

## Erin Nelson

---

**From:** mariagarcia@frontiernet.net  
**Sent:** Monday, August 28, 2023 3:13 PM  
**To:** Office  
**Subject:** SITLA Disconnect Petition Comments by Tamara Desrosiers

To: The Town of Bluff  
From: Tamara Desrosiers  
Re: SITLA Petition to Disconnect AND the Bears Ears Land Swap  
Thank you for this chance to express my opinions.

### Part I

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the Salt Lake Tribune ran an op-ed by Ann Leppanen, Mayor of Bluff, titled “A lose-lose land exchange for small-town Utah”. Quoting U.S. Representative John Curtis, “that those on the ground understand best and care the very most about preserving and protecting this land” she lamented that local residents could have explained why this particular exchange of 3 parcels of BLM land is a bad idea for Bluff, had SITLA or Curtis bothered to listen.

A more curious standpoint comes from State Rep. Phil Lyman who told FOX 13 News that the swap is “of, by and for the environmentalists” and that he intends to sue to stop “this unconstitutional transfer of land.”

Locals have been led to believe that it was Lyman himself who pushed for the Bluff parcels to be included in the trade, to bump up the traded acreage remaining in San Juan County.

Its gets curiouser and curiouser. SITLA wants to trade out their parcels within Bears Ears National Monument because they are, as SITLA Director Michelle McConkie says “really difficult for us to make money on partially because of the scattered nature.”

I own 2 acres and a home that borders the west parcel, one of the three SITLA wants from the BLM. My land is separated only by a 30-foot easement retained by Guymon Ranches.

Neither of the 2 parcels along the river is in the Monument nor are they accessible by road. They can only be reached (on foot, bicycle, or horse) via the trail system. They are separated by private land owned by Recapture Lodge, and bordered on the east and west by private land owned by the Gaines Family and Guymon Ranches, respectively.

The east parcel was cut off when the landowner decided to close a county road in protest of the then-new idea of the Bluff River Trail. Phil Lyman was in full support of this road closure. I would still be in jail if I had closed a county road.

The west parcel was cut off when, before the town incorporated, the San Juan County Commissioners back in the 1990s allowed individual landowners to buy their adjacent alleys in Bluff. The now privatized alley leading to the west parcel cut off access formerly used by Guymon Ranches, as well as to landowners in the then-newly (and illegally) subdivided 8 acres formerly owned by Martha Lyman.

Leppanen writes: "The Bluff River Trail, which passionate town residents worked to create for more than a decade [*actually for more than 2 decades and I was one of those residents*], runs through both parcels. Again we can't understand why the Department of the Interior would convey such valuable recreational land for development".

As this back room deal unfolded, even the BLM was reportedly caught off-guard about the Bluff River Trail parcels to be included in the trade. If they weren't in the room, who was?

## Part 2

In the tradition of the late, great Mr. Rogers, I am here to talk about being good neighbors. It's something that we learn in church, love thy neighbor. It's something that we teach our children, do unto others. It's unfortunate, but many people in Bluff (and pretty much universally), feud with their neighbors.

***"I am sure that SITLA has long experience, as do I, of having properties subject to the tender mercies of and the screaming activists therein."***

Bruce Baird wrote that in an email to SITLA. He's the attorney for the Actons, who are colluding with the Utah state land agency to disconnect 9500 acres from the Bluff city limits. Mr. Baird, that is NOT how a good neighbor talks. And SITLA, good neighbors don't petition to disconnect.

Those screaming activists Baird referred to are US, the people of Bluff. We are your neighbors SITLA. In fact my property and my house is right next door to the west parcel of BLM land SITLA wants to trade IN to as part of the Bears Ears land swap. How exactly does SITLA think they can make money for the school children of Utah, off land that is inaccessible flood plain?

Does anyone else find it odd that SITLA wants to trade IN to Bluff, 3 different parcels of BLM land, while simultaneously joining a petition to disconnect almost 10,000 acres from Bluff? You want in, but you want out.

There is nothing that strikes fear in the heart of Utahns more than hearing "SITLA is going to be your new neighbor".

A few years ago SITLA auctioned off a beloved and beautiful piece of Comb Ridge, a parcel that most certainly would now be part of the proposed Bears Ears land swap.

By disconnecting a large segment of SITLA land on the northeast edge of Bluff, when SITLA eventually auctions that land off, the buyers will be able to do whatever they want, Bluff's watershed, view shed, and P & Z rules be damned.

BLM should disconnect itself from the disconnect petition and BLM should revise the land swap so that SITLA can't get more land in Bluff, while simultaneously trying to get out of Bluff. BLM should defend the Bluff River Trail, not just hand it over to an agency famous for its gravel pits.

Good neighbors work together to support their community and protect its world class viewsapes, the watershed, water system, planning and zoning, a healthy economy, quality of life. We all want good schools, but not for the price we have to pay for SITLA's poor choices based solely on one value, money.

There may be no way to revise the Bears Ears land swap, or to stop this disconnect, but if there is a way, I pray the screaming activists therein will find it.

### Part 3

If the Town of Bluff determines it cannot win, or does not want to go broke trying to litigate against the disconnect petition, I totally understand. Cut your losses. Quite a bit of the SITLA acreage on the Bluff Bench proposed to be disconnected is actually going to be traded out to the BLM as part of the Bears Ears land swap anyway. I cannot understand why SITLA is including 9500 acres. SITLA is engaging in some pretty sketch speculation as it insists on keeping what they call the Bluff Block. By their own admission, the gravel pit is almost played out. And word has it that the proposed solar project is fairly iffy, not only due to its faulty location (the ground is not flat) but but there are other challenges with Rocky Mountain Power that may seal its fate. It's disingenuous to blame Bluff for their lack of progress. And the Actons and their charming piece of over-grazed stinking desert? Greed has a funny way of bouncing bad karma back to you in unexpected ways. Mr. Baird has certainly found a cash cow ambulance to chase.

Remember, the SITLA/Bears Ears land swap is NOT law yet. Unlike SITLA, Congress and the Department of Interior (BLM) are theoretically democratic institutions, ie, they respond to concerns of constituents, and they follow the rule of law. Why on earth is the BLM part of the disconnect petition? Who signed off on that and why? The first angle might be to convince them that there is no advantage for them to participate and they need to withdraw. That might be enough to isolate the Actons as an island or peninsula.

Beyond that, negotiations, protests, letter-writing campaigns, whatever it takes, but both Representative John Curtis and the BLM need to hear from the citizens of Bluff (and beyond) on how the land swap bill must be revised to NOT reward SITLA any more acreage in a town they are so desperate to leave. I am talking about the 2 parcels that contain the River Trail, and the third one along the highway with the big petroglyph panel, ancient granaries, and its sliver of connection to the river. BLM MUST retain ownership of those parcels; SITLA is ill-equipped to manage them on any level whatsoever.

Thanks for all you do,  
Tamara Desrosiers  
1328 S. Oak St., Cortez CO 81321

970-769-6735  
mariagarcia@frontiernet.net