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Testimony of Matthew Anderson,
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a project of Sutherland Institute

Regarding

H.R. 4532, Shásh Jaa' National Monument and Indian Creek National Monument Act

Before the

Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Committee on Natural Resources

U.S. House of Representatives

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Good morning Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and members of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands, and thank you for the invitation to speak.

San Juan County is a land of towering mesas, red rock canyons and unparalleled beauty. More impressive than this landscape, however, are the people who call this place home. For locals, public lands are about much more than rock climbing, camping, and outdoor recreation. Their history, culture and future depend on access to public lands and the life-sustaining resources they provide. Simply put, public lands are their whole world.

For nearly two years, I have spent countless hours getting to know the people of San Juan County, learning about their connection to the land and coming to understand why they overwhelmingly opposed the Bears Ears National Monument. While President Trump's decision to reduce the monument was a bold first step, locals recognize that congressional action alone is the only path that can secure their future.

Today, I would like to share with you the stories of three San Juan County residents and how the provisions of H.R. 4532 respect their history, promotes their culture and preserves their way of life.

First, I would like to tell you about Grandma Betty Jones. Grandma Betty is a Utah Navajo and serves as a leader and medicine woman in her community. I first got to know Grandma Betty at an anti-monument rally in Bluff, Utah. There she told me stories of gathering traditional herbs and medicines along Elk Ridge and herding sheep on the reservation, and she explained the spiritual nature of Bears Ears. Grandma Betty also expressed her fear that a national monument designation would restrict local tribes' access to the land. Much of her concern centered on the reality that a designation could limit woodcutting and the heat it provides Navajo homes during the long winter months. After all, she and other local Native Americans have seen firsthand that national monuments restrict this type of activity. Just a stone's throw away from Bears Ears is the Natural Bridges National Monument. The words "No Woodcutting" greet visitors in big bold letters. H.R. 4532 ensures that Grandma Betty, her family and other Utah Native Americans will have a prominent seat at the table in determining how Bears Ears and the surrounding area will be managed. This first-of-

its-kind legislation will keep Utahns' homes warm and protect against the whims of centralized government.

Debbie Christiansen serves as president of the San Juan County School Board. I spent an afternoon in her living room getting to know her – listening to stories of raising her family in a small town, discussing her love of the students she serves, and learning of her hopes for the future of San Juan County. She shared with me the educational struggles her county faces. You see, it costs nearly three times as much to educate one student in San Juan County as it does in other parts of the state due to its small population and large land mass. When you combine this with the fact that less than 8 percent of the county can be taxed to support education and the rampant poverty in the region, it is no wonder that Debbie opposes decisions that put further strain on the limited educational resources her county has. She viewed the Bears Ears National Monument as an insurmountable hurdle that locked up state trust lands and the funds they provide the region's schoolchildren. Today's bill makes Debbie's job a little easier by opening up funds to educate the next generation. The land exchange in H.R. 4532 permits the State of Utah's School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration to swap parcels in the Shásh Jaa' and Indian Creek National Monuments for mineral-rich lands both within and outside of the county. While clearly not the answer to all of San Juan County's educational struggles, this bill can have a profound and lasting impact on the county's schoolchildren.

Zeb Dalton is a third-generation cattle rancher and makes a living grazing livestock in the shadow of the Bears Ears Buttes. In the spring of 2016 I met him and his teenage son at their corral to learn about ranching in southeastern Utah and his concerns over the then-proposed Bears Ears National Monument. From horseback, Zeb expressed his worry that a designation would bring with it steeper regulations and decreased numbers of grazing cattle. He cited the experiences of his neighbors in Kane and Garfield counties, where – despite President Clinton's promise that grazing would remain at historical levels in the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument – the number of actual use AUMs has declined by almost a third in less than 20 years. Those ranchers left in the area face an uphill battle. They struggle to extend or move water lines within their allotments, fence riparian areas, maintain roads, or take other necessary measures to ensure the health and safety of their livestock. This is slowly pushing cattle off the range and ranchers off the land their families have worked for generations. Zeb fears his business, cultural heritage and family's future will be next. H.R. 4532 helps safeguard Zeb's and other San Juan County ranchers' way of life – allowing them to use the land as they have for generations.

While Grandma Betty, Debbie and Zeb all differ in how they use public lands, they all stand in solidarity in their call to preserve, protect, and responsibly use the land. After all, who knows and loves this area more than those who call it home? Without congressional action, Bears Ears, Shásh Jaa', and Indian Creek will be relegated to nothing more than political footballs being punted back and forth with each change of presidential administration. Nobody wins in that scenario – not the archaeological resources, not the environment, and certainly not the people of San Juan County.