

JUAB SPECIAL SERVICE FIRE DISTRICT

May 14,2018

The Honorable Tom McClintock
Chairman
House Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington,D.C. 20515

The Honorable Colleen Hanabusa
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal lands
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE:H.R. 3777 Juab County Conveyance Act 2017

Dear Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Hanabusa,

My name is Byron B. Woodland, and I am a Juab County Commissioner and a Board Member of the Juab Special Service Fire District. On behalf of the Juab Special Service Fire District I am writing to ask for your support of "H.R. 3777 the Juab County Conveyance Act of 2017".

The Juab Special Service Fire District was created by Juab County and is a subdivision of Juab County. The Juab Special Service Fire District provides fire protection for and encompasses the entire geographical boundaries of Juab County and all of its taxpayers. Juab is a rural Utah county located approximately 85 miles south of Salt Lake City. The county has a population of 11,200 and covers a geographical area of 3,412 square miles (2,183,681 acres) of which 2,115 square miles (1,751,000 acres) are federal or state lands. The federal lands include parts of 3 national forests (Manti-La Sal, Fishlake, and Uintah-Wasatch-Cache); the Mt Nebo Wilderness; 3 wilderness study areas (Rockwell, Fish Springs, and Deep Creek); and two federal recreation areas (Little Sahara Recreation Area and the Fish Springs Wildlife Refuge). This also includes thousands of acres of BLM controlled lands. In a recent study performed by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah, Juab County was listed as the 9th fastest growing county by percentage increase in the United States. Our growth is mostly residential with very little commercial and industrial growth. Our communities are actually considered bedroom communities compared with our more urban neighbor to the north, Utah County. Since we have a growing population requiring increased services and a very limited commercial and industrial tax base, we are very financially challenged.

Fire suppression in Juab County is provided by the Juab Special Service Fire District which was established in the year 2001. The fire district is funded by Juab County tax payers and the tax rate is capped by Utah State law at .0008. The fire district consists of 6 fire departments with buildings located in the communities of Eureka, Levan, Mona, Nephi, Rocky Ridge, and in the west desert unincorporated communities of Callao, Granite and Partoun. We have approximately 125 fire fighters who volunteer their time and receive minimal pay for training, fire, and emergency responses with a base pay of \$7.50 per hour. Out of necessity and insufficient budgets, most of the upkeep and maintenance on fire equipment and buildings is performed by the fire fighters on their own time. The fire district is responsible for the fire suppression in all of the incorporated communities, all unincorporated private lands, and provides "first response" fire suppression on all 2,115 square miles of state and federal lands in the county. Along with their firefighting responsibilities, the district also provides rescue services, accident assistance, and extrication throughout the county.

Based on State Law, the Juab Special Service Fire District has entered into an agreement with the State of Utah to provide Wildland Urban Interface Fire Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation work throughout the county. As part of the agreement the fire district is required to provide activities directed at reducing the number of human-caused fires (Goal: Fire-Adapted Communities), take actions to reduce or eliminate risks to persons, property or natural resources (Goal: Resilient Landscapes), and provide activities that lead to *safe*, efficient, and capable wildfire suppression response (Goal: Strong Initial Attack Capability). Utah State law requires the Juab Special Service Fire District to dedicate a set annual participation commitment budget (i.e. 2018 total participation commitment budget is \$167,813) for these activities and to provide "First Attack" response on all wildfires on public lands. The goal is to reduce the number, intensity, and devastating destruction caused by wildfires in the county and significantly reduce the fire suppression costs to local, state and federal agencies.

The Juab County Conveyance Act will provide for the transfer, without consideration, of the ownership of a 2,000 square foot office building, storage building, and 2.66 acres of land from the U.S. Forest Service to the Juab Special Service Fire District. The property will be used by the Wildlands Urban Interface Mitigation Crew, County Fire Warden, and Emergency Services. This is an old, well used and somewhat dilapidated property that doesn't serve the Forest Service needs (i.e. please refer to the attached photographs). In *fact*, the Forest Service ceased using the building approximately 8 years ago and has allowed the fire district to use and maintain the building since 2016 at no *cost*, other than the fire district pays for the utilities and maintenance of the property. If conveyed to the fire district, it will also provide for enough land for the future construction of a much needed new fire house in Nephi City.

The Juab Special Service Fire District simply cannot afford to pay for this facility due to its extremely limited tax base (i.e. the certified tax rate is capped by state law at .0008 referred to above) and resulting budgets. 100% of the past and current operating budgets of the fire district have been and are committed to the fire protection and mitigation work being provided. There are positively no surplus fire district funds that could be used toward the purchase of this property. The fire district is making good use of this property to fulfill its mission and budget commitment towards fire prevention, preparedness, and mitigation.

The conveyance of this property will enhance the Juab Special Service Fire District's ability to provide fire protection for the residents of Juab County, motorists on Interstate-15, and all public lands within the county. It will enhance the Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Crew's ability to reduce the number and intensity of wild fires on public and private lands and reduce the cost to the local, state and federal governments. It will also provide a center for Emergency Services in the county. The risk of hazardous material spills is fairly high since Juab County has over 50 miles of interstate highway, two Union Pacific rail lines and several high pressure natural gas lines. The Juab County Sheriff currently has emergency communication and other equipment set up in the building that is needed to manage these types of events. The additional property will provide a location to build a much needed fire house for Nephi Fire Department. The current building is too small to house expensive equipment such as water tender (i.e. water tanker) trucks. This type of truck is essential for fighting fire on wildlands and unincorporated locations in the county. They should be housed in a heated building so they can be full of water year around. Currently they are drained in the winter to prevent freezing. In an emergency, we have to take time to fill the tanks on the trucks before we can respond. The conveyance of this property will definitely benefit the citizens of Juab County and the United States Government.

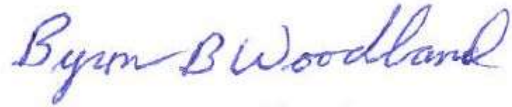
Juab County has a long history of having numerous, large and very expensive wild land fires. In fact, the average 10-year fire history in rural Juab County = \$85,644 and is one of the highest in the state for a rural county of our size. This 10-year average fire history factors into the annual participation commitment budget set by the State of Utah which = \$167,813 for Juab County. Other rural counties total participation commitment budgets include: Beaver County = \$43,233, Emery County = \$15,684, Garfield County = \$27,216, Grand County = \$46,742, Kane County = \$126,901, Millard County = \$200,001, Piute County = \$2,552, Rich County = \$12,592, San Juan County = \$66,426, Sanpete County = \$210,413, Sevier County = \$33,883, and Wayne County = \$1,020. It should be noted that Millard and Sanpete Counties are larger class size counties with higher populations and a higher tax base.

As a rural county with insufficient tax base and wildland fire budgets, Juab County residents and businesses already shoulder a heavy tax burden and cannot afford a tax increase, even if the certified tax rate cap referred to above didn't exist. The fact that it does exist doesn't allow the Fire District to increase taxes by more than a few ten-thousandths of a percent (i.e. certified tax rate cap .0008 – current certified tax rate .00073 = .000068). The result of a tax increase to the certified tax rate cap will not result in a sufficient amount of funding to make any real difference. Juab County's annual participation commitment budget of \$167,813 is 19% of its total operating budget of \$882,042 which severely limits and challenges the Fire District in its mission of protecting life and property for its residents. The remaining 81% of the Fire District's budget must support 125 firefighters in training, compensation and equipment as well as provide and maintain fire trucks, fire stations, and other necessary fire equipment for 6 Fire Departments county wide. If this property is not conveyed to the Juab Fire District at no cost, it will severely hamper the fire districts ability to perform its mission of "PREVENTION", "PREPAREDNESS" and "MITIGATION" and to meet its annual participation commitment budget required by Utah State law. If the fire district is unable to meet its participation commitment, the state is not obligated to cover the costs of wild land fires in Juab County which would, without question, bankrupt the fire district and county whom could never afford the "*often-times*" catastrophic wild land fire costs.

As a Commissioner of Juab County and a Board Member of the Juab Special Service Fire District, on behalf of the residents of Juab County, I respectfully request your timely passage of H. R. 3777.

Thank you for your consideration and time.

Sincerely,



Byron B Woodland
Juab County Commissioner
Juab Special Service Fire District Board









