

Testimony of Timothy Donaldson  
School Children's Trust Director, Utah State Office of Education  
Presented to the House Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation  
Oversight Hearing:  
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Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Tim Donaldson and I am the Director of the School Children's Trust Section at the Utah State Office of Education. I thank the Subcommittee for conducting this hearing on the critical issue of how to resolve the tensions between school trust lands and federal land ownership. I am before you today to support this new idea to accommodate more effective school trust land management and improved federal conservation management.

In Utah we have seen dramatic growth in funding for public education coming from the School LAND Trust Program. In the 2000-2001 school year, the school trust provided approximately \$5 million for public education, which was less than 1/10 of 1% of the overall public education. For the school year which just began, the 2013-2014 school year, the school trust distribution was over \$37 million, which represented 1.2% of the overall public education budget. This is fast-growing money, which has doubled in size approximately every five years. It is also tax-free money, which makes it a gold mine for helping with the challenge of funding public schools in our state, a state which has the lowest per-pupil spending for public education in the country. With a uniquely large ratio of K-12 students to tax-paying workers in Utah, the need is dire for us to fully maximize every public education funding resource that we have.

There are other western states which provide for a significantly larger proportion of the public education budget through their school trust lands and corresponding permanent school funds. It is our belief in Utah that the school trust will be a big part of the solution as we work to more fully fund public education in the years and decades to come. There have been decades of contention in Utah between public education advocates and federal land management agencies, as hundreds of thousands of school trust land acres were captured in national parks, monuments, and other federal conservation designations. Had this proposal which is before you today been in effect then, the interests of public education would have been more fully valued and tensions would have been diminished.

Thomas Jefferson was a critical early supporter of public education in America, and the school trust lands largely owe their existence to his vision. Jefferson envisioned a self-governing republic of educated, informed citizens enjoying the blessings of civilization and the arts, advancing scientific knowledge, and developing technology to enhance and enrich the way we all live our lives.

My wife is a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher at a west-side school in Salt Lake County. Ms. Donaldson has 33 students in her classroom this school year, including one student with Autism, one student with Asperger's, and one student who is a refugee from Iraq, and she does not have an aide. More school trust lands money would help provide for more teachers and aides. I see and hear every night how challenging it is for our educators to fulfill the promise of our society and provide a high-quality public education to all of our students. We need to fully utilize every resource that

we have to fund public education. We need the tools in place to work through the inevitable land management conflicts in such a way that Jefferson's vision of lands held in trust to support public education can be fully realized.

We thank the Subcommittee for your attention to this important matter and we look forward to working with you as legislation is crafted that can gain broad bipartisan support and ultimately be enacted to help better fund the education of our children. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions.