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Testimony of Matthew Anderson,
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a project of Sutherland Institute
Regarding
The Enhancing State Management of Federal Lands and Waters Act
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
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Good morning, Chairman Bishop, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Lowenthal, and members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources. Thank you for the invitation to speak.

The West is home to some spectacular landscapes. Towering redrock mesas, endless seas of sagebrush and majestic mountains make the West's public lands as diverse as they are beautiful. This diversity and splendor is not lost on those who call the West home. In fact, no one knows or loves these public lands more than locals whose history, culture and future depend on the health, accessibility and the life-sustaining resources of these lands. Simply put, public lands are our whole world.

Despite this reality, a narrative persists that state management of federal lands will set aside environmental stewardship and recreational activities in favor of unrestrained logging, grazing and extraction practices. My testimony aims to debunk this by focusing on the extraordinary efforts being taken by Western states to balance conservation and recreation alongside economic interests.

When it comes to recreation, Western states recognize the increased demand, both in terms of the number of people and the types of recreational activities. Today, there are more hikers, mountain bikers, snowmobilers, and off-road enthusiasts than ever before in the West. We see that Western states are stepping up to the plate and meeting recreational demand through innovative and popular solutions on state lands.

Despite the perception that state trust lands are managed solely for resource extraction, Western state trust land agencies are accommodating recreational demands while still meeting their fiduciary responsibilities. In fact, most Western state trust lands allow recreational use – either free or through the purchase of a moderately priced permit. Some Western states have also elected to lease parcels for specific recreational opportunities, like mountain biking, to provide a better recreational experience than can be found on federal lands. Some state trust agencies are even purchasing land to enhance recreation. For example, Montana's Land Banking Program allows the sale of trust lands that have low recreational value, and the revenues are used to purchase lands with more recreational opportunities. The purchased parcels are required to generate more revenues than those sold, so land

banking meets financial and recreational demands. Since 2003, 68,000 acres of Montana trust lands have been sold, 84 percent of which were surrounded by private lands. In return, nearly 65,000 acres of legally accessible land with recreational opportunities have been purchased.

Western state parks also provide exceptional recreational opportunities and are incredibly popular. In fact, although the West's state parks make up only one-fifth as much land as national parks in the West, they bring in nearly 80 percent as many visitors on a per-acre basis. This is largely due to the types and quality of recreational opportunities they provide that are enhanced by developed amenities like lodges, visitor centers, campgrounds and other guest services. But these parks don't solely focus on recreation; they also manage for wildlife habitat and environmental preservation.

Western states are doing much more than designating and maintaining state parks to preserve the environment, and my home state of Utah is no exception. Utah has the largest active watershed and wildlife habitat restoration program in the United States. The Utah Legislature has partnered with local hunters and the federal government to invest approximately \$14 million annually for conservation and has restored almost 1.5 million acres since 2005. In 2014, the Utah State Legislature passed the Utah Wilderness Act – recognizing the importance of protected wilderness areas and providing a path for preserving state lands as state wilderness areas. And most recently, many of Utah's state officials have thrown their support behind HB 4532, which prohibits mineral extraction within 1.35 million acres of the Bears Ears region. These types of efforts are being led and conducted across the West.

You see, Westerners understand and embrace the reality that local decision-making and sensible land management are not mutually exclusive and appreciate this recognition by the Enhancing State Management of Federal Lands and Waters Act.

However, we at Sutherland Institute maintain that more can and should be done, if the legislation's intent is to make localism the guiding principle of federal land management. If states are wise and experienced enough to make decisions regarding oil and gas drilling on public lands, then don't they have the capacity to manage recreational opportunities, logging, grazing, wildlife and environmental protection as well?

As is evidenced by the cited examples, there is no hard and fast rule as to what uses get priority on public lands under state management. Instead, local voices, expertise, values and circumstance guide the sustainable uses of our state land management and should do the same for our federal multiple-use public lands. Under this approach, states become the agent of the federal government in setting multiple-use priorities on federally controlled public lands, to the benefit of the public, state and federal budgets, and the lands themselves. Localism would drive better public land management by leveraging local knowledge and manpower, while maintaining the opportunity for federal guideposts to protect against bad actors. In short, if localism is a good approach for oil and gas drilling, then why not for other uses?