

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 21, 2011

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar,

We have received your letter, dated June 10, 2011, seeking our input to “identify BLM-managed public lands where there is strong support in the local community and among elected officials for permanent protection.” We appreciate your recognition of Congress’ role in any wilderness discussion and taking the time to ask for our opinion. The unique landscapes of the west add to the quality of life for those who have the opportunity to enjoy them. However, the content of your letter indicates that you have not fully understood our concerns, or the concerns of our constituents, regarding expansion of wilderness in the west, nor does it show an understanding for the economic crises in which our country and region is currently mired.

As members of the Western Caucus, our top priority is the creation and sustainability of jobs. Individually and collectively we have introduced and cosponsored dozens of pieces of legislation to improve the economic environment in the west. This includes legislation to release Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) and so-called roadless areas; to advance responsible energy development; to expedite fuels reduction work on beetle ravaged forests; to relieve the tax and regulatory burden on farmers and ranchers; to advance the country’s position with respect to rare earth, critical minerals, and other hard-rock mining; to help your agency crawl out from under the constant onslaught of litigation; to increase timber sales; and many others.

From the content of your letter, we can only conclude that the Department of Interior remains intent on spending its time and limited resources on efforts to hinder job creation in the west. While it may be possible in some cases for new wilderness areas to result in economic benefit and new jobs, often that is not the result. Further, in the few instances where there is “strong support in the local community and among elected officials” for new wilderness protections, we trust the Member of Congress representing the area in question to advance that cause consistent with the Wilderness Act of 1964. After all, the designation of Wilderness is solely the purview of Congress – it is not the job of the Department of the Interior to “build a strong, bipartisan wilderness agenda.”

Given this, and in response to your letter, we write today with a counterproposal. To help inform our efforts at job creation, we respectfully ask that you help identify legislative proposals we have put forward that the Department of Interior could support to create jobs in the West. For example, the Department could identify BLM WSAs to release for multiple uses. The Department could remove the burdensome and unnecessary delays imposed by Master Leasing

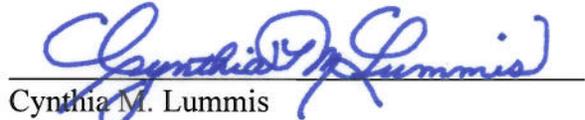
Plans in order to advance domestic energy production. The Department could allow the current Resource Management Plan process to dictate land-use decisions on areas with so-called "wilderness characteristics," rather than pushing duplicative plans that only serve to confuse, divide, and delay economic growth. These are just a few.

The areas we represent are poised to be economic drivers for our country, but only if the Department of the Interior is a willing partner. Responsible energy development and access to traditional uses of public lands will help to create jobs and stabilize our economy to far greater effect than any "wilderness agenda" could hope to achieve. Towards this end, we invite you and selected staff to discuss this directly with us at a joint meeting of the Western Caucuses. We look forward to hearing how you can work with us to build jobs and restore the nation's economy.

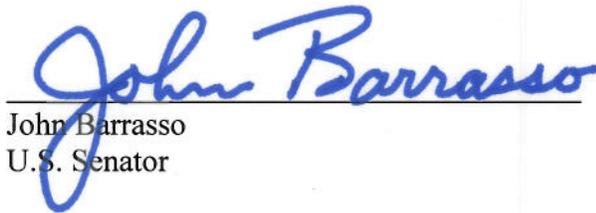
Sincerely,



Dean Heller
U.S. Senator



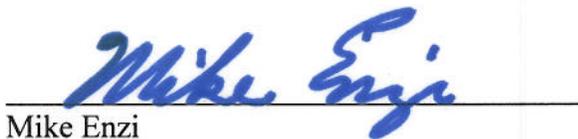
Cynthia M. Lummis
U.S. Representative



John Barrasso
U.S. Senator



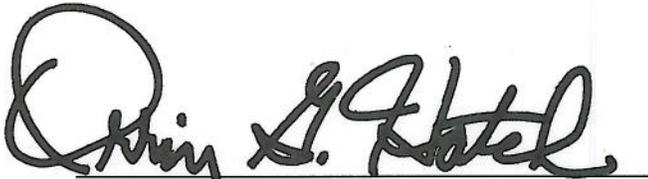
Stevan Pearce
U.S. Representative



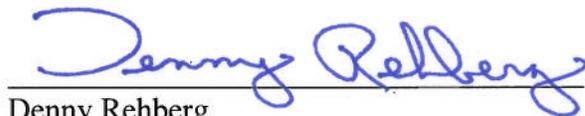
Mike Enzi
U.S. Senator



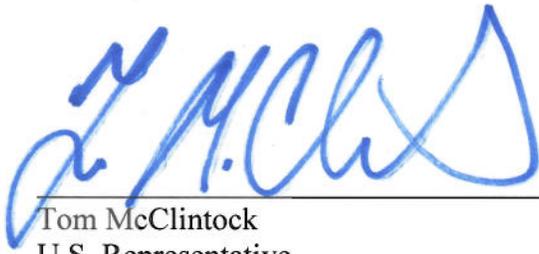
Rob Bishop
U.S. Representative



Orrin Hatch
U.S. Senator



Denny Rehberg
U.S. Representative



Tom McClintock
U.S. Representative



Raúl Labrador
U.S. Representative



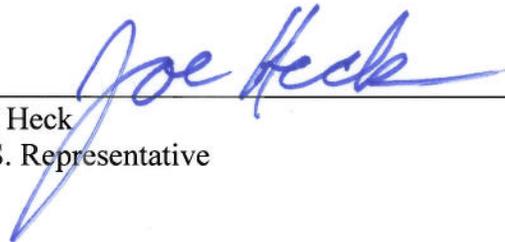
Jason Chaffetz
U.S. Representative



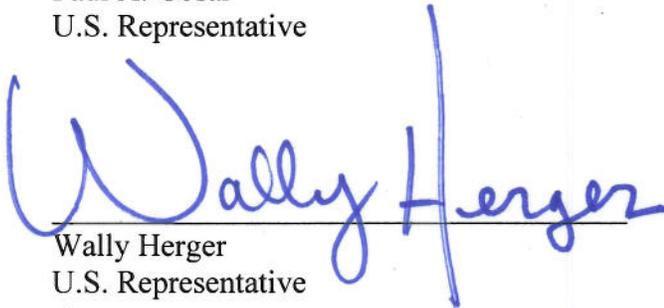
Kristi Noem
U.S. Representative



Paul A. Gosar
U.S. Representative



Joe Heck
U.S. Representative



Wally Herger
U.S. Representative



Paul C. Broun
U.S. Representative



Don Young
U.S. Representative