

# Paul Rolly: Utah officials say they can manage lands better, but look at their record

By [PAUL ROLLY](#) | The Salt Lake Tribune

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President Barack Obama's designation Wednesday of the 1.35 million-acre [Bears Ears](#) National Monument in San Juan County elicited the expected response from Utah politicians, who took turns denouncing the act as cataclysmic.

Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, who introduced the so-far unsuccessful [Public Lands Initiative](#) in Congress as an alternative, said the designation deprives local communities of a voice.

Gov. Gary Herbert was disappointed, as was House Speaker Greg Hughes.

Sens. Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee vowed to do everything they can to get it reversed in the new Trump administration.

Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes is looking at a potential lawsuit.

Even Utah's State Auditor John Dougall and Treasurer David Damschen weighed in about how appalled they were.

The Utah officials, of course, believe land-use issues are better left in the hands of the local jurisdictions and residents of the affected areas.

But are they really?

Let's take a look at the record of Utah's handling of public lands and natural resources over the past year.

One such brilliant scheme was the Utah Legislature's endorsement and financial commitment as a backup for a \$53 million investment in a deep-water port in Oakland to ship eastern Utah coal abroad to China and other overseas markets.

That, despite the fact Oakland officials say they won't allow the port to be built, and China has such a glut of coal it doesn't need imports.

So much for sound business sense.

The Legislature approved in March the swap of \$53 million in state sales tax revenue, which had been earmarked for transportation, for an equal amount of royalties from the Permanent Community Impact Board.

The state money would be deposited in a newly created infrastructure fund controlled by the CIB.

The \$53 million originally was going to come directly from the CIB, which takes money from federal oil and gas lease royalties and uses it to fund projects designed to benefit communities impacted by the drilling projects.

Usually the funds are used for roads, sewers and other infrastructure improvement projects that are within the state. Using that money for out-of-state oceanic coal ports is, to say the least, unusual.

When criticism of the plan reached peak levels, the fund swapping scheme was devised by legislators because the state funds did not face the same kind of regulatory barriers.

Now, after all that, the Oakland coal port proposal is all but dead.