

Statement for the Record
Department of the Interior
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
H.R. 686, Utah National Guard Readiness Act
May 4, 2011

Thank you for inviting me to testify on H.R. 686, the Utah National Guard Readiness Act. The Department does not oppose the conveyance of the lands identified in H.R. 686 to the State of Utah for homeland security or national defense purposes. However, we would like the opportunity to work with the Committee on modifications to the reversionary clause and the map referenced by the legislation.

Background

Camp W. G. Williams is located approximately 25 miles south of Salt Lake City, Utah, in an area of expanding residential development. The 24,000-acre base is a National Guard training site administered by the Utah Army National Guard and includes training facilities for a variety of military purposes. Approximately 18,000 acres of the base are comprised of public land that has been withdrawn for the benefit of the United States Army as a training facility for the Utah Army National Guard under the provisions of Executive Order 1922 and Title IX of Public Law 101-628, the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990.

H.R. 686

H.R. 686 directs the Secretary of the Interior to convey to the State of Utah, at no cost, approximately 431 acres of the 18,000-acre withdrawal. Those 431 acres are to be used by the Utah Army National Guard. The legislation includes a reversionary clause to return the land to the ownership of the United States if attempt is made to sell the land or use the land for non-National Guard or non-national defense purposes.

Because the public lands proposed for conveyance are currently withdrawn for the benefit of the United States Army, a portion of the overall withdrawal to the Army is revoked by this legislation in order that the lands may be appropriately conveyed. We defer to the Department of Defense on the partial revocation of the underlying withdrawal.

The Department generally does not oppose this conveyance at no cost because the legislation provides that the land conveyed must continue to be used for important national security and defense purposes. However, we would note that these lands are already withdrawn for military uses to the U.S. Army for use by the Utah National Guard. It is unclear why it is necessary to convey these lands directly to the State of Utah for use by the National Guard.

We would like to work with the Sponsor and the Committee on modifications to the reversionary clause. Specifically, the reversionary clause language is complicated, nonstandard, and would be difficult for the Department of the Interior to oversee. We would like to discuss placing responsibility for the reversionary interest with the Department of Defense in order to ensure that the land is only used for national security or homeland defense purposes.

Additionally, we would like to provide a new map to be referenced in the legislation. The BLM in Utah completed work in 2008 that corrected past survey problems, and we would like to incorporate this up-to-date, accurate information in a new map. Furthermore, the Department of Justice advises us of a necessary modification to section 2(b) of the bill, which they want to address with the Sponsor and the Committee. Finally, we have some minor technical modifications we would like to address.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on H.R. 686.