



Faith and the Land: A Call for Wilderness Stewardship

United by a shared belief in the spiritual importance of wilderness, religious leaders and members of 11 different Utah faith traditions have come together to call on elected leaders to recognize the spiritual value of Utah's wilderness heritage and to support the preservation of the state's remaining wild lands. We represent members of the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Islamic, Jewish, Latter-day Saint, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Unitarian Universalist and United Church of Christ faith communities in Utah.

Why Utah's wilderness landscapes deserve protection

During dialogues and in personal statements written by members of our diverse faith communities, members of our congregations say that Utah's wild lands are vital to their spiritual inspiration, renewal and nourishment. For many people of faith, wilderness provides a place of worship and reflection. The astounding beauty, utter vastness, and enveloping silence of wild places awakens a sense of awe and connects people to something larger than themselves.

Why meaningful protection is needed for Utah's wild lands

To put it in biblical terms, "God isn't making any more wilderness." Unless we act to preserve Utah's remaining wild places, they will continue to be diminished over time. Utah has less land protected as designated Wilderness than any other intermountain state – about 1,157,000 acres, or only 2% of the state's 54 million acres. And of the nearly 23 million acres managed by the BLM, only around 260,000 acres have been designated by Congress as Wilderness. Yet an on-the-ground inventory completed by Utah citizens shows that approximately 9 ½ million acres of the nearly 23 million acres of BLM managed public land in Utah remain wild and essentially undisturbed by significant human encroachments. Furthermore, wherever BLM has re-inventoried public lands for wilderness values, the agency has verified the citizens' findings the vast majority of the time. If we want to provide our children with the opportunity to experience the beauty, vastness and wonder of Utah's wild places as we have, we need to provide more meaningful protection for Utah's wilderness heritage.

What wilderness designation allows:

- Hiking, camping, horseback riding, x-country skiing, canoeing, rafting, mountaineering and rock climbing, wildlife viewing, photography, hunting and fishing are allowed in designated wilderness.
- Grazing is allowed in designated wilderness areas and even motorized wheelchairs are allowed.
- Fires, insects and diseases may be controlled in wilderness areas. The Wilderness Act states that "such measures may be taken as necessary in the control of fire, insects and diseases."
- Wilderness designations respect private property rights. Only federal land may be designated as wilderness and property owners must be assured adequate access to their land.

Finally, protecting Utah's wilderness heritage does not prevent the development of significant amounts of oil and gas. Only a fraction of Utah's oil and gas resources lies beneath the 9 ½ million acres of public lands identified by the "citizens' inventory" as deserving of wilderness protection -- less than 4 weeks of natural gas and roughly 4 days of oil at current consumption levels.¹ Protecting Utah's wilderness heritage still allows robust energy development in Utah on lands not designated as Wilderness.

¹ Mark Lemkin, *An Analysis of Utah Oil and Gas Production, Leasing and Future Resources*, [http://redrockheritage.org/oilandgas1/\(April 10, 2007\)](http://redrockheritage.org/oilandgas1/(April%2010,2007).).