

Testimony of Peter Metcalf
President & Co-founder: Black Diamond Equipment, Ltd., Salt Lake City, Utah;
Vice Chair & Board Member: Outdoor Industry Association
for the
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Natural Resources Committee
The United State House of Representatives
Hearing on H.R. 1925, America's Red Rock Wilderness Act
October 1, 2009

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this subcommittee regarding America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, H.R. 1925. My name is Peter Metcalf. I am a Utah resident and the president and founder of Black Diamond Equipment, a Utah-based outdoor equipment design and manufacturing company with annual sales of approximately \$90 million per year with approximately 250 Salt Lake City based employees, another 30 in Europe and a 100 more employees in Asia. I am also appearing before the committee today in my capacity as a member of the board of directors and vice-chair of the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA.) OIA is a national trade association whose mission is to ensure the growth and success of the outdoor industry.

First, I'd like to thank the sponsors of this legislation, especially Congressman Hinchey and Chairman Grijalva. The citizens who helped craft this bill, and those who have worked to protect Utah's redrock country for more than 25 years, are deeply grateful for your uncommon vision and steadfast commitment to these magnificent wild lands.

I also applaud both chambers of Congress for working to pass the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act earlier this year as part of the Omnibus Public Lands package.

I appeared before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests back in 2006 to register our concerns about the original version of this bill. It has since been signed into law as a vastly improved and widely celebrated example of public land policy which grants real protection to 180,000 acres of Utah's Zion-Mojave wilderness. Yet, as important as this conservation victory is, it represents just a tiny fraction of the qualifying wilderness lands in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act.

Overview of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act

Introduced in 1989 by the late Congressman Wayne Owens, America's Red Rock Wilderness Act seeks to protect what remains of Utah's unspoiled BLM wild lands—from the serpentine canyons of the Green and Colorado Rivers to the ancient cultural sites of Cedar Mesa; from the island mountain ranges of Utah's West Desert to the wildlife-rich forests of the Tavaputs Plateau. Proposed wilderness lands in the bill

include such poetically named places as Arch Canyon, the Burning Hills, Comb Ridge, the Vermilion Cliffs, Labyrinth Canyon, Wild Horse Mesa, the Deep Creek Mountains, and Desolation Canyon, to name a few.

So unique and jaw-droppingly beautiful are these public lands that people come from all corners of the globe to see them. They provide the prelude and the backdrop for Utah's five national parks, yet they are threatened every day by oil and gas development, mining, exploding off-road vehicle use, and the endless proliferation of roads.

To protect these remarkable landscapes, the Outdoor Industry Association strongly supports passage of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act—a grassroots initiative that is home-grown, field-checked and time-tested. In crafting the original bill, citizen volunteers spent thousands of hours in the field documenting wilderness characteristics and carefully mapping the boundaries of proposed wilderness areas. These volunteers included Black Diamond employees. Their efforts resulted in one of the most comprehensive land inventories ever conducted by a non-governmental organization. Now updated to include 9.4 million acres of proposed wilderness, this citizens' inventory has been largely validated by the BLM. To date, the agency has verified the wilderness character of 74 percent of lands proposed for designation in the bill.

Utah Wilderness and the Outdoor Industry

Active outdoor recreation is increasingly a strong and vital part of our nation's economy, especially in rural areas. In 2005, 159 million Americans participated in outdoor recreation, with the greatest numbers in the gateway sports of hiking, biking, camping and paddle sports. In Utah alone, the outdoor industry contributes over 6 billion dollars annually to the state's economy. Protecting the public lands that support outdoor recreation is critical to establishing and sustaining balanced local economies across the nation, especially in the West.

Several years ago, the Outdoor Industry Foundation, with the support of many other trade groups including the travel industry, completed the industry's first study quantifying the contribution of active outdoor recreation to the U.S. economy. We looked at eight activity categories: bicycling, camping, fishing, hunting, paddling, snow sports (including downhill skiing, snowboarding, cross-country/ nordic, snowshoeing), hiking and backpacking (including mountaineering/canyoneering), and wildlife viewing. The study concluded that active outdoor recreation:

- contributes \$730 billion to the US economy;
- generates \$289 billion annually in retail sales and services across the U.S.
- touches over 8 percent of American's personal consumption expenditures—more than 1 in every 12 dollars circulating in the economy;
- generates \$88 billion in annual state and national tax revenue; and
- supports nearly 6.5 million jobs across the U.S.

In times of difficult economic hardship, Americans always return in large numbers to the great outdoors. During the Great Depression and in every recession since, we have utilized the outdoors as our national place for renewal. In the coming years, outdoor gear sales and recreational outings will play a significant and growing role in maintaining healthy outdoor businesses and strong communities.

During the first eleven months of the current recession, industry-wide outdoor product sales grew an extraordinary 10% as family's returned to camping, cycling and other affordable outdoor activities. At the same time, many state and federal lands are seeing a dramatic increase in visitation.

My company is headquartered in Utah because it is a world class recreation destination. With outstanding opportunities for camping, hiking, skiing, mountain biking, climbing, canyoneering and river running, Utah pretty much has it all. Many of these activities take place on BLM-administered public lands in areas like Indian Creek, the San Rafael Swell, and Desolation Canyon: all proposed wilderness areas that currently lack protection. These iconic landscapes are directly linked to the strength and the resonance of our global brand.

Threats to Utah Wilderness

Threats to these landscapes come in many forms. Controversial plans to sell oil and gas leases near several Utah parks and in proposed wilderness areas have made national headlines lately, as has the recent federal bust of an archaeological looting ring centered in Utah's San Juan County. Other threats are more insidious: like the rapid spread of off-road vehicles into nearly every corner of Utah's backcountry. Illegal trails often find their way onto BLM route maps due to pressure from off-road vehicle groups. Just a few of these routes, once established, can disqualify thousands of acres from future wilderness consideration.

The rallying cry of wilderness opponents is "More access!" and they accuse conservationists of "locking up the land." The truth is, a full 70 percent of the lands within America's Red Rock Wilderness Act are within just one mile of a vehicle route—that's about 10 city blocks in Washington, DC. If the Red Rock Bill were passed today, there would still be tens of thousands of miles of primitive dirt roads and trails available for motorized use on Utah's BLM lands. At the same time, lands protected in the bill would remain open to hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, camping, river running, hunting, fishing, guiding, scientific study, fire and insect control, and even existing livestock grazing.

When it comes to energy, the vast majority of BLM land would still be available for oil and gas development after passage of the Red Rock Bill. Even now, the industry cannot keep up with the leases it holds. At the end of fiscal year 2008, five million acres of BLM land were under lease in Utah, yet only 1.5 million acres of those lands were in production.

According to the federal government's Energy Information Administration, the state of Utah holds approximately 2.5 percent of the country's proven natural gas reserves and a mere one percent of the country's proven oil reserves. Only a fraction of that lies beneath proposed wilderness. In fact, government figures show that "technically recoverable" undiscovered natural gas and oil resources on lands within America's Red Rock Wilderness Act amount to less than 4 weeks of natural gas and roughly 4 days of oil at current consumption levels. Such a trivial amount will hardly make or break our nation's energy independence. On the other hand, as Wallace Stegner famously noted, *"Wilderness, once we have given it up, is beyond our reconstruction."*

Protecting Wilderness and Mitigating Climate Change

If passed, America's Redrock Wilderness Act would permanently preserve some of the most stunning landscapes on earth, protect critical water sources and native plants, safeguard archaeological treasures, and preserve large blocks of habitat for native animals like bear, cougar, bald eagle, and bighorn sheep.

Wilderness designation is also the best strategy for making our public lands as resilient as possible to the effects of climate change. The United States Geological Survey predicts that the Colorado Plateau will become hotter and drier over the next century, leading to more wildfires, increased water demands, and dwindling water resources. The result will be large dust storms, which we've already begun to see in southern Utah. This dust is carried on the wind all the way to Colorado, where it's deposited on mountain snowpack high in the Rockies. The dark colored dust absorbs heat, causing earlier spring run-off, which impacts everything from wildlife to agriculture to Colorado's multi-billion dollar ski industry. Protecting Utah's roadless BLM lands from the soil disturbance that accompanies roads and development would help mitigate this cycle of environmental damage while protecting the agricultural and recreational economies that rely on seasonal snowpack.

Support for Utah Wilderness

America's Red Rock Wilderness Act is supported by 139 member of the U.S. House and 21 members of the Senate. It is also endorsed by the Sierra Club, Earthjustice, the Natural Resources Defense Council, The Wilderness Society, and over 200 member organizations of the Utah Wilderness Coalition. Most importantly, Americans throughout the state of Utah and across the nation support this visionary bill. In a September 2009, a Dan Jones statewide poll showed that just over 60% of Utahans that had a position supported protecting 9 million acres or more of Utah BLM wilderness.

Conclusion

America's Red Rock Wilderness—with its soaring arches and plunging canyons—is a landscape that captures the soul and the imagination. It is the land of Old West Outlaws and Navajo legends, a place where ancient cultures have left their stories etched in stone. No other landscape in the United States—or even the world—is quite like it. It is one of the country's greatest assets; a global draw that can't be copied in china or done more cheaply in Bangladesh. These lands are, in part, our competitive advantage, yet because we did not sacrifice in their creation there are those who are challenged to understand that their highest economic and societal value is to leave them as they are. As Steward Brand once wrote: *"Natural systems are priceless in value and nearly impossible to replace, but they're cheap to maintain. All you have to do is defend them"*.

Let us remember that these wild lands have played an integral role in forging the uniquely American character and defining our humanity. When they are gone we will have lost something uniquely American. Please protect this national treasure for future generations by casting a vote for America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. Rest assured it will be good for wildlife, good for our air and water, good for the outdoor industry & the clean, sustainable outdoor economy, and good for the American public.

Thank-you.

