

STAFF REPORT

TO: Summit County Council
FROM: Janna Young, Interim County Manager
MEETING: January 11, 2023
SUBJECT: Consideration of NACo Public Lands Center



Recommended Council Action

Consideration of contributing 1% of federal recovery funds received as a public lands county to help the National Association of Counties (NACo) set up a National Center for Public Lands Counties.

Background

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is proposing to establish a National Center for Public Lands Counties (The Center) and is requesting funding contributions from public lands counties to set up The Center. This issue was discussed at the November 15, 2022, Utah Association of Counties (UAC) board meeting at which former Council member Glenn Wright was present. Glenn brought this issue to the Summit County Council in December 2022 and the Council Chair requested a work session on the topic in the new year.

Summit County receives Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) funding from the federal government due to the amount of federal land we have within County borders on which we cannot collect our typical property tax dollars, yet we are providing services to those areas. As such, we are considered a public lands county, which triggered an additional contribution from the federal COVID-19 recovery dollars (American Rescue Plan Act, aka ARPA) through the PILT program (ARPA PILT).

NACo is requesting 1% of this ARPA PILT contribution to fund The Center. If we decide to contribute funding, the process is for public lands counties in Utah to be invoiced by UAC who will then hold the funds until NACo requests it from all the state associations. The target is to fully fund The Center at \$15 million.

The purpose of The Center is to help raise attention and education, particularly at the federal level, to the important role public lands play in our nation's prosperity by showing how public lands are interconnected with the

County's needs economically and from a natural infrastructure perspective. For example, a wildfire on federal land near a major water source can jeopardize water quality in our cities and towns. The Center will allow counties to tell these stories and promote public lands issues to the media, think tanks, and other key decision-makers.

UAC is asking Summit County to invest in The Center.

Please see attached letter from UAC with additional details about this proposal from NACo.

Considerations

- Summit County is expected to get around \$850,776 from the ARPA PILT allocation, which is in addition to the \$8 million we received from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) originally
- There are very few restrictions on the use of these funds. As a general matter, we can treat these monies in a similar manner to how we treat funds generated from our local general fund revenues. The only major restriction is they cannot be used on anything to do with lobbying activities. There are annual tracking and reporting requirements until the funds are spent
- We have discussed internally as staff using these funds on our Weber Watershed Resilience Fund or Endowment Fund for fuel reduction treatments in the headwaters of the Weber River, or as contingency for the new County facility we are constructing on the Gillmor parcel
- Summit County's relationships within UAC are important and supporting The Center would provide goodwill, particularly among the other more rural public lands counties, which will help us at the state legislature
- With that said, the benefit of The Center to Summit County is unclear. Perhaps it would be wise to wait to contribute funding until The Center is more established to better understand its purpose, operations, and benefits

- From a financial standpoint, is this project sustainable? Will counties be expected to provide ongoing funding and what is the plan if it costs more than \$15 million? What if other counties across the nation do not contribute? We should better understand the longer term impacts of committing funding



November 30, 2022

UAC Board Members:

As a follow up to our conversation had during our November 15, 2022 board meeting concerning NACo's proposed National Center for Public Lands Counties (The Center), UAC has received additional information on the financial ask from NACo and details on The Center.

Location

The Public Lands Center will be a part of the NACo organization with headquarters in Washington, DC, but the Center will likely have an office in a western state.

Funding

It is proposed that counties will be invoiced by UAC who will then hold all funds submitted by counties until NACo requests all funds from the state associations. The target is full funding of The Center at \$15 million. This would fund several staff members and allow The Center to have a robust start. If NACo receives half of the full funding request, The Center would be significantly scaled back, but would still be able to start. If The Center receives \$1 million, for example, this will mean a huge adjustment to or reconsideration of The Center. If needed, payments will be returned to counties by UAC. For those counties who have already agreed to pay their one percent contribution of their LATCF, UAC will invoice those counties immediately.

Governance

The Center will be governed by a body consisting of the WIR Executive Committee, the NACo Public Lands Policy Steering Committee Chair and Vice Chairs, the state association executive from the WIR Immediate Past President's home state, and the NACo Executive Director. The policy direction will be driven by WIR (Western Interstate Region of NACo).

Media and Research

The Center will weave together the narrative around public lands counties and the national interest in our prosperity by showing how public lands are interconnected with the country's needs: e.g., a wildfire on federal land near a major water source can jeopardize water quality in our nation's large urban communities. The Center will give public lands counties their best opportunity to share these stories with their peers, media, think tanks, and other key players to demonstrate how prosperous public lands counties create a prosperous America.

The Center will also utilize digital media, such as podcasts and video interviews, and develop written county profiles focusing on:

- County partnerships with federal agencies, states, tribes and other counties to reduce wildfire risk, responsibly develop energy and minerals, improve public access to federal lands, protect watersheds, conserve species and their habitat, and protect our national parks and other national treasures.
- County investments of Payment in lieu of Taxes (PILT), Secure Rural Schools (SRS) and other natural resource revenue payments to benefit their citizens and surrounding public lands
- The economic drivers in rural and urban public lands counties
- The development and implementation of county natural resource management plans and baseline socioeconomic data for environmental analyses
- Resource values of federal lands to those of nearby privately owned lands
- Meeting the unique challenges facing public lands counties, including affordable housing for residents and federal employees, ensuring a stable tax base to deliver critical services and managing infrastructure on federal lands.

Your Opportunity

The Utah Association of Counties has a unique opportunity to invest in The Center. NACo staff, state association executives and county officials set a fundraising goal of \$15 Million over the next two years to hire the necessary staff to conduct critical research and keep The Center on a sustainable financial course. If successful, this initial investment will pay dividends for generations to come.

If you have any additional questions, please contact either me or Zeke Lee.

All my best,

Brandy Grace, CEO
Utah Association of Counties