

**Leavitt, Babbitt Sign Land Swap To Free Up Resources for Schools; School endowment could realize \$1 billion. Environmentalists praise action**

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Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt on Friday signed a peace treaty of sorts to end the decades-long Cold War over school trust lands locked within federal reserves.

The agreement -- a historic pact that could become a model for settling other public-land disputes -- was inked on the east lawn of the Governor's Mansion under a big, white canopy, with more than 200 state, county and federal officials in attendance.

With thunder crashing and rain pouring in torrents behind him, Babbitt called the agreement an ``extraordinary achievement" that will take care of Utah schoolchildren and ``God's creation," the natural environment.

The deal, which has roots in the administration of former Democratic Utah Gov. Scott M. Matheson, calls for the exchange of nearly all school trust lands trapped within the boundaries of Utah's national parks, monuments, forests and Indian reservations.

Totaling nearly 377,000 acres, the school trust lands will be exchanged for \$50 million cash from the U.S. Treasury and for about 139,000 acres of federal lands elsewhere that can be exploited for their commercial and mineral value. For example, the federal lands proposed for exchange contain \$13 million in unsold coal leases. Other federal lands proposed for state ownership are valuable for their real-estate potential: 33,000 acres near Lake Powell, 1,900 acres in Washington County and 3,000 acres near a ski resort in Cache County.

Leavitt estimated the exchange will be worth at least \$1 billion to the school endowment over the next 30 years. The endowment currently is worth \$200 million. Interest from the account goes toward education.

Utah's congressional delegation and state education leaders -- who in the past vilified President Clinton and Babbitt over the 1996 designation of the new Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument -- on Friday thanked Clinton and Babbitt. They hailed the agreement as a boon to the future of education.

The Babbitt-Leavitt pact on Friday also won the endorsement of former Utah First Lady Norma Matheson, an environmentalist, and the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA), a perennial opponent of Republican land initiatives in Utah.

To take effect, the Babbitt-Leavitt agreement requires an act of Congress. Rep. Jim Hansen, R-Utah, plans to introduce the agreement as a bill in the House next week, with a hearing as early as May 19.

While anti-Clinton Republicans in Congress could derail the bill, Babbitt said his biggest worry is that lawmakers will try to amend it or attach their own unrelated riders, bogging it down in endless debate.

If the bill passes, Utah's School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA), which manages trust lands in Utah, will drop one lawsuit it has pending against the Department of the Interior over a 1993 law that requires Interior to exchange school trust lands.

SITLA also will withdraw from another over the new national monument. The Utah Association of Counties, another plaintiff in the monument lawsuit, has not decided whether to withdraw.

#### THE SWAP: WHO GETS WHAT

Here is a summary of the land swap between Utah and the federal government. (A more detailed list can be found on The Tribune's online edition at [www.sltrib.com](http://www.sltrib.com)):

##### What the Feds Get

- 176,699 acres in the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument
- 80,000 acres in Utah national parks and recreation areas
- 47,480 acres in Navajo and Goshute Indian reservations
- 70,000 acres in Utah's national forests
- 2,560 acres of unusual Alton coal field tracts

##### What Utah Gets

- \$50 million cash
- \$13 million worth of unleased coal in Emery County
- 160 million tons of coal
- 185 billion cubic feet of natural gas
- Other minerals, including limestone, tar sands and oil and gas
- 139,000 acres of federal land and minerals in nine counties

