

Thank You, Chairman Grijalva for having me here to testify today. I also ask for consent to submit statements from Save Our Canyons, Snowbird, and The Salt Lake Public Utilities Department for the record.

The Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act is a significant expansion of public lands protection for three impressive canyons separating the high granite peaks of the Wasatch Front range of the Rocky Mountains, towering above the Salt Lake Valley.

From the time of the Mormon pioneer settlement, Utah's growth in arid Northern Utah relied on this life-giving source of pristine water flowing down these canyon streams.

Countless Utahns have picnicked, hiked, skied, climbed, and retreated from the hassle of city life—with their children and grandchildren-- in this beautiful natural area.

My legislation seeks to secure that legacy for the future

It designates an additional 26,000 acres of wilderness and special management area protection, representing the first major Wasatch Front watershed protection effort since the Utah Wilderness Act of 1984.

Since then, the population of Salt Lake County has grown from 678,000 to 1.1 million. More than half a million people in the Salt Lake Valley get most of their drinking water from these canyons.

Besides that, millions of local residents and visitors spend time and money here, enjoying the great outdoors. These

peaks and canyons form the stunning natural backdrop to Salt Lake Valley homes, businesses and Utah's state capitol.

For at least 25 years, many groups have talked about this goal. Today, I am very pleased to acknowledge the months of discussions among a diverse group of stakeholders, resulting in this legislation. Beyond the formal stakeholder process, we have also solicited comments from our website and from an open house that was held in Salt Lake County.

To name some of the highlights:

It creates a new 7,700-acre wilderness area on Grandeur Peak/Mount Aire, to be called the Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak Wilderness Area.

Wayne Owens was a strong advocate for Utah's public lands protection when he served in the House of Representatives. I think this is a fitting tribute to his effort and to his memory.

It also creates special management areas totaling over 10,000 acres. These areas will be managed for strict watershed protection, while allowing for the permitted use by the helicopter skiing business under existing Forest Service rules and regulations.

The bill resolves a long-standing conflict between backcountry skiers and Snowbird Ski Resort over a proposed expansion into a treasured area known as White Pine Canyon. My bill settles this contentious issue.

It closes an off-road vehicle trail that has perpetrated erosion and pollution-- but maintains a trail that is popular with the mountain biking community.

My bill is a compromise reached by a number of businesses, environmentalists, and city and county entities. As is the nature of compromises, everyone gave up something in order to arrive at a bill that furthers the common goals we all share—protecting the watershed and preserving the outdoor experience.

Time and progress have replaced small farms and orchards with numerous small businesses. They locate—and create well-paying jobs here-- because of the outdoor recreation these canyons offer. Utah enjoys a multi-billion dollar tourism economy, thanks to the public lands that support so many outdoor activities.

I understand that there are concerns regarding the land exchange language and the watershed language in my bill. I have been working with the Forest Service to clarify the land exchange language and I look forward to working with both the Forest Service and House Natural Resources Committee regarding the watershed language.

Wallace Stegner –the famous writer who lived in Salt Lake and admired the collective spirit of the early Mormon settlers—noted that water is the true wealth in a dry land. Recognizing the asset of abundant, clean water was one of the great successes of our ancestors. It is one that all who collaborated with me on this bill—as well as hundreds of thousands of Utahns—wants very much to pass on to future generations.