

Rural Utahns, like those of us in Bluff, will benefit from the BLM Public Lands Rule

As the largest land manager in the nation, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) can play a leading role in protecting more of the important public lands and waters, and in turn, our communities, for the future. That is why I am excited about the Bureau's Public Lands Rule, which lays the groundwork for conserving wildlife habitat, restoring places impacted by wildfire and drought and better engaging tribal nations. This rule, which was just finalized, rightly places conservation on the same level with fossil fuel development and other extractive uses in order to protect our shared heritage of healthy public lands and intact cultural resources.

The BLM plays an important role in Utah, managing nearly 22.8 million acres of public lands in our state — areas vitally important to the conservation of water, wildlife and tackling the climate crisis. I know this first hand; here in Bluff we're right at the heart of where the nation's leading scientists say a hotter, drier future is nearly upon us. Yet the vast majority of these lands are open to oil and gas development and, more broadly, current BLM management is geared towards taking from the land rather than conserving it. The Public Lands Rule will bring much needed and long overdue balance to the agency's management of these lands across the West and throughout Utah.

Protected public lands are important to Utahns. Outdoor recreation is a significant and growing sector of Utah's economy, and BLM managed public lands play a foundational role in maintaining public health. Seventy-two percent of folks in our state participate in outdoor recreation each year. We recreate on these lands that attract and sustain employers and families, in turn helping our communities thrive. In fact, as recently studied, outdoor recreation is the number one factor drawing tech sector employees to live and work in Utah.

What's more, according to the



A city sign is seen at the edge of town in Bluff on Oct. 19.

BETHANY BAKER Tribune file photo

Outdoor Industry Association, Utah outdoor recreation generates \$12.3 billion in consumer spending annually and 110,000 direct jobs within the state. In 2017, outdoor recreation jobs supported more than twice as many direct jobs in Utah than mining and energy jobs combined.

The rule will also make sure that tribal nations' voices are heard and that Indigenous knowledge is solicited, listened to and used in the conversation about how to manage our public lands. This emphasis on engaging tribal nations is long overdue and is a part of the rule I'm most grateful for.

In addition to the demonstrable economic benefits of the Public Lands Rule, there is strong support from many sectors urging the BLM to do more to conserve public lands across the West. Native American tribes, western leaders



ANN K. LEPPANEN

and business owners who live in communities that depend on BLM lands, have been calling for greater protections of BLM lands for years. The long list of supporters includes western local elected officials — I joined 120 western peers, over 20 from Utah, signing onto a letter calling for greater protections of BLM lands.

Many of the lands that the BLM could better protect include Utah's wildest red rock wilderness; iconic public lands that Americans

dream of when they think about Utah's canyon country. In southeastern Utah, where I live, this would include Harts Point, looming above Indian Creek and Bears Ears National Monument and the wild Dirty Devil region.

Unfortunately, despite the popularity and benefits of the final Public Lands Rule, Utah's Representative John Curtis and his anti-public lands partners in the House recently pushed legislation that will keep the scales clearly weighted in the favor of old, dirty extractive industries. The legislation, which I believe has no chance of being enacted into law, prevents the BLM from finally balancing management across the over 245 million acres they manage. People across the West and around the country support the balance between conservation and extraction the Public Lands Rule creates. Sadly, Representative

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Curtis and his allies have voted to undermine our chance to have sustainable management into the future.

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I commend the Bureau of Land Management for listening to the voices of westerners — including Utahns — who are praising the Public Lands Rule. The details laid out in the rule will positively impact the incredible BLM lands we love and enjoy in the Beehive state — for our communities now, and for future generations.

Ann K. Leppanen is the mayor of Bluff.

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