**NEWS RELEASE**

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[**Public lands are big business Moab**](http://publiclandsolutions.org/News.html)

*Business leaders to BLM: Protecting recreation opportunities on Utah’s public lands key to local economy*

Public lands are big business in Moab. Two of the nation’s most iconic national parks – Arches and Canyonlands – and the surrounding public lands bring in hundreds of thousands of visitors to Grand County, Utah each year generating tens of millions of dollars in tourism and outdoor recreation related activities.

In 2012, for example, visitors [spent](http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/ut/moab_fo/mlp0.Par.99715.File.dat/Moab-MLP_Socioeconomic-Baseline-Final_web.pdf) $125.7 million in Grand County, and tourism employed more than 2,300 people.

“Our business community recognizes that, to maintain a healthy, thriving and diverse local economy, the recreation values on public land must be maintained,” said Kirstin Peterson, City Council member and owner of Rim Mountain Bike Tours. “With smart planning, we can protect the parks and surrounding landscape that belong to all Americans and ensure oil and gas drilling occurs responsibly and in the right places.”

With that economic interest in mind, more than 50 business owners in Utah today sent a [letter](http://publiclandsolutions.org/uploads/MLP_Biz_Letter_52315.pdf) to the Bureau of Land Management, urging a smarter approach to public land management. Today is the final day to submit comments on the [Moab Master Leasing Plan](http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/moab/MLP.html) (MLP) to the BLM.

The Moab MLP would take a broader look across the local landscape and to plan oil and gas development and potash mining in a way that aims to protect the regional recreation economy and public lands. Businesses in Moab have thrived because of recreation opportunities on public lands like hiking at Fisher Towers, mountain biking and jeeping at Gemini Bridges and climbing at Indian Creek.

“As business owners in the region, we support the Bureau of Land Management’s effort to better accommodate multiple uses through landscape-wide plans, and we believe that this type of planning is critical for the future economic development of the region,” the business owners said in the [letter](http://publiclandsolutions.org/uploads/MLP_Biz_Letter_52315.pdf).

“Like a good snowpack that brings a flowing river, my business depends on healthy land and water in this region,” said Denise Oblak, owner of Canyon Voyages rafting company. “It is critical that policymakers understand this and plan in a way that best supports our recreation economy.”

The business owners noted four land designations for BLM consideration, including: open, with tailored stipulations; no surface occupancy; lease retirement zones; and closed. From outfitters and guides, restaurants and lodging to law firms and manufacturers, these residents understand the impact of the recreation economy and the opportunities it creates in the region.

In 2010, tourism generated $6.6 million in local tax revenue – nearly 14 percent of the total revenue for Grand County, Utah.

“Master Leasing Plan is just a formal way to say smart planning,” said Petersen “If we can get energy development and lands conservation right from the beginning, our economy will continue to thrive.”

The letter included a [map](http://publiclandsolutions.org/uploads/PLS_STIPS_map_052814b.jpg) to show the “best way to enhance and maintain” leasing for energy extraction and the recreation economy in the region.

“We applaud the BLM for its work so far and are impressed that Alternative ‘C’ provides a strong plan for protecting recreation opportunities on public lands and the local economy,” said Scott Newton of Poison Spider Bicycles.

The Moab economy depends on both visitation to the nearby National Parks and visitation to the lands around the parks. Tourists and outdoor enthusiasts visit both the national parks and the BLM lands surrounding those parks to enjoy the long list of activities such as hiking, biking, climbing, and jeeping.

