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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Balancing Access and Protection: Navigating New Permits at Castleton Tower Campground**

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It was the 11-year-old who gave up birthday presents. It was the soldier who sent the last \$20 in his pockets as he headed off to the conflict in the Middle East. It was three years of diligent fundraising and awareness-raising. It was all of these efforts and the support of Castle Valley and Grand County residents that saved 221 acres at the base of Castleton Tower. Utah Open Lands' promise to defend and protect these lands began more than 25 years ago when the historic access and campground at Castleton Tower were threatened by a 15-lot gated subdivision.

As threats go, the latest one for this beloved landscape is one that Utah Open Lands hopes will remind us all of the obligation we have to respect the balance of recreational use with protection of the resource itself. That is what hangs in the balance this time, as the organization works diligently with Grand County staff to synergistically move through new county codes and permit processes that have arisen in part from the rise of recreational demand throughout the state since the outdoors became everyone's go-to during Covid.

"Castleton Tower is a geological marvel that holds a significant place in the hearts of the community. Its iconic presence has not only captivated climbers and outdoor enthusiasts for more than half a century but is now rightly regarded by many as a beacon of unity, rallying people worldwide in its preservation, demonstrating we can all make a difference," said Maryssa Fenwick, Land Protection Associate with Utah Open Lands. "What we need now is patience. For people to respect the process and halt use in the area," continued Fenwick.

Utah Open Lands 'inherited' the primitive, dry-use campground when the organization purchased the land from Utah's School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration. The land provides the main access for those climbing Castleton Tower, and the potential sale of the land to development rallied the necessary support to save it. "The act of saving something requires us to be ever mindful that it could have been lost," said Wendy Fisher, Executive Director of Utah Open Lands. "And our knowledge of that loss means we can't just be a user of these places, but that we, collectively, must be a steward for the land." Utah Open Lands cite unending development pressures juxtaposed against increasing recreational

demand as a potential 'death by a thousand cuts' for the diminishing open land reserves that the public enjoys and urge the public to respect a healthy carrying capacity of the land in a way that safeguards the delicate environment we all love. Fisher acknowledges that use, camping, recreating, and visiting these amazing open spaces has outstripped existing facilities in many parts of the state but urges users that the answer cannot be rogue trails and camping in undesignated areas. The consequence she cautions is more than just the inability to sustain the health of the environment. "What we, all of us, do now will determine the fate of places like Castleton Tower Baseland into the future," said Fisher. The organization is requesting from the County the designation of 'historic non-conforming' use, recognizing the historical use and establishment of the campground that began several decades ago. "Working closely with County planners and officials, Utah Open Lands is optimistic about the progress towards reopening the site. In the meantime, we urge everyone to respect its current closure," said Fenwick.

### Background on The Baselands at Castleton Tower Preserve

In the spring of 1999, the threat of a 15-lot subdivision loomed over the base lands surrounding Castleton Tower. Just a year prior, the Utah School Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) sold eighty acres at the base of Parriott Mesa, and had it not been for the money Utah Open Lands wired to stop the backhoe in its tracks those lands would have been lost to development. This act galvanized the community into action. Local community members organized into the Castle Rock Collaboration (CRC), and Utah Open Lands (UOL) began conservation negotiations with SITLA, agreeing to pay a fair market value for the 221 acres if the agency would provide the organization with the time to fundraise. The Utah Open Lands' campaign garnered the support of outdoor retailers, and over three years esteemed partners like Petzl, Patagonia, REI, and Black Diamond joined forces with Utah Open Lands and the Community in raising funds for the preservation of this precious landscape.

The rallying cry for preservation echoed far beyond the confines of Utah. This groundswell of support transcended geographical boundaries, underscoring the universal reverence for Castleton Tower and, critically, the protection of the historic climbing access and primitive camp that had developed on the state lands over time. Through relentless advocacy and fundraising endeavors, UOL and its partners successfully acquired the base lands beneath Castleton Tower.

Since coming under the stewardship of UOL, the campground has remained a vital hub for outdoor recreation, free of charge and accessible in honor of the effort that ensured its protection.

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