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FYI - On December 14, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a legislative hearing on H.R. 4558, Grand Staircase Escalante Enhancement Act. The bill would establish a new national park and preserve, three discrete national monuments, and a Management Council that would develop the associated land management plans. Members in attendance included Chairman McClintock (R-CA-4), Ranking Member Hanabusa (D-HI-1), and Reps. Stewart (R-UT-2), Tipton (R-CO-3), Bergman (R-MI-1), Gallego (D-AZ-7), and Lowenthal (D-CA-47). Also in attendance was Full Committee Chairman Bishop (R-UT-1).

The hearing lasted about two hours, and the tone was fairly contentious. The first witness panel was a members' panel that included Rep. Stewart, who introduced his bill. The second panel consisted of Mike Leavitt, former Utah Governor; Leland Pollock, Garfield County Commissioner; Susan Hand, Willow Canyon Outdoor business owner; and Vicki Varela, Utah Office of Tourism Managing Director. During the members' panel, Rep. Stewart responded to questions from Chairman McClintock and Rep. Lowenthal to clarify sections of the bill. Rep. Stewart clarified that the bill would not release approximately 900,000 acres of wilderness study areas, but affirmed his intent to open approximately 677,000 acres of the former national monument to mining and other forms of energy development.

During the second witness panel, discussion focused on the tourism industry, Utah's economy and state sovereignty, the legitimacy of both President Clinton's and Trump's national monument proclamations, the scope of the Antiquities Act, and hunting and grazing in national parks and monuments. Witnesses expressed both support for and opposition to the designation of a new national park and preserve. During one notable exchange with Commissioner Pollock, Rep. Gallego questioned whether Garfield County had sufficient local funding to engage in the management mechanism proposed by the bill. Following the exchange, Chairman Bishop stated that if enacted, H.R. 4558 would require that the proposed Management Council, composed primarily of local Utah and state representatives, would develop management plans, but that the BLM would implement and fund the plans and manage the proposed national monuments. In another notable exchange with Mr. Leavitt, Rep. Lowenthal emphasized his belief that Congress had confirmed the boundary of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument as designated by President Clinton through related legislation.

Related EE story follows:

NATIONAL MONUMENTS

Bill to let locals make plans for Utah sites draws fire

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

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The House Natural Resources Committee today debated a bill on the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Jeff Hollett/Flickr

House Natural Resources Chairman Rob Bishop (R) today rejected suggestions that legislation to create a new national park and trio of monuments in his home state of Utah amounts to a de facto transfer of federal lands to local officials, who would develop management plans for the sites.

He emphasized that federal agencies would be responsible for day-to-day management of the areas.

Bishop's remarks came during a subcommittee hearing on Rep. Chris Stewart's (R-Utah) proposal, which would codify reductions President Trump made to Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument earlier this month and establish a sixth national park in the state ([E&E News PM](#), Dec. 4).

Democrats and environmental advocates have criticized the legislation, the "Grand Staircase Escalante Enhancement Act" ([H.R. 4558](#)), for establishing a seven-member "management council" dominated by state and local officials.

"That just flies in the face of the way any federal public lands have been managed to date in this country," National Wildlife Federation Associate Vice President for Public Lands Tracy Stone-Manning told E&E News ahead of the hearing. "The feds would be beholden to whatever management plans would be created by this council. Trump stood in the Statehouse in Salt Lake and said, 'You're going to get your land back,' and he wasn't kidding."

She added, "They may as well turn the deed over to the state of Utah. This would become federal land in name only."

Under Stewart's proposal, the council would be charged with developing and implementing management plans for the new Escalante Canyons National Park and Preserve, as well as the Grand Staircase National Monument, Kaiparowits National Monument and Escalante Canyons National Monument.

That council would be dominated by five local and state officials — including two Garfield County and two Kane County commissioners and one state legislator representing those counties — and would also include one Interior Department representative and one nonfederal "at-large representative."

The legislation also would require federal land managers to "adhere to the management plans created by the Management Council."

Bishop criticized suggestions that local officials would effectively be in charge of the new park and monuments, arguing that day-to-day operations and funding still reside with the federal government.

"You're using the same word, but you're using it with different definitions," Bishop said, referring to arguments over the term "management."

"When you're talking about [the] management plan, you're talking about coming up with the rules

of engagement of how the monument will be run; you won't actually be running it," Bishop said to Garfield County Commissioner Leland Pollock, who testified before the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. "The federal government will still be running it, and the federal government will still be paying for it."

Garfield County, Utah, Commission Chairman Leland Pollock testified today at a hearing on Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument legislation. House Committee on Natural Resources

A Natural Resources spokeswoman noted that the legislation would still require the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service to implement the management plan.

In a verbal spat with Arizona Rep. Ruben Gallego (D), Pollock disputed the idea that the management council would control the federal lands, because BLM would continue to "bear the burdens of the cost."

"We will not be managing those lands. ... The government's BLM and the Park Service would be managing them. The county wouldn't be managing the lands," Pollock said. "You want to transfer me that land? Do it right now. Transfer me that land and I'll manage it, I'll tax it."

Gallego criticized the proposed management council, asking Pollock about the funding the county had designated for management activities as well as whether he possessed the "skills ... to manage a national park."

National Parks Conservation Association Director of Legislation and Policy Ani Kame'enui told E&E News that Stewart's proposal would establish a new kind of management structure, particularly in the case of NPS lands.

"We're certainly concerned about the precedent it sets and the message it sends," Kame'enui said. She also noted that while the management council would set policy for both BLM and NPS lands — which have distinct missions — the legislation would allow for only one federal representative, possibly excluding one of the agencies.

"It's very discouraging to see Mr. Stewart deviating from the expertise we find reassuring in our National Park Service," she added.

Hole in the Rock

Hawaii Rep. Colleen Hanabusa, the subcommittee's top Democrat, also took aim at a provision in Stewart's bill to transfer ownership to Utah of the Hole-in-the-Rock Road, a 55.5-mile historic road constructed by Mormon settlers migrating to the state in the 19th century.

Hanabusa said the measure would further advance "the deeply unpopular federal lands transfer movement," in which opponents of public lands would like to see the federal estate dispersed to state ownership.

Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance Executive Director Scott Groene also criticized the Hole-in-the-Rock Road proposal, asserting that the provision would eliminate "public involvement on decisions affecting this corridor through the heart of the monument."

"In addition to tearing apart the Grand Staircase, this legislation is also a giant step as precedent towards surrendering America's public lands to local parochial interests determined to drill and mine," Groene told E&E News.

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