

# Development vs. conservation in Utah ski country

By Sallie Dean Shatz, New York Times

SALT LAKE CITY – The Wasatch Range, towering over an arid, urban sprawl of a million people, provides two important assets that are increasingly at odds – a vital supply of water for residents and pristine snow for a ski industry that rakes in \$1.2 billion a year.

Now, two competing bills in Congress are setting up a new skirmish in the West's perennial battle between conservation and development.

One bill, involving an ambitious project known as SkiLink, was filed by Representative Rob Bishop, a Republican from northern Utah. It would allow developers to bypass some jurisdictional and environmental protections to build a gondola linking the base of the Solitude ski area in Salt Lake County and the upper part of the Canyons ski area in Summit County.

The bill would override some federal and local restrictions on ski areas in the Wasatch Range and would require the United States Forest Service to sell 30 acres of public land to accommodate SkiLink.

The competing bill, the Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act, was created after two years of public meetings and was introduced by Representative Jim Matheson, a Democrat who represents the area. It would preserve the same tract of Forest Service land for its "wilderness quality" and watershed.

For more than 100 years, the towering range has been protected as a watershed. Expansions of ski areas in the central Wasatch are not allowed under multiple jurisdictional management

plans, which the resorts say inhibit their ability to compete.

Ski areas now cover 6,294 acres of the central Wasatch, though Bishop's legislation could create a legal precedent that could pave the way to more than double that, encompassing the watershed's headwaters and affecting Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, which are home to four ski areas and supply 60 percent of Salt Lake City's water.

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