

**Grand Canyon Trust
Submitted for the Record**

**Statement of Ty Cobb, Board Member, Grand Canyon Trust
Before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests**

May 3, 2007

S. 390 Utah Recreational Land Exchange Act of 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. Grand Canyon Trust strongly supports S. 390, the Utah Recreational Land Exchange Act of 2007, with modifications to bring the bill into alignment with HR. 1210 the House version of the bill. Changes to the bill which are evident in HR. 1210 were very carefully negotiated in the House National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee and should be entirely incorporated into S. 390.

The Grand Canyon Trust, now in our 22nd year, is a non-profit conservation organization headquartered in Flagstaff, Arizona with an office in Moab, Utah. Our mission is to protect and restore the Colorado Plateau—its spectacular landscapes, flowing rivers, clean air, diversity of plants and animals, and areas of solitude and beauty.

S. 390, The Utah Recreational Land Exchange Act of 2007, will protect valuable recreational lands, critical watersheds, cultural resources, essential wildlife habitat, lands of extraordinary scenic beauty and lands in Wilderness Study Areas by conveying sensitive state-owned lands in the Colorado River corridor to the Bureau of Land Management. The area is currently a checkerboard of federal lands and Utah State Trust Lands (SITLA) which the state is mandated to manage for benefit of Utah's school children by raising dollars for the Permanent School Fund. This is accomplished primarily through leasing the lands for minerals development or selling the lands for private development. Since conservation dollars cannot keep pace with the disposition of state lands, the proposed land exchange is the only viable way to keep such a broad and cherished landscape from becoming fragmented. Preservation of this landscape is in the interest of members of the Grand Canyon Trust and the American public, since the existing federal estate in southeast Utah is a national treasure.

The Landscape

In southeast Utah, the spectacular 1200 square mile basin of Canyonlands National Park lies at the geographic heart of the Colorado Plateau. Here, 300 million years of geologic history are revealed in the deep canyons of the Colorado and Green Rivers. The downward cutting movement of the rivers and their tributaries, through layers of sedimentary rock, continues to form one of the largest and most intricate canyon systems on earth. Upstream on the Green River are Labyrinth and Stillwater Canyons, and on the Colorado River, the twin jewels of Arches National Park and Westwater Canyon. S. 390

will consolidate federal lands for consistent management in this landscape of the Colorado River corridor.

This extraordinary geologic province is filled with the greatest density of natural arches in the world; Morning Glory Arch and Corona Arch will be conveyed to the federal estate in the proposed exchange. Pinnacles, rock fins, grottos, balanced rocks, hoodoos and natural bridges abound, sheltering a richness of species in diverse habitats. Mountain ranges provide watersheds that give life to the adjacent desert country. Vast expanses of bare red rock are broken by lush riparian areas, ephemeral pools, grassland and sage steppes. In this land of extremes, temperature fluctuations of 50 degrees in one day are common, animals and plants have evolved unique adaptations to survive and many of these species are endemic to the region. In addition, southeast Utah contains one of the world's great archaeological districts where priceless treasures from the past are abundant. S. 390 will convey lands like these to the BLM where they can be managed to protect their values for the American public.

Conservation Values

There have been numerous acquisitions of SITLA lands in Grand County in recent years by individuals and conservation organizations for the purposes of preserving open space and recreational lands, and for protecting watersheds and wildlife habitat. This reflects a very strong desire and commitment of private resources for protecting this spectacular landscape. During the same period, developers and even Off-Highway Vehicle groups have outbid conservationists and purchased SITLA lands in the area for their private uses, fragmenting the surrounding federal estate. In this competitive market, conservation sales have necessarily become comparable sales. S. 390 provides for appraisers to determine these values with respect to the actual parcels included in the exchange.

With escalating land values, it has become difficult to procure funding for conservation initiatives on a scale commensurate with the problems posed by checkerboard federal/state patterns of ownership. Legislative land exchanges can be a rational solution in such cases and are now a very important conservation tool. Approximately 350,000 acres of SITLA lands remain in Grand County and some naturally possess conservation values, such as those adjacent to Arches National Park. It would be impossible to purchase all sensitive SITLA lands to protect them. Therefore the Grand Canyon Trust and other conservation organizations working in the state support this kind of carefully negotiated land exchange legislation as a common sense solution for protecting these important landscapes.

Public Benefits

In addition, protecting these lands is consistent with Grand County's economy, which is based on tourism. In 2006, the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget reported that the tourism industry provided over \$100 million dollars to Grand County's economy. On the other side of the ledger, SITLA will receive federal oil and gas development property in Uintah County, slated for development regardless of ownership, ensuring new

revenues for their beneficiaries. We support this public benefit for education in the state of Utah. In Uintah County, minerals development is the primary force in the local economy, which is why elected officials there also support S. 390.

Review and Support

We also approve of the process through which this legislation was developed. Cooperating with Grand Canyon Trust, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance and Utah Wilderness Coalition, SITLA vetted the proposed exchange lands and these groups now approve of the selected lands. Grand Canyon Trust worked with The Nature Conservancy and the Utah Natural Heritage Program to map Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species, both plant and animal, on the proposed exchange lands. Using current data, we found no habitat overlap on lands SITLA would acquire for development while TES species do exist on lands being conveyed to BLM, where they would ostensibly have better protection under federal laws.

Groups supporting this legislation include Grand County, Uintah County, San Juan County, Castle Valley Town, Moab City, Governor Huntsman's Task Force on Outdoor Recreation, the Utah Legislature, Utah Open Lands, The Nature Conservancy, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Grand Canyon Trust, Utah Guides and Outfitters, Utah Rivers Council, National Parks and Conservation Association, Outdoor Industry Association, area ranchers, Grand County Backcountry Council, Grand County resort and tourist business owners, Utah Education Association, National Education Association. Other groups reviewing and commenting on the legislation included Utah Natural Heritage Program, Center for Native Ecosystems, Utah Wilderness Coalition, The Wilderness Society, Moab Field Office Bureau of Land Management, Utah Department of Natural Resources and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

Revisions and Endorsement

Since the House hearing on the proposed legislation in September 2005, Grand Canyon Trust has attended meetings of the House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health. Committee staff and officials from Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management and Utah State Trust Lands have revised HR. 2069, the Utah Recreational Land Exchange Act of 2005, to address issues raised at the House hearing and Senate hearing in 2006. We are grateful to the staff and agencies for their cooperation with one another and many hours of time, over two years, devoted to drafting a better bill which is reflected in the House version of the 2007 bill, HR. 1210.

Under Section 4 (d) (1), we favor changing the timing language so that the set period for implementation is not mandatory and allows sufficient time for any actions necessary to properly implement the exchange.

Grand Canyon Trust supports the fair and equal exchange of values for the trade. We also support rolling conveyance of the lands as provided in the legislation.

Grand Canyon Trust is also in favor of permanent mineral leasing withdrawals for this exchange under Section 6 (2) (B) which refers to some 20,000 acres of high value scenic and recreation lands being conveyed from SITLA to the BLM.

Management of Conveyed Lands

Southeast Utah's living Eden of canyons mesas and deep river gorges attracts recreational users from all over the world who come to hike, mountain bike, climb, run rivers, ride horses, ski and explore via jeeps and all-terrain vehicles. In recent years, an exponential increase in visitation to the public lands has demonstrated the necessity for good planning to accommodate the multiple use mandates on federal lands.

The Moab BLM Field Office is currently revising its Resource Management Plan. Lands being conveyed to the BLM in the exchange will be managed according to the plan that is now being designed for lands currently in BLM ownership which surround exchange parcels. The Moab BLM planning team has stated that, in the Colorado River corridor, they are working to be consistent with the Three Rivers withdrawal signed by Secretary Norton in September 2004. This withdrawal protects two hundred miles of the Colorado, Green and Dolores river corridors and an additional fifty miles of side canyons from nuisance mining claims on locatable minerals for twenty years. Moab BLM planners have written special management designations into their preferred alternative to protect scenic and recreational values in the river corridor.

Conclusion

The Utah Recreational Land Exchange Act of 2007 has a very broad coalition of support, from rural Republican county commissioners to conservation organizations. In Utah, it is rare to have consensus of this kind for a public lands management proposal. S. 390 is an extraordinary conservation opportunity for protection of federal lands in Utah. Grand Canyon Trust believes S. 390, with the above stated modifications, provides the opportunity for a successful legislative land exchange. We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to approve a version of this bill with our recommended changes. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.