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OUTDOOR RETAILER DAILY



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Who speaks for Utah?

Gov. Gary Herbert's aggressive campaign to wrest control of federal wildlands has fired up Utah outdoor business leaders like Black Diamond's Peter Metcalf. *Jason Stevenson* investigates the issues and heated rhetoric.

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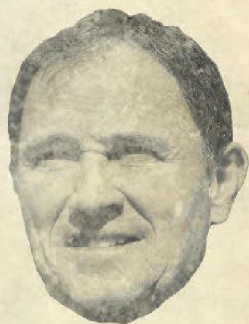
RIP, Gene

O.R.D contributor *Michael Hodgson* remembers a longtime industry sales leader.



Suzanne Yeo in extended side angle pose on a SUP board.

BATTLE BEEHIVE



GOVERNOR ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

GARY HERBERT

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ FOR THE STATE OF UTAH



WILL UTAH'S FIREBRAND POLITICS OVER FEDERAL LANDS PUSH OUT

IN THE STATE

S. ★ **PETER METCALF**
FOR THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY



OUTDOOR RETAILER AWAY? BY JASON STEVENSON



STEP OUTSIDE THE SALT PALACE,

turn north and walk a mile up State Street, and you'll come to the granite columns of the Utah State Capitol.

At first glance, you might think you're in Washington, D.C. The copper-domed building so closely resembles the U.S. Capitol that it stood in for its federal look-a-like in films like "Legally Blonde 2."

But there's little love for the federal government in this building.

In March, Utah's 104-member legislature passed a law demanding that the federal government turn over 22 million acres of Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service land — including the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument — to the state, and set aside \$3 million for a lawsuit if it doesn't comply. The state wants to control, and even sell or lease some of the land for private use, including for oil and gas development. The legislature also passed a resolution supporting SkiLink, a plan to force the U.S. Forest Service to sell 30 acres of proposed wilderness and watershed land in the Wasatch-Cache National Forest to construct a ski gondola connecting the Big Cottonwood Canyon resorts to the Park City resorts. And lastly, the state announced its decision to sue the feds (again) under an 1866 mining law to take control of 19,000 unused roads, some of which cut across designated wilderness.

PROTEST VOTE

The firebrand politics aren't sitting well with many in the outdoor industry, especially those who call Utah home.

"Utah is associated with some of the worst policies regarding federal land in the country," said Peter Metcalf, founder and CEO of Black Diamond.

Beginning in 1991 when he relocated his company from Ventura, Calif. to Salt Lake City, Metcalf has been an active proponent for improving outdoor recreation and land protections in Utah. He also played a key role in luring the Outdoor Retailer show from Reno, Nev. to Salt Lake in 1996. And after two decades of seesaw negotiations with Utah politicians, Metcalf is fed up. "Any attempt to influence the governor, the legislature and our federal representatives is dead under the current political leaders," he said. "Any response they give is lip service."

The Beehive State's recently passed laws place it ahead of other Western states in the growing resistance to federal land policies. Utah was the only state this year to advance a law demanding the sale of federal land. Similar bills were vetoed in Arizona, and stalled in the Colorado legislature, while the governors of Idaho and Wyoming were noncommittal when Utah Gov. Gary Herbert pressed them this summer to follow his state's lead. "I think many people in the outdoor industry believe that Utah is ground zero for sagebrush rebellion," Metcalf said, referring to a period of similar tension over public lands during the 1970s and '80s.

Alarmed by what he describes as a threat to the integrity and vibrancy of federal lands, Metcalf resigned three weeks ago from the Utah Ski and Snowsports Industry working group. In justifying

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his move, Metcalf called the recent actions by Utah's legislature and Herbert as "hostile to the interests of the outdoor industry" as well as "reactionary and contrary to the state's long-term economic benefit."

It later came out that Herbert wrote a letter to Metcalf asking him to resign from the working group if he "cannot work in a spirit of collaboration." As he runs for re-election this year, the governor has staked the position that energy development and protecting the environment are not mutually exclusive. "This is not an all-or-nothing proposition," Herbert wrote in his letter to Metcalf. "We can both maintain our vibrant outdoor industry and tap the vast, long-term economic potential of multiple use of our public lands, which would be facilitated by state control."

Metcalf's resignation comes at a crucial time as Outdoor Retailer's organizers decide whether the show remains in Salt Lake, or leaves for another venue like Denver, Anaheim, Orlando or Las Vegas after 2014.

THE WEIGHT OF POLITICS

When it comes to choosing a future site, Outdoor Retailer Show Director Kenji Haroutunian said politics isn't a factor for Nielsen, the California-based firm that owns and operates the show. "We don't really make decisions on venues for events based on politics. We make decisions based on what the industry tells us what they want, what they need," he said. Haroutunian personally believes the local governance can influence the fit of the show, "But I'm not sure that moving the show out or in particular area, is the right approach."

The host location's policies do matter to the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), the show's title sponsor and main membership group. "Politics are important," said Lori Herrera, OIA's executive vice president and COO. "It is one piece of the broader business decision that Nielsen needs to make. We think the political environment is part of the cultural fit" Herrera acknowledges that the outdoor industry is linked to the natural environment in a way that goes beyond sales and revenues. "We are in an industry that is driven from the head and heart," she said. "And we know that [politics] is something our board and members care about."

Although the majority of OIA's lobbying occurs at a national level, it also pays attention to Utah. Herrera said OIA has pressured the state's leaders for many years, most recently sending letters to Herbert criticizing the state's conservation and land management policies (see sidebar). After OIA's lobbyists approached Herbert during the Western Governors' Association meeting in June, they convinced him to meet with the OIA board during this Summer Market to continue the discussion. The governor's staff confirmed the meeting.

Due to OIA's lobbying efforts and Metcalf's public protests, it's likely Utah's public land policies will play some kind of role in deciding Outdoor Retailer's future. But looming larger than politics is Salt Lake City's lack of room for the rapidly growing Summer and Winter Markets. (Read our *O.R.D. Day 1 feature on the show's possible new homes.*) Mark "Roody" Rasmussen, senior vice president at Clearfield, Utah-based Petzl America, Inc. agrees that the companies and reps who attend OR are passionate about the

outdoor industry and the environment. But when asked whether Utah's controversial public land laws could encourage the show to leave the state, Rasmussen said no. "The reality is that there is not enough exhibitor space, hotels, or taxi cabs to accommodate a growing show. And that's going to push OR out of Utah."

VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

A second factor undercutting the influence of politics in the debate is the lack of concern shown by the outdoor community, especially compared to previous clashes. A recent check of "Collective Voices," the online bulletin board set up by OIA to discuss OR's future, showed that among the 104 comments under the question "Where's the best place for Outdoor Retailer?" only one person suggested leveraging OR's potential departure to apply pressure on Utah's politicians.

While many posts support keeping the show in Salt Lake City, they don't mention the state's public land policies as a major concern. That's the opinion held by Nicole Orr, a marketing manager for Danner Footwear in Portland, Ore., who has attended OR the last three years. She admits she's out of the loop on Utah politics, but she also doesn't think it matters. "When it comes to decisions about the future of OR, I feel it's better to do the right thing for members of OIA, and do the right thing for the folks who actually attend the show," she said.

That absence of politics in discussions about Outdoor Retailer's fate could change as attendees arrive to Salt Lake and learn more about Utah's recent challenges to federal land policies. At the same time, the crowded convention could highlight the severe space crunch in Salt Lake City—pushing logistical issues to the top of the list. There's also another notion being considered by both Nielsen and OIA that could guide their choice: the idea that a host location's outdoor culture doesn't matter that much. "There's no evidence to indicate that having a show in an area that's friendly to the outdoor industry has a positive economic benefit to the industry," Haroutunian said. He claims that promoting a healthy, growing industry that represents the entire recreational economy will generate more political firepower than simply picking a safe haven for the show.

A similar thought process is occurring at OIA, according to Lori Herrera. "One of the discussions we've had at the board is how much of the culture is the city, and how much is what we — the outdoor industry — are bringing to the city." Even Metcalf, who a decade ago encouraged Outdoor Retailer to boycott

Utah over similar rollbacks of wilderness protection, realizes that the same strategy won't succeed today. "If the show is staying in Utah as an attempt to influence public policy, it's not working. How could be it any worse?" he said. "If this is the best we can do, we all should go home."

THE PRICE OF MOVING

"If there is one surprise in the feedback we've been getting, it's just how much love there is for Salt Lake City," admitted Haroutunian. "Even the people who feel pain because of the cramped conditions at the Salt Palace hate the idea of leaving. When I attended the show as a retailer, a huge draw for me was to come and get some climbing days in, and get some skiing days in during the winter show," he said. "The show stays active at night, in a restaurant, in a night club, on a chair lift, or when you're tied into a rope together."

Former SNEWS editor-in-chief Michael Hodgson, who now runs the Collective Voice website for Outdoor Retailer and OIA, also has seen strong support for Utah on the forum. "Even though they're calling out the lack of hotel rooms and lines at restaurants, people are also very comfortable in Salt Lake City, especially given the backdrop of mountains and nearby recreation."

Losing Outdoor Retailer could lead to more political fallout, possibly hurting Utah's ability lure new outdoor-related companies and jobs. According to the Economic Development Corporation of Utah, more than 1,000 sports and outdoor product companies are based in the state. Many of these firms arrived during the 16 years Outdoor Retailer has called Salt Lake City home, and the state's business team highlights the show's presence to attract more.

Petzl's Rasmussen said he sees any move as a significant threat to state's recreational economy. "If Salt Lake City solves the logistic issues and the show stays, the political issues in Utah would continue to be worked on," he said. "But if the show leaves, I think the biggest loss will be Salt Lake's position as a bully pulpit to protect the outdoor community here in Utah." With five national parks (third behind California and Alaska), plus six national forests and seven national monuments, Utah often plays an outsized role in the tug-of-war between the extraction and recreation economies. "Having OR in Utah really gives us a much more seat at the table than we have without the show," Rasmussen said. If Outdoor Retailer relocates to Denver, Anaheim or Orlando, then perhaps the biggest losers will be the hikers, climbers, skiers and outdoor companies who call Utah home.



Down to the Wire ... Again

If disputes between the outdoor industry and Utah's pro-development politicians sound familiar, they are. In May 2003, Peter Metcalf and OIA president, Frank Hugelmeyer threatened to pull the show out of Salt Lake City unless then-Utah governor Mike Leavitt did more to protect wilderness in the state. Earlier that year Leavitt removed safeguards from 6 million acres of potential wilderness in Utah. An agreement reached by Leavitt and OIA during the

2003 Summer Market led to formal recognition of the outdoor industry's importance to Utah and a 145,000-square foot expansion of the Salt Palace — both of which convinced Outdoor Retailer to stay. After several quiet years, OIA clashed again with Utah politicians in 2011 over attempts to restrict the BLM's ability to inventory wilderness-quality land in Utah, and Gov. Gary Herbert's policies to promote extraction industries over outdoor recreation.