

Bill Could Entice Film Production To Utah With Economic Incentives

Jessica Lowell | February 16, 2021



After three seasons of the popular cable-TV series *Yellowstone*, production left Utah for Montana. However, a new bill could incentivize film studios to move to Utah.

The move to Montana directly affected Summit and Wasatch Counties.

In an interview with KPCW, Utah Film Commission Executive Director Virginia Pearce said both counties tend to see a similar amount of activity because of their proximity.

“Over the past three years, there have been about 150 film permits issued in those areas,” Pearce said. “And obviously, some very iconic productions, *Yellowstone* - all three seasons - *Wind River*, *Hereditary*, *Wolf of Snow Hollow* - that just came out last year.”

Pearce said production during season two of *Yellowstone* -which is a good indication of all three seasons- brought in about \$40 million dollars to the area. Of that money \$15 million went to wages of around 400 jobs during their nine months of production.

However, *Yellowstone* production left Utah after they were offered

\$10 million from Montana in economic incentives.

Republican Senator Ron Winterton, who represents both Summit and Wasatch Counties, is sponsoring a bill that could entice studios to come to Utah by upping the state budget for tax credit certificates.

During a Senate committee meeting last week he said the state currently has a \$6.7 million incentive budget, and his bill would more than double that amount to \$15 million.

“This money stays in the state of Utah,” Winterton said. “We pay them on the money that they spend here in the state. So they have to produce their receipts in order to get if you want to call it a rebate...we’ll call it an incentive. I think this is rural economics at its best, because this money does come back in sales tax, and to the cities and counties.”

Mark Moench is the president of Thousand Peaks Ranch in Oakley, which was used as a filming location for *Yellowstone*. During the committee meeting he said while production companies help urban areas, they also attract companies to rural ones.

“I was also impressed how they expanded even beyond our property to other county locations within Summit County and even outside, and in what we call, you know, rural Utah...spending some money, using local talent,” Moench said.

Pearce said after three years of significant growth in the industry in Utah, they already have funds that are allocated for future years.

“We have tapped out of that incentive dollars every year for the past couple of years, we usually run out mid-year,” Pearce said. “And that’s where we get into trouble of just not being able to, you know, think in the future, because we just don’t have funds to support a big production, like *Yellowstone*, over multiple years.

While *Yellowstone* officials have shown some interest in potentially coming back to Utah for an offshoot, Pearce said she’s not worried about bringing production back and instead is looking ahead at what the bill could offer.

“Utah has so many great resources that film productions look for, we’re close to LA, we have great infrastructure, we have great crew,” she said. “So all those things combined really make it a desirable place for films to be.”

Winterton’s bill passed the Senate Economic Development and Workforce Services Committee unanimously and now awaits discussion on the Senate Floor. ■