

UTE INDIAN TRIBE STRONGLY OPPOSES PROPOSALS TO GIVE AWAY LANDS AND MINERALS WITHIN ITS UINTAH AND OURAY RESERVATION

The Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation strongly opposes provisions in the draft Utah Public Lands Initiative bill that would give away the Tribe's land and minerals. The Tribe is continuing to assess the draft bill recently released by Congressman Rob Bishop and Congressman Jason Chaffetz, but strongly opposes a land exchange between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Utah's School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) within the Tribe's Reservation.

"We contacted the Congressmen and SITLA more than a year ago to talk about any proposals for lands within our Reservation," said Chairman Shaun Chapoose, "but, discussions were kept secret and now the bill proposes to give away our most valuable resources."

The Uintah and Ouray Reservation was established and held in trust as a homeland for the Ute Indian Tribe. The Tribe actively manages its oil, gas and natural resources to fund its government and provide for its members. Without a word of tribal consultation, the bill proposes to consolidate SITLA land holdings in areas within the Tribe's Reservation that are rich with mineral resources.

While the bill may resolve issues for Utah, it largely ignores Utah's Indian tribes. The Ute Tribal Business Committee, the governing body of the Tribe issued the following statement "If Congressman Bishop and Chaffetz did not want to fix land management problems on Indian lands, then they should have left our lands out of their bill. Instead, the bill proposes to take Indian lands and resources, to fix Utah's problems."

According to the draft bill, SITLA would get land and minerals within the Tribe's historic Uncompahgre Reservation making up the eastern half of the Tribe's current Uintah and Ouray Reservation. Lands within the Uncompahgre Reservation are currently managed by the BLM but should have been restored to Indian trust status and managed by the Bureau Indian Affairs following the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934.

After Congressman Bishop refused to include a provision in the Public Lands Initiative to address this oversight, the Tribe asked the Administration to correct the error. Until the mismanagement of the Tribe's lands is resolved, the Tribe is forced to oppose any changes to land use within the Uncompahgre Reservation.

The Tribe appreciates that the bill provides space for Native American economic development, but this section is curiously left blank. The Tribal Business Committee continued, "The Ute Indian Tribe is an economic powerhouse for northeast Utah, we could have filled these pages and more with economic development ideas."

About the Ute Indian Tribe - The Ute Indian Tribe resides on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in northeastern Utah. Three bands of Utes comprise the Ute Indian Tribe: the Whiteriver Band, the Uncompahgre Band and the Uintah Band. The Tribe has a membership of more than three thousand individuals, with over half living on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation. The Ute Indian Tribe operates its own Tribal government and oversees approximately 1.3 million acres of trust land which contains significant oil and gas deposits. The Ute Tribal Business Committee is the governing council of the Tribe. The Ute Indian Tribe is still engaged in legal battles with the state of Utah and local counties to protect the Tribe's jurisdiction over lands that were specifically set-aside and reserved by the federal government for the benefit of the Tribe.