

Thank you for being here today. My name is **Erin Gilmore** and I am the pastor of Holladay United Church of Christ. We are gathered here in the rotunda of the State Capitol today as people of faith who feel compelled to speak on behalf of Utah's wild lands and to call our elected leaders at all levels in Utah to help provide meaningful protection today for these precious lands. We come today with 250 statements from people representing 11 different faith communities and one interfaith community about why wilderness is important to us spiritually. These statements were gathered at Wilderness Stewardship events over this past fall and winter at various places of worship including: Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Islamic, Jewish, Latter-day Saints, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Unitarian Universalist and United Church of Christ and an interfaith event in Vernal, Utah. These events were a continuation of the Faith and Land Initiative - a coalition of people from these same faith communities who, a little less than a year ago, released an interfaith statement entitled a Call for Wilderness Stewardship that summarizes why wilderness is important to us spiritually and why we are calling our elected leaders to protect Utah's wild lands.

We are here today because while we come from diverse communities of faith we share a common belief that we are called to be stewards of the land. We stand together today because we believe we can and we must protect the common ground that we share as Utahns. If we fail to protect our land today we don't get a do-over. We ask you today to put aside the political rhetoric, the special interests, and historical divisions and hear us as people united from across many walks of faith calling for meaningful protection of our common ground. We can't do it without you. We can do it together. Thank you for your time.

George Handley

This remarkable interfaith effort of over 250 people from 11 different faith communities represents an exceptional undertaking for two reasons: first, it shows that a vital source of our spiritual health and renewal is access to wilderness; second, it shows that our shared love and care for wilderness unifies an extraordinary diversity of people in Utah. Our beliefs might differ, but our values harmonize on this essential point: wilderness teaches us humility, wonder, respect, and gratitude for the Creator. Wild beauty has a special quality: its joys are spiritually meaningful because they are unexpected, like grace. Wild beauty teaches us about our small but important place in a diverse, complex, and interdependent world and inspires the moral value of self-restraint. We are on a clear path to privatize, develop, and ruin every last wild and beautiful place in America. As the great LDS thinker, Hugh Nibley, once said, “the appreciation of beauty is nothing less than the key to survival.” When we get to the point where beauty is dispensable, we are in trouble. Wild beauty is a gift that requires our best stewardship.

It is human arrogance, however, to assume that stewardship gives us license to do as we please to nature or to act in short-term interest only. It is wrong to assume that nature always needs human development and improvement in order to have value. I like to remember that the Bible, for example, teaches that God used the words “good” and “very good,” to describe a world not yet inhabited by humans. I also like to remember that He commanded Adam and Eve to “dress” the garden but also to “keep” it and “take good care” of it. Of course, there is a place for gardening, extracting needed resources, and developing land. But if we assume we can use up nature without limitations, we will not

only ruin its remaining wild beauty, but we will degrade ourselves. We live in an age of rapid growth and aesthetic impoverishment. To protect wilderness requires the highest principles of love, gratitude, modesty, humility, and self-sacrifice and provides more opportunities for more people to derive spiritual benefits from enjoying the wilderness responsibly.

As these people have witnessed, wilderness enhances spiritual and physical health and the bonds of family and community. We endanger our health and those bonds if we stand aside and allow continued unrestricted use of ATVs, unhampered development, fossil fuel extraction, and environmental degradation. To get serious about preserving wilderness is to get serious about living a more reverent and gentle life. We are here today to call upon our elected leaders to work with us to make meaningful progress in protecting Utah's public and shared heritage of extraordinary wild lands.

I'm **Stephen Trimble**, and I'm a member of Utah's Jewish Reconstructionist congregation Chavurah B'Yachad.

The Faith and the Land conversations *have* found neglected and elusive common ground. We *have* tapped into shared mainstream values in Utah: citizens from all walks of life and faith traditions passionately and sincerely want their grandchildren to have the same liberty to visit and explore untrammelled wilderness and to leave it as they find it for *their* grandchildren.

The Interfaith Statement on Wilderness breaks down old boundaries and reveals our shared ethic: we Utahns love our wild deserts and canyons and mountains and rivers.

The only way our future relations will be able to meet this basic human need for wild country is if we take meaningful action to preserve public wildlands. This means mapping and evaluating Utah's public lands for wilderness character and acting to protect, *truly protect*, those lands from impairment.

We have already completed the first task. The Citizens' Inventory of Utah wilderness found that over 9 million acres of public land in Utah retain wilderness character. Where the Bureau of Land Management has looked at the same lands mapped by these dozens of citizen volunteers, the agency tally verifies the citizen's inventory nearly 90 percent of the time. This is important: the BLM's own scientists acknowledge the value and scale of the citizen's inventory that forms the factual backbone of America's Redrock Wilderness Act.

These easels that surround us display handwritten and heartfelt pleas from the citizens of Utah asking that you, our elected officials, listen; that you be true stewards of the public trust; and that you act from our shared understanding of common sense and common values.

These statements point out threats to Utah's wildlands. Without legislative and administrative action to protect Utah's remaining wildlands, these threats will degrade and diminish our wilderness heritage.

Designating wilderness to preserve an increasingly scarce experience will not "lock up" the land. Nearly three-fourths of the ground in America's Redrock Wilderness Act lies within one mile of roads. Grazing, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, hiking,

rafting—wilderness allows for them all, and wilderness legislation recognizes pre-existing private property rights, as well. The vast majority of Utah’s significant energy reserves lies outside the boundaries of proposed wilderness. Tens of thousands of miles of ORV routes remain accessible outside proposed wilderness.

Wilderness protection grows from an ethical commitment to justice. Indeed, the most eloquent writer to ever articulate the American land ethic, Aldo Leopold, uses words that Utah citizens of faith find familiar. Leopold asks us to judge the rightness of our choices by whether they preserve integrity, stability, and beauty—values we all wish to perpetuate. Wilderness protection is intimately intertwined with living ethically, living mindfully, living with restraint.

It turns out, there is a theological base to wilderness politics—and it’s a base that unites rather than divides. We are all allies. Let’s make democracy work once again. Let’s take wise action for the future, together.

My name is **Dede Carpenter** and I am a member of Community of Grace Presbyterian Church in Sandy.

Fifteen months ago the Faith & The Land dialogue was just another upcoming event on my church calendar. As a leader of Adult and Family ministries I had been asked if members of my congregation would be willing to address the question, Is Wilderness important to you spiritually?

I knew **my** answer...you see I had been drawn to Salt Lake by the beauty of the Wasatch Mountains almost thirty seven years ago and the outdoors is a thread woven through the best of my childhood memories...adventures that began in a hometown with

an amazing lake, gorges and waterfalls... and continued through my teenage years with family camping trips; exploring the West's national parks and Canadian wilderness.

In awe of the diversity and vast landscapes of the West I also connected with something more intangible....God's presence seemed closer to me in the wilderness.

Is Wilderness important to me spiritually?

Definitely, yes....

My experience and answer is not unique....

It was the common ground of participants in our Faith & The Land dialogue last January; a collection of thoughts and experiences visible in the posters presented today.

After acknowledging the value of wilderness....What is the next step?

My faith directs me to take what I call the LESA approach.

Listen for God's word for you

Educate yourself....

Share your voice...

Act with compassion...

Since January 2009 I have continued to listen..... I began educating myself on wilderness issues specific to Utah....I have shared my voice with larger interfaith groups dialoguing on wilderness and the need for protection.....I have called and written Congressmen.....

I am here today to ask Utah representatives to listen to the **call for action** coming from the people represented here today; a diverse group from many faith traditions who found a common ground in the wilderness.

It is with one voice that we call upon our representatives to read these comments

that underscore the need for protecting wilderness lands.

It is with one voice that we ask our representatives to share their stories and dialogue with others.

...And with one voice we ask for meaningful protection of Utah wilderness areas; beginning with the Citizen's inventory of 9.4 million acres.....

Our call is a call for compassionate action that honors creation and protects the irreplaceable gift of wilderness for future generations

Thank you