

Statement of Lawrence A. Finfer
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Bureau of Land Management
Before the House Resources Subcommittee
On National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands on
H.R. 3936, The Shoshone National Recreation Trail Act
April 16, 2002

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide testimony regarding

H.R. 3936, the Shoshone National Recreation Trail Act. While the U.S. Forest Service is the primary Federal land manager within the proposed trail, the bill also encompasses 67 miles of BLM-administered lands. The Department supports this bill and looks forward to working with the Committee and our partners in Utah on cooperative management strategies to implement H.R. 3936.

Bill Analysis and Background

H.R. 3936 provides for the designation and management of a 521-mile system of trails in northeastern Utah to provide recreational access for motorized vehicles and other users as appropriate. In addition, we understand that the trail would serve as a "connection" for a number of small communities within the region by providing economic opportunities through services to recreational users of the trail. We further understand that H.R. 3936 enjoys strong local support within the State of Utah.

Once designated, the Shoshone National Recreation Trail would provide 521 miles of scenic and high-quality interconnected trail segments in Rich, Cache, Box Elder, and Weber Counties in Northeast Utah. According to the State of Utah's Department of Natural Resources, the number of registered Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs) has doubled in the State since 1990. H.R. 3936 will assist agencies such as the BLM in meeting the needs of this growing user group on Federal lands.

The BLM strongly supports the provisions in Section 1 (c) (2) of H.R. 3936 which promotes the use of cooperative agreements between the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture and the State of Utah Department of Natural Resources and appropriate county governments regarding trail management. We believe that it is imperative that a cooperative management plan and framework be established that is inclusive of all parties involved in the trail, whether they are land owners or recreational users. This cooperative effort is consistent with Secretary Norton's "4 Cs" principle, which stresses consultation, cooperation and communication, all in the service of conservation.

Management Concerns

While supportive of the concepts embodied in H.R. 3936, especially the use of existing trails, we have identified certain issues that need to be addressed in order to develop appropriate trail-head and staging facilities, trail maintenance, and protections for the resources BLM manages under the provisions of the

Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). We look forward to working with the Committee to address these concerns.

Among our concerns, is the language contained in Section 3 of the bill, entitled "Motorized and Non-motorized Use". Section 3 states: "Non-motorized use of the Trail may be allowed to the extent that such use is compatible with motorized use." The BLM recommends that this section be amended to reflect the provisions in current regulations under 43 CFR 8342.1(c) which states: "Areas and trails shall be located to minimize conflicts between off-road vehicle use and other existing or proposed recreational uses of the same or neighboring public lands, and to ensure the compatibility of such uses with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account noise and other factors..." This regulation promotes compatibility among the various uses of National Recreation Trails.

The BLM has some further concerns regarding appropriate management of the Trail which include continued protection for lands that contain riparian areas, fragile soil types, big game crucial winter range, sensitive sage grouse habitat, and raptor nesting sites. To protect these species and the associated sensitive habitats, the BLM would need to continue the current seasonal restrictions on portions of the proposed routes. This should not be a major conflict with Trail system operation or deviate from the current management scenario. Additionally, two BLM campgrounds (Little Creek and Birch Creek) are proposed as trail heads for the system. One campground will require renovation, the second will require additional infrastructure. These concerns will need to be addressed through the cooperative management framework proposed in the bill.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on H.R. 3936. The BLM looks forward to participating in the cooperative management agreements and implementation of the Shoshone National Recreation Trail if designated. I would be happy to address any questions you may have.

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