

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Witness Statement

Statement by Congressman Merrill Cook

before the National Parks Subcommittee in support of

H.R. 3035, the Utah National Parks and Public Lands Wilderness Act

I want to thank Chairman Hansen and the other members of the National Parks Subcommittee for allowing me to speak today in support of H.R. 3035, the Utah National Parks and Public Lands Wilderness Act.

First of all I want to commend Mr. Hansen for his diligence and hard work in bringing together the various state, local, private and federal agencies and organizations to craft a bill to protect the West Desert area of Utah. His tireless negotiations with Governor Leavitt and Secretary Babbitt have led to this landmark legislation. H.R. 3035 will designate over one million acres of Bureau of Land Management property as wilderness in the West desert and over 1.3 million acres as wilderness in Utah's existing national parks.

Utah is renowned for its scenic beauty, and the people of my state are committed to preserving their natural heritage. At the same time, Utah is rich in the natural resources needed to make our state and nation strong economically and militarily. Balancing these sometime divergent interests is never easy and every group is never totally pleased.

I know some concern has been expressed about so-called "hard release" language that would prevent the BLM from managing as wilderness land currently being managed as wilderness, but not included in this bill. I am sure that as the bill proceeds through the legislative process that the committee will work to address these concerns.

Overall, H.R. 3035 is a good, well thought out compromise of which the Committee should be justifiably proud. It will protect the varied ecosystems of western Utah, which range from high desert peaks to alpine forests, from salt and mud flats to the Mojave desert. It will encompass thirty-one separate areas all along Utah's western border. At the same time, our nation's security interest at the Utah Test and Training Range, this country's premier military training range, will be protected. There are numerous provisions in the bill which will improve wildlife management and preserve the historic water and grazing rights of local residents.

In addition to the new wilderness land in the West Desert, the bill also designates new wilderness areas in five of Utah's most beautiful national parks: Arches, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef, Bryce Canyon and Zion as well as the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Dinosaur and Cedar Breaks National Monument.

In his State of the Union address, President Clinton announced his interest in designating new wilderness areas in Utah. I am pleased that Secretary Babbitt and the Administration are supporting this legislation. I know that Mr. Hansen and the committee appreciate the Administration's willingness to join in the

development of this bill, as do the residents of the state of Utah. In the past the Administration has not been so willing to work with the Utah delegation, the Governor and the people of my state before making land decisions. I hope today's legislation signals a change in that approach by showing the good that can be accomplished through good faith cooperation and open communication.

I am proud to be a cosponsor of this bill. The people of Utah appreciate the Committee's commitment to helping us protect our environment and preserve our natural heritage. Again I want to thank the members of the committee for giving me this time.

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