

July 10, 2013

The Honorable Rob Bishop  
123 Cannon Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bishop,

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide additional input into the Grand Bargain Land Exchange Initiative. This effort is an unprecedented opportunity to address many of the pressing issues regarding the responsible and appropriate use of public lands in eastern Utah.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) is a national non-profit conservation organization composed of families and individuals who live for the opportunity to experience traditional, nonmotorized hunting and fishing on backcountry public lands. BHA focuses on protecting quality wildlife habitat and clean water on public lands throughout the West.

By protecting quality habitat, sustainable populations of wildlife thrive. Without healthy numbers of wildlife, participation in hunting and fishing diminishes, resulting in these long-cherished traditions in Utah becoming frustrating and pointless. To ensure that the heritage and future of hunting and fishing on public land remain enriching, character-building pursuits, decision-makers and legislators must make wildlife habitat protection a priority.

Hunting and fishing, along with other outdoor recreation activities, also contribute enormously to the state's economy. Failing to protect the resources that support these activities would have negative consequences for many sectors, especially in rural communities that depend on sportsmen's dollars for a significant portion of their annual income.

In the following paragraphs, I have described BHA's priorities in regards to the Grand Bargain Land Exchange Initiative. Our priorities pertain not only to specific land areas, but also address management actions and jurisdictional land ownership patterns. We would support a land exchange that not only protects quality wildlife habitat, but also establishes areas of compatible resource development to support a diverse economic base for Utah.

Because healthy and sustainable populations of wildlife require a full range of connected habitat types, they thrive best in expansive areas of largely undisturbed landscapes. There is perhaps no other area in Utah that offers the opportunity to secure large blocks of prime wildlife habitat than the Book Cliffs-East Tavaputs Plateau area in Grand County. That is why this area has been called "the Serengeti" of the West. Within that region, an area of state-owned land comprising over 126,000 acres is referred to as the "Roadless Area." Because this area is remote, undeveloped, and its rugged terrain limits motorized access, it provides extraordinary wildlife habitat. For these reasons, it is BHA's top priority for protection in the Grand Bargain Land Exchange Initiative.

To remain at viable and sustainable numbers, the populations of big game that reside in this region also require connections and movement corridors to critical wintering habitat existing at lower elevations toward the east and southeast of the Roadless Area. Similarly, reducing the potential for habitat fragmentation resulting from conflicting land use mandates, along with the opportunity to improve management efficiency of

land management agencies, are priorities for BHA. These ownership patterns should be simplified to the greatest extent possible as land exchange proposals are formulated.

Specific land exchanges to accomplish these priorities should be negotiated in collaborative work sessions including representatives from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), the Utah School Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and citizen groups such as BHA, who recreate on these lands. A conceptual map demonstrating how these BHA priorities could be achieved is included as an attachment to this letter.

In addition to the Book Cliffs-EastTavaputs area, BHA supports land exchanges and permanent protection of wildlife habitat in other areas of eastern and southeastern Utah. Lands suitable for wilderness designation identified in county land use planning efforts by Emery County and Grand County, as well as for BLM Wilderness Study Areas (WSA's) in Carbon, Uintah, and San Juan Counties, should be protected from motorized intrusion that is well-documented to be detrimental to wildlife.

Areas where motorized activity is already extensive should be prioritized for that use. Similarly, potential conflicts between various outdoor recreation users could be minimized by identifying and prioritizing areas for specific uses, especially for those activities that have limited opportunities elsewhere.

Besides recommending specific lands for exchange and designating areas for wildlife habitat protection, BHA proposes that management prescriptions be implemented on exchange lands so that stipulations are in place to preclude uses detrimental or counter to the purpose for a given land exchange. For example, lands obtained through the exchange process for purposes of maintaining critical wintering habitat should not be jeopardized by activities that would hinder wildlife from accessing and using those lands.

Where areas of intensive development are proposed, measures to protect wildlife movement corridors and use of adjacent habitat should be established. The "Energy by Design" guidelines promoted by the Nature Conservancy provide a model that could help ensure that impacts to wildlife populations are minimized and short-term.

In summary, BHA remains dedicated to preserving high quality wildlife habitat on public land, and the hunting and fishing traditions that require access to those lands. We consider the Grand Bargain Land Exchange Initiative to be a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity to secure vital areas of wildlife habitat that might otherwise be lost forever. Acquiring and protecting these areas will help ensure that wildlife populations remain at sustainable levels so that wildlife-related recreation may provide meaningful and healthy experiences for present and future generations.

Sincerely,

Ken Theis, Utah Coordinator  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Enclosure : Referenced map to be mailed to Rep. Bishop's Washington, D.C. office