Today, Representative Rob Bishop introduced the Utah Public Lands Initiative (PLI). The proposed legislation fails to protect the imperiled cultural resources of Bears Ears, puts important natural and cultural resources at risk to rampant energy development, and undermines protection for priceless red rock Utah lands. The PLI divests Americans of their shared public lands heritage by granting the State of Utah permitting authority over energy development on Federal lands, including mandatory grazing on all public lands in eastern Utah, and handing over valuable public lands and resources to the State. The bill fails to reflect areas of agreement reached through years of local discussion.

Three years of missed deadlines have positioned this bill extremely poorly for enactment. The chances of PLI becoming law during the 114th Congress are slim to none, especially with so little time remaining. In the 114th Congress, at least 5,534 bills have been introduced to the House. Of those, about 10 percent passed the House. Less than 2 percent of House bills have become law. With threats from looting, vandalism, and development increasing every day, it is time to recognize that President Obama must act to create the Bears Ears National Monument.

“The PLI carves up to 600,000 acres of critical lands off of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument and demotes sovereign Native American Tribes to just a voice in the crowd advising how the lands should be managed,” said Bill Hedden of the Grand Canyon Trust. “Federal land managers at the Bears Ears NCA would be given the impossible task of maintaining 'historical uses' without distinction between mining, chaining, off-road vehicle use, or conducting ceremonies, gathering herbs and visiting sacred
sites. San Juan County entirely dismissed Native American concerns by rejecting the homegrown proposal to fully protect a Bears Ears National Monument—one that garnered 64% local support.”

“The intent of Rep. Bishop’s bill is simple: abandon our public lands to indiscriminate abuse by the oil and gas industry,” said Sharon Buccino, director of the land and wildlife program at the Natural Resources Defense Council. “It would open up this iconic Utah landscape to coal mining, tar sands, oil shale, and oil and gas development. That would put local communities and our climate at increased risk. And it would undermine the clean energy future we are already moving to.”

“Across the nation, including in southeast Utah, many of our most ecologically intact landscapes are anchored by national parks. Yet, national parks are only as protected as the landscapes of which they are a part. This legislation would make Utah’s national parks, at best, lone islands. It rolls back protections to the surrounding landscapes and undermines federal land management authority and expertise on park ecosystems. We are disappointed in the bill and its partner act, that flies in the face of one of our nation’s most bipartisan conservation tools, the Antiquities Act,” said National Parks Conservation Association’s David Nimkin.

"The PLI includes provisions that are incompatible with any real conservation efforts," commented Wayne Hoskisson from the Sierra Club. "The bill still substitutes easily-modified national conservation areas for lands that deserve and need wilderness designations. The delegation is already attempting to undermine the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area in Washington County, which was created only seven years ago"

“The new version of the Public Land Initiative protects even less wilderness than the earlier version. It opens protected areas to energy development and furthers the State of Utah’s efforts to seize public land. It is a terrible, terrible bill for Utah wilderness,” said Scott Groene, executive director of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. “This is nothing but an attempt to stop the Bears Ears national monument designation. President Obama will now see clearly that the Utah delegation is not serious about protecting our important public lands. He should act quickly to do the job himself.”

“Everyone agrees that Bears Ears needs urgent protection,” said Scott Miller, Southwest regional director for The Wilderness Society. “After numerous missed chances at legislation over three-plus years, now is the time for President Obama to designate the Bears Ears National Monument. The Antiquities Act has created many of America’s most treasured national monuments and Bears Ears should be among them.”

"The 'National Conservation Areas' in this bill are a misnomer. The PLI legislation includes huge loopholes that would prohibit land managers from truly conserving lands," said Ryan Bidwell, Senior Director with Conservation Lands Foundation. “PLI undermines the BLM’s system of National Conservation Lands, and is not a legitimate conservation alternative to a Bears Ears National Monument."