



Board of Commissioners
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September 28, 2009

The Honorable Congressman Raul M. Grijalva, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
1333 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Grijalva:

Emery County, Utah submits the following statement concerning H.R. 1925, America's Red Rock Wilderness Act of 2009. We ask that our remarks be accepted and included in the public record of the current hearing.

Emery County is located in east central Utah, encompasses 2.8 million acres, nearly the size of the state of Connecticut. Of those 2.8 million acres, about 2.2 million acres, 80 % of Emery County, are administrated by the federal government. Another 12% are state lands. Only 8% of land surface within Emery County is privately owned. More than the sponsors, co-sponsors and other proponents of this bill, the citizens and government leaders of Emery County live with land use planning and land use legislation which affects federally administered lands. Decisions made in Washington today, affect our neighbors tomorrow.

The citizens of Emery County, the state of Utah, and the nation benefit from commodities derived from federal land. Coal made available under federal leases produce electricity utilized in many western states. Coal will continue to be a major energy source even as the nation transitions to other energy sources. Federal mineral lease payments help fund infrastructure and schools. Coalbed methane and other natural gas have been tapped in recent years as a cleaner energy source. Uranium may well provide the fuel source for carbon-neutral nuclear energy. America's Red Rock Wilderness Act would withdraw about 67% of BLM lands in Emery County from availability of these resources. As our nation attempts to become more energy independent, it is unwise to withdraw over nine million acres of energy resources in Utah from potential use.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as areas of 5,000 acres or more, and among other qualities, "retains its primeval character...which generally appears to have

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been affected primarily by the forces of nature, and...has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." Many large areas within Utah Wilderness Coalition's proposal simply don't measure up to the standard. For example, Lost Spring Wash, a 37,000 acre parcel in this bill, is criss-crossed with BLM designated motorized routes, is bordered on one side by a major state highway and on another by an interstate utility corridor. Other examples are Eagle Canyon and Molen Reef proposed wilderness areas which are bisected by a paved county road, adjacent to an interstate highway and harbor valuable gypsum resources used in wallboard, agricultural products and pharmaceutical industry.

This is not to say there are not areas worthy of wilderness designation within Emery County. Those areas will total somewhere around 450,000 acres, consistent with the original wilderness inventory completed by BLM in 1983. In contrast, the 1.4 million acres included in the Red Rock bill is simply unfounded by conditions on-the-ground.

Our concern regarding the Red Rock wilderness bill, and this hearing today, is that it seems to be, once again, an effort to throw down the gauntlet. It seems that Red Rock proponents are telling us that they have determined how much Utah wilderness there should be, and, regardless of any input, will not be swayed from that objective.

The season of the highly contentious, statewide wilderness bills is past. It is now time for localized, collaborative efforts, involving all stakeholders---resolving issues through the input of those who know and understand the lands the best.

And all the elements are in place to continue in other areas---the precedent, the partners, and the process. We have the prototype. We know it works. The Washington County Land and Conservation Act, signed into law this year, is evidence that collaboration works.

Emery County believes the wilderness designation issue should be resolved in Emery County, and is in the process of creating legislation to that effect. We also believe a process inclusive of local, grass roots sensitivities has proved to be a more effective strategy than the statewide, overly complex effort reflected in Americas Red Rock Wilderness Bill. Wilderness advocates have been invited to participate with us to finalize this issue. We encourage this committee to consider a process similar to one used to designate 250,000 acres of wilderness in Washington County, Utah recently.

Although some will bemoan the five year process which the Washington County bill required, that process has clarified language issues which have been stumbling blocks in the past and will probably hasten future county or regional plans, while the Red Rock bill before you is in its twentieth year and remains highly contested by the State of Utah, the affected counties and communities within the state.

The Red Rock proposal was produced without input from local or area stakeholders. It is purely the idea of those who advocate its passage. If this committee moves this legislation forward, and ignores the healthy and productive process which is gaining

support in our State, it will be saying that it does not want a public process; that it does not want stakeholder involvement; nor want legislation that represents the finest work of many partners working together to discuss and refine and evaluate and cooperate in an effort to resolve the many complicated issues inherent in public land management.

We urge that you do not support the proposed Red Rock legislation. We urge you to allow us to move forward with our regional, collaborative process, which has been proven successful. The result will be that, within the next few years, you will see millions of acres of land given permanent wilderness protection by this body, through legislation produced in local areas by collaborative planning processes, and with a broad base of stakeholder support. Surely it is not difficult to see which effort would be the healthiest, the most productive, the best for the land and the resources, and the best for the American people. We ask your committee to allow us to continue this work, and urge your rejection of this contentious Red Rock legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of Emery County's concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Kofford".

Gary Kofford, Chairman
Emery County Board of Commissioners

cc: The Honorable Senator Robert Bennett
The Honorable Senator Orrin Hatch
The Honorable Congressman Jim Matheson
The Honorable Congressman Rob Bishop
The Honorable Congressman Jason Chaffetz