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Herbert's unholy alliance hurts economy

By peter metcalf

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Each year the Utah Legislature attacks the magnificent public lands that exemplify the Utah experience. This year several legislators, with Gov. Gary Herbert's support, have offered bills that would transfer ownership of federal public lands to the state, which would then be free to sell them for development.

Herbert also supports litigating rights to approximately 19,000 miles of dirt roads and faint tracks through our national parks, monuments, and wilderness areas under an old repealed federal law known as R.S.2477. Where we now have iconic Utah landscapes, we'd have roads, fumes, oil and gas fields and coal mines. These are short-sighted, destructive bills that would do lasting harm to our state, our economy and our quality of life and would do permanent damage to Utah's status as a leader in the active outdoor recreational economy.

Without its awe-inspiring, wide-open spaces, Utah would be just another "flyover" state, with little to set us apart from dozens of other states vying for new businesses in this challenging economic climate.

To date, Utah has balanced economic vitality with a sense of stewardship for protecting the landscapes that make our state unique. But the current bills would rob us of that equilibrium and destroy one of the most vibrant and fastest-growing economic sectors in our state — active outdoor recreation. This is an industry that is dependent on the integrity of our public lands. For that, we'll be rewarded with the continued vibrancy of our active outdoor recreation economy.

Utah's remarkable natural beauty gives us an edge when it comes to convincing businesses to relocate. They see the unparalleled opportunities to hike, ski, kayak, camp and spend time with their families as a significant attraction. I know. Drawn by the open spaces to ski, climb and backpack, I moved our business from California to Salt Lake in 1991. Since then, Black Diamond has grown into a \$145 million,



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publicly traded enterprise that employs nearly 300 people in Utah and many more globally.

However, Black Diamond is just a small part of a vigorous, growing outdoor industry in Utah. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, the active outdoor recreation industry contributes \$5.8 billion annually to Utah's economy, supports 65,000 Utah jobs, generates nearly \$300 million in annual state tax revenues and produces nearly \$4 billion annually in retail sales and services in Utah.

Additionally, our industry hosts the Outdoor Retailer trade show in Salt Lake City twice a year. The show attracts more than 2,000 companies and over 40,000 people from all over the world and amounts to \$40 million in direct spending within the city.

Without natural places for our customers to recreate, our businesses would be seriously handicapped, and Utah's economy would be unnecessarily damaged.

That's why this Legislature's attack on federal public lands, with full support from the governor, is so short-sighted. These folks are killing the goose that lays the golden egg. The roads litigation would also negate an explicit promise made by then Gov. Mike Leavitt (and respected by Leavitt's successors, Olene Walker and Jon Huntsmen) to the Outdoor Industry in 2004 as a means of keeping the Outdoor Tradeshow in Salt Lake City and the outdoor recreation economy vibrant.

Herbert should exercise leadership and inspire all Utahns to see beyond the mindless rhetoric that passes for debate on this issue in the Legislature. It would be wonderful if Utah's political leaders celebrated the world-renowned beauty of the federal public lands in our state instead of trying to bulldoze them for short-term profit.

Can't the governor and Legislature realize that these federal public lands are a gold mine — as they exist right now?

Herbert represents all the people of the state, including those who value pristine wildlands and the beauty, solitude, and economic benefit they offer. Many Utahns are part of this vibrant, and growing industry, and we wonder why these bills, their sponsors and the governor choose to turn their backs on this economic windfall.

If winning the hearts and minds of the Outdoor Industry Tradeshow participants and the outdoor recreational community is important to Utah, these bills will insure the opposite result. Clearly, the governor has a lot to answer for.

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