

# Take it or Leave it: Book Cliffs Highway Update & Some Thoughts on "Production v Consumption...by Jim Stiles

by stiles • August 3, 2014 • 4 Comments

[stiles](#) August 3, 2014



Four months ago, the Grand County Council presented a proposal to build an "energy transportation corridor" via Sego Canyon, through the Book Cliffs, to possible oil development sites in the northern tip of Grand County. The plan included the creation of a paved highway, for energy transportation and tourism, that would have linked Vernal, Utah with I-70 and other recreation destinations in southeast Utah. It also proposed a corridor for energy pipelines.



Sego Canyon is narrow, isolated, and undeveloped, accessible only by an unimproved dirt road. It ends at the Ute Indian reservation boundary. A gate was constructed by the Utes in the mid-80s and the

completion of the proposed transportation corridor would require the construction of at least ten miles of new road, through some of the most rugged terrain in the American West.

I drove the Sego Canyon road twice this summer and it was obvious that the construction of the kind of paved highway and pipeline right-of-way a project like this requires would be devastating. I cannot overstate how much destruction would occur if this project went forward. It would require the removal of every plant and tree, from one edge of the canyon floor to the other, for 20 miles, to accommodate the scale of the proposal.







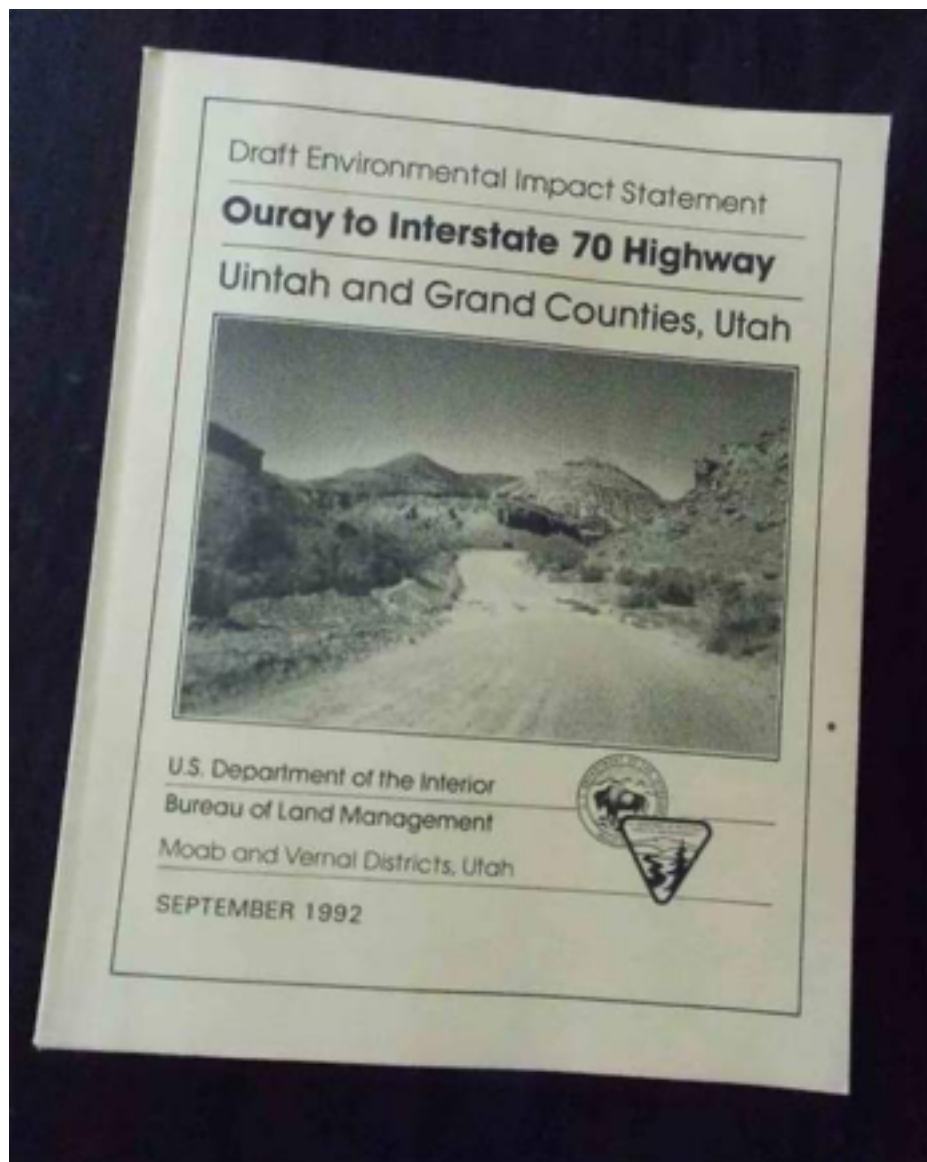
Last month, Grand County Council Chair Lynn Jackson, who helped spearhead the Sego Canyon plan, suggested that the feasibility studies being performed for Grand and Uintah Counties broaden their focus. He wants to include another north-south route through the Book Cliffs—the Hay Canyon route. This was the same corridor promoted in the early 90s, which was vigorously opposed by many Grand County citizens.

Read more in ["16 Questions for Grand County Council Chair Lynn Jackson, on the Book Cliffs Highway."](#)

Now, Jackson has predicted that the ongoing feasibility studies will indeed conclude the Sego Canyon route is not viable. I hope he's right, because to build that road, via that route, would prove to be one of the greatest environmental disasters since the construction of Glen Canyon Dam. But if Jackson's prediction holds true, that leaves Hay Canyon and we're right back where we were 20 years ago. It should be recalled that the Hay Canyon road proposal was heavily scrutinized and that the BLM spent years developing its "Draft Environmental Impact Statement: OURAY to INTERSTATE 70 HIGHWAY." The EIS was released in September 1992 and fortunately, because I never throw anything away, I still have my copy.

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The proposal then was to "construct an 83 mile-long roadway to Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) and Federal highway standards...A 200 foot ROW (Right-of-Way) would be required along the entire route." The highway would have mostly followed existing dirt roads and jeep tracks, but the terrain would have been dramatically altered by the expanded highway. The Proposed Route would have descended the Book Cliffs via Hay Canyon to its confluence with East and Middle Canyons, then south to I-70.



The BLM rejected the plan; its "agency preferred alternative" was called "Paving Existing Alignments Alternative." It called for paving part or all of the existing roads, but an expanded ROW was rejected. Any paving would be required to stay within the current rights-of-way and the idea of a tourist highway, built to UDOT and federal standards, between Vernal and Moab was rejected. The BLM considered "Environmental Consequences" of the proposed route in Section 4 of its EIS. They were many and I include just some of them here...

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#### *4.2.2 Geologic hazards*

*"Areas of the proposed route underlain by the Douglas Creek Member of the Green River Formation are considered to have a potential for landsliding if large volumes of material are excavated and filled to form road grades."*

#### *4.2.5.1 Terrestrial Wildlife*

*"Adverse impacts to big game following completion of the highway would include increased traffic and human use resulting in disturbance and displacement...increased hunting pressure and harvest; increased poaching mortality; and increased mortality from vehicle-animal collisions." Following construction, the proposed highway would increase disturbance in the bald eagle wintering areas..there is also the potential for bald eagle mortality die*

*to increased motor vehicle collisions.*

*"Mule Deer mortality from motor vehicle collisions can be significant where highways cross important deer ranges... The Proposed Route bisects key big game ranges and migration routes."*

#### *4.2.6.3 Threatened, Endangered, or Other Sensitive Plant Species*

*"Nine federally-listed candidate plant species would potentially be affected by construction along the Propose Route."*

#### *4.2.1 Wilderness*

*"The Proposed Route could not be approved or constructed under the BLM's Wilderness Management Guidelines because the quality of wilderness values in both WSAs would be reduced."*

#### *4.2.14.1 Cultural Resources*

*"Adverse impacts to significant cultural resources may occur as result of several project-related activities."*

#### *4.2.19 Irreversible/Irretrievable Commitment of Resources*

*"Construction of the proposed highway would involve the commitment of a range of natural, physical, human and fiscal resources that could result in the irreversible or irretrievable commitment of these resources. Irreversible is*



*a term that describes the loss of future options. It applies primarily to the effects of use of nonrenewable resources such as cultural or paleontological resources, or to those factors, such as soil productivity, that are renewable only over long periods of time. Irretrievable is a term applied to the loss of production, harvest, or use of natural resources... The disturbance of cultural and paleontological resources would be an irreversible and irretrievable loss.*



These references reflect just a portion of the EIS. So today, as Grand and Uintah Counties (hopefully) move away from the Sego Canyon option, they must still consider that their

alternative, Hay Canyon, at the scale they are proposing, was examined and studied more than two decades ago, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the conclusion in 1992 was that the proposal was untenable.

I realize that the intention of the Grand County Council is to find new ways to generate revenues for its citizens. As the population of Grand County expands, so will demands for services. Tourism and the amenities economy will not generate the kinds of revenues required to satisfy its citizens' needs, especially as their demand for services keeps growing. Even former Councilman Chris Baird (now running again), agrees that tourism can't generate the kind of revenues needed to sustain its population. In a long email conversation with Baird in August 2012 about tourism, he said, "You make it sound like the recreation industry in Moab is some kind of unstoppable juggernaut. However, it just barely keeps people alive, and has facilitated a 1% growth rate. Grand County is the 4th slowest growing county in Utah."

With that kind of understanding, even from one of its most aggressively anti-energy politicians, Grand County must either submit to more energy development, just to pay its ever-expanding bills, or

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learn to live with less. Grand County’s budget last year topped \$12 million. In 2013, seven of the top ten taxpayers were tied to energy or the transportation of energy. Their combined contribution to the tax base exceeded \$2.7 million—almost a fourth of total tax revenues. If environmentalists and progressives in Grand County want to oppose energy development in their home county, they should consider ways to downsize their expectations for the community. For years, I’ve talked about the issue of “production vs consumption.” I cannot offer a better example than the conflicted and sometimes hypocritical values you see here.

01/09/2014

**GRAND COUNTY CORPORATION  
ASSESSOR'S TOP TAXPAYERS REPORT**  
Alphabetical Order Listing for 2013

9:59:51AM

Parcel	Taxroll Name	Status	Serial Number	Taxable Value	Taxes
1	INTREPID POTASH-MOAB LLC	OK	26-21-30-9&10	115,059,217	1,106,639.55
2	MID-AMERICA PIPELINE COMPANY LLC	OK	1203 TAX PAYER NO	57,595,997	554,920.00
3	UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD CO	OK	1891 TAX ORY	44,829,741	431,172.45
4	PACIFICORP	OK	21-20-21-23.4	26,603,483	265,089.01
5	NORTHWEST PIPELINE CORP	OK	1357 TAX PAYER NO	24,167,952	233,612.00
6	FIDELITY E&P COMPANY	OK	13427 TAX PYR NO	23,621,814	227,194.61
7	RED ROCK GATHERING COMPANY LLC	OK	14130 TAX PAYER NO	21,619,658	207,937.87
8	WANG ORGANIZATION LTD	OK	26-21-1-149.3	18,885,576	195,390.16
9	WESTERN WATER ENERGY SERVICES	OK	20-24-8-1-16	15,728,287	151,274.66
10	FRYER COLIN DON	OK	26-21-1-25.2.1	14,938,840	151,255.74
11	MOAB 21 LLC	OK	25-21-35-15	14,509,555	150,115.86
12	SRR PARTNERS LLC	OK	C SOR RIV PH2	10,372,107	104,187.82
13	RAILCAR ROLLING STOCK	OK	ST TAXPAYER NO 326	7,145,723	68,727.56
14	BECKER ENTERPRISES INC	OK	26-21-12-10 & 20.1	7,079,960	73,249.27
15	WANG ORGANIZATION LLC	OK	26-21-1-123 123.4.1	6,805,571	70,410.43
16	KOEHLER JAMES P	OK	25-21-36-10.1	6,405,873	66,275.17
17	LONE MTN PRODUCTION CO	OK	1110 TAXPAYER NO	6,129,266	58,951.28
18	CANYONLANDS INN INC	OK	26-21-1-15-13&11.1&1	6,027,672	62,362.30
19	MATHIS PROPERTIES LLC	OK	26-21-12-8&8.3.1&7.9	5,874,147	60,773.92
20	CASA DE AMIGOS LLC	OK	25-21-26-16.3.9	5,822,177	60,236.24
21	MOAB LODGING LLC	OK	25-21-26-16.3	5,244,816	54,262.87
22	MID AMERICA PIPELINE CO	OK	1203 TAX PAYER NO	4,393,424	45,454.36
23	LWJ FAMILY LLC	OK	26-21-12-20.6	4,332,504	44,824.08
24	QUESTAR GAS	OK	1273 TAX PAYER NO	4,118,456	42,602.64
25	DEANE INVESTMENTS LLC	OK	48588&859.1&10-2 URA	4,102,912	42,439.42
26	NATIONAL FUEL CORPORATION	OK	1313 TAXPAYER NO	4,051,281	38,965.22
27	RED ROCK PARTNERS LLC	OK	26-21-1-142.1	4,046,162	41,861.58
28	GRAND OASIS LLC	OK	26-21-2-6.1&6.5&6.6	3,462,797	35,826.10
29	PALLADIUM FOUNDATION	OK	25-21-26-4.3	3,445,098	33,677.15
30	ELK CREEK CAMPGROUND LLC	OK	25-21-26-16.3.5&17	3,138,925	32,475.33
31	EREKSON ALMA Y TRUSTEE	OK	26-22-7-68.2	3,035,261	31,402.81
32	MOAB INVESTMENT PARTNERS L C	OK	BCF-2 MCKNIGHT SUBD	3,030,240	31,350.86
33	MOAB RV RESORT LLC	OK	25-21-35-17.10.3.20	2,980,773	30,838.99
34	AUGUSTUS ENERGY PARTNERS LLC	OK	13565 ST TAX PYR NO	2,806,093	26,989.00
35	J & J PROPERTIES OF TROY LLC	OK	1-S-C MT VU ETAL	2,783,637	28,771.74
36	BATEMAN DONALD S	OK	26-21-12-20.6.1.1	2,744,146	28,390.94
37	CANYONLANDS CAMPGROUND L L C	OK	26-21-12-8.3&8.4.1	2,682,283	27,750.91
38	PARK JUNG H	OK	25-21-36-51.6	2,646,288	27,376.50
39	MOAB RIVER LAND LLC	OK	24-23-2-8	2,634,861	26,467.18
40	TRAPAX	OK	25-21-27-4.1	2,485,007	25,709.89
41	P V R INC	OK	24-23-21-2.5 & 22-11	2,360,342	23,709.65
42	BUSINESS RESOLUTIONS LLC	OK	25-21-36-35.2	2,352,700	24,341.03
43	EMPORIUM MEMBERS LLC	OK	26-21-1-16-1	2,350,058	24,313.70
44	GRAND PROPERTIES LLC	OK	26-21-1-57.1.58.61	2,314,926	23,950.21
45	MAA KRUPA HOSPITALITY LLC	OK	25-21-36-15.14	2,281,712	23,006.60
46	MAVERIK COUNTRY STORES INC	OK	26-21-12-5.20	2,262,939	23,412.37
47	R C LEASING LLC	OK	26-21-12-20.6.2	2,198,391	22,744.56
48	FRYER COLIN	OK	26-21-1-8-5	2,114,173	21,773.44
49	MATHIS MICHELLE L	OK	26-21-1-24-12&13.1 &	2,058,367	21,295.87
50	J&S FUND LLC	OK	26-21-1-8-6.1.1 & 7	2,036,891	21,073.68
51	LESMEISTER FAMILY PARTNERS L P	OK	26-21-1-25-19 & 20	2,020,653	20,905.68
52	WHITE HORSE DEVELOPMENT COMPA	OK	1 WHITE HORSE	1,990,654	20,595.31

I hope the Book Cliffs Highway dies—yet again—and stays down. But I’m predicting that energy development will expand, and Moab will continue to grow, dramatically, and local progressives and environmentalists will continue to complain about the destruction. They will strenuously



object, not realizing or willing to admit the connection between energy extraction and a community that saw the issuance of building permits valued at \$16 million, just in the first quarter of 2013. They're living proof that Pogo was right — 'We have met the enemy and they is US.'

***Jim Stiles*** is the Founder and Co-Publisher of the Canyon Country Zephyr.

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