March 17, 2014

Honorable Rob Bishop  
123 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
Fred.Ferguson@mail.house.gov

Dear Congressman Bishop:

I recently spoke to Fred Ferguson in your office about the effort to develop comprehensive land use legislation for public lands in eastern Utah. After reviewing the information on your website, I see that various stakeholder organizations were asked to submit letters of interest, organizational priorities, and provide relevant information to the collaborative process that is underway. Although late into the process, HawkWatch International, Inc. (HWI) respectfully requests to be included in future communication and information gathering efforts.

The mission of HWI is to conserve the environment through education, long-term monitoring and scientific research on raptors as indicators of environmental health. We believe that through our efforts to monitor and protect birds of prey, we can also protect our shared environment, our rich natural heritage and ourselves. HWI has successfully worked for over 25 years with hundreds of volunteers, supporters and partners as a science-based, nonpolitical, non-confrontational organization for environmental conservation.

The open and wild lands of eastern Utah provide habitat for a number of species of raptors across a diversity of landscapes from forests to canyons to desert and agricultural lands. We, of course, want to ensure that public lands policies and management work together to protect wildlife habitat and health of all birds of prey. We understand the need for economic development and job creation at national, state and local levels but also believe that our shared stewardship for our natural resources requires a sustainable and sensitive approach in the use of our public lands. The protection of the state’s magnificent landscapes and the conservation of wildlife and the environment that they depend upon is critical to the recreation industry and the health of local communities in eastern Utah.

We are concerned about potential impacts of climate change, increasing fire, and different types of energy development, recreation, mining, timber operations and other resource extraction industries that have the potential to degrade or fragment wildlife habitat. We have particular concerns about oil and gas, wind energy, and transmission line development that, if not well planned, can have significant impacts on hawks and eagles due to habitat loss, disturbance, collision, and electrocution. Particular areas in the state have unique concerns and issues; for example, Mexican...
Spotted Owls and California Condors are two at-risk species found in Utah’s canyon country. The Mexican Spotted Owl is a federally threatened species and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a recovery plan for the owl that includes protection for sensitive areas of the owl’s habitat from disturbance and ongoing monitoring of the population to determine changes and trends in the viability and success of this species. Golden Eagles occur throughout the state of Utah and nest on our cliffs and canyons, can be sensitive to changes in land use, such as energy development and recreation, and are also afforded special federal protection through the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. These are but a few examples of raptors that may be at risk from detrimental changes to their key habitats in the state, and we urge you to consider raptors in the planning process. We offer HawkWatch International as a resource in this regard.

As you continue the process of stakeholder engagement and seek to find an appropriate balance for the competing interests and uses of the public lands we would support increased protection of wildlife habitat in general and urge particular attention to the conservation of unique and sensitive habitat areas that support concentrations of raptors and raptors at risk, such as the Mexican Spotted Owl. We know that working towards consensus and collaboration on public lands issues is a difficult and slow process and we wish you and all of those that invest their time and energy in this collective and important effort great success. We appreciate your leadership in bringing the parties together and welcome future opportunities to participate and contribute to an outcome that will benefit communities, wildlife and our amazing heritage of natural resources in the state of Utah.

Sincerely,

Paul Parker
Executive Director