

**Statement of**

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**Before the**

Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives

**"Utah Public Lands Initiative Act"**

September 14th, 2016

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Tsongas, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Clif Koontz, Executive Director of Ride with Respect (RwR), a 501c3 nonprofit organization that conserves shared-use recreation of the public lands surrounding Moab, Utah. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Utah Public Lands Initiative (PLI), a bill that I believe lives up to its stated purpose "to provide greater conservation, recreation, economic development, and local management of Federal lands..."

For the past thirteen years, Ride with Respect has assisted state and federal agencies with the management of off-highway vehicles (OHV's). Our motto of "caution, consideration, and conservation" promotes an ethic of respecting oneself, other trail users, and the land, itself. Our trail work almost always benefits conservation, and rarely involves constructing new trails. More often we relocate existing trails away from sensitive resources, such as unstable soils, riparian areas, and cultural sites. I have supervised over twelve-thousand hours of field work, and am proud of RwR's contribution to the natural resources and the local community as well as visitors who depend on them.

In 2012, when groups seeking to vastly expand wilderness designations proposed a two million-acre Greater Canyonlands national monument, I was concerned that such a proclamation would likely close trails systems for which RwR has been the caretaker. By 2013, the monument threat had spawned a collaborative effort in which Rep. Bishop and Rep. Chaffetz solicited input from stakeholders via each county in eastern Utah. I don't know how many hundred hours I've spent participating, but my personal notes on various meetings and correspondence specific to the PLI is one hundred-thousand words long.

To illustrate this difficult process, let me describe an area between Moab and Labyrinth Canyon called Big Flat. As part of Grand County's Big Flat Working Group, in 2014 I attended a dozen meetings to develop a package of conservation, recreation, and development areas. The old county council accepted these recommendations, but rather than forwarding them to the congressmen, the council deferred to incoming council members. In 2015, the new council modified the Big Flat Working Group package to emphasize conservation. In 2016, compared to what the new county council had recommended, the PLI bill proposes more SITLA trade-in areas but also more NCA and wilderness acreage, thereby honoring

the balance point set by the new council. Although I prefer the position of the old county council, I respect the deliberative process, and accept the outcome.

In fact, beyond Big Flat, most areas covered by the PLI would be more restricted than what the counties had recommended. To develop a viable bill, the congressmen made careful concessions to wilderness groups without undermining the interests of local communities. Unfortunately wilderness groups have turned their backs on negotiation in favor of another quick fix, this time proposing a 1.9 million-acre Bears Ears national monument. As with Greater Canyonlands, Bears Ears covers many motorcycle and ATV trails where RwR's stewardship would no longer be welcome, if every other national monument is any indication. While the threat of monuments can be credited for making many stakeholders compromise, it has clearly had the opposite effect on wilderness groups.

At the risk of being blunt, the PLI isn't a great deal for OHV riders, and a monument could be a great fundraising tool for RwR. However I'm not taking time off the trail just to advance my hobby of motorcycling or my profession of directing a nonprofit organization. I'm here because imposing a monument on half of a county would only entrench controversy. While the PLI couldn't be a panacea, it would go a long way toward resolving controversy by providing a more clear direction. In my fourteen years of service on public lands, the PLI is the closest proposal I've seen to sustaining people and places.

I submitted twenty attachments to convey the PLI's thoroughness, and ask members of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands to focus on the six attachments from this past summer. Also please feel free to ask questions. Thank you.