

For Immediate Release:  
April 20, 2009

For information:  
Terri Martin 801-631-1384  
Deeda Seed 801-803-9892

## **Many faiths, one spirit in a call to protect Utah's wild lands**

United by belief in the spiritual value of wilderness, people from diverse religious traditions have come together in a call to protect Utah's wild lands.

The effort has been taking shape over the past year in *Faith and the Land: A call for wilderness stewardship* dialogues held in a variety of religious settings. These forums brought together members of the Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Islamic, Jewish, Latter-day Saint, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Unitarian Universalists and United Church of Christ faith communities.

More than 230 people took part. Participants discovered that, though their religious practices might vary, they stood on common ground in their respect for creation and the natural world.

On April 21, the day before Earth Day, representatives of the faith communities will release an interfaith statement, drawn from the dialogues, about the spiritual importance of Utah's wild lands and the need for action protect for these special places.

The event will take place at 11 a.m. in front of the Wallace Bennett Federal Building, 125 S. State Street in Salt Lake City. After a brief news conference, the group will deliver copies of the interfaith statement to the offices of Senators Bennett and Hatch, along with a letter requesting a meeting to discuss wilderness issues.\*

"People from very diverse faith backgrounds identify wilderness as a place of great spiritual importance," said Reverend Diana Johnson of the St. Marks Episcopal Cathedral, one of the spokespersons for the group, "and a place worthy of protection."

"In the dialogue sessions we shared powerful stories about how wild lands are important to each of us spiritually and how our faith tradition calls on us to care for nature," said Reverend Erin Gilmore of Holladay United Church of Christ, "We see the development of the interfaith statement as a starting point for communities of faith throughout Utah to continue the conversation about ways to honor nature and protect Utah's wild lands."

"We are hopeful that our elected leaders and fellow citizens will understand the importance of providing protection for Utah's wild lands, before these lands are lost to human inflicted damage," said George Handley, a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

"Protecting Utah's wild landscapes is stewardship in action," said Reverend Steve Goodier of Christ United Methodist Church, "We invite other faith communities to join us in calling for protection of Utah's precious wilderness landscapes that are so important to us spiritually."

*Faith and the Land* dialogues were coordinated by the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, which is available to help additional church groups organize local forums in coming months.

**Who/What – Representatives from diverse faith communities release interfaith statement on the spiritual importance of wilderness and call on Utah leaders to provide protection for Utah wilderness**

**When – April 21, 11 a.m.**

**Where – Outside Federal Building, 125 S. State Street, Salt Lake City**

\*Congressmen Matheson, Bishop and Chaffetz will also receive the statement along with a meeting request – their main offices are not at the Federal Building.

###