

Mr. Hinchey's Statement for the October 14, 2008 Utah RMP Press Teleconference

Utah's redrock wilderness is a uniquely special place. I understand this, just as my friend the late Wayne Owens understood it when he first introduced America's Red Rock Wilderness Act in 1989. When Congressman Owens left the House of Representatives, he asked me to continue to fight for the land that he so valiantly championed, and for the last 15 years I have aimed to protect Utah's canyons and redrock plateaus as a tribute to him and to the land.

I have taken a keen interest in how these public lands have been managed and mismanaged as the case may be, and have witnessed a growing appreciation from citizens across the country for the wild, undeveloped landscapes of Utah's public lands. Even the Bureau of Land Management, the agency that is now entrusted to manage these lands for the benefit of current and future generations, recognizes that in addition to the existing Wilderness Study Areas, than an additional 3 million acres under review in these decisions qualify for wilderness designation. In other words, the Bureau has now acknowledged that nearly 5 million acres, or 87% of the lands in America's Redrock Wilderness Act in the areas under review in these six plans, meet the criteria required by the 1964 Wilderness Act.

Obviously, all of these lands should have been designated Wilderness Study Areas 20 years ago when the agency conducted its initial wilderness inventory in Utah, but the Bureau somehow overlooked these 3 million acres of outstanding wilderness lands. Inexplicably, given that the agency has finally admitted that these additional lands have wilderness values, it has decided **not** to manage these lands to preserve these unique, and irreplaceable values so that Congress can eventually and ultimately decide what lands merit permanent protection under the Wilderness Act.

These six Resource Management Plans, which have been rushed through the public process by a desperate Bush Administration, will place at risk 3 million acres of recognized redrock wilderness by blanketing these special places with thousands of miles off-road vehicle routes, and oil and gas drill rigs, sludge pits and other infrastructure required for industrial development. The Bush Administration's BLM has abdicated its duty to manage these public lands for multiple uses, including wilderness, and has ignored its own and other federal agencies' scientific data that should have guided its decisions. Even the EPA has expressed its concern with these land management decisions due to the BLM's off-road vehicle route designation decisions, air quality analysis deficiencies, and the failure to take into account the effects of climate change in these long-term management decisions.

Over the past year, I have worked with over one-hundred Members of Congress in an effort to get the Bureau of Land Management to address the deficiencies in these proposed Utah plans. We have also requested that the agency adequately protect and manage the nearly 3 million acres of recently-identified roadless lands, and that the Bureau brief members of Congress before issuing the final decisions for these six plans. The BLM has failed to respond to our requests so far. Examining the final plans, it is

clear that the BLM failed to make reasonable, balanced decisions, which would have protected the agency-identified roadless areas. Specifically:

- **Were the BLM to protect all of the nearly 3 million acres of agency-identified roadless areas from off-road vehicle use and the associated damages from such use, 91% of the 20,000 miles of motor vehicle routes proposed in these plans would remain open to motor vehicle use – providing ample access and off-road vehicle recreation opportunities.**
- **Similarly, if the BLM would protect all of the nearly 3 million acres of agency-identified roadless areas from energy exploitation, still 86% of the proposed oil and gas wells could still be drilled.**

The Bureau has stated that it will issue final decisions on these plans in the coming days before the Bush Administration expires. For that reason I have submitted letters of protest for each of these plans and will continue to bring attention to the deficient policies of this agency. I will not give up until this land is protected – permanently. I will urge the next Administration to take steps to fix these horrible plans, and I will vigorously pursue passage of America's Redrock Wilderness Act, in order to permanently protect the last remaining wild lands in Utah.