

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

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### Witness Statement

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#### Statement of Chad W. Johnson, County Commissioner, Beaver County, Utah

Chairman Hansen & Members of the Committee:

My name is Chad Johnson and I have served as a Beaver County Commissioner for the past 23 years. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my feelings and concerns regarding wilderness in western Utah and particularly in Beaver County.

During much of this time I have been extensively involved in public land issues, and in particular the wilderness debate. When the BLM did its original wilderness inventory of Beaver County they proposed approximately 7,000 acres, which in their opinion met the criteria of wilderness as established by Congress. We held public meetings on this issue and determined that most citizens of Beaver County opposed any wilderness in the county. Likewise, our neighboring counties, who share some proposed wilderness with Beaver County, opposed wilderness. The County Commission chose not to support wilderness at the time, even though the acreage within the county was minimal.

The BLM's recent reinventory of Beaver County proposed nearly 90,000 acres of wilderness. This legislation would create nearly 85,000 acres of wilderness in Beaver County. I have witnessed the wilderness designation process move from a bona fide, criteria-based process to a political, number-game. This is upsetting and frustrating to me and the residents of Beaver County. I find it very difficult to understand how the BLM could propose 7,000 acres in the original study and a few years later recommend 90,000 acres if indeed the criteria established by Congress was adhered to. In addition, the BLM reinventory process avoided any coordination or input from local governments or the citizens most impacted by wilderness designation. I am concerned with the precedents being set for wilderness designation in other parts of Utah and the west.

Beaver County recently expended limited funds to complete a GIS based ground survey of the proposed wilderness areas to see if they meet established criteria. They do not. There are existing roads, developed water resources, mining areas, fences and private properties inside these proposed wilderness areas.

Small rural counties such as Beaver are in desperate need of economic development. In the past five years three mining operations have come into the county, which have contributed significantly to the county's economy. Each of these operations is mining a material that either had no use, was not known to be in the area, or had no value just ten years ago. This tells me chances are high that these proposed wilderness areas will stifle economic development in Beaver County.

For these reasons Beaver County does not support wilderness designation. However, with all that said Beaver County does support the Utah National Parks and Public Lands Wilderness Act. As I mentioned I have been part of this debate for many years. There has been no compromise on either side of the issue and

no progress has been made. Even though there are acres in this proposed wilderness which we feel do not meet the criteria of wilderness, we are willing to compromise. For this compromise Beaver County needs the language in this legislation retained regarding livestock grazing, overflights, management of adjacent property, and release language giving us some assurance that this process has truly come to an end.

As you are well aware, there are many pressing concerns facing local, state, and federal governments. It is time to put wilderness to bed, at least in the western counties of Utah, and move on to the other important issues facing all of us. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for your time and consideration.

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