

**Statement of
Michael Goar
Managing Director
The Canyons Ski Resort, Park City, Utah**

Before the

**U.S. House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Washington, D.C.**

On

**H.R. 3452
Wasatch Range Recreation Access Enhancement Act**

December 2, 2011

Chairman Bishop, Congressman Grijalva, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Mike Goar and I serve as the Managing Director of Canyons Ski Resort (Canyons). Canyons is the largest single ski and snowboard resort in Utah and is one of the five largest ski resorts in the United States. Canyons is owned by Talisker Corp., which employs 2,000 people in its Utah operations. I want to thank Chairman Bishop and Cong. Chaffetz for introducing *the Wasatch Range Recreation Access Enhancement Act (H.R. 3452)*. I also want to thank Utah's Senators Hatch and Lee for sponsoring companion legislation in the United States Senate.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my support for the bill and explain its purposes before this Subcommittee.

The Wasatch Range Recreation Access Enhancement Act would allow Canyons to purchase for fair market value 30.3 acres of federally owned land that is managed by the Forest Service. That purchase will enable the construction of a two-mile, 8-passenger gondola or tram known as "SkiLink." This legislation offers an exciting addition to Utah's ski experience as it connects the Wasatch Front with the Wasatch back ski resorts. Specifically SkiLink is a direct transportation-only option for skiers between Canyons and Solitude Mountain Resorts. The gondola would not deposit

skiers on the high ridge and would not in any way interfere with dispersed recreation like backcountry skiing, hiking and mountain biking.

The two-mile corridor alignment, which the bill authorizes for sale, has the least impact on the surrounding land and watershed environment. Currently, the 30.3 acres of Forest Service land identified in the bill is sandwiched between several much larger private land parcels that are already owned by Canyons and Solitude. The 30.3 acres have not been identified by the Forest Service as proposed wilderness or as needing special federal protection. SkiLink would be constructed using the best management practices (BMP) so there is a low impact to the surrounding watershed environment. The use of helicopters for concrete placement and tower installations creates a minimally invasive construction technique. Canyons would use the very latest, proven design and construction mitigation methods. Intelligent phasing and logistics to minimize use of ground-based equipment will be utilized and management and operating procedures will tread lightly on the natural landscape. Finally, the riparian corridor along Big Cottonwood Creek will be protected through established design, permitting and best construction practices to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any anticipated impacts on wetland or stream functions. Over the past two construction seasons, the Canyons has built three separate lifts on private lands using these best practices method of construction. We know how to do it right.

H.R. 3452 will produce numerous regional transportation and environmental benefits by connecting these two resorts in Summit County and Big Cottonwood Canyon. On busy ski days, there are 43,200 skiers at the Wasatch Front ski areas; 53 percent are visitors to the Wasatch Front and Back. Generally, visitors ski at the resort where they are staying, but about 20 percent of the time, they “roam” to other resorts. SkiLink would reduce the need for “roaming” skiers to travel on canyon roadways.

SkiLink is not intended to be the comprehensive transportation solution to the problem of ski resort access, but it does offer immediate traffic benefits. The idea of connecting all of Utah's major ski resorts with trains or high-alpine roads has been discussed and studied for decades. The larger transportation options, are very costly and have significant environmental and permitting hurdles to overcome. SkiLink is a unique and simplified approach. On its own, this project is expected to decrease traffic by as much as 10% on a peak ski day which translates to 18,000 cars per year. Approximately 1 million fewer miles will be driven per year between Summit and Salt Lake Counties. Also, 1 million fewer pounds of greenhouse gases would be realized.

This bill will create the most unique interconnected ski network in the United States and enhance the economic opportunities for the tourism and hospitality industries in Utah. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of this bill. I am submitting for the record letters of support from Ski Utah and three reports that outline the environmental, economic, and transportation benefits of SkiLink. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to be here today and will be happy to answer any questions.