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Congress of the United States
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COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND LABOR
COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES

CHAIRMAN, CONGRESSIONAL
WESTERN CAUCUS

February 22, 2013

Utah Land Office/Navajo Land Department
C/O Commissioner Kenneth Maryboy
P.O. Box 410
Montezuma Creek, UT 84534

Dear Commissioner Maryboy:

Public lands are valued across the state of Utah. These lands support a range of uses, including recreation, solitude, wildlife habitat, historical uses, and resource development. However, the history and management of the public lands in Utah is long on episodes of contention and conflict, and short on examples of compromise and consensus. For decades, unsettled land-use designations have fueled distrust and acrimony. Much of the debate has centered on a false choice between multiple-use or land conservation. I reject this either-or proposition. Conservation and multiple-use can coexist. They each have an important role in making our state healthy, inviting, and thriving. Much of the long-term success of counties, tribes, and other stakeholders depends on both balanced conservation and responsible development and use.

The existing gridlock and land ownership pattern has created countless problems between state, tribal, and federal interests. Nearly 120 years after statehood, most Utah landholdings (school trust lands) still exist as a checkerboard pattern of isolated square-mile sections surrounded by federal lands. The small size of the individual state school sections and their location within the federal estate preclude the state from effectively managing its lands or from realizing their full potential for the school trust, the purpose for which the lands were originally granted.

After observing and participating in the public lands debate for many years, I believe we are in the midst of a paradigm shift. There is a growing consensus that a more reasonable, balanced use of the public lands can be achieved in Utah. Through conversations with county and state officials, tribal leaders, conservation groups, industry, non-governmental organizations, and the public, I believe Utah is ready to move away from the tired arguments of the past. We have a unique window of opportunity to end the gridlock and bring resolution to some of the most challenging land disputes in the state.

In order to strike an appropriate balance between conservation and responsible development and use, and to create greater certainty for the citizens of Utah and Indian Country, I am pleased to announce that I am initiating a process to develop federal legislation that seeks to address many of the issues that have plagued public land management in eastern Utah. The intent of this letter is to formally request comments from interested parties on public lands issues that are important to their respective organizations in this region of the state.

To better understand your organizations interests and priorities, I ask that you provide a written, prioritized list of public land designations it wishes addressed – including wilderness, other land designations, or other considerations. Given the significant scope of this process, each individual item that is submitted, should have a unique overall ranking to help my office understand your priorities.

The benefits of land conservation and multiple-use are well-known and obvious. Your organization's list of priorities will help inform and shape the discussion with other partners and stakeholders as we attempt to craft legislation that will help accomplish the appropriate balance of conservation and multiple-use on our public lands and help sustain and elevate our quality of life for generations to come.

Utah is blessed with unparalleled landscapes, recreational opportunities, and world-class natural resources. This effort will be both time-consuming and challenging – but it's worth it. I look forward to working with you as we move into the next phase of this critically important endeavor. I ask that you please provide your list of priorities via email to Fred Ferguson in my Washington, D.C. office (Fred.Ferguson@mail.house.gov) no later than March 22, 2013.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rob Bishop", written in a cursive style.

Rob Bishop
Member of Congress