Dear Commissioners,

We all love the Wasatch Mountains for their amazing natural beauty and great value as a refuge for Utah residents and tourists to enjoy. Yet, the increased population growth of the adjacent communities brings challenges to the Mountains’ preservation. Without due attention to those challenges, we raise the prospect that this precious resource loses the attributes that have made it such a beloved natural sanctuary, thereby diminishing whatever contributions those attributes make to the appeal of this area and to the economic benefits that come with that appeal.

**Hence, we beseech the Commission to resume its efforts to exert its political capital to persuade our Senate and House representatives to push for Congress to designate the central Wasatch Mountains as a National Conservation Area.** This designation would act as a check on unmanaged actions by disparate interests that could further degrade this precious resource. By doing so, the Commission would fulfill a central component of the Mountain Accord. (See the Addendum below for details about the federal designation goals expressed in the Accord).

We on the Stakeholders Council take heart in the fact that Utah is already one of 12 states for which Congress has designated protected areas (<https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/utah>). BLM Utah already manages many remarkable National Conservation Lands including three national monuments, three national conservation areas, multiple historic trails, and many wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and wilderness study areas.

Recent history shows that it is possible to persuade our representatives to support federal conservation area designations in our state. During the 2019-2021 legislative session, the 116th Congress passed [Public Law 116-9, the John Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Recreation, and Management Act](https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s47/BILLS-116s47enr.pdf), which designated two new BLM land areas in Utah as National Conservation areas - the John Wesley Powell National Conservation Area (<https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/utah/john-wesley-powell-nca>) and the McCoy Flats Trail System (<https://www.blm.gov/visit/mccoy-flats-trailhead>). The Senate voted for the bill 92–8 on February 12, 2019, and the House of Representatives passed it 363–62 on February 26. President Trump signed it into law on March 12, 2019, as P.L. 116–9. All of Utah’s Senate and Congressional representatives voted for the Bill except for Mike Lee. (<https://data.democratandchronicle.com/roll-call/issue/john-d-dingell-jr-conservation-management-and-recreation-act/116th-congress-senate-bill-47/)>. Mitt Romney was a cosponsor.

Hence, we request that the Commission rekindle this as a priority in 2023-24 and we offer our assistance in helping the Commission think through what strategies could bear the most fruit in pursuing this goal. This critical legislation will help not just the environment, but recreation, transportation, and our economy, by protecting a natural system that is truly cherished and unique.

**ADDENDUM**

**1. EXCERPT FROM THE MOUNTAIN ACCORD FINAL REPORT, SEPTEMBER 2016**

The agreed-upon actions in the Accord include:

**• Federal land designation (National Conservation and Recreation Area) to protect over 80,000 acres of USFS land**

• Land exchanges among the four Cottonwood ski areas and the USFS

• Transportation improvements for the Cottonwood Canyons focused on increasing transit use, biking, and walking and decreasing single-occupancy vehicle use

• Public transportation improvements in Parleys Canyon to connect the Salt Lake Valley and the greater Park City area

• Piloting private shuttle service in Millcreek Canyon

• Environmental monitoring (dashboard), adaptive management, and restoration activities

• Development and implementation of a comprehensive trail and cycling plan

• Coordinated, comprehensive program to acquire lands with environment and recreation values from willing sellers

• Study and consider options for multi-jurisdictional coordination and funding

• Commitment to continue public engagement and transparency

**2. MOUNTAIN ACCORD EXCERPT ABOUT THE FEDERAL LAND DESIGNATION**

**The signers of this Accord agree to support and pursue a new federal land designation for the central Wasatch region** (from Parley’s Canyon to Little Cottonwood Canyon). **The federal designation will provide special protections against development and environmental degradation for U.S. Forest Service land and any private land transferred into federal ownership within the boundary**… The federal lands within this boundary total approximately 80,000 acres. **Options for the federal land designation could be National Recreation Area, National Monument, or Conservation Management Area (all requiring designation by U.S. Congress)**. It is intended the federal lands will continue to be managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The federal land designation will specifically prohibit expansion of ski areas onto public lands beyond the resort area boundaries... The ski areas will support the land designation actions, and will not seek to further expand their respective footprints onto public land within the federal designation area .... The signers of this Accord recognize that the federal land designation and the land exchange will require federal action, and have drafted federal legislation proposing these actions.

The signers agree to continue work on the draft legislation and to formally approve the proposed legislation language through the Mountain Accord Executive Board consensus process. **The signers of the Accord request that the U.S. Congress introduce the federal legislation as soon as possible; and the desired outcome is for legislation to be enacted before the end of the 2016 calendar year**. The federal legislation may establish new wilderness areas as recommended by the Executive Board. The signers of this Accord anticipate growth in year-round use of the ski areas and expressly support changes to recreation infrastructure (e.g., lifts, trails, etc.) that respond to changes in demand within the ski areas’ respective U.S. Forest Service Special Use Permit boundaries. The signers recognize such changes would be managed through standard permit processes. Lands transferred to U.S. Forest Service ownership within the Special Use Permit boundary will be managed according to the Special Use Permit. The signers of this Accord agree to carry out land designation actions, including the adjustment to wilderness boundaries…in a manner that will preserve transportation alternatives and not prejudice the NEPA process. Transit infrastructure, transit stations and associated public amenities (such as restrooms), trails, and trailheads may be considered within the new federal designation and on the lands exchanged into public ownership, in locations consistent with intended outcomes and Mountain Accord vision and goals. Nothing in the Accord is intended to limit the Utah Department of Transportation from providing avalanche control and maintenance activities on current and future transportation facilities.

**3. SUMMARY OF THE FEDERAL DESIGNATION LEGISLATION AGREEMENT FIRST PROPOSED ON 09-11-15**

• U.S. Forest Service to retain management of the designation

• Purposes …conserve and protect the ecological, natural, scenic, wilderness, cultural, historical, geological, and wildlife values of the [Designation]; protect, enhance, and restore the water quality and watershed resources in the [Designation]; and conserve and protect the existing allocation of quality recreation opportunities within the [Designation].

• Management Prescriptions …in a manner that conserves, protects, and enhances the resources of the [Designation]; ensures protection of environmentally sensitive areas and watershed resources; does not allow ski area permit boundary expansion beyond what is authorized on the date of the enactment of this Act, as depicted on the map; provides for adaptive management of resources and restoration of damaged resources; and in accordance with— the laws (including regulations) and rules applicable to the National Forest System; and this section.

• Permanent protection of appropriate resources

• Comprehensive mechanism for management • Allow and encourage acquisition of lands within the boundary

• Authorize land exchanges

• Modify wilderness boundaries for Bonneville Shoreline Trail and transportation alternatives

• Establish Wayne Owens Grandeur Peak / Mount Aire Wilderness • Add to existing Lone Peak Wilderness

• Do not impact current permitting process

• Restrict ski resort permit boundary expansion

• Watershed, water quality, and ecological protection (e.g. Albion Basin)

• Allowances for adaptive management, preventative measures, and restoration (fire, avalanche control, vegetation, etc.)

• Authorize U.S. Forest Service to assess fees and for fees to be used within the designation

• Maintain existing allocation of developed and dispersed recreation use

• Does not affect private land within Designation Boundary