

Statement for the record – Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands hearing on

H.R. 3452, December 2, 2011

I am concerned that H.R. 3452 creates a dangerous precedent for federal government intervention by overturning decades of planning and collaborative land use decisions by Utah citizens, together with state and local elected officials, to protect an irreplaceable economic asset—the watershed of the Wasatch Front canyons.

Utah is the second most arid state in the country. Our water supply is the lifeblood of our community. Beginning in 1847, the Mormon pioneers managed the Wasatch watershed under the stewardship of prominent church leaders. Recognizing the asset of abundant, clean water was one of the great successes of our ancestors. It has been the cornerstone upon which subsequent generations of Utahns built a thriving and prosperous community.

The Salt Lake Forest Reserve was established in 1904 for long-term protection of the Salt Lake Valley's water supply and to reforest the canyon areas, which had been heavily impacted by logging, mining and livestock grazing. In 1905 all federally managed forests were transferred to the U.S. Forest Service. Today's Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest Management plan identifies the acreage in H.R. 3452 identified for sale to Canadian-owned Talisker Corporation as watershed which is "functioning, but at risk" and establishes it as a priority for remediation by the Forest Service. Under federal law, watershed protection is the top management priority in the National Forest. A growing body of research suggests that source protection—maintaining the health of the functioning watersheds—is critical to protecting water quality and quantity and controlling treatment costs.

The population of Salt Lake County is nearly 1.1 million people today. Most receive their drinking water directly from the canyons of City Creek, Parley's, and Big and Little Cottonwood. In 30 years the population is projected to increase by 55 percent. That increased demand by homes and businesses for clean, affordable drinking water puts more pressure on public officials to balance maintaining the water supply with a desire for public access and recreational expansion.

The people of Utah themselves have established this priority of watershed protection. During 18 months of stakeholder open house meetings—facilitated by the State of Utah, Salt Lake County and Salt Lake City and capped by a 2009 Value Survey—thousands of residents responded to the question “What issue is most important to you in each canyon?” Watershed ranked number one in both Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons.

Recently, I initiated a similar stakeholder-driven process to address long term land and water use in the Wasatch Front Canyons. For 25 years, many groups talked about the goal of expanding public land protection in a way that protected the watershed and preserved the outdoor experience. Over three years, I brought a diverse group of public, private and business interests together to draft a bill that offers a balanced approach in Millcreek, Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons.

Working together, we achieved a compromise. Everyone gave up something in order to arrive at a bill that furthers the common goals we all share. I introduced that bill—H.R. 5009--in the last Congress and will introduce similar legislation shortly. During the groups' in-depth discussions, the idea of a ski interconnect lift was acknowledged and a potential corridor for it was identified on the map. The proposed ski interconnect is a long-running, controversial proposal that all

parties understood would require a longer discussion by stakeholders through an extended public process prior to any resolution.

In my view, H.R. 3452 represents a top-down directive that short-circuits an open, collaborative approach. Such a directive epitomizes what my constituents have long objected to by imposing a Washington, D.C. view of how public lands issues should be resolved.

It has been my experience that public lands issues in Utah are often characterized by a lot of emotional rhetoric but not much progress. For too long the discussions centered on an all-or-nothing approach that failed to consider multiple points of view. That is why I am a strong advocate for the model I developed with former Senator Bob Bennett which resulted in the successful Washington County Growth and Conservation Act, which became law in 2009. It is a model I replicated in drafting my Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act and I am convinced it represents the only appropriate, workable path forward.

There is no question that outdoor recreation represents an important and growing source of economic development and job growth in Utah. Currently, the outdoor industry contributes \$5.8 billion to the local economy and 65,000 jobs. The leaders of the growing Utah Ski and Snowboard industry point out that the attraction of the Wasatch Range is linked to the opportunity it provides as a destination for mixed use among lift-served skiing, backcountry skiing, heli-skiing in the winter and hiking, mountain biking, trail running and view corridors in the summer. By advancing only one economic interest, H.R. 3452 will compromise the present balance and integrity that exists between outdoor recreation businesses and other Wasatch Canyon interests.