

THE UTAH WILDERNESS COALITION

Congressman Rob Bishop
123 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bishop,

Thank you for your invitation to present our priorities for public land conservation in eastern Utah. The Utah Wilderness Coalition is the nationally recognized partnership devoted to protecting Utah's wilderness quality Bureau of Land Management (BLM) landscapes. It is our pleasure to provide to you our legislative proposals for Utah's redrock country.

As a top priority, our coalition urges you to focus on the Greater Canyonlands region, located in Grand, San Juan, Garfield, Wayne and Emery Counties, as the central landscape under discussion. The Greater Canyonlands contains some of the largest roadless areas in the contiguous United States. As much of it is unprotected, it deserves greater recognition and protection. This natural watershed landscape has been arbitrarily partitioned between National Park Service, BLM and Forest Service – leading to confusion and a lack of coordination between agencies. However, a negotiated bill would benefit the Greater Canyonlands region by increasing certainty of future management and necessarily increasing coordination between the agencies. Moreover, there is very little private land within the Greater Canyonlands region and at least one of the private landowners is supportive of protection surrounding his property.

Our coalition has been pressing for increased recognition and protection of the Greater Canyonlands region for some time now, including calls for a national monument, which have been echoed by many outdoor businesses. Furthermore, we previously requested a public process addressing Greater Canyonlands from Governor Gary Herbert, whose office cited this letter as the opportunity to take up that request. In addition, Utah Senator Jim Dabakis and Rep. Patrice Arent recently introduced a joint resolution in the Utah Legislature calling for the protection of this amazing region through a public process. Senator Dabakis also put up an online petition site asking for supporters of his resolution. At last count, the petition had received more than 3,600 individual signatures. Whether through national monument, Wilderness or other designation, increasing numbers of people now recognize that the Greater Canyonlands region warrants further conversation and protection. Addressing it through your upcoming process will give Utahns the best possible opportunity to have their voices heard.

Our second priority landscape is the San Rafael Swell, located in Emery and Wayne Counties. This area has seen more legislative proposals than any other part of the redrock – and for good reason. The San Rafael Swell contains the most accessible redrock lands to the urban Wasatch front and subsequently sees significant recreational pressures. Emery County, which contains the vast majority of the San Rafael Swell, has developed a proposal that would be a good starting point for negotiations through your process. If an agreement could be reached over management of the San Rafael Swell, it would put to bed one of the longest running land use

feuds in Utah and provide certainty for off-road vehicle use as well as the quiet recreation that the Swell is so famous for providing.

A land exchange between the federal government and the Utah State Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) would be a necessary component to any legislative proposal. Historically, these types of win-win deals have further protected federal lands while increasing SITLA's access to economically developable lands in non-conservation priority areas. A land exchange in any BLM region would have the significant benefit of removing SITLA inholdings from existing protected areas and any lands that would be protected through legislation. Many of these inholdings are in areas with low economic development potential but high conservation value.

Similarly, resolution of the R.S. 2477 issue should be considered in any conservation proposal. The longstanding issue of what qualifies as a road has led to endless litigation and uncertainty regarding both past and future designations. Agreements to this end are possible as was demonstrated in the Deep Creek Mountains in Juab County.

Finally, in order to assure the best possible outcome for this process, we believe that the meetings must be led by a neutral, independent facilitator with experience in public lands and related issues. Ensuring that all voices have equitable representation in both the process and the outcome is paramount to success.

We look forward to the hard work ahead with your office and other stakeholders to address the issues listed above. The Utah Wilderness Coalition's collective experience on legislation, extensive on-the-ground knowledge and considerable Utah and national grassroots networks brings significant resources to bear in helping to construct and pass successful legislation. Our record on collaborative dialogues and agreements with oil and gas companies and your office in the protection of the Cedar Mountains demonstrates an ability to successfully negotiate in good faith while keeping conservation goals in perspective. We hope to bring these experiences to the table in the months ahead to help create a successful legislative package.

Sincerely,

Sharon Buccino
Director, Land and Wildlife Program
Natural Resources Defense Council

Athan Manuel
Director, Lands Protection Program
Sierra Club

Scott Groene
Executive Director
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

Cc: Sen. Orrin Hatch
Sen. Mike Lee
Sen. Dick Durbin
Rep. Jason Chaffetz
Rep. Jim Matheson
Rep. Chris Stewart
Rep. Rush Holt