



The Honorable Tom McClintock
Chair
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20215

The Honorable Niki Tsongas
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20215

September 14, 2016

RE: H.R. 5780, the Utah Public Lands Initiative Act, and H.R. 5781, the PLI Partner Act

Via: Email

Dear Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Tsongas, Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, and Members of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands:

The Grand Canyon Trust (GCT) writes today in strong opposition to H.R. 5780 and H.R. 5781. The bills fall far short of the ambitious goal set forth by Congressman Rob Bishop (R, UT) in 2013 – “to build consensus among stakeholders” around which areas in seven eastern Utah counties should be preserved and which should be developed. Because the PLI would weaken existing on-the-ground protections for irreplaceable cultural resources and much of eastern Utah's best wilderness-quality lands, the Grand Canyon Trust cannot and does not support H.R. 5780 and H.R. 5781. This disappointing package of bills fails both the Native American tribes of the [Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition](#) and Utah's and America's birthright of wild and pristine public lands.

The bills would [diminish the voice of sovereign Native American tribes](#) in management of the Bears Ears cultural landscape, prevent the creation of new or expansion of existing national monuments, encourage rampant development of dirty fossil fuels and uranium, forever prohibit sensible management of livestock grazing, and hand over public lands and public roads to the State of Utah to further a staunchly anti-federal public lands agenda.

Here are just a few of the many ways the PLI fails.

It would:

- Leave more than half a million acres of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument unprotected, including tens of thousands of irreplaceable cultural sites and some of the best canyon and mountain scenery in the United States, while forever prohibiting future protections;

- Demote the voice of sovereign Native American Tribes in management of Bears Ears to a small voice in a crowd of advisors, instead of enacting the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition's [visionary proposal](#) to blend traditional knowledge with western science and land management in new and exciting ways;
- Leave millions of acres of potential wilderness unprotected, particularly biologically important national forest wilderness, while preventing protections in the future;
- Hand permitting authority for fossil fuel development of public minerals over to the State of Utah while rolling back the Bureau of Land Management's oil and gas leasing reforms, cancelling master leasing plans for the seven PLI counties;
- Transfer vast blocks of federal public lands to the State of Utah in the Uintah Basin, Book Cliffs, near the San Rafael Swell, and near the Green River east of Moab for expedited development of tar sands, oil shale, potash, coal, and uranium without public review or input, turning some of Utah's best wildlife habitat and scenic landscapes into industrial zones;
- Mandate that cattle and sheep grazing occur at present stocking levels (or increased stocking levels) on all public lands across eastern and southern Utah, and reestablish livestock grazing where it has been limited previously due to resource or ecological damage;
- Render void the only true piece of consensus reached by conservation and other stakeholders in Summit County, Utah by breaking our agreement;
- Reward scofflaws by granting a right-of way to open the illegal off-road vehicle route in Recapture Canyon, site of the infamous 2014 protest ride that drew Bundy militia members to San Juan County, Utah;
- Turn tens of thousands of acres of public lands and thousands of public roads over to state and county ownership, furthering Utah's radical public land seizure agenda, and;
- Create an unprecedented and troubling new kind of national conservation area that sets up an irreconcilable conflict where destructive land uses such as mining, oil and gas development, grazing, and off-road vehicle use are to be preserved on an equal footing with cultural resources and intact ecosystems.

In creating the PLI, Representative Rob Bishop embarked on an ambitious journey with the stated goal of breaking the stalemate over permanent land protection in eastern Utah. He wrote of a "window of opportunity" and "a paradigm shift," and of "moving away from the tired arguments of the past," promising that "a more reasonable, balanced use of the public land can be achieved in Utah."

The PLI has been a long, arduous process, and the Trust has done our level best to engage thoughtfully, thoroughly, and productively. Despite our efforts toward reaching durable compromise over dozens of field trips and mapping work sessions, H.R. 5780 and H. R. 5781 make it abundantly clear that no "paradigm shift" has taken place. Regrettably, what could have been a victory for all sides was undermined at every turn by the intransigence and pervasiveness of anti-public lands politics. A golden opportunity has been missed, and we remain steadfast in our opposition to H.R. 5780 and H.R. 5781. Nonetheless, the Trust remains hopeful that all sides can find the political will to begin again in a subset of counties where consensus among stakeholders is within reach, renewing the hope and optimism that characterized the origins of the PLI.

Though consensus compromise has thus far failed through the PLI, we know that win-win solutions are possible - solutions which truly serve the best interests of future generations and Utah's exceptional landscapes. Now, it seems our best and only option is to continue offering our unreserved support to the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition in their push for a new presidentially-proclaimed national monument.

Thank you for the opportunity to enter these comments in the record.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim B. Peterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Tim Peterson
Utah Wildlands Program Director

CC:

Governor Gary Herbert
Senator Mike Lee
Senator Orrin Hatch
Representative Jason Chaffetz
SITLA Director David Ure
Interior Secretary Sally Jewell
Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack
CEQ Managing Director Christy Goldfuss
Bureau of Land Management Director Neil Kornze
National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis
USDA Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell