



Conserve Southwest Utah

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Senator Lisa Murkowski

Chair, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

838 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Subject: Water Scarcity in Southwest Utah and S. 1508

Senator Murkowski,

My name is Edward Andrechak, and I am the President of **Conserve Southwest Utah (CSU)**, an environmental non-profit that has worked for 20 years to protect the landscapes, cultural resources, and water supply of Washington County in Southwest Utah. Our region is home to beautiful red rock vistas and magnificent landscapes, including Zion National Park, which draws millions of visitors each year and is an anchor to our tourism-driven economy. Washington County is also one of the fastest growing counties in the country, which makes balancing development with smart, sustainable growth a defining challenge — particularly because water is the lifeblood of our arid corner of the Mojave Desert. That is why the **Shivwits Band of Paiutes Jurisdictional Clarity Act (S. 1508)** raises serious concerns for our organization and for the wider community we represent.

As a sovereign nation, the Shivwits Band of Paiutes has the right to develop their land and to utilize their water rights as they see fit, and CSU recognizes and respects that right without qualification. Our concerns about S. 1508 are not about what the Band may choose to do with its water — they are about what this legislation would allow a private developer to do with it.

This proposal comes at a moment of acute water crisis. Southern Utah has just experienced the lowest precipitation water year since record-keeping began more than 100 years ago. On May 21, 2026, Utah Governor Spencer Cox declared a statewide drought emergency, with every Utah county now in severe or extreme drought.

S. 1508 facilitates the development of a luxury resort by the **REEF Capital Group (REEF)** to be built on Shivwits Band of Paiutes reservation trust lands, adjacent to the western edge of Washington County. The size, scope, and location of the project, which includes four golf courses and an airport, will significantly reduce the region's already imperiled water resources and limit our potential to build a sustainable water future.

The 2001 Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe Utah Water Rights Settlement Agreement guarantees the Shivwits Band of Paiutes the use of two significant annual water rights — one for 2,000 acre-feet of secondary water per year and a second one for up to 1,900 acre-feet of secondary water per year — pending water level availability at nearby Gunlock Reservoir. REEF's development plan is reported to include, at a minimum, the entire first Shivwits Band of Paiute water right of 2,000 acre-feet per year for its golf course resort project. The recently-issued Joint Public Statement, 'Clarification Regarding Water Resources and the Proposed Black Desert Resort Development' confirms this preliminary project requirement.

For perspective, Washington County uses an estimated 66,000 acre-feet (AF) annually. Two thousand (2,000) AF, or 650 million gallons, equates to nearly 3% of the water used by the entire county in a year. For added perspective, 2,000 AF is roughly enough water to supply every single one of the 11,000 residents in neighboring Ivins City, Utah for an entire year.

Moreover, Washington County has a population of 214,000 people with a reported 8–10 million visitors annually, and already holds 14 golf courses. These existing courses use ~10% of the total water use. Adding REEF's four golf course project would increase water use by golf courses to 13% of total, or a staggering one eighth of all water dedicated solely to golfing recreation. Yet golf generates only about \$150 million of the county's \$10.7 billion GDP — just 1.4% of the total. In other words, with the REEF development, golf would consume 13% of the county's water while producing just 1.4% of its economy -- a nearly tenfold mismatch between water use and economic value.

The Washington County Water Conservancy District (WCWCD) has the primary responsibility to manage the county's water supply needs. The WCWCD utilizes a One Water strategy, which is a collaborative and integrated strategy, based on conservation and reuse, to ensure a safe and resilient water supply. A more detailed description of One Water is provided [HERE](#). The WCWCD projects a very tight water supply vs. demand situation between 2026 and 2030. Aggressive *conservation* efforts are the primary 'lever' to balance this situation until secondary water produced from wastewater *reuse* infrastructure is delivered to the system in 2030.

In response to worsening water scarcity, the WCWCD instituted a "no new golf course" policy in Washington County in 2024. This policy was reportedly communicated to REEF during development meetings with the WCWCD in 2024 and 2025. REEF's response was to approach the Shivwits Band and pursue a 'workaround', accessing and using a majority of the Band's secondary water supply to irrigate its four-golf-course resort. Local news reports indicate REEF's development plans are causing significant rancor and divisiveness within the tribal community, and that many, if not most, Shivwits Band members oppose REEF's plans and the use of sovereign water supplies for luxury golf course irrigation. If S. 1508 is passed out of committee and voted into law, a private developer will be in a controlling position to take the "wet water" from the Shivwits Band of Paiutes water rights for 99 years and use it for its multi-golf-course complex or anything else they like.

In an arid environment, every drop matters, especially in the face of increasing demands and a changing climate. CSU advocates policies and practices which protect water as a vital resource to ensure a future where both our community and our ecosystem can thrive. By enabling a single developer's complete control of such a large portion of the region's water supplies, the Shivwits Band of Paiutes Jurisdictional Clarity Act (S. 1508) puts a strain on Washington County's water resources, endangers the region's water stewardship plans, and undermines the conservation efforts every resident is now being asked to make. Conserve Southwest Utah (CSU) requests that you consider this critical information seriously and factor it into the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs decision on S. 1508. We further request this letter be added to the testimony/record on S. 1508.

Respectfully,



Edward Andrechak

President

Conserve Southwest Utah

References: Washington County Conservation District website.