

Public Lands Initiative

FAQ

What is the Public Lands Initiative?

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

What does the PLI Act do?

The PLI Act is federal legislation that designates certain federal lands for conservation purposes, certain lands for recreational purposes, and other lands for economic development purposes. As a result, the PLI Act creates land-use certainty for local communities and land users.

How was the PLI Act developed?

The PLI Act was written by Congressmen Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz and U.S. Senator Mike Lee. To assist the delegation in writing the bill, over 65 detailed proposals were submitted by local governments, Native American tribes, and interested stakeholders representing more than 120 different interests. The PLI Act seeks to combine these diverse proposals into a single compromise plan. Any group that has an interest in public land management in Utah has been welcome to the PLI table. Public meetings and various open letters were sent or posted on Rep. Bishop's website inviting comments and participation.

Which lands are included in the PLI Act?

Lands within seven eastern Utah counties are included in the PLI Act, including Summit, Duchesne, Carbon, Uintah, Grand, Emery, and San Juan counties. The total acreage of federal land within these counties is approximately 18 million acres.

Will the public have an opportunity to submit comments or provide additional input on the PLI Act?

Yes. The public can visit www.UtahPLI.com to view the draft legislation, maps, and leave a comments and suggestions.

I don't like wilderness, so why should I support the Utah PLI Act?

Without conservation provisions and wilderness designations, the PLI Act could not become law. Without a law, uncertainty and fighting would continue, perpetuating a status quo that has been broken for decades. Lack of movement will also invite unilateral presidential monument designations. Embracing balanced conservation will settle the wilderness question while also serving as currency to get other things done.

I don't think public lands should be used for energy development, agriculture, or motorized forms of recreation. So how can I support the PLI Act?

Federal lands are open and available to all for multiple uses. The PLI embraces this fact and seeks to provide certainty and opportunity for all types of land users. While some may oppose provisions related to multiple-use, these opponents should support the fact that the conservation provisions outnumber opportunity provisions by a 4-to-1 margin. Compromise is key to legislation.

How will the State of Utah benefit from PLI?

The state of Utah's public education system will benefit from increased energy and mineral production. Public land users will benefit from the regulatory certainty that comes from congressionally designated lands. Local governments will benefit from revenue generated from multiple use of the land, including recreation, mineral development, and energy production. The outdoor recreation businesses community will benefit from the improved certainty surrounding land use and conservation. Future generations will benefit by having responsible policies that utilize the land in the most responsible and reasonable ways that make sense now and into the future.

Why did it take so long to release the PLI Act?

Developing a compromise proposal that satisfies 120 different perspectives while maintaining local support is a timely endeavor. In many instances, day trips to specific sites (4 dozen to be exact) were needed to better understand just one page of the bill. Multiplied by the additional 65+ pages, and one quickly realizes how timely the drafting of a multi-county lands bill can become. In the end, getting the bill right was the primary factor.

Who will sponsor the bill in the U.S. Senate?

Senator Mike Lee. As a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and active driver of PLI, he is anxious to engage Senate colleague on the PLI Act. Senator Hatch has been involved in PLI since the beginning and will also play a key role in advancing the proposal.

Is PLI consistent with the Transfer of Public Lands?

Yes. Both the PLI Act and Transfer of Public Lands Act (TPL) are grassroots efforts intended to resolve land-use conflicts in rural Utah. The PLI Act will deliver immediate land transfers to local communities in the form of land exchanges, direct conveyances, and management agreements. The PLI Act will create Utah's first state forest, expand state parks, grow the state's energy portfolio, and boost state wildlife management.

TPL is a long-term strategy seeking similar results. TPL will most likely move forward through legal means and it could take many years to work its way through the court system. In the meantime, TPL proponents can highlight management successes under PLI when making the case for increased state management or ownership. TPL proponents will also have fewer detractors once the conservation component is resolved under the PLI Act.

Can Utah still take back federal lands if we agree to PLI?

Yes. Litigation and legislation are not mutually exclusive. The state's legal effort can still move forward. Reps. Bishop and Chaffetz and Sen. Lee support Utah's involvement with TPL and all other efforts to improve land-use certainty in rural Utah. The more efforts to bring resolution, avoid unilateral national monument designations, and make rural Utah a better place to live, the better.

Is this just an attempt to sell off Utah's public lands?

No, not at all. The goals of PLI are to improve the management of public lands, not to privatize them. Lands under the PLI Act will be managed by the federal government or a state/local government - not private interests.

Has the state legislature been involved in PLI?

Yes. State legislators whose districts include participating counties have been involved in local discussions and planning. Other legislators that have an interest in land management have been briefed and given information pertaining to PLI and its progress.

How does the PLI Act benefit Native Americans?

The PLI Act creates a landscape-level National Conservation Area known as the Bears Ears NCA that encompasses areas of cultural significance, such as Cedar Mesa, Bears Ears Buttes, and Beef Basin. Native Americans would represent 50% of the Bears Ears Management Commission which is charged with developing a land management plan for the Bears Ears NCA.

The Opportunity section also includes a title related to Native American economic development. Mineral transfers, land adjustments, and other provisions will help to spur economic development in tribal communities.

Can we really trust Utah's congressional delegation to preserve and protect public lands?

Rep. Bishop and other members of Utah's congressional delegation have overseen the creation of many wilderness areas during their time in Congress. More specifically, Congressman Bishop, as chairman of federal lands committees in Congress has seen dozens of lands bills become law under his watch including the Cedar Mountain Wilderness area which was created in 2006 after Congressman Bishop facilitated a locally-driven, collaborative process.