

Testimony of Randy G Johnson, Emery County Public Lands Department

H.R. 5727 Emery County Public Land Management Act of 2018

House Committee on Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Public Lands

1324 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and members of the Committee:

I am here on behalf of Emery County to express our strong support for H.R. 5727, the Emery County Public Land Management Act of 2018. My name is Randy Johnson and I am with the Emery County Public Lands Department, and serve as public lands advisor to the Emery County Commissioners, as well as to the Emery County Public Lands Council.

I'd like to thank Congressman Curtis and Senator Hatch for their work on this legislation over the last six months. Additionally, I would like to express Emery County's appreciation to Ranking Member Hanabusa for cosponsoring this bill. We believe our process gives all stakeholders a seat at the table, on both sides of the aisle, and creates an opportunity to work together and solve some of the largest problems facing the land and people in Emery County.

This legislation represents the hard work of the Emery County Public Lands Council, along with a multitude of stakeholders over the last twenty-four years. It mirrors very closely the language contained in Public Law 111.11, including the Washington County, Utah public lands bill. But, with nearly one million acres of conservation, it far exceeds the scope of the Washington County bill. It is much needed legislation, both for the resource, which is being heavily impacted by increasing visitation, as well as for the people who love and enjoy the land.

I want to highlight the wide variety of stakeholder engagement this bill has seen over the years. This has included public meetings, tours provided by Emery county, outreach by the Congressional delegation, and much more.

We have engaged with local citizens, conservationists, non-motorized recreationists, motorized recreationists, sportsmen, museums, Native American tribes, the State of Utah, local governments, the Utah Congressional delegation, federal agencies, and many more. To be clear, this is not a proposal created by Emery County alone, but is the result of decades of outreach by the County and others.

While we are not opposed to fine tuning this bill, and continue to work with Congressman Curtis and Senator Hatch to do just that, we hope the Committee members will keep in mind the process that predates the introduction of this legislation.

The Process:

For more than six years the Emery County Public Lands Council has been engaged in a comprehensive collaborative process, drawing together a broad range of stakeholder participants in a long series of meetings and field trips. Public land management issues are complex and often highly contentious, and have been that way in Utah for more than two decades. But, Emery County recognized early on that holding rigidly to one position when there is such a disparity of viewpoints cannot produce positive results. The situation demands a better approach---a blend of perspectives and backgrounds with a common goal of solving problems and finding solutions. As a result, Emery County engaged in a process to bring stakeholders together in a collaborative setting with an eye on finding common ground.

The Council first carried out this assignment from 1995 to 2000, resulting in federal legislation which was introduced in 1998 and again in 2000 under Congressman Jim Hansen. It failed to advance at that time. More recently, the Commission directed the Public Lands Council to coordinate a second comprehensive stakeholder process. For more than six years the Council has been engaged in that process, drawing together a broad range of stakeholder participants in a long series of meetings and field trips. H.R. 5727 is the product of that effort. The components of the legislation follow the recommendations given to the Emery County Commission by the Public Lands Council.

Throughout the process, Emery County has respectfully recognized the importance of different perspectives, and has worked to address each of the uses represented by our stakeholder partners.

What H.R. 5727 does:

- Establishes 577,986 acres of permanent Wilderness
- Establishes a 383,380 acre National Conservation Area to protect the recreational, cultural, historical, educational, natural, scenic, and wildlife resources of the San Rafael Swell Region;
- Converts over 97% of the Wilderness Study Areas into permanent Wilderness, with a net increase of wilderness of over 135,000 acres;
- Exchanges nearly 100,000 acres of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) land to help fund Utah's schools;
- Empowers Utah State Parks to manage areas in critical need of improved management surrounding Goblin Valley State Park through a Recreation and Public Purposes agreement;
- Creates Jurassic National Monument to improve and enhance the resources and facilities at Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry.

Along with the substantial conservation created by this legislation, H.R. 5727 is written to address specifically identified land management problems. The increased popularity and the sheer size of the San Rafael Swell has created a number of challenges. And, the fact that I-70 bisects the Swell from east to west adds to those challenges. People from all over the United States and the world come to see the scenery or hike or ride the many canyons, roads, and trails. Some see the beautiful canyons for the first time as they drive I-70, and exit the freeway to explore. They are often unfamiliar with the area and unaware of the ruggedness of the land. This, along with limited signage in much of the area, can put

people at serious risk. In 2017, Emery County's volunteer Search and Rescue Team made well over 100 rescue missions, many of them highly technical and dangerous rescues. H.R. 5727 is specifically written to address these and other problems. Sections 402, Temple Mountain Cooperative Management Area, and Section 101, establishment of the San Rafael Swell Western Heritage and Historic Mining National Conservation Area are particularly directed at these issues. Most of the search and rescue missions occur in the slot canyons, access to which would now be managed by the State Parks. Further, the National Conservation Area would bring added signage and improved management of historical and cultural sites of interest to visitors. This will create a safer environment, a much better and more educational visitor experience, and better protection of the sensitive lands and resources.

Description of the area:

In land mass, Emery County is just under 3,000,000 acres, slightly smaller than the State of Connecticut, with just under 11,000 residents in 8 small communities. Over 92% of our county is public land. As a result, every decision made in regards to the management of our public lands affects us in some way. We are bordered on the west by the 10,000 foot high mountains of the Manti-LaSal National Forest, and those mountains are the source of our water---the lifeblood of our communities. On the east are the Bookcliffs, within which is Desolation Canyon, one of the largest contiguous wild areas in the lower 48 states. Sitting within these mountainous borders is the San Rafael Swell, a gigantic geographic upheaval, which resulted in one of the most unique and beautiful areas in the world. The San Rafael lies entirely within the boundaries of Emery County. The uniqueness of the Swell comes not only from its unusual geography, but from the wonderful blend of the land itself and the history of man's interaction with that land. This blend of land and people began with the earliest settlers in search of a livelihood, and continued through the Great Depression, when the Civilian Conservation Corps left their mark on the area. This was followed by Madam Curie who, according to local folklore, visited Emery county to view the uranium resources at Temple Mountain. And then came the expansion of uranium ore production during the cold war period. These, combined with the outlaw history, the rock art left by the Fremont and Anasazi cultures, and the extensive paleontological resources has made the San Rafael Swell a wonderful blend of man and nature.

Some of the CCC projects, like the Swinging Bridge over the San Rafael River, are historic works of art. And, remnants of the many "Mom and Pop" uranium mining projects are a tribute to the ingenuity and tenacity of these pioneering folks. While we endlessly debate the kinds of management that should be used, and what size the wilderness areas should be, it would be unfortunate indeed if we failed to recognize and preserve the human history and heritage which is as much a part of the land as its geological features. Wallace Stegner spoke of this blend in his description of Emery County. In ***American Places***, he wrote, "The plateaus remain aloof and almost uninhabited, but the valleys are a collaboration between land and people, and each has changed the other." He added, "The land is not complete without its human history and associations. Scenery by itself is pretty sterile."

H.R. 5727 will work to successfully protect both scenery and human history. With the establishment of nearly 600,000 acres of permanent wilderness and the creation of a 385,000 acre National Conservation

Area we will preserve for future generations this marvelous blend of man and nature which is the San Rafael.

Summary:

I would like to reiterate that this legislation comes from an extensive process over many years of work with all user groups and the public, operated in the most respectful way, and in the most comprehensive manner possible. May I also mention once again that, aside from our extensive stakeholder process from which this legislation evolved, we have continued to work with Members of Congress and various user groups in an effort to fine tune and improve the bill. What you see in front of you represents that continued effort.

We are here to ask you to help us obtain certainty on our vast public lands, and to put to rest decades long disputes. We are asking you to do what no other institution can do---provide the security of permanence for the sake of our future survival as a county, and for the sake of the special lands and historical sites which represent the wonder which is the San Rafael Swell.

We ask for your support of H.R. 5727.