

UTAH LEADERS LISTEN TO SOME WILD TALK

Brent Israelsen

The Deseret News. Salt Lake City, Utah: April 15, 1995. pg. B.1.

Copyright The Deseret News April 15, 1995

The governor and congressional delegation ventured into rural Utah this week to gather the public's views on what a Utah wilderness bill should look like.

Their effort might well be called Herculean - especially if Hercules was any kind of a masochist. In addition to the usual, passion-charged rhetoric, the politicians got an earful of direct, sometimes personal, criticism of their wilderness-designation process, their motives and even their campaign finances.

In general, though, wilderness advocates painted a portrait of a bleak future if huge chunks of U.S. Bureau of Land Management land in Utah are not set aside as federally protected wilderness.

Opponents described an equally bleak world if huge chunks of land are set aside.

The comments came during a series of regional meetings, which conclude today in Salt Lake City. The meetings are for gathering input on recommendations submitted to the governor two weeks ago by rural county commissioners affected by wilderness proposals.

Those recommendations call for about 1 million acres of wilderness - roughly one-half what the BLM has recommended and less than one-fifth of what environmental groups want.

Having complained all along that the counties have been given too much power in the wilds debate, environmentalists packed the rural meetings this week to express their displeasure.

Sen. Bob Bennett, R-Utah, assured critics, however, that the counties' recommendations are only one tool to be used in drafting a wilderness bill, which the delegation hopes to introduce in Congress by June 1.

"If we can't arrive at some consensus, there may be several bills introduced by this delegation," Bennett said.

Here's a summary of the meetings held Thursday in Price and Moab, and Friday in Cedar City and Richfield:

Price

In Price, Gov. Mike Leavitt, Rep. Enid Waldholtz and Rep. Bill Orton heard testimony relating to wilderness proposals in Uintah, Carbon and Emery counties, which are home to Desolation Canyon, the Book Cliffs and the San Rafael region.

A huge majority of the 50 or so speakers expressed strong opposition to the Uintah and Emery commissioners' plans, which total 122,000 acres - about 1 million acres less than what environmental groups have proposed.

"Your proposal just stinks. It's terrible," said Gail Hoskisson, a Carbon County native now living in Salt Lake City.

But Uintah County Commissioner Lewis Vincent said his county cannot afford to set aside thousands of acres of wilderness.

"We want to see all our young people grow up and get an education and get a job so they can stay in Uintah County," he said.

Vernal resident Will Durrant criticized Uintah's exclusion of the White River. Making that area a wilderness, he said, "hardly consists of taking food out of babies' mouths or putting people out of work."

In Emery County, commissioners excluded hundreds of thousands of acres of land in the San Rafael Swell because of a nearby power plant, the area's potential for mineral extraction, conflicts with upstream water rights and because there are too many roads.

That rationale was chastised by many speakers, who said Emery County is looking for trivial excuses not to designate wilderness.

Several local residents, however, praised the county's efforts.

"We don't need any outside influence telling us how to take care of the land that is our future," said Emery City Mayor Gary Petty.

Carbon County's proposal for 85,000 acres of wilderness garnered high praise from environmentalists because it is 20,000 acres more than the BLM proposal.

Moab

In Moab, Waldholtz, Orton and Leavitt were joined by Bennett. Together, they listened to comments about wilderness recommendations proffered by Grand and San Juan counties.

More than 75 people spoke, most in favor of large wilderness designation.

Like Carbon County officials, the Grand County Council enjoyed the praise of wilderness supporters because Grand County recommended more than 200,000 acres of wilderness - about 10,000 more than the BLM proposal.

Some, however, thought Grand County's plan was a little short and should have included more **acres** in Labyrinth Canyon as well as Fisher Towers, which was excluded for the benefit of the film industry.

A handful of local, traditionally anti-wilderness residents criticized the county's proposal for going too far.

"I feel we've been sideswiped by the county council," said Moab resident Jimmie Walker, a former county commissioner.

Ray Tibbetts, also a former commissioner, criticized the council's proposal for locking up the southern Book Cliffs from future energy production.

San Juan County's recommendation for about 134,000 acres of wilderness (about 850,000 less than what environmentalists want) sustained significant opposition because it would exclude Grand Gulch and much of the Cedar Mesa area, which is rich in remnants of ancient Indian cultures.

Commissioner Bill Redd pleaded loudly for Congress to protect San Juan County's right to farm, mine and drill for oil.

"I would be very careful with how much of Utah's wealth we want to tie up," he said.

Most speakers at the meeting disagreed.

One of them was Midway, Wasatch County, resident Renee Bradshaw, who is part American Indian. She said she was offended by Redd's representation that Indians are opposed to wilderness.

"We have a moral obligation not to take more from our Earth than is prudent."

Cedar City

Utah's congressional delegation, along with Leavitt, heard wilderness proposals from four southern Utah county commissions and listened to concerned citizens at Southern Utah University Friday morning.

Hatch, Bennett, Orton and Waldholtz attended.

Views of those attending were divided, but much of the public comment favored the various

county commissions' recommendations.

The most drastic departure for the BLM recommendations came from the Kane County Commission, who suggested that the proposed wilderness designation be reduced from 221,033 acres to 47,092.

Commissioner Joe Judd said that Kane County chose four areas of the 15 on the list for further wilderness-designation study. The Kane County contingent showed slides of workers in Kane County who struggle to make a living. Judd said Kane County's economic base is nothing more than a tourist base and the county needs more jobs.

``We're not in love with a coal mine, but we've got to have something to meet our tax base other than to sell hamburgers, make beds, pump gas or clean toilets. There are some people who would like to have us do just that. I've been told by some environmentalists on the Wasatch Front that if you can't do that and make a living, maybe we just ought to go away. Well, we're not going to go away. There's only 5,000 plus of us and we are trying our best to just make a living," he said.

Judd said the mine in question would give the county 600 jobs that would provide the infrastructure the county needs to survive.

Judd said the 40 impacted acres wouldn't seriously affect the Kaiparowits area and would be mined for 100 years. He also pointed out that Kane County lost the Kaibab Lumber Sawmill and a uranium mine recently.

``We've lost 300 jobs in that little area," he said. ``Because they've taken that forest away from us."

Ed Hahne of Iron County said that the Spring Creek area, located above Kanarraville, is too small for the wilderness designation and that the designation would attract too many people who would trample and destroy the area.

Iron County Commissioners recommended that the Spring Creek area above Kannaraville not be included because that canyon is so small - 1,607 **acres** - and is needed for future water development for the small community south of Cedar City.

Washington County recommended 50,524 acres be designated wilderness, down from the BLM recommended acreage of 65,752. Most of the acreage the commission wanted dropped from possible wilderness designation was attached to future water development sites for the high-growth county.

Springdale residents spoke out in favor of wilderness because, as one speaker said, ``We support wilderness because wilderness supports us."

Richfield

Some 60 speakers paraded to the microphone at the wilderness hearing in Richfield Friday afternoon, with environmentalists outnumbering opponents 45 to 15.

Gov. Mike Leavitt and a congressional delegation, including Bennett, Waldholtz, Orton and Rep. Jim Hansen, R-Utah, presided at the hearing.

The hearing involved lands in Millard, Wayne and Beaver counties, with commissioners in the latter two strongly supporting ``no wilderness." They argued many areas in the BLM proposal failed to meet the criteria of the Wilderness Act.

``Wilderness, by its definition, will encourage impact on the land," said Beaver County Commissioner Chad Johnson.

Intensive studies in Wayne county show that ``there is already extensive wilderness disguised as parks and recreation," said Wayne County Commissioner Meeks Morrell.

On the environmental side, comments ranged from "wilderness is about a whole ecosystem and its preservation" to the scientific values of wilderness as related to endangered species and loss of habitat, former Utah State University professor Jack Spence said.

"We are talking about saving just a little bit of beauty," said Heidi McIntosh of Salt Lake City, a lawyer who works for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance.

One of the most adamant wilderness opponents, Newell Hales of Salina, said it would be no more ridiculous to designate Salt Lake City's State Street to 7200 South or San Francisco and New York as wilderness "than the proposals that I am hearing today."

Millard County commissioners have recommended 30,100 acres as wilderness designation, about one-third of the total proposed by the Bureau of Land Management, while the Utah Wilderness Coalition recommended 327,399 acres in that county.

"Who do the extreme environmentalists represent?" asked Millard County Commissioner Lana Moon. "They are not elected."

She extolled the value of minerals in proposed wilderness areas, claimed several businesses and industries would close if there could be no extraction of those resources.