



WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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**ON BEHALF OF THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES**

**HEARING TITLED, “EXPLORING THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF THE GOLDEN
AGE OF AMERICAN ENERGY DOMINANCE”**

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Garfield County, Utah, and the National Association of Counties (NACo).

My name is Jerry Taylor. I serve as a Commissioner in Garfield County and as Chair of NACo's Public Lands Policy Steering Committee. Garfield is a rural county where federal land policy determines much of our economic life. Nearly 90 percent of our land is federally managed. We provide essential services across a landscape larger than the state of Connecticut with a small and dispersed tax base. That reality makes the federal partnership indispensable to our residents and to the millions who visit every year.

About NACo

Founded in 1935, NACo is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States, bringing together county officials to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service.

About America's Counties

Counties are highly diverse, not only in my state of Utah, but across the nation, and vary immensely in natural resources, social and political systems, cultural, economic and structural circumstances, as well as public health and environmental responsibilities. Of the nation's 3,069 counties, approximately 70 percent are considered "rural," with populations less than 50,000, and 50 percent of these have populations below 25,000. At the same time, there are more than 120 major urban counties, which collectively provide essential services to more than 130 million people each day.

While county responsibilities differ widely, most states grant counties significant authorities to fulfill public services. These authorities include construction and maintenance of roads, bridges and critical infrastructure, assessment of property taxes, record keeping, administering elections, and overseeing jails, court systems and public hospitals. Counties are also responsible for consumer protection, economic development, employment and workforce training, emergency management, land use planning and zoning. Counties – like Garfield County – make federal lands accessible, safe and economically productive for the nation.

About Garfield County

Garfield County spans more than 5,000 square miles with fewer than 5,000 residents. Our county hosts nationally significant public lands that draw visitors from around the world. We are home to multiple national parks and state parks, and nearly 1.9 million acres of the Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument. These places support small businesses in lodging, guiding, dining and retail, and they also increase demand on county roads, law enforcement, search and rescue and emergency medical services.

Beneath the Kaiparowits Plateau within the Grand Staircase–Escalante lie some of Utah’s largest untapped coal resources. Responsible access to energy and minerals, alongside recreation and grazing, can support local jobs, generate federal revenue and fund county services that keep these landscapes open and healthy.

The Economic Potential of Federal Lands

Permitted uses on federal lands — oil and gas, forestry, grazing, mining and recreation — are not abstract debates in Garfield County. With about 90 percent of our land federally managed, our county budget and local economy depend on how well these activities are supported and sustained.¹

Recreation is a cornerstone of our economy. Bryce Canyon National Park drew 2,498,075 visitors in 2024 — up substantially from pandemic-era lows.² Those visitors support hotels, restaurants and outfitters across the county. At the same time, they create real costs for counties that provide law enforcement, emergency medical services and search and rescue to keep those areas safe and accessible.³

Energy and minerals remain an important piece of the picture. In 2024, Garfield County produced 93,109 barrels of oil.⁴ These resources generate federal mineral revenues that flow back to Utah and help counties like ours fund schools, maintain roads and support public safety.⁵

Grazing sustains multigeneration ranches that form the backbone of our rural culture and economy. It also reduces fine fuels that can feed catastrophic wildfire. Across Utah, the Bureau of Land Management administers about 1,410 grazing allotments and just over 1.3 million animal unit months — many of which include operations in Garfield County.⁶

Finally, active forest management is underway on Dixie National Forest. The U.S. Forest Service has proposed fuels reduction projects covering more than 200,000 acres in southern Utah — much of it in areas that benefit Garfield County.⁷ These

treatments protect watersheds, reduce wildfire risk and safeguard the communities we serve.

Responsible use is conservation in practice. Managed activity prevents fuel buildup, addresses invasive species and maintains working landscapes. Counties like mine have shown that multiple use can protect resources while local communities and economies.

Challenges That Undercut Local Prosperity

Rural counties face persistent barriers that prevent us from realizing the full potential of federal lands. Restricted access to leasing and project areas reduces jobs and revenue that counties rely on to provide services. At the same time, high volumes of visitors strain law enforcement, search and rescue operations and local roads, often without commensurate federal offsets. With a limited private tax base, counties depend on stable funding from the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program to meet basic obligations.

Lengthy and duplicative permitting processes also increase costs and delay community benefits. Counties work hard to build strong relationships with federal agencies, but too often we do not have a seat at the table in the early stages of project review. That lack of coordination prevents us from aligning local requirements — such as zoning modifications — with federal permitting actions, adding unnecessary time to project completion. These delays can be reduced by ensuring counties and other partners have a formal role in the permitting process. One example would be for counties to enter into formal agreements with lead federal agencies as cooperating agencies to clarify roles, expectations, decision-making authority, dispute resolution processes and areas of consensus.

Counties urge Congress to enact legislation to streamline the federal permitting process and to give state, local and tribal governments a consistent seat at the table from start to finish.

In places like Garfield County, a short construction season magnifies the effect of delays. Missing a window due to permitting can push work an entire year, drive up costs and postpone safety or access improvements that serve residents and visitors alike.

Counties as Essential Partners

Counties are not just stakeholders. We are partners at the forefront. When a hiker is lost on a monument trail, when a wildfire ignites near a grazing allotment, when a

storm washes out an access road, county responders and road crews are first to act. Local knowledge, capacity and accountability are necessary to meet national goals for energy, recreation and conservation.

A durable path to American energy leadership respects multiple use, values local expertise and ensures that counties can plan and deliver the services that make federal lands work for the public.

Recommendations

America's counties offer the following recommendations to support responsible use of federal lands and strong local economies:

- Streamline federal permitting for energy, grazing and land management projects with clear timelines and accountability
- Protect PILT and other revenue sharing so counties with large federal land bases can fund essential services
- Formalize county input in federal land use planning to ensure local expertise shapes decisions on access, mitigation and operations
- Affirm multiple use as sound stewardship, recognizing that energy, grazing, forestry and recreation can complement one another when locally informed and responsibly managed
- Enact legislation to streamline the federal permitting process and give state, local and tribal governments a consistent seat at the table from start to finish

Conclusion

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter and members of the Committee, Garfield County reflects both the promise and the pressure of America's federal lands. We host world class landscapes and significant energy potential. With balanced policies, we can deliver both economic strength and conservation results.

By restoring responsible access, streamlining permits, protecting PILT and elevating local voices, Congress can help counties like mine sustain vital services, safeguard visitors and steward the lands we all share.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. We look forward to working with you to advance policies that strengthen communities, support energy security and uphold true conservation.

Sources

1. [Drilling Edge – Garfield County, Utah wells and production data](#)
2. [National Park Service – Bryce Canyon visitation statistics, 2024](#)
3. [AP News – Bryce Canyon tourism impacts, NPS Visitor Guide, 2024](#)
4. [Drilling Edge – Garfield County oil production, 2024](#)
5. [MineralAnswers.com – Garfield County mineral revenues](#)
6. [Bureau of Land Management – Utah grazing statistics](#)
7. [Salt Lake Tribune – Dixie National Forest fuels reduction, Jan. 2025, KSL – Fuels reduction project in southern Utah, Jan. 2025](#)