



southern
utah
wilderness
alliance

PREPARING FOR A MEETING WITH A MEMBER OF CONGRESS OR HIS/HER STAFF

STEP ONE:

A phone call identifying yourself, explaining your purpose, identifying the proper staff person in the office, and seeking an appointment.

Let them know that you are members of a local congregation. You can also say that you are representing the Utah Wilderness Coalition (which is composed of the Sierra Club, the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, and The Wilderness Society plus 200 other organizations and businesses across Utah and the U.S. of A.) and that you would like to schedule a meeting of 15 – 20 minutes to discuss a piece of legislation, “America’s Redrock Wilderness Act”. Start by asking for a meeting with the Member, but don’t turn down a meeting with staff.



STEP TWO:

Everyone should meet outside the office just prior to the appointed time and enter together. One of you should be the primary spokesperson and one should be assigned primarily to listen and make sure you get a clear response to your request.

Bring a few materials to leave, not an overwhelming amount. Something with pictures is good, if you have a photograph of your family/friends in Utah’s redrock country that is a nice plus.

The Member or his/her staff person is likely to know little about the legislation, though don’t say anything along those lines so as to avoid being inadvertently insulting. You will most likely be their primary source of information.

STEP THREE – THE MEETING:

Begin with a thank you – something good s/he’s done for the environment.

Next make “the ask”, you are there to encourage the Member to become a cosponsor of “America’s Redrock Wilderness Act” (S1170; HR 1919)

Offer two brief reasons why you are concerned about protecting the land. Pick the two that you think are most persuasive. If you’ve got personal experience that should get a mention.

Briefly describe the legislation: that Sen. Durbin/Rep. Hinchey is the lead sponsor, that it will designate public lands in Utah as wilderness which is the highest protection for deserving lands that US law allows.

Briefly describe the land, here some pictures or brochures with pictures would be useful. Be sure to note how spectacular it is and that it is thus of national, indeed worldwide, significance.

Briefly describe the threats -- focus on the off-road vehicles and oil and gas development.

They'll have a few questions -- here are some guesses at what they might be.

Why do people in your state care?

Answers: the land is of such quality that it's earned it; many people visit it and care deeply about it; many people are aware of it and want it protected so they can visit it. It is public land and just like the Grand Canyon or the Indiana Dunes/Apostle Islands/Boundary Waters/Pictured Rocks, deserves support of people from across the country.

What do people in Utah think about it?

Answer: most Utahns support it, but it is controversial and the Utah delegation is supporting the minority view that would seek to designate as little land as possible as wilderness. Rep. Matheson has said that he will not actively support or oppose the bill and Rep. Bishop sponsored a bill that designated a small portion of our proposal as wilderness. If they ask for further specifics tell them you'll have to get the information and send it at a later date (SUWA staff can help you with that).

When is it going to come to a vote?

Answer: We don't know, but we are hopeful there will be a Congressional hearing in 2008.



End the conversation by making sure the response you get to the "ask" about cosponsorship is clear to all (if you meet with a staff person, they will probably need to get back to you). Find out when you should get back to them for a response.

If there are any things that they are to get for you or you are to get for them make sure there is a clear understanding of what they are and approximately when those items will be taken care of.

A couple of things to look out for: it would not be unusual if they sought to divert the conversation to other items of a more casual content. Be polite, but always steer it back to the topic you came to discuss. It is also surprisingly easy to get out of such a meeting without a clear answer (even if it's just we'll be getting back to you) about the main question you came to ask. Be sure you get a response to the cosponsorship question.

If they disagree (odds are they will have questions but not actually disagree), feel free to discuss the matter, but don't get into an argument.

Lastly, don't feel like you need to be an expert. You are the expert on what you think and who you represent and that is the main authority you will need. You are likely to know way more about the matter than the person you are meeting with – even if it is the Member. If there is something you don't know, be upfront about not knowing it and say you'll get the information for him/her.

STEP FOUR – FOLLOWUP:

Send the person you met with a thank you note. In it politely state that you are looking forward to a positive response to your request. Report the results of the meeting to the SUWA staff person with whom you are dealing. Call the person you met with in two weeks (or at an agreed upon time) to get a progress report.