

The Public Lands Initiative

Summary and Section-by-Section

The Public Lands Initiative (PLI) is a locally-driven effort to bring resolution to some of the most challenging land disputes in the State of Utah. The initiative is rooted in the belief that conservation and economic development can coexist and make Utah a better place to live, work, and visit.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the 20 different sections of the draft legislation, known as the Utah Public Lands Initiative Act.

The PLI Region

The PLI Region covers 7 eastern Utah counties, encompassing approximately 18 million acres of federal land. Member of the Utah Congressional Delegation, local officials, and stakeholders have met over 1,200 times in an effort to craft a comprehensive land-use plan for the entire region.

PLI Process

Congressmen Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz launched PLI in February 2013. Since that time, more than 120 different stakeholders have submitted more than 65 detailed proposals regarding land management in eastern Utah. Altogether, their offices have held more than 1,200 meetings with local and tribal leaders, interested parties, and subject matter experts.

For more information, please visit www.UtahPLI.com.

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Division A – Conservation

The first half of the legislation covers land protection and conservation. In total, the Conservation portion of PLI would designate 4,335,377 acres of federal land and 301 miles of rivers.

Title I – Wilderness

PLI will create 41 wilderness areas covering 2,274,373 acres of federal land. Wilderness is the most restrictive federal land designation and ensures that rugged landscapes will remain intact for future generations to enjoy. PLI will more than quadruple the number of acres of wilderness designated within the counties.

Title II – National Conservation Areas

PLI creates 14 National Conservation Areas covering 1,835,085 acres of federal land. Like wilderness, NCAs offer protection to worthy landscapes found on federal land. But where NCAs differ from wilderness is that they offer greater flexibility for multiple-uses and opportunities for local involvement in the land management process.

Title III - Special Management Areas

PLI creates seven Special Management Areas covering 94,958 acres of federal land. SMA's are located on National Forest System lands and promote watershed management and offer similar protection and flexibility of National Conservation Areas.

Title IV – Arches National Park Expansion

The Delicate Arch, one of Utah's most recognizable landmarks, will be further protected under PLI. Arches National Park will be expanded by 19,255 acres, ensuring the area behind Delicate Arch remains untouched and protected.

Title V – Jurassic National Monument

The Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry is home to the largest concentration of Jurassic era dinosaur fossils in the world. With seasonal closures and limited resources at the current BLM site, a bottom-up process of local stakeholders determined that this site warrants National Monument status as part of the PLI legislative effort. This enhanced status will help to increase visitation and support the mission of this world-class, 867-acre area.

Title VI – Wild and Scenic River Designations

PLI will designate 301 miles of Utah rivers as wild, scenic and recreation. This equals the approximate distance between Salt Lake City and St. George.

Title VII – Ashley Creek Recreational and Special Management Area

Ashley Creek Recreational and Special Management area will facilitate all-season outdoor recreation and forest product development in the vast 110,839-acre area. Mineral development and extraction will be prohibited in order to promote and protect the outdoor recreation experience.

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Division B – Opportunity

The second half of the legislation covers recreation and economic development opportunities. In total, this section would provide for new recreation and economic development opportunities on 1,054,449 acres of land.

Title I – School Trust Land Consolidations

Utah's public education system is supported by a little known state agency called SITLA. SITLA's mission is to manage remote parcels of state land for the benefit of the state's education trust fund. PLI would consolidate roughly 336,441 acres of state land in locations that would maximize revenue for Utah's school kids.

Title IA – Book Cliffs Roadless Area

SITLA will also swap minerals in the Book Cliffs Roadless Area for more accessible minerals in the Uintah Basin. This swap will support the education trust fund while also providing for the 35,891 acre Book Cliffs Roadless Area to be protected and managed by the state of Utah for its scenic and wildlife values.

Title IB – Wilderness Release

PLI will release from temporary wilderness study status five different units totaling 80,797 acres. These lands do not merit wilderness status and will be returned to multiple-use.

Title II – Goblin Valley State Park

The greater Goblin Valley State Park area has experienced a large increase in recreators, campers, and general visitors. A bottom-up process involving BLM, Emery County, and Utah State Parks has identified a solution that would expand Goblin Valley State Park and create a co-management area within the greater park region. PLI expands the park by 9,994 acres and creates a 156,540 acre co-management area that protects resources and manages recreation.

Title III – Price Canyon State Forest

PLI creates Utah's first state forest. Scattered parcels of state lands will be reconsolidated into one location in Carbon County, Utah, creating the 13,321 acre Price Canyon State Forest.

Title IV – Deer Lodge Land Exchange

There are 233 acres of Land Exchanges in the Deer Lodge Exchange.

Title V – Scofield Land Transfers

Land ownership records in and around Scofield State Park are incomplete. Various administrative errors, dating back more than 50 years in some instances, have left homeowners and the federal government at odds over who owns what land. This section seeks to remedy the confusion by creating a framework for the homeowners and the federal government to resolve the disputes.

Title VI – Land Conveyances

PLI empowers state and local land management through 23 separate federal land conveyances to state and local entities. The total acreage being conveyed is 40,449 acres. The purpose of the conveyances is to facilitate and enhance recreation and public use of local lands. Expansion of the Canyonlands Field Airport, transfer of the historic Hole-in-the-Rock Trail, and creation of the Fantasy Canyon State Park are among some of the conveyances authorized in this section.

Title VII – Land Disposals

There are over 30 sites identified by BLM as being suitable for disposal. PLI would expedite the disposal of this excess land in Emery County.

Title VIII – Canyon Country Recreation Zones

The Big Flat Working Group divided portions of Grand County into seven different recreation-planning zones. Within each zone, various objectives were outlined, from mineral lease retirement to expanded motorized and mechanized use. This section codifies the work done by the Grand County group.

PLI also creates two recreation zones in San Juan County to facilitate motorized and mechanized recreation. In total, PLI creates 375,689 acres of recreation zones between the two counties.

Title IX – Red Rock County Off-Highway Vehicle Trail

Motorized recreation enthusiasts have long searched for a trail system that connects small recreation towns in Colorado, Emery County, Grand County, and San Juan County. The 93-mile Red Rock Country OHV Trail created by PLI would provide family friendly recreation opportunities and boost local economic activity.

Title X – Long-term Native American Economic Development

Native American tribes are active participants in the PLI process. The Navajo Nation, Ute Tribe, and Ute Mountain Ute are among the many tribes that must gain economic development advantages under PLI. Mineral transfers at McCracken Mesa, potential land

transfers along the San Juan River, and other provisions should be included to enhance economic opportunities for Native Americans. This title needs more work; more ideas from tribal leaders are needed to help enhance economic development opportunities in the tribal communities.

Title XI – Long-term Energy Development Certainty

Geologic experts within the Bureau of Land Management have categorized certain federal lands as being “open” to energy development. Lands determined to be open with few stipulations do not merit protective status. The highest and best use of this land is energy development. PLI ensures that lands identified by experts as being suitable for development are leased and developed in a streamlined, timely manner. Note: this section does not waive environmental reviews required by law.

Title XII – Long-term Travel Management Certainty

The State of Utah has gained ownership of approximately 78 miles of R.S. 2477 claims through litigation and settlement over the past 19 years. Nearly 36,000 miles remain unresolved. This section seeks to strike a balance that would result in the State of Utah gaining ownership over a large majority of unresolved claims within the PLI counties while also recognizing that certain routes in sensitive places could be closed.

Title XIII– Long-term Land Use Certainty

Lincoln County, Nevada is home to the Basin and Range National Monument. President Obama created this monument just 10 years after the local community enacted the Lincoln County lands bill. This lands bill was created in a process very similar to PLI. The fact the president doubled the size of the Lincoln County lands bill after an exhaustive, locally-driven process is troubling. The Utah Congressional delegation and many local leaders do not want this unilateral action to be repeated. The final PLI bill must include language that guarantees long-term land use certainty. The delegation has language it prefers, but is instead asking PLI participants to craft language that ensures a large-scale national monument is not created within the PLI counties.