

Madam Chairman and Subcommittee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to present the background and importance of HR 722, designating a mountain in the State of Utah as "Miracle Mountain".

Elk Ridge is a small city located about an hour south of Salt Lake City in the great state of Utah. It's a bedroom community nestled on the bench of the southern Wasatch Mountains. Our neighbors consist of a few small cities, many acres of cherry and peach orchards, and the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest.

Because we share a common border with forest land, the threat of wildfire is real. During the summer, it's common to have dry southerly winds and, given the fact the forest land is located to our south, we have a heightened awareness of the risk during the critical months of July through September.

History shows that wildfires impact numerous communities throughout the United States each year. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, approximately 8.5 million acres burned in 2018 including the Mendocino Complex Fire in Northern California that grew to be the largest fire in California's history and the Camp Fire, which was California's deadliest and most destructive fire ever recorded. These are sobering facts that can't do justice to the devastating impact on communities, families, and individuals who were directly affected.

On Friday, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018, lightning sparked the Bald Mountain fire which would later become a significant event for Elk Ridge and our neighboring city Woodland Hills. On September 13<sup>th</sup> a prolonged period of "Red Flag" weather warnings were issued. With the help of southerly dry winds in excess of 35 MPH the fire began its transformation into a major wildfire and was headed directly for the city. It grew rapidly from a few acres to over 6,000 acres in less than 16 hours. More importantly, the leading edge of the fire progressed from approximately 9.5 miles away to 4.5 miles away. This rapid advancement in such a short time gave cause to issue a mandatory evacuation order for all of Elk Ridge and Woodland Hills at approximately 6 p.m. on the evening of September 13<sup>th</sup>.

With the city being evacuated, an eerie quiet feeling of uncertainty settled in with the smoke. That evening we watched the fire progress from 4.5 miles away to 2.5 miles away with stiff south winds pushing the edge ever closer. Experienced wildland firefighters commented that the city would be horribly inundated before morning. We all resigned to the fact that homes would be lost but, fortunately, lives would be spared due to the evacuation.

During the late hours of September 13<sup>th</sup> and the very early hours of the 14<sup>th</sup> we observed a dramatic change in the fire's progression. It was a change that even the firefighters couldn't explain. Even though the winds had not changed in direction or intensity and there was plenty of fuel available, the northerly progression turned east defying all reason. By the time daylight came, the fire had skirted along the southern edge of Elk Ridge and Woodland Hills.

With daylight upon us I decided to inspect the southern areas of the city for evidence of spotting where the embers may have started fires within the city. As I approached the mountain that is the subject of

H.R. 722, I commented to myself that it was a miracle that the fire had stayed behind the mountain and there was no reasonable explanation for what we witnessed that night. There is no better name for the mountain than "Miracle Mountain".

As it turns out, that was not the only unexplainable event of the Bald Mountain fire with respect to Elk Ridge. For example, the only structure that was lost in the fire was a wood shed located in the Loafer Canyon Recreation area. The shed burned completely to the ground with only a pile of ash to mark its spot. The amazing thing was, the shed was also located within 20 feet of a home and directly under a large pine tree. The pine tree was scorched but it never burned and the home was spared any damage.

This time was a difficult time for city residents. The evacuation came with little notice giving very little time to gather irreplaceable items to take during the evacuation. It also involved community support to patrol and secure the city during the 9 days we were away from any possible criminal activity and to escort people into and out of the city. The surrounding communities offered tremendous support to evacuees and to the city. Businesses from all around donated supplies, food, and drinks to the point that the firefighters from all around the country ate with us. Although the Red Cross was immediately on scene, not a single person required their service because of the tremendous support from surrounding communities.

As Mayor of Elk Ridge, I testify that the Bald Mountain fire had the potential to devastate our little city and to disrupt the lives of our residents far beyond the inconvenience of being evacuated. Many residents have adopted the name "Miracle Mountain" simply due to the unexplainable events that occurred during this time of uncertainty.

Madam Chairman, I have laid out before you a very brief summary of the miraculous events that occurred. I have given a brief description of how the local communities and agencies came to our aid. I cannot do justice to everything we witnessed. Furthermore, I cannot explain why Elk Ridge was spared a fate similar to other communities that were absolutely devastated from wildfires. The empathy felt throughout our communities only serves to deepen the feelings of gratitude for the events we witnessed.

I'm confident that you can understand how difficult it would be to leave your home not knowing its fate and returning home without even a trace of smoke damage. I'm sure you've witnessed and recorded events that defy a logical explanation. It would be a terrible tragedy to simply let all this fade away with the passage of time without having some permanent reminder of these events recognized by so many people as miraculous. It is therefore my hope that this subcommittee will find it favorable to give the mountain the name of "Miracle Mountain" as a reminder for generations to come that something special occurred to save Elk Ridge during the Bald Mountain fire.

I appreciate the time given to this important subject. I appreciate our Honorable Congressman John Curtis for his dedication to and sponsorship of this bill. I thank the entire Utah delegation for their support.