aquifer recharge areas.”  
---from one of the letters

account for about 4% of the county’s revenue). The letters were very clear on economic factors alone: protect public lands from extraction for the long-term economic health of the county.

### **Concerns about the Process**

Most writers expressed appreciation to the County Council to offer their views on public lands. Writers took their responsibility to address the issue very seriously. At the same time, some 18% of letter writers expressed concerns about the process being followed. Several noted that Grand County had already engaged in a long and public process of outlining land use, resulting in the 2012 Grand County General Plan. Others felt there had been a lack of public participation and transparency as the Council sub-committee develops its alternative proposals to submit to Representative Bishop. Still others opined that Representative Bishop’s motivation was less about protecting and more about opening public lands, including the Book Cliffs region, to major extractive actions.

### **Conclusion**

The 182 letters analyzed in this report resulted from a request of the Grand County Council for citizen input about the status of public lands in the county. While the absolute numbers and percentages of responses are impressive, even more, the strong feelings of writers stand out: a deep love and sense of caring for the land; concern about the well-being of the land as it is; an appreciation of the links between open public lands and the county’s economy and a healthy vibrant community; and strong opposition to further industrial impacts on the land. Writers feel at home in Grand County and they value being here and enjoying the beauty that surrounds all of us.

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Citizen members of the ad hoc committee that reviewed all of the letters and prepared this report included Jane Butter, Pam Hackley, Wayne Hoskisson, Nancy Kurtz, Bob O’Brien, Bill Rau, Susan Roche, Sarah Stock, Deb Walter, Gerrish Willis.

## Appendix 1: Methodology

In response to the Grand County Council's request for input on Representative Bishop's Public Lands Initiative, the Council recorded 183 letters received. These were 'date stamped' by the County Administrator. The letters were posted to [www.grandcountyutah.net](http://www.grandcountyutah.net).

From this source, the Committee made hard copies of the letters and numbered them in sequence from 1-183. One letter had been published twice so the total published letters under review were 182.

An initial review of 60 or so letters was conducted to get a sense of what people were saying and to record a preliminary list of the noted observations, issues, concerns, places, and recommendations concerning the disposition of public lands in Grand County, and in some cases beyond.

The committee identified three major categories that would encompass the overall perspective of each letter. The first two were: Support Protective Designations and Oppose Protective Designations. Under each of these categories were listed the type of designation that was supported or not:

### Support Protective Designations

- a) Support Protective Designations
- b) General Wilderness Support
- c) America's Red Rock Wilderness
- d) Forest Service wilderness
- e) Grand Canyon Trust Forest Wilderness
- f) BLM Wilderness Study Areas/Wilderness
- g) Public Land Solutions
- h) Greater Canyonlands National Monument
- i) National Parks
- j) Watershed protection
- k) No New Extractive Developments
- l) No Extractive Developments

### Oppose Protective Designations

- a) Oppose Protective Designations
- b) Wilderness Opposition

- c) Release Wilderness Study Areas
- d) No Expansion of Wilderness
- e) Oppose New National Monument

It should be noted that a few letters did not express support or opposition to protective designations and some both opposed and supported protective designations.

The third major category identified was Process Issues to reflect expressed concerns about the Congressman Bishop's Public Lands Initiative, the Grand County Council's process or other concerns.

#### Process Concerns

- a) Concerns about what the county is doing
- b) Lack of public participation in developing GC proposal
- c) GC clarify what is and what not is not being proposed
- d) Thanks for extending deadline
- e) Council minutes on PLI not available
- f) Needs larger GC planning context/analysis

We also coded reasons for supporting protective designations and for opposing protective designations.

As the committee read through the letters, other items were noted that did not appear on the original list.

A separate listing was made of each place name mentioned in every letter.

The tally sheet was constructed in a spreadsheet format. Each reader was assigned about 20 letters to read through and code. Information gathered included number of signers and letter source (for example: individual, business, organization, government). When an item on the tally sheet was mentioned, it received the number, 1, beside it. Any additional comments were added for later review by the committee. A second, independent read-through of each letter and tally was conducted by another reader. The pair of readers then met to confirm tallies and resolve any discrepancies.

The number of letters that noted each comment was compiled. Then each comment was expressed as a percent of the total number letters as well as the total number of signers.

The committee reviewed these results and decided upon further consolidation of the information to provide a succinct representation for the report. The tallies for oppose protective designations and support protective designations tally to slightly greater than 100% because some letters expressed both support for protective designations and opposition to protective designations.

## Appendix 2: Specific Areas Noted by Writers

Note: We recognize that some areas extend beyond Grand County, but have recorded what people noted.

	Eastern Book Cliffs	North of I70
128 Corridor	Fisher Towers	Onion Creek
Adobe Mesa	Fishlake National Forest	Porcupine Rim/Sand Flats
Amasa Back	Gemini/Tusher	Potash Rd
Amasa Back Bike Trails	Goldbar Canyon	Professor Valley
Arches Adjacent	Grand View/Mt. Waas	Rainbow Rocks
Areas near Gr & CO rivers	Granite Creek or Canyon	Range Creek
Around Moab	Gray Canyon	Renegade Point
Around National Parks	Green & Colorado Rivers	Roan Cliffs
Backcountry	Grey Canyon	Rock Creek/Sinbad Ridge
Bartlett/Tusher	Hell Roaring Canyon	San Rafael Swell
Beaver Creek	Hells Hole	Secret Spire
Beckwith Plateau	Hidden Valley	Seven Mile Canyon
Behind the Rocks	Hideout Canyon	South Mountain
Big Horn Mountain	Hill Creek	Spring Canyon
Big Triangle	Horsethief Point	SRMA
Bitter Creek	Hunter's Canyon	Stillwater Canyon
Black Mesa	Island in the Sky	Survey Point
Bookcliffs	Jack Creek Canyon	Sweetwater Canyon
Castle Ridge	Johnson's Up on Top	Tavaputs Plateau
Castle Valley	Kane Creek	Taylor Canyon
Cataract Canyon	Kane Spring Road	Tenmile Canyon
Cedar Mesa	La Sals	Three Canyon
Cliffhanger Trail	Labyrinth Canyon	Tombstone Rock
Confluence Green and Colorado	Long Canyon	Turtle Canyon
Culvert Canyon	Mary Jane Canyon	Upper Horseshoe Canyon
Dark Canyon	Mexico Point	Westwater Canyon
Dead Horse Point	Mill Creek	White Rim
Desolation Canyon	Mineral Canyon	Wild & Scenic Rivers
Diamond Canyon	Morning Glory	Willow Basin
Dome Plateau	Mt. Peale	Willow Creek
Dragonfly Canyon	Myton-Sand Wash	Yellow Bird
Duma Point	Negro Bill Canyon	