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### Roads compact is at risk

County claims: Conferees may strip a bill of a deal meant to guard sensitive Utah public land; Rural roads deal at risk

*Christopher Smith The Salt Lake Tribune*

WASHINGTON -- A bipartisan compromise to stop Utah counties from expanding roads across national monuments, proposed wilderness areas and other sensitive public lands may be stripped this week from a final Interior Department spending bill. Alarmed at the prospect,

104 House members have sent a letter to House and Senate members of the Interior Appropriations conference committee. They are urging committee members to leave intact the House-passed amendment that would restrict the Bureau of Land Management from processing "**disclaimers of interest**" to turn over certain roads across public lands in Utah to counties. Eliminating that provision could allow the counties to develop roads across national monuments, wildlife refuges, potential wilderness areas and national parks, signers of the letter claim.

"The **disclaimer rule** could have widespread negative consequences," Reps. Mark Udall, D-Colo., and Vernon Ehlers, R-Mich., wrote in a letter also signed Friday by 102 other House members. "[The amendment] would not protect all lands that could be affected but it would protect some of the most sensitive parts of America's public lands."

In July, the House passed a measure pushed by Utah's two GOP House members that limited an amendment by Udall that would have prohibited use of federal funds to process Utah's road claims made under the 1866 frontier law known as Revised Statute 2477.

Udall had hoped to neuter an agreement reached in April between Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt and Interior Secretary Gale Norton that essentially allowed the federal government to deed ownership of disputed backcountry roads across public lands to Utah for maintenance and improvement.

A "perfecting" amendment to the Udall amendment by Utah Republican Reps. Rob Bishop and Chris Cannon and Rep. Charles Taylor, R-N.C., cleared the House 226-194 after sponsors offered a compromise by prohibiting BLM from processing **disclaimers** on roads crossing national parks, national monuments, wilderness study areas, wildlife refuges or federal wilderness areas.

Now, Republican-led conferees meeting Monday behind closed doors were considering whether to strip the Taylor-Cannon-Bishop amendment from the final version of the spending bill since there is no similar provision in the Senate-passed version of the Interior appropriation, according to House Democratic staff

members.

"There is a lot of concern for how this will affect our public and private lands throughout the country," said Lawrence Pacheco, a spokesman for Udall.

Environmental groups, which had generally applauded the compromise amendment, warned of a public backlash.

"To completely have this language ripped out of the bill would be an utter disappointment to the public's expectation of how these special lands should be protected," said Kristen Brengel, a lobbyist for The Wilderness Society.

Bishop and Cannon did not sign the letter to Interior conferees requesting their amendment remain in place, nor did Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, who had voted against the Taylor-Cannon-Bishop amendment after his own compromise amendment failed on a technicality.

Through spokesmen, Bishop and Cannon said Monday they were unsure what would become of the amendment until the final report is issued, but remained supportive of the compromise language.

In an interview, Matheson said he was unaware of the Udall letter but was still against the amendment since it failed to address potential threats to private property by the **disclaimers**.

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