

Statement of John Jones  
Carbon County Commissioner

Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests & Public Lands  
Of the Committee on Natural Resources  
H.R. 1925--America's Red Rock Wilderness Act of 2009

October 1, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Bishop and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to testify today on behalf of the people of rural Utah who are the object of Representative Hinchey's affection.

My name is John Jones and I represent Carbon County, a historic coal mining community with strong traditions of organized labor who have provided utilities across the country with some of the nation's finest high BTU low sulfur coal. Ours is the most Democratic County in Utah and like you, Mr. Chairman, we are proud Democrats who are concerned about providing good jobs and stable economic opportunities.

As I look at the impacts of the Red Rock Wilderness bill, I see the imminent destruction statewide to thousands of miles of roads, mine sites, well pads, cabins, landing strips and stock ponds, many complete with their supporting structure. It is not uncommon as you travel these roads to run into people who are both working the land and out enjoying these historical sites. True management of multiple use

lands including recreation is accomplished through trail and road systems that provide access to these areas. If this doesn't prove that an area is touched by man, I don't know what could. Moreover, this evidence of man throughout the proposed Red Rock Wilderness has been and remains the primary ticket to rural Utah's prosperity—it is not in the view of those who live there—detrimental, but the highest and wisest use of the land.

Carbon County, like many other counties in Utah, has just participated in a grueling seven year public process working with the Bureau of Land Management to develop a balanced Resource Management Plan (RMP) which protects lands with truly outstanding environmental qualities and leaves open for development crucial oil and gas rich lands. This was NO last minute 11<sup>th</sup> hour backroom deal.

Mr. Chairman, we had high expectations for this Administration and supported it last November. Since then, without any explanation, Interior Secretary Salazar, overturned our seven year effort to create the Price area RMP by blocking legitimate oil and gas areas upon which our people depend for work and economic opportunity. Not to mention that his devastating actions are driving away energy producing companies that pay about 60% of Carbon County's property taxes -- of which over \$12,000,000 went to the local School District last year. The same is true with other RMPs developed across Utah.

Now, under the guise of a contrived effort by the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA), to portray the Red Rock Wilderness bill offered by New York's Representative Hinchey as a Utah "citizens" bill, passage of H.R. 1925 would place a nail in the coffin for rural Utah communities and render impossible any long-term economic opportunities for the people in our counties who are surrounded by government-owned land and whom we were elected to serve and represent. The idea that SUWA and its lackey, Mr. Hinchey, represents the voice of rural Utah is like saying King George III represented the American colonists on issues of taxation—it just isn't so!

Our people have asked, how is it that a wilderness bill offered by a New Yorker on behalf of SUWA is treated seriously by this Committee when a BLM RMP developed locally over the course of seven years through a legitimate public involvement process is thrown out by our own Administration thus squandering employment opportunities for our people in the process? This is not what we elected President Obama to do. Things here in Washington, D.C. are seriously off track. This bill threatens the very survival of rural Utah.

We support reasonable protections for all public lands and wilderness designation when necessary to protect truly outstanding national treasures in their pristine state. However, the proposed Red Rock Wilderness bill targeting Utah would

devastate our local economies even more so during this economic recession and at a time our country should be moving away from foreign energy. Moreover, the vast majority of the lands covered by the bill would actually suffer environmental degradation if subjected to leave-it-alone wilderness style management regimes. When the lands are not managed they are fire prone and lose their usefulness for grazing, wildlife, watershed and recreation.

Earlier this year, HR146, the Omnibus Public lands package which was signed into law by President Obama, proved to be a much better way to protect our public lands including wilderness values. That package included such measures as the Washington County bill in Utah, the Owyhee Initiative in Idaho, and the Carson City bill in Nevada. These measures are the models for successful resolution of these land protection issues going forward, and they are far superior to the overreaching approaches of the past, which H.R. 1925 represents. Particularly troubling is the fact that H.R. 1925 still includes acreage in Washington County which the new Washington County law specifically released from wilderness classification. So much for SUWA keeping its word.

Without the buy-in of the people who are actually impacted by the management decision or in this case wilderness, there is little chance those decisions will ever be honored or respected. Locally driven processes like the 7-year BLM RMPs

developed across Utah or like the Washington County, Utah Wilderness bill developed on a case-by-case, area-by-area basis is the only proven way to resolve the wilderness impasse in Utah or anywhere else. That is the model this committee should follow, not the overreaching, overbearing approach embodied in the Red Rock bill. The people of Carbon County and the rest of rural Utah trust our Utah Congressional delegation to represent us because they understand Utah and have shown us that they listen. We hope that this Committee will see the Red Rock bill for what it is, unrepresentative of our views and counterfeit in its creation. The future of the land we love and care for, rural Utah itself hangs on your decision.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of rural Utah.