

NEWS RELEASE

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RANCHERS, ACTIVISTS DECRY
THE “MOTHER OF ALL MILITARY LAND GRABS”

Salt Lake City: Ranchers and activists are gearing up to stop the “mother of all military land grabs” in Utah’s West Desert and are insisting upon a full environmental and public review of the plan to expand the Utah Test and Training Range.

“On its face, this land grab is unnecessary and unjustified,” said Steve Erickson of the Citizens Education Project. “The Air Force already has nearly unfettered use of the airspace over these lands, so this is not about preserving or even expanding the airspace. Claiming it’s necessary to protect Hill AFB from base closure is also a load of malarkey - Hill’s in no jeopardy,” Erickson said.

“We hear that the Air Force wants to own these lands to protect the UTTR from encroachment, but this land grab would be an unwarranted encroachment upon the residents of Snake Valley,” according to Callao rancher Annette Garland. “There’s little chance of any significant development of property in this area, so that’s a red herring,” Garland said. “We are highly suspicious of the real motivation behind this military take over of the public’s land – is this the first step in reviving the electronic battlefield plan that we defeated 23 years ago?”

Garland is also worried about the potential impact or loss of access to water rights. Snake Valley residents have been in a ten-year fight to prevent their groundwater from being exported to Las Vegas. Erickson said he believes Dugway will expand its boundary to the south as part of the land exchanges.

U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) is sponsoring an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for 2015 to authorize the transfer of BLM lands to the Department of Defense and to exchange state-owned land parcels within the UTTR and the Cedar Mountains Wilderness for unspecified federal property. (<https://www.congress.gov/amendment/113th-congress/senate-amendment/3819/text>) The lands involved comprise over 700,000 acres, an area the size of Rhode Island or the Dugway Proving Ground. Affected areas include the Bonneville Salt Flats, Pony Express trail, Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, and a large swath of northeastern Snake Valley.

Erickson said that Hatch should back off trying to push this through Congress without public debate and an Environmental Impact Statement. “Clearly this is a major federal action that should be subject to full environmental impact analysis and public scrutiny,” he said.

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