

# **Committee on Resources**

## **Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands**

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### **Witness Statement**

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#### **STATEMENT BEFORE THE INTERIOR HOUSE COMMITTEE**

#### **ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2000**

**WILSON G. MARTIN**

**DEPUTY, STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER**

**STATE OF UTAH**

Mr. Chairman, it is my pleasure to be here and address this subcommittee. Because of the willingness of the chairman and this committee to listen and support this proposal the support of the Department of Interior, and the good work of the citizens of that significant part of Utah, much progress has been made towards developing a San Rafael Western Legacy District. Now we need formal support to create this Legacy.

The Emery County Commission has held numerous meetings and the Bureau of Land Management has provided some funding and helped kick off the Legacy District. A database has been developed in partnership with Utah State University that, when fully populated, will be used in planning and in bringing key partners together. The County is also committed to collecting and documenting (with video and audio tape) the oral histories, stories and folklore of the region. This will create a rich record and interpret the historic resources of the area.

The San Rafael Legacy District is one of the country's last frontiers and possesses important historical, cultural, and natural resources representative of the American West. According to Edward Geary,

"The earliest Euro-American traveler clearly on record as visiting the county was Jedediah S. Smith during his southwestern expedition of 1826. Smith found the region "unpromising," describing it as "very barren and rocky" with "little appearance of Indians and game quite scarce a few Mt. Sheep and Antelope." The Old Spanish Trail reached its northernmost point in Emery County in order to skirt the Canyonlands and take advantage of the Green River crossing and the relatively low elevation of Wasatch Pass. In some places, visible traces of the thousands of horses and mules that traveled the trail remained imprinted on the land until the mid-twentieth century. Now only the San Rafael name remains to memorialize this era, though at one time many landmarks bore Spanish names. Huntington Creek was known as the San Marcus, Cottonwood Creek as the San Mateo, Muddy Creek as Rio del Morro, or "Castle River," and Ivie Creek as Rio del Puerto, or "River of the Pass."

"Most of the recorded impressions of the Emery County region by early travelers carried on the uncomplimentary tradition established by Jedediah Smith. George C. Yount, a member of the 1830 William Wolfskill party, remembered Castle Valley as "the most desolate & forlorn dell in the world - Every thing about it was repulsive & supremely awful."

"Hanna Seely, compelled to trade a spacious brick home in Mount Pleasant for a one-room log cabin on the banks of Cottonwood Creek, was initially less optimistic than her husband about the region's prospects. She

later recalled, "The first time I ever swore was when we arrived in Emery County and I said 'Damn a man who would bring a woman to such a God Forsaken country!'"

The district contains examples of pre-Columbian and Native American culture, Paleontological resources, geologically unique land features, and the history of exploration, pioneering, settlement, ranching, outlaws, prospecting and mining. The San Rafael's resources support the development of a Legacy District.

Emery County has a widely varied landscape. It is situated between high mountains, some over 11,500 ft. above sea level, of the Manti-La Sal National Forrest, on the West and the serpentine course of the Green River at 4,000 feet, running through Gray and Labyrinth canyons on the East. It is a land of ancient upheaval, forming the San Rafael Reef. This massive uplift is approximately 75 miles long and 30 miles wide. Rivers cut fantastic canyons and the upheaval-created interesting formations, including the Coal Cliffs, Molen Reef, Hondu Arch, Temple Mountain, Molleys Castle, the Black Box, the Head of Sinbad and Goblin Valley.

The rock, now exposed, contains a wealth of geologic record, including fossils of dinosaurs and other plants and animals and the internationally famous, Cleveland Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry. Ranger-led tours allow visitors to view fossils in their original sites as well as see the work of quarrying.

Those same streams and rivers allowed human use of the area for thousands of years, even though some of the area is barren desert. Evidence of prehistoric human occupation of the land is present throughout the county. A good example of this is the Buckhorn Wash panel.

The Buckhorn Wash petroglyph panel is near the San Rafael River. This panel was restored in 1996 and interpretive signage erected to allow visitors to understand the significance of the site. The feeling of standing in the same place as the painters of nearly 2,000 years ago, is something anyone, including the handicapped, can wonder at. This panel, along with the San Rafael River Bridge, one of many structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression, and the Denver and Rio Grande Lime Kiln, located nearby, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Over 300 Pictograph and Petroglyph panels are scattered through complex maze of canyons and cliffs in the region, along with Paleo-Indian sites. The Black Dragon Canyon Pictographs, Ferron Box Pictographs and Petroglyphs, Rochester-Muddy Creek Petroglyph site and the Temple Mountain Wash Pictographs, are all listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These sites have national significance for their beauty and age.

In historic times, this area has had a long and colorful past. Evidence exists of explorers and settlers and later agricultural and mining interests scattered in existing and abandoned small towns, in locations as diverse as the land, these small towns boomed, and some disappeared. Walking down the street in the ones left can give a feeling of being in another time.

National Register sites in these small towns includes the Peter Lars Larson house, in Cleveland, the Emery LDS Church, the Samuel Singleton house and Ferron Presbyterian Church with cottage, and in Huntington, the Tithing Granary and Roller Mill & Miller's House.

Castle Dale, the county seat, is rich in local history. Historic buildings include Castle Dale School, housing the Pioneer Museum, the Paul C. Christensen house, the Peter Johansen house and the Justis Wellington Seeley II house, all on the National Register. Castle Dale is the location of the important Museum of the San Rafael, where visitors learn about the history and heritage of the area.

Green River lends it's name to the city of Green River, location of the John Wesley Powell Museum and home to businesses which specialize in running the Green and other area rivers. The Green River Presbyterian Church, a symbol of the area's cultural diversity, is on the National Register. Green River is

also famous for the excellent watermelons and other longer season crops.

Many historic sites and attractions are open for tours, visits or available as event locations. Other destinations include the Cedar Mountain Driving Tour, which gives the public access to archaeological sites of the area. There are not just National Register sites that can attract visitors, but sites from the 1950's, including Temple Mountain Uranium Mines. Where unique stories can be told.

There are not only places to visit, but there is also organizational support. In this area, there are three Certified Local Governments, certified under the National Park Service Historic Preservation Act and one Main Street Organization. These local governments already receive grants and technical assistance for developing a heritage industry in Utah. The Castle Country Travel Council has been a long supporter of the heritage of this region. Private organizations, like the Adventure River Expeditions, of Green River, and the College of Eastern Utah, have supported this region's heritage destination experiences and economic development through heritage. With this legislation, the county organization can put plans in place and implement efforts to develop the Legacy District.

"Emery County residents not only cherish their rural heritage but also place a high value on easy access to both the Wasatch Plateau and the San Rafael Swell. Local people tend to read their own and their families' history in these public lands. They return year after year to the same mountain campsites or take their Easter excursions to the same favorite destinations in the San Rafael. They show their children and grandchildren where a pioneer ancestor scratched his name on a rock or where a shepherding great-uncle carved an inscription in the smooth white bark of a quaking aspen. The trails where the family's cattle were once driven to the summer range on the mountain or the winter range in the desert, the forest clearing where a relative once operated a sawmill, the ledge where grandpa almost struck it rich during the uranium boom: all have deep personal meaning." (Ed Geary)

Wallace Stegner remarked on "the aloofness with which this country greeted human intrusion" and "the effect it has had on its settlers. The plateaus remain aloof and almost uninhabited, but the valleys are a collaboration between land and people, and each has changed the other."

The San Rafael has the resources, the people, and the organizations to develop a Legacy District. Together, they assist in conserving this important heritage area, establish and maintain interpretive destinations, develop recreational opportunities and increased public awareness and appreciation of the natural, historical, and cultural resources of this region. Not only this, but economic development can be realized. Much of the land is federal and managed by the Bureau of Land Management, which makes the Legacy District designation a good fit.

The Legacy District, developed in conjunction with business, local, state, and federal

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