

**Statement of
Michael H. Jensen
Salt Lake County Council
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, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of *the Wasatch Range Recreation Access Enhancement Act (H.R. 3452)*. I am Michael H. Jensen and have served as a member of the Salt Lake County Council since first elected in 2000. Representing Salt Lake County Council District Two, I have served three terms as Chairman of the Salt Lake County Council. I also serve on the following boards; the Salt Lake County Redevelopment Agency, the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, the Salt Lake County Council of Governments and the Wasatch Front Regional Council. On the Wasatch Front Regional Council as well as on the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, I serve as the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

The Wasatch Range Recreation Access Enhancement Act would facilitate the construction of a two-mile gondola known as “SkiLink” connecting the Canyons Ski Resort in Park City, Utah with the Solitude Mountain Resort in Big Cottonwood Canyon. The linkage of the Wasatch Front to the Wasatch Back will enable skiers

and snowboarders to have access to 6,000 acres of existing ski terrain making the Utah ski experience the most unique and diverse in the United States.

According to the 2010 Utah Economic Report to the Governor, Utah's skiing opportunities have attracted 4 million skier visits annually since 2005, despite the economic downturn. The Utah Ski industry is an economic driver that has a positive ripple effect across multiple industries and regions in Utah. It is anticipated that the SkiLink project will build on that popularity and add dollars to the economy, create new jobs and increase tax revenue. According to a recent economic study, SkiLink will infuse \$ 51 million into the Utah economy in its first year and provide \$3,000,000 in increased tax revenue. When it opens, SkiLink is expected to attract 75,000 people. To date, out-of-state skiers add around \$1.3 billion to the Utah economy supporting around 20,000 jobs. The addition of SkiLink will only enhance economic opportunities by adding 500 more jobs in Utah, something badly needed during recessionary times.

It is imperative that we balance Utah's transportation and environmental needs with the growth of Utah's tourism industry. **H.R. 3452** provides a unique solution and immediate benefit to our transportation issues. The Wasatch Front population is expected to double in the next 30 years and skier visits are expected to continue to grow by at least two percent per year. This will require more than just increasing capacity on canyon roadways. As a county council member, I share with my colleagues the responsibility to improve transportation in our county canyons. Ski Link is not a final solution but it is a right first step. SkiLink will help to improve the

air quality and transportation challenges we face as Utah continues to grow.

Some might argue that SkiLink should be put on hold until a comprehensive, holistic study has been made of the broader transportation issues facing all of Utah's ski resorts. There have already been several studies of ski resort interconnections and transportation alternatives. These Interconnect and Canyon transportation studies date back over two decades starting with a final report of a Governor's task force from 1986. There are other solutions, in addition to SkiLink that also deserve review including a cog rail line proposed by the Utah Transit Authority to Snowbird and Alta up Little Cottonwood Canyon. Because of great cost, these solutions are far into the future.

There have already been multiple studies...over three decades. It's time to do something.

Some argue that there will be a negative environmental impact to the surrounding land and watershed environment. The actual design of SkiLink as a gondola or tram is the least environmentally invasive option while maintaining the natural landscape. During construction, Utah's ski resorts deploy the best management practices (BMP) so there is no impact to the surrounding watershed environment. Water quality records clearly show that lifts have been successfully developed in adjacent areas with similar slope, soil and vegetation with no adverse impact to water quality. To further insure that these protections are followed, the SkiLink project will be subject to compliance with appropriate

federal, state and local permitting requirements.

This legislation provides numerous economic, transportation and environmental benefits. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of **H.R. 3452** and will be happy to answer any questions.