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Workman abandons claims to eight roads

S.L. County abandons 8 road claims

Thomas Burr The Salt Lake Tribune

In what environmentalists and Salt Lake City officials call a partial victory, Salt Lake County now says it does not want to **claim** ownership of eight pathways in Big Cottonwood Canyon that previously had been submitted to the state in an ongoing dispute over rights of way across federal lands. GOP County Mayor Nancy Workman sent a letter this month to the Utah Attorney General's Office saying the county has no interest -- at this time -- in seeking **claims** to the eight byways. Those paths were added without public notice to a list of 15 other roads approved in 2000 by the County Commission.

"We're just going to revert back to the original list and we're fine with that," Workman said Tuesday. "I just don't see a reason for [considering them] right now."

The county previously had denied requests -- by reporters and environmentalists -- to reveal the roads submitted for consideration as a byway created under a 19th century law that allowed counties to build across federal lands. That law, Revised Statute 2477, or RS2477, was repealed in 1976; counties retained rights to those roads, but no maps were kept.

Workman's letter, dated Dec. 16 and obtained Tuesday by The Salt Lake Tribune, comes to light as a Sandy developer, Canyon Ventures, is seeking motorized access from the U.S. Forest Service across Mill D South Fork **Road**, also known as Cardiff Fork -- one of the Big Cottonwood roads the county had sought to **claim** and now isn't. Canyon Ventures has said it wants to build a year-round resort on its property at the top of the **road**.

Salt Lake City officials -- who are concerned that **road claims** across watersheds could lead to development -- were pleased by Workman's move.

"There are many, many people who are concerned about these watersheds and applaud this decision," said LeRoy Hooton Jr., director of the city's Public Utilities Department.

Save Our Canyons, which is fighting RS2477 **claims**, was excited, too.

"We are relieved that Salt Lake County has renounced its RS2477 **road claims**," said group trustee Tom Stephens. "Mayor Workman obviously realized that the county **road claims** created a no-win political issue for her, given the tremendous grass-roots negative response to them."

Democratic County Councilman Joe Hatch said the mayor had more courage than her Republican colleagues on the council, which decided this summer not to abandon the possible **claims**.

"I'm delighted," Hatch said. "The mayor took the absolutely right approach saying we don't **claim** rights across these roads."

Hatch plans to ask the County Council next week to pass a resolution supporting the mayor's action.

Assistant Attorney General John Boyden said Tuesday that he will respect the mayor's request, unless there is a "compelling state interest" in overriding the county.

Counties across the state have a right to say what they want to **claim**, he added.

"They are able to instruct us from day to day what they want done," Boyden said. "Let's say they change their mind in six months; we'll listen to them."

The state is deciding which roads to **claim** in land controlled by the Bureau of Land Management and has not addressed roads in the national forests.

Workman said her decision did not come because of lobbying by any groups. She said she reversed the county's position on the eight roads because state officials asked for justification on why they were picked and the county had no answer.

"I couldn't give them a reason they were on there," Workman said.

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Claims not sought by Salt Lake County:

Mill F East Fork

Mill D South Fork (Cardiff Fork)

Mineral Fork

Silver Fork

Days Fork

Honeycomb Fork

Willow Heights Canyon

American Hollow

Claims sought

by Salt Lake County:

Burr's Fork Lane

Killyons Canyon

Emigration Canyon

Little Mountain

Lambs Canyon

Mill Creek Canyon

Extension of Mill Creek Canyon

Church Fork

Porters Fork

Pole Canyon

Alexander Fork

Mill D North Fork

Butterfield Canyon

Rose Canyon

Yellow Canyon

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