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Chairman Rob Bishop
House Committee on Natural Resources
324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop:

As President of the Utah Association of Counties, I proudly express the associations' support of H.R. 3990 because it gives local governments a meaningful voice in national monument designation. When applied appropriately, the Antiquities Act authorization to designate national monuments is an important tool for protecting artifacts and sites. Unfortunately, the intent of the Antiquities Act – protecting important artifacts – has given way to political power plays. A better process would build consensus.

Utah's counties have been at the forefront of calling for limitations to the presidential power to declare national monuments – granted in the Antiquities Act of 1906. Protection of treasured sites is best done with a broad base of local support. Utah is home to eight (8) national monuments. Some of the national monuments in our state are assets to the counties they sit in. For example, Cedar Breaks National Monument and Dinosaur National Monument add tourism value to the counties by highlighting locations. On the other hand, excessively large monuments, like Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and Bear's Ears National Monument, have been vigorously opposed by the counties and the State of Utah. As long as the Antiquities Act allows monuments to be created at the stroke of a pen, the holder of the pen has little incentive to consider the concerns of or impacts to local communities. Process matters to Utah's counties and our residents, and that process should include local support.

As you well know, nobody in the world is prouder of Utah's natural wonders than the people who call this great state home. Our residents deserve a voice in determining the site and size of national monuments that designate what we are so proud of. The citizens of Utah have called on Congress to require partnership between federal officials and locals in creating monuments. H.R.3990 would do that by requiring local consent to large monument designations. The result would be a better, more thoughtful, process. Those who want to preserve our natural wonders would have to take time to work with locals to determine the appropriate scope of designations rather than forcing monuments upon us.

The current process of monument designation is deeply flawed, as evidenced by the controversy surrounding recent designations. Preservation, when handled correctly and at an appropriate scale, should be something that unites Utah residents. Utah Association of Counties supports H.R. 3990 because building consensus for national monument designations will ensure that local knowledge and input are heard, thus creating a broad base of local support. For these reasons, the Utah Association of Counties enthusiastically supports H.R. 3990. Thank you for hearing and responding to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Mark Whitney, President of Utah Association of Counties