

**UTAH BACK COUNTRY PILOTS ASSOC.**

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**U.S. Congressman Rob Bishop**  
**U.S. Congressman Jason Chaffetz**

2 Nov. 2013

**C/O Fred Ferguson**

Legislative Director,  
Rep. Rob Bishop (UT-01)  
123 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20515

Re: Utah Land Initiative

Dear Fred,

My name is Steve Durtschi. I am the President of a Utah pilot's group called Utah Back Country Pilots (UBCP). I am also the Utah Liaison for the Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF). (You met with the RAF Pres., John McKenna, last week). UBCP works closely with the RAF. The purpose of this letter is to comment on the Utah Land Initiative. We would also like to introduce UBCP and provide a short history of our activities. Included is some detail about recreational aviation in Utah and why I believe it is important. Finally, we will provide some technical data on some of the landing strip assets we have in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the developing Utah Land Initiative. We believe the time is right to end what has been so many years of ceaseless bickering about many Utah land use issues. We applaud our representatives for taking this issue head on and hope that they are successful. We stand at the ready to assist any way we can.

By way of introduction, Utah Back Country Pilots Assoc. began in 1996 as a group of pilots who enjoyed flying the "back country". Since the formation of UBCP, our membership has grown to approx. 450, both in Utah and surrounding states (and even a few members in Europe!). We started with three goals: first to promote safety. We do this through dissemination of data and shared experiences of our members. Second, we desire to protect, champion, and maintain our small collection of remote recreational landing strips. Third, we endeavor to promote a leave-no-trace visiting and camping ethic.

We should digress for just a moment and define a "recreational landing strip". Such a landing field is typically remote, unpaved, and minimally maintained. It is a recreation destination and as such may exist in the most beautiful and sensitive lands in our state - often with no road access. These landing strips offer pilots, their friends and family a chance to combine a love of flying with a love of the outdoors. They also serve as "trail heads" to access wilderness and other trails and a chance for pilots to enjoy the solitude of the back country.

Utah has many such landing strips. They are a strong link to our past as most were built to support mining and oil and gas exploration many years ago. Now they have become, we believe, National

Treasures and pilots have come from all over the country and even from abroad to spend a few nights in these beautiful remote areas.

Back country pilots are passionate about flying to access our public lands. As we mentioned earlier, airplanes are not an anathema to sensitive areas, but have been utilized in the Utah back country for more than half a century. Pilots are quick to point out that their airplanes possess a lighter footprint than virtually any other recreational vehicle. Airplanes have no drive mechanism to their wheels and do not need miles of road to get where they are going. They require only a quarter mile or so of surface runway to land and take off. Once on the ground, they are pushed into the background and left until needed to return home.

UBCP works closely with the BLM, several county governments, and our own Utah Division of State Aeronautics in preserving and maintaining Utah's recreational landing strips. We have been instrumental in obtaining BLM "Title V" Rights of Way to five landing strips. These BLM leases allows on-going inspection and maintenance to be performed. In addition, UBCP has for the past dozen or so years, leased the Happy Canyon Landing strip near Canyonlands National Park from the State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) . We enjoy a good candid working relationship with SITLA and the BLM. All of the BLM Title V and our leased landing strip are open unrestricted to the public and funding for all UBCP projects comes from volunteer effort, private donations and a small annual member dues.

UBCP was instrumental in providing input for the Price District Resource Management Plan (RMP). This plan was approved and released in 2008 and approves the continued use of four landing strips within the district. Our own State Aeronautics Dept. has also been supportive of the back country and in the past several years have sought our expertise in adding Utah's remote recreational landing strips to our Utah Aeronautical Chart.

Our latest work centers on a small but beautiful landing strip in the San Rafael Swell called Mexican Mountain. This landing strip is inside the Mexican Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and was approved for continued public use in the Price District BLM 2008 RMP. In 2011, UBCP presented a management and maintenance proposal for this landing strip to the Price District BLM. The BLM liked the idea and an exhaustive EA was prepared and is currently working through the public comment process.

We know that any all-inclusive lands bill will entail a myriad of public land users and uses. This letter concerns only recreational aviation with respect to public land access. Some years back, UBCP completed an inventory of landing strips in Utah, and identified some 200 landing strips that have historically been used by airplanes. Many of those inventoried are now barely visible and are no longer used. Others do not possess the characteristics of a recreational destination and are little used by pilots. We have relegated the more popular and currently used landing strip technical data and location information as a separate PDF supplement to this letter. For further details concerning Utah recreational landing strips, we have included a copy of, with our compliments, of *Fly Utah!* by Galen Hanselman. This little two volume set is an excellent resource and perhaps the best and most comprehensive guide book available. We have also included a few copies of our Utah State Aeronautical Chart .

Again, thank you for allowing us to comment on the Lands Initiative. We will follow the developments of the bill closely as it unfolds. It is our hope that during this process, you will consider aviation as a historic and current legitimate use of our public lands.

Sincerely,

Steve Durtschi,  
Pres., Utah Back Country Pilots,  
Utah Liaison, Recreational Aviation Foundation

encl: *Fly Utah!* by Galen Hanselman (two volume set, books and chart)  
Utah State Aeronautical Chart (2 copies)