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STATE OF UTAH

SCHOOL & INSTITUTIONAL TRUST LANDS ADMINISTRATION (SITLA)

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

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**SITLA & The Nature Conservancy Close on Second Parcel to Protect Rare Species
New Nature Preserve Expands in St. George**

The State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) and The Nature Conservancy (the Conservancy) closed March 5, 2009, on the second parcel for conservation of the federally-listed and endangered Dwarf Bear Poppy. The 135-acre parcel was purchased by The Nature Conservancy for \$444,000 in the White Dome area of St. George.

The purchase is the second step in an ambitious plan to create a new 800-acre preserve that may determine the fate of two globally rare and federally-listed plants in Washington County. Located in the fast-developing "South Block" in south St. George, the White Dome Nature Preserve will provide an oasis for plants, animals and people—with plans in the works for public hiking trails and educational signage.

In June of 2005, SITLA and The Nature Conservancy entered into a Letter of Intent with various federal and state government agencies, including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Utah Department of Transportation and the Bureau of Land Management.

This diverse group of partners has worked together on a vision for the White Dome Nature Preserve, which will protect habitat for several at-risk species, including the zebra-tailed lizard and loggerhead shrike, as well as extremely rare native wildflowers. The Preserve will harbor some of last remaining populations of the threatened Siler pincushion cactus, and the endangered dwarf bear claw poppy, — found in Washington County and nowhere else on Earth.

In May of 2007, The Nature Conservancy made its first purchase in the creation of the White Dome Nature Preserve. The 55.52-acre tract was purchased for \$167,100, with money raised from private donors and funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Today's land purchase marks an important milestone for conservation in Washington County," said Elaine York, the Conservancy's West Desert Regional Director. "Thanks to collaboration and a shared vision, some of Washington County's most unique species will be preserved for future generations to enjoy."

Since the initial purchase at White Dome, the Conservancy conducted innovative restoration work to improve the area's habitat for the dwarf bear claw poppy. Ecologists restored degraded habitat by decompacting the soils and planting seeds native to this formation. SITLA facilitated this restoration project by contributing biological soil crusts with

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microorganisms vital to the health of this ecosystem from adjacent lands that it owns, and waiving an administrative fee. JBR Environmental Consultants conducted the restoration work and donated a portion of their time.

According to SITLA Director Kevin Carter, "SITLA is proud to be part of an effort to preserve some of Utah's most important natural areas and to develop the South Block in a way that helps St. George residents appreciate the native wonders of the Mojave Desert." These transactions allow SITLA to receive funds benefiting public schools while adding open space that will be protected and preserved. This open space will be an amenity to other lands owned by SITLA near the White Dome.

The Nature Conservancy has been active in the balanced preservation of important natural areas in Washington County—and has been a private landowner and taxpayer in the County—for nearly 20 years. Key projects have included working with Brigham Young University to establish the Lytle Preserve in Beaver Dam Wash, active participation in the Desert Tortoise Habitat Conservation Plan process which established the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve and acquisition of part of the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve north of St. George.

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SITLA is an independent state agency that manages 3.4 million acres of Utah trust lands for the benefit of Utah's schools and other public institutions. Money generated from the school trust lands is deposited in the state Permanent School Fund, a perpetual endowment that annually distributes income to each K-12 public school in Utah.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. The Conservancy and its more than 1 million members have protected nearly 120 million acres worldwide.. In Utah, The Nature Conservancy has protected nearly 900,000 acres of at-risk habitat. Visit us on the web at nature.org/utah.