



**Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act of 2010
HR 5009**

Written Testimony of

**The Honorable Ralph Becker,
Mayor of Salt Lake City**

To the

**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
111th Congress**

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Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to transmit my written testimony regarding the Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act of 2010. I provide this written testimony as Mayor of Salt Lake City, and as a member of an environmental planning firm that conducted NEPA and planning work in the Wasatch Mountains. I also provide this testimony offering my perspective as a park ranger and firefighter for the National Park Service for six years.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Congressman Jim Matheson for his leadership in introducing this legislation, and for his leadership in the collaborative process that was used in the development of this legislation. In addition, I would like to recognize Congressman Rob Bishop, Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, for his dedication to our state. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Committee Chairman Rahall and Ranking Member Hastings, ex-officio members of this Subcommittee.

Introduction

Intertwined with their beauty and wildness, the Wasatch Mountains surrounding the communities of the Salt Lake Valley sustain our quality of life and serve as a constant reminder of our stewardship over our remarkable natural resources in Utah. Salt Lake City's health, security, and economic prosperity are dependent on this mountain range. They provide clean drinking water, clean air, diverse recreational opportunities, and landscape-scale habitat protection.

Keeping these mountain ecosystems whole and healthy is critical for us to continue to provide our growing population with clean water and air, and to continue to protect biodiversity so that we remain resilient and adaptive to the environmental challenges we may face.

The conditions and circumstances for the Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection legislation are very different than most wilderness legislation. The Salt Lake Valley is unique in its natural setting. Our population of over 1,000,000 enjoys accessible peaks rising 7,000 feet above the valley floor. We walk out our doors and into a vibrant downtown Salt Lake City or open and spectacular mountain terrain. The landscape is truly unmatched; as are the pressures to develop. The vast majority of Salt Lake Valley residents support strong protections in the Wasatch canyons to preserve the land and protect our vital watershed.

The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest is one of the most heavily visited national forests in the nation. The pressure to develop sensitive areas in this forest with roads, structures, off-road vehicle trails, and other development are significant, and growing. Further development not only threatens the water supply for the valley's growing population, it also threatens to permanently destroy the existing wilderness quality of lands contained in this legislation. After decades of study, I strongly believe if we fail to adequately protect the Wasatch Mountains with strict limitations on development, we will have lost a treasure beyond words. If we take steps to protect the Wasatch Mountains, as many of our predecessors have, through strict limitations on

development, future generations will praise our wisdom and foresight. The Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act is the most important piece of natural resource policy of our time.

Wilderness designations within the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, and specifically within portions of Salt Lake City's watershed areas, first occurred with the passage of wilderness legislation in 1978 and in 1984. Congress had previously passed federal legislation providing specific protections to Salt Lake City's watershed in 1914 and in 1934. This legislation directed control in Salt Lake City's watershed areas over activities like mining and timber harvesting. This history of wilderness and federal watershed protection legislation demonstrates Salt Lake City and Congress stand on common ground to protect Salt Lake City's watersheds.

I strongly believe now is the right time to protect additional eligible wilderness areas due to growing development pressures within the Wasatch Mountain watershed areas; population growth projections and resulting increased water supply demand in the Salt Lake Valley; and projected impacts to western water supplies due to climate change.

Collaborative Approach to Proposed Legislation

The Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act of 2010 is the result of more than a year of intensive collaboration among government agencies, ski resorts, and environmental organizations. I believe the proposed legislation represents and balances Salt Lake City's local resources and various uses of the Wasatch Mountains.

Salt Lake City participated in this collaboration with the goal of long-term watershed protection through wilderness designation. This collaborative process was not easy, and all interests ultimately compromised something from their original visions. However, I commend Congressman Matheson for pursuing this collaboration as this approach ensures long-term watershed protection through wilderness legislation.

Of particular note, the establishment of Special Management Areas outlined in HR 5009 reflects a compromise. These areas were originally envisioned as wilderness by Salt Lake City and the environmental community. After intensive dialogue, the Special Management Areas are supported by Salt Lake City and environmental organizations to accommodate the existing helicopter skiing special use permit while managing all other aspects of these areas as wilderness. Similarly, the existing proposed wilderness areas avoid popular mountain bike trails. The land exchange facilitates ski area expansion and benefits watershed protection by exchanging private lands under threat of development in the watershed into Forest Service ownership and within Wilderness and Special Management Areas.

A Secure Water Supply for the Future

Settled by pioneers in the mid-1800s, surface water runoff from the Wasatch Mountains has been the primary source of water for the valley communities. These mountains rise to more than 11,000 feet above mean sea level and act as a catcher's mitt for the storm systems that cross the dry desert to the west, blanketing them with hundreds of inches of snow each winter. This

mountain snowpack is the primary storage for 60 percent of the drinking water supply to Salt Lake City and several other Salt Lake Valley communities.

To underestimate the importance of these watersheds to the arid environment of the Salt Lake Valley would be unwise. This high-quality runoff requires minimal treatment before it is distributed and minimizes public health risks posed by source water contamination. In addition, drinking water remains affordable by minimizing treatment costs associated with chemical and energy use.

Particularly unique among western water supplies is the close proximity of the communities that rely on the water to the Wasatch Mountain watersheds. This minimizes energy use in the transmission of water to the public and reduces the embedded energy in our water supply. Faced with regional climate change impacts on western water supplies and reoccurring drought periods, further protection of our local water sources will ensure our community's self-reliance.

As our population continues to grow, so does our demand for water. The Utah Governor's Office of Planning and Budget projects that Salt Lake County's population of one million people will increase by an additional 400,000 by 2030, and will double by 2060. The proximity of clean water from the Wasatch watersheds to the Salt Lake Valley facilitates this development, and is critical to accommodate this significant projection of population growth.

Watershed Stewardship

For decades, Salt Lake City Public Utilities has been the wise steward of 195 square miles of watershed, conducting studies and adopting protective policies and regulations in order to sustain high-quality water for both the Salt Lake City and surrounding service areas, such as Sandy City, and the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District.

Salt Lake City's stewardship relies on a partnership with the US Forest Service that has spanned more than a century. About 80 percent of the Salt Lake City watershed area is federal land managed by the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. These lands were incorporated into the National Forest System in 1904. In 1905, Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot met with Salt Lake City officials to stress the importance of the partnership between the US Forest Service and Salt Lake City to protect the city's watershed areas. Mr. Pinchot also visited the Big Cottonwood Canyon watershed, promising federal aid for watershed protection. The current forest plan for this area specifically prescribes protective watershed management, while recognizing the difficulties of managing these lands under the existing framework of watershed protection with increasing development pressures.

Benefits of Watershed Protection Under Wilderness Designation

Research and studies have shown the linkages between the development activities occurring in watersheds and resulting degradation of water quality and supply. Development leads to bacteriological contamination sediment loading and further degrades water quality. Pollutants can be washed from parking lots and roads. Furthermore, development increases impermeable and semi-impermeable areas, which affects soil absorption, increases runoff rates, and elevates

the risk of flooding. Increased development disrupts and segments habitat areas, affects wilderness qualities, compromises ecosystem health, and ultimately damages the watershed.

Even with the intensive watershed stewardship programs and policies that are in place and will continue, and the positive partnership between Salt Lake City and the US Forest Service, we are experiencing more pressure for more types of development. When considered cumulatively, this additional development threatens to degrade the City's watershed areas. The expanding development pressure within the City's watershed areas also diverts scarce resources from both Salt Lake City and the Forest Service since both agencies must constantly evaluate and respond to these pressures. Salt Lake City is also deeply concerned that climate change impacts will disrupt the hydrologic cycle in our area, and in turn, place even more pressure on the health of the watershed areas.

For decades under good leadership in Salt Lake City and the Forest Service, we have successfully taken the conservative approach to watershed protection: control the amount and types of human activities, keeping human exposure to water courses to a minimum, and carefully mitigate any development in the Wasatch Canyons. In some parts of the country, watersheds have been off-limits to human use. We've allowed some use, in fact a lot of use, but we've carefully controlled and monitored that use to protect our drinking water.

Inclusion of the additional proposed areas within the Wilderness Preservation System and Special Management Areas of the legislation will significantly limit both the pressures and the resulting impacts of human development within our watershed areas. We believe this will (1) avoid watershed degradation from additional development; (2) provide more opportunities for the ecosystems within our watershed areas to adapt to climate change impacts; and (3) help Salt Lake City and the Forest Service focus resources on other watershed stewardship and resilience programs as we face growing populations, water demand, and climate change impacts.

Recreation, Aesthetic, and Wildlife Benefits

Although Salt Lake City's primary purpose in this legislation is to provide more protection to its watershed areas, we also acknowledge and wholeheartedly support the numerous other benefits of the Wilderness and Special Management Area designations.

The Wasatch Mountains are cherished for their rugged beauty and recreational opportunities. This legislation preserves thousands of acres that are enjoyed today for their wilderness qualities. These mountains are also home to a variety of habitat areas, including State Sensitive Habitat. Because of the geography and other physiological characteristics of these mountains, these environments are diverse, and include habitat such as lower elevation scrub oak and sage brush, fragile high alpine wetlands, meandering riparian corridors, and stands of aspen and conifer forests. This variety of habitat area allows broad biodiversity. The lands that are proposed to be protected will additionally provide critical landscape-scale protection to these habitat areas, allowing opportunities for better adaptation of wildlife to changing environmental conditions such as climate change or extended drought.

Perhaps the greatest benefit we can leave future generations beyond a stable, secure water supply is a backyard wilderness for our urban population where the opportunity for solitude in the mountains is preserved. I marvel on every outing that we can all enjoy a wilderness experience so close to our urban dwellings. As the population continues to grow, those experiences in our Wasatch Mountains will assuredly become ever more valuable.

Legislation Overview and Intention

The Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act will add more than 26,000 acres of wilderness and special management areas to the more than 56,000 acres of wilderness that currently exist above the Salt Lake Valley. Much of the proposed wilderness and special management area is within watersheds that are current and future planned sources of the Salt Lake Valley's drinking water supply. In combination, the existing wilderness areas and the lands included in this legislation will provide landscape-scale watershed and habitat protections. In addition, these lands have wilderness qualities as outlined in the 1964 Wilderness Act.

Given the continuing and expanding pressures to increase development and uses of the federal lands within the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, it is my strong opinion that this scale of preservation is necessary to ensure the continuation of our high-quality water supply to a growing population and to protect existing wilderness qualities. This protection will provide better opportunities for the watersheds to adapt to challenges such as climate change and drought. In short, I view the Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act as a significant action to ensure the long term sustainability and resiliency of the natural resources relied upon by the Salt Lake Valley.

The Revised Forest Plan for the Wasatch-Cache National Forest was published in February 2003 after several years of analysis and public process. The Central Wasatch Management Area was designated in the Forest Plan and includes the seven major canyons that rise up from the Salt Lake Valley, including much of the land that is proposed as wilderness and special management area in this legislation. The management goal of the Central Wasatch Management Area is described in the 2003 Revised Forest Plan:

The underlying premise of resource management in this Management Area is the need to provide long-term, high quality culinary water to the large urban population of the Salt Lake Valley. Salt Lake City owns all or the largest percentage of water rights in each of the Wasatch Canyons... and has congressionally delegated authority to protect the water supply. Congress also directed the Forest Service to administer designated watersheds in cooperation with Salt Lake City for the purpose of storing, conserving and protecting water from pollution. Providing quality recreation opportunities within the framework of watershed protection will be an increasing challenge as the Wasatch Front population and national and international destination use of the area continues to grow. Continued coordination and cooperation among federal, state, and local government agencies, residents, businesses, and the recreating public will be imperative in order to meet these growing demands.

As noted in the 2003 Revised Forest Plan, there are significant challenges to continue to protect these lands in light of the growing pressures for more use and development in the watershed areas. The intense pressures for more development in the watersheds are of concern. Wilderness designation reflected in this bill provides our best assurance to protect the health of our watersheds and the integrity of the natural qualities of our mountains.

Salt Lake City and the Wasatch-Cache National Forest have worked together for more than a century to manage the culinary watersheds to improve and sustain water quality and supply. The underlying premise of management for the Central Wasatch Management Area as stated in the 2003 Forest Plan reflects this relationship and the challenges facing our community to preserve and protect our essential water supply.

Our intention is to preserve and protect the long term health of the watershed in light of continuing pressures. As a City, we are concerned that the increases in development pressures may lead to future Forest Plan decisions that could present incremental and cumulative impacts to watershed health, or set a negative precedent for watershed protection.

Designation of Wilderness

Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak/Mount Aire Wilderness Area

The Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak/Mount Aire Wilderness Area would establish 7,759 acres of wilderness along the north side of Mill Creek Canyon and the southern drainage of Parleys Canyon. The Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak/Mount Aire Wilderness Area ranges in elevation of about 5,300 feet above mean sea level to over 8,000 feet above mean sea level. Two notable mountain peaks exist in this area: Grandeur Peak and Mount Aire.

This area encompasses a portion of Lamb's Canyon, a sub-watershed within the Parleys Canyon watershed that contributes to Salt Lake City's Mountain Dell Reservoir. The Parleys Canyon watershed provides about 10 percent of the drinking water to Salt Lake City's service area. The Mill Creek Canyon drainage is not currently a source for drinking water, but will be in the future to help meet projected Salt Lake Valley water supply demands. Salt Lake City owns a significant majority of the water rights in Mill Creek Canyon. The most recent water supply projections anticipate the Mill Creek watershed to be a water supply source in approximately 2025.

The boundary of the Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak/Mount Aire Wilderness Area is offset from the Pipeline Trail to allow for continued mountain biking and Mill Creek Canyon Road to allow for future utility and road maintenance and improvements.

Rocky Mountain Power, the regional electricity supplier, owns and maintains critical power transmission lines through Parleys Canyon to Summit County. Easements for these transmission lines exist along the northwestern boundary of the Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak/Mount Aire Wilderness Area. The wilderness boundary should be offset from these existing easements; every effort should be made to ensure continued access and maintenance of these critical transmission lines.

The Wasatch 100 footrace that occurs on an annual basis includes the Elbow Fork Trail from Lamb's Canyon to Mill Creek Canyon, which is within this wilderness area. Given the short distance traveled through this wilderness area and the relatively small number of people participating, this race does not have significant watershed or environmental impact and the race should be permitted to continue. Precedence for this can be found in legislation allowing similar footraces to continue through portions of designated wilderness, including the Western States 100 in California and the Hard Rock 100 in Colorado.

Mount Olympus Wilderness Addition and Bear Trap Wilderness Area

The Mount Olympus Wilderness Addition would add 813 acres to the existing 15,300 acre Mount Olympus Wilderness Area, established in 1984 by the Utah Wilderness Act. The Bear Trap Wilderness Area is comprised of 2,342 acres. For our intent and purposes, the Mount Olympus Wilderness Addition and Bear Trap Wilderness Area are contiguous, but they are separated by the Mill D North Trail. The Mill D North Trail was excluded from wilderness designation because it has long been used, and is still actively used, by the mountain bike community as an important access and connection to the Wasatch Crest and Upper Mill Creek trails. This network of well-constructed trails, including the Mill D North Trail, is used by cyclists and hikers, and is highly valued by our local mountain biking community.

In combination, the existing Mount Olympus Wilderness Area, the Mount Olympus Wilderness Addition, and the Bear Trap Wilderness Area protect the north drainage of the Big Cottonwood Canyon watershed. This watershed provides 22 to 24 percent of the drinking water to Salt Lake City's service area. This large expanse of land ranges in elevation from about 6,000 feet to more than 10,000 feet above mean sea level and contains many diverse environments; including aquatic, riparian, wetland, and various forest habitats.

The boundary of the Mount Olympus Wilderness Addition is offset from the Desolation Trail and the Wasatch Crest Trail to allow for continued mountain biking; and Big Cottonwood Canyon Road to allow for road and utility maintenance and improvements. These include maintenance and improvements to existing sewer, water, and electricity infrastructure. The eastern boundary of the Bear Trap Wilderness Area is offset from the canyon's eastern ridgeline, representing a compromise made with Solitude ski resort during the collaborative process.

A handful of small water supply systems in the Big Cottonwood Canyon communities have their water sources located within the Mount Olympus Wilderness Addition and the Bear Trap Wilderness Area. The pipelines extending from these water sources are periodically maintained by the system owners and the existing access and maintenance of these water sources and pipelines should be permitted to continue.

Lone Peak Wilderness Addition

The Lone Peak Wilderness Addition would add 4,427 acres of land to the 30,000 acre Lone Peak Wilderness Area. The existing Lone Peak Wilderness Area includes the southern drainage of the Little Cottonwood Canyon watershed, as well as areas outside the watershed in American

Fork Canyon. The Little Cottonwood Canyon watershed provides 12 to 14 percent of the drinking water to Salt Lake City's service area. This legislation adds White Pine Canyon, sub-drainage of the Little Cottonwood Canyon watershed, to the Lone Peak Wilderness Area. There have been decades of conflict over White Pine Canyon between advocates for helicopter skiing, ski area expansion, and preservation of wilderness qualities. White Pine Canyon is currently within the helicopter skiing special use permit, and the canyon's ridgelines and interior are used for skier drop-off and pick-up by helicopters. Although the legislation will not allow helicopter landings in the canyon's interior, the intention is to offset the ridgeline of the wilderness boundary to allow for ridgeline landing. The inclusion of White Pine Canyon in the Wilderness Preservation System reflects a balance of compromises over allowance of land exchanges and special management areas made by all involved in the collaborative process.

White Pine Reservoir is located in the interior of White Pine Canyon. The reservoir is used to store irrigation water supply for Salt Lake Valley irrigation water users. The dam and reservoir are periodically accessed by the private irrigation company to conduct necessary maintenance. This access and maintenance activity should continue to be permitted.

The northern boundary of the Lone Peak Wilderness Addition allows for road and utility maintenance and improvements.

Designation of Special Management Areas

The designation of Heliskiing Special Management Areas reflects a compromise among several interests in the collaborative process for this legislation. Although Salt Lake City would prefer wilderness designation, we are reluctant to impact the helicopter skiing business by removing its permitted area through wilderness designation. Much discussion was generated regarding options, including grandfathering the permit into wilderness areas and redrawing wilderness boundaries. The best option, which was suggested by Wasatch Powderbird Guides, the heliski operator, is the Heliskiing Special Management Areas. The special management area option was also used in the San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act (Rep. John Salazar, HR 3914) for the Sheep Creek Mountain Special Management Area. The special management areas in the Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act would provide strong watershed protections by protecting wilderness qualities, and through this management, would allow for the inclusion of these lands into the Wilderness Preservation System in the future should the helicopter skiing permit cease. The following special management areas are included in the legislation:

- 1,275 acres adjacent to the Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak Wilderness Area in Mill Creek Canyon and the Lamb's Canyon sub-drainage of the Parleys Canyon watershed.
- 1,957 acres adjacent to Mt. Olympus Wilderness in areas of Mill Creek Canyon.
- 5,835 acres adjacent to Twin Peaks Wilderness, including critical watershed encompassing Mineral Fork, Cardiff Fork and Days Fork drainages in Big Cottonwood Canyon.
- 1,413-acres in the Silver Creek Canyon drainage in American Fork Canyon.

The eastern boundary of the 5,835 acre special management area adjacent to the existing Twin Peaks Wilderness reflects a compromise with Solitude ski resort; the original proposed

boundary included the drainage west and adjacent to the existing Solitude Special Use Permit Area. Additionally, the boundaries of this special management area are offset from Big Cottonwood Canyon Road to allow for road and utility maintenance and improvements. Access to and maintenance of the water source and infrastructure associated with the small water supply system serving the community at the mouth of Cardiff Fork should continue to be permitted within this special management area.

Land Exchanges

This legislation facilitates a land exchange that will place hundreds of acres of land within Salt Lake City's watershed owned by Snowbird ski resort into public ownership and wilderness and special management areas. In exchange, Snowbird ski resort will receive land along the saddle between the East and West American Fork Twin Peaks and within American Fork Canyon. It is our understanding that Snowbird ski resort intends to construct a tram to the saddle between the American Fork Twin Peaks, accessing additional terrain in American Fork Canyon, constituting an expansion of its ski area. The area of ski terrain expansion is outside of Salt Lake City's watershed.

Given Snowbird's intention with its received land in the exchange, and the balance of protection of wilderness qualities and watershed protection we are seeking in this legislation, we strongly feel that several conditions in the exchange should be honored:

- 1) Snowbird must give all of its holdings in the Flagstaff Area of Little Cottonwood Canyon to public ownership.
- 2) The land exchanges in the Flagstaff Area of Little Cottonwood Canyon will be placed in Special Management Area, specifically prohibiting ski area expansion.
- 3) To protect the Town of Alta, the Flagstaff Special Management Area will allow for avalanche control, including military artillery, active in-situ devices, and passive avalanche control structures.
- 4) Snowbird must give its holdings in White Pine Canyon to public ownership; those lands would become part of the Lone Peak Wilderness.
- 5) Snowbird must give its holdings in Cardiff Fork Canyon to public ownership.

Avalanche Control and the Town of Alta

It is our strong opinion that special attention should be given to avalanche risk and control in the avalanche-prone, south-facing areas above the Town of Alta, from Mount Superior on the western edge of the Town of Alta, to Grizzly Gulch along its eastern edge. The Town of Alta, along with the US Forest Service, Utah Department of Transportation, and Alta Ski Lifts Company have worked for decades to provide safety for Little Cottonwood Canyon Road (State Route 210) and for the inhabited structures that exist within the avalanche run-out zones.

Currently, avalanche risk in the areas above the Town of Alta is controlled by the Utah Department of Transportation, using military artillery. For various reasons, the future use of military artillery may not be sustainable. We feel that the Town of Alta should be supported in

conducting a feasibility study of options for avalanche control, and in future funding for implementation.

Ski area compaction of the areas above the Town of Alta has been cited as one option to reduce avalanche hazards in Utah Department of Transportation's 2006 *Little Cottonwood Road SR 210 Transportation Study*. This study states:

Compaction of the snow cover by skiing is increasing due to a rise in ski touring on the south facing slopes above Alta. Compaction reduces the likelihood of large deep slab avalanches by mixing and strengthening snow layers. Fewer deep avalanches mean a reduced risk to the highway and to buildings in the Town of Alta. Alta Ski Lifts is studying its expansion options, and one option includes new ski lifts on the south-facing slopes above Alta Village. This could cause widespread skier compaction, thereby decreasing the risk of large destructive avalanches at Alta. Ski lifts would also provide access to the avalanche starting zones for control teams, reducing the need for artillery rounds fired from Peruvian Ridge. Shrapnel from artillery would no longer be a factor. It should be understood that even with significant skier compaction of the avalanche paths above the Town of Alta, large avalanches will, on occasion, still occur. Although they will be much less frequent than under current conditions, the road between East Hellgate and Grizzly as well as numerous buildings in the Town of Alta, will still be threatened.

Ski area expansion in this area would have negative effects on watershed and would significantly impact other public uses of this area, specifically backcountry use and access. Due to the negative impacts of ski area expansion within the watershed areas, we do not support ski area expansion on the south-facing slopes above the Town of Alta. In addition the avalanche control benefits of ski area expansion in this area have not been fully evaluated. In fact, ski area expansion and resulting skier compaction will not eliminate the need for other active and passive avalanche control strategies to be implemented to protect buildings and the road.

The Town of Alta and Alta Ski Lifts have long been important partners with Salt Lake City on numerous watershed management policies, processes and projects. Given our long and supportive relationship, and our desire to ensure public safety issues are addressed, we do wish to be supportive in working with the Alta community in its effort to develop a comprehensive avalanche control strategy. We also strongly encourage federal support to conduct an avalanche control feasibility study and implementation program to ensure the safety and viability of the Alta community.

Conclusion

The additional 26,000 acres of protection afforded by this proposed legislation will ensure future generations of Salt Lake City and Salt Lake Valley residents continue to have access to high-quality water supply. Protection of our watersheds is critical for our future health and security, particularly as we face combined challenges due to population growth, increased water demand, climate change, and drought.

As a community, we also recognize other advantages to the proposed Wilderness and Special Management Area protections that include significant recreation, aesthetic, and wildlife benefits.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony to the Committee.