

Most people would think that clean water is just as important as clean air. If you think so, then you need to be aware of what the legislature could do to your next glass of water.

[Cryptosporidium](#) is a parasite that lives in the intestinal tracts and feces of livestock. It is highly contagious. When humans ingest it, it causes vomiting and diarrhea that can last up to a month. It can be severe or even fatal in those with weak immune systems. When it gets into culinary water supplies, it [survives chlorination](#) and most filtration technologies. Removing it can require whole municipal water systems to be re-engineered, at great expense.

If you would rather not risk getting cryptosporidium in your water, [HB135](#) is your worst nightmare. HB135 will strip Salt Lake City of its ability to protect its canyon watersheds from multiple types of contaminating development. Overturning a century of protection that was prompted by cholera outbreaks, the bill will allow livestock to be grazed on the city's watershed, which would greatly increase the risk that our drinking water will be contaminated by coliform bacteria, giardia, cryptosporidium, and a [long list of infectious diseases](#). How did such a "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad" bill ever see the light of day? This is probably not a surprise, but someone (not you) stands to make a lot of money.

A group of land speculators have obtained important Wasatch Canyon property, albeit dry canyon lots without water rights. No water rights means those properties have limited monetary value. But their non-monetized value to the community is priceless because of their undeveloped beauty and because they are part of critical watershed for Salt Lake City. The owners, however, gambled on their ability to manipulate the political system to create those water rights and thereby reap a tremendous windfall profit by either selling to developers, or forcing the city to buy the property at grossly inflated prices in order to protect the watershed. For years the scheme went nowhere. But then they found the perfect answer, Rep. Mike Noel, the same one that is already the target of a [formal ethics complaint](#) over conflict of interest with his land holdings and his push to shrink the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

Mike lives in Kanab, so he won't be drinking much Salt Lake City water. No

matter. Mike has never seen an anti-environmental bill he didn't like, so who better to go after water quality in Salt Lake City? Noel has dramatically changed the property owners' fortunes (literally), getting HB135 past the first legislative hurdles.

Noel and his collaborators want you to dismiss concerns of contaminated water as an exaggeration. Recall however, that Salt Lake had to close City Creek Canyon to any human visitation for 23 years (1952 – 1975) because grazing had contaminated its watershed. Five decades prior to City Creek's closing, water quality in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons was so degraded due to deforestation, mining, and contamination, that the state of Utah asked the federal government to help replant the forest and restore our water to acceptable quality.

HB 135's real purpose is to take away Salt Lake City's seat at the table when the fate of its watershed is decided. The bill's backers even say in their private e-mails that their strategy is to “minimize Salt Lake City.” These e-mails, obtained through GRAMA requests, are viewable at – <https://goo.gl/9EBUup>

Consider a 300-acre parcel of land in Cardiff Fork in Big Cottonwood Canyon, one which this group insists it has acquired through adverse possession. With Salt Lake City's watershed protections intact, this parcel is worth less than \$500,000. With HB135 stripping away watershed protections, they have visions that it will be worth tens of millions of dollars. They will either sell it to developers, paving Cardiff Fork over with asphalt and condos, or force Salt Lake City into paying a massively inflated price to leave it undeveloped and protect your watershed. You lose either way.

Part two of this group's strategy is to amend the State Constitution to allow municipalities to sell off their water rights and lease them back. This would complete Salt Lake's surrender of control over its watershed. Salt Lake's own Rep. Keven Stratton is rushing this bill, [HJR 15](#), through the legislature despite the unanimous request of the Executive Water Task Force that both bills be held for study.

These land owners know that their bills are more likely to pass if they remain under the radar during the last chaotic days of the legislative session, when

many other issues will command most of the attention. Under a spot light and calm deliberation, these bills would be seen for what they are--blatant efforts to remove protections from Salt Lake's drinking water so that a handful of wealthy, politically connected speculators can collect on bets that they placed on otherwise worthless canyon property. Noel, perched atop the House rules committee, is their ticket to riches, counting on his clout to slide this through the cracks of the legislative process at the last minute.

Among the highest obligations of government is to protect public health, safeguard public assets and promote the common good. HB135 and HJR15 do the opposite. Their sole purpose is to game the system to line the pockets of a select few at your expense. If you believe in your right to clean water, at an affordable rate, and your right to enjoy the beauty of our canyons, then your legislators need to hear from you.