

A STEP FORWARD FOR UTAH'S ZION-MOJAVE WILDERNESS



REVISED WASHINGTON COUNTY WILDERNESS LEGISLATION INCLUDED IN S. 22, OMNIBUS PUBLIC LANDS PACKAGE



The revised Washington County wilderness legislation will protect spectacular wilderness quality lands in the Zion-Mojave region of Utah. Above: Joshua trees bask in evening sun glow, proposed Beaver Dam Wash NCA. Below: Slaughter Creek, in the rugged Bull Valley Mountains, will be protected as wilderness. © Ray Bloxham/SUWA.

Thanks to the efforts of concerned citizens throughout Utah and the nation, a revised wilderness bill for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in Washington County, Utah is supported by Sen. Bob Bennett (R-UT), the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, and other members of the conservation community. The bill is included in S. 22, the Omnibus Public Lands Package, recently approved by the Senate. This current version of the legislation includes important protection for 180,000 acres of BLM wildlands that make Utah's Zion-Mojave region so appreciated by the American public. Senators Bennett and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), as well as Utah wilderness champions in the Senate and House, deserve thanks for their work to improve this bill in order to protect a truly special part of Utah's spectacular redrock country.



Exquisite BLM Landscapes: Once Threatened, Now Protected

The current proposal doubles the amount of wilderness quality land offered protection in a much maligned 2006 proposal for the region and would double the amount of Congressionally designated BLM Wilderness in Utah today.

Important places adjacent to Zion National Park that are extensions of the area's iconic landscape, like Canaan Mountain and Black Ridge, will be permanently protected as Wilderness. Over 50,000 acres of Utah's lowest wilderness quality lands in the Mojave Desert, surround-

The Salt Lake Tribune

The Washington County Growth and Conservation Act doesn't look much like it did when Utah Sen. Bob Bennett, a Republican, and Rep. Jim Matheson, a Democrat, jointly introduced it more than two years ago. It's been pared, shaped, revised and, we think, vastly improved as a result of criticisms and hard work by Utahns concerned about its focus on "growth" and the way it neglected the "conservation" of some of the state's most scenic and fragile lands.

...[T]he bill designates more than 256,000 acres of additional wilderness, much of it in or near Zion National Park, but also including many smaller areas long considered of wilderness quality by environmental groups and the Bureau of Land Management itself. ...Unfortunately, some fragile lands were not protected, as they should be, from motorized recreation, although all-terrain vehicles will be limited to trails in most areas.

We were critical of provisions in the original act that allowed up to 25,000 acres of public land to be sold off, with most proceeds going to Washington County for growth-related projects. We wrote that it was wrong to encourage more of the sprawl that has turned once-scenic St. George into a cluster of ugly shopping malls connected by miles of freeway.

So we're glad to see a change that allows only public lands already designated by the BLM as surplus to be sold. Ninety-five percent of the proceeds must be used to acquire in-fill lands in the wilderness and conservation areas. The rest will go to education.

—Salt Lake Tribune, January 12, 2009, "A better bill: Revisions improve land act"

ing the Beaver Dam Wash, will now be closed to motorized vehicles and mineral entry as a part of a new National Conservation Area. We are especially pleased that the rugged and remote Bull Valley Mountains Complex of wildlands, which includes the region's only native trout fishery, will be designated as Wilderness.

No Longer Selling Public Land to Bankroll Local Development

Previous versions of this legislation proposed selling tens of thousands of acres of public land owned by all Americans, and directing millions of dollars in proceeds towards controversial local development projects. The Washington County legislation no longer sets this precedent of selling public lands in exchange for wilderness protection.

The Senate-approved bill sells only public lands already identified for disposal by the BLM in its existing management plan (4,000 acres) and directs 95% of the proceeds toward acquiring ecologically valuable inholdings within the county's wilderness and conservation areas. The remaining 5% of proceeds is directed towards education.

Further Improvements

Additional improvements have been made from previous versions of Washington County legislation. The bill no longer gives away thousands of acres of public land rights-of-way for water development projects; it removes a provision directing proceeds from public land sales towards a controversial water pipeline from Lake Powell to St. George, Utah; and it includes stronger management language for designated wilderness areas and off-road vehicle use.

Remaining Concerns

Some concerns remain which we will work to see alleviated in future legislation: the release of currently protected wilderness study area (WSA) land in Canaan Mountain; the inclusion of damaging motorized vehicle routes in the proposed Beaver Dam Wash NCA; and the failure to protect additional wilderness quality lands in the Zion-Mojave region, including the Dry Creek unit of the Zion National Park wilderness complex.

PROTECT UTAH'S ZION-MOJAVE WILDLANDS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS BY SUPPORTING REVISED WILDERNESS LEGISLATION FOR WASHINGTON COUNTY



For more information, please contact the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance:
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Above: Hikers overlook Zion National Park from Canaan Mountain's redrock splendor. Both areas are protected as Wilderness in this bill. Right: A rare perennial stream meanders through Doc's Pass, a component of the Bull Valley Mountains Complex proposed wilderness area. © Ray Bloxham/SUWA.