

## **Utah communities harmed by dependence on federal government**

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Sprinklers water the White House lawn in Washington, Sunday, June 10, 2012. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

Rural Utah's extreme dependence on the federal government is unhealthy and unnecessary. Federally managed recreation areas, energy sites and land management offices have shuttered their doors as part of the ongoing federal government shutdown.

Earlier this year, the federal government illegally withheld or reduced community development and education payments owed to our counties. Our local towns and communities that depend on tourism, energy development and land-use are paying the price because of Washington's dysfunction and instability.

Rural Utah should not be penalized just because Washington can't work together. In some of our counties, 90 percent or more of the lands are owned and managed by the federal government. When the federal government doesn't operate, neither do these lands. This creates a worst-case scenario in which businesses dependent upon natural resources lose customers, shed jobs, and our entire community suffers both in the near and long terms.

Now is the time for rural Utah to band together to protect our lands, economies and way of life from the instability and mismanagement of Washington, D.C. Now is the time to push for greater local control, local ownership and local management of public lands in eastern Utah.

Certain federally owned lands in eastern Utah should be owned or managed by local or state agencies. Local management and planning is more efficient and would protect land, communities and local businesses from the partisan gridlock that has become the norm in Washington. Local management would ensure that Utah's spectacular landscapes and natural resources would remain open and accessible to the public, regardless of Washington bickering.

A variety of local and state land agencies could handle greater management responsibilities. The Utah State Park System is nationally recognized for its scenic landscapes and outdoor recreation opportunities. Just recently, the Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park was named the country's seventh best "Hidden" state park by USA Today. The Utah Grazing Improvement Program comprises top rangeland resource professionals and implements scientifically supported grazing policies on both state and federal land. In Grand County, the Sand Flats Recreation Area is home to the world-famous Slick Rock Trail. This county-managed recreation area is open and fully operational during the government shutdown, despite the federal government's ownership of the land.

The congressional delegation's comprehensive land planning initiative is one of the vehicles to enact these needed reforms. Partnerships like those at Sand Flats can and must be replicated in our counties as part of the initiative. This would ensure that worthy landscapes, local economies and recreational opportunities are protected and bolstered — the proverbial win-win outcome.

The ongoing government shutdown is the latest example of the unhealthy dependence rural Utah has on the federal government. This dependence is unnecessary and steps can be taken to lessen our reliance. It will require leadership at every level, openness by some for new and dynamic ideas and a

realization that the status quo just isn't working.

***This commentary was submitted by Emery County Commissioner Jeff Horrocks, Uintah County Commissioner Mike McKee, San Juan County Commissioner Phil Lyman, Grand County Commissioner Gene Ciarus, Carbon County Commissioner John Jones and Wayne County Commissioner DeRae Fillmore.***