

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 2, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
1349 C Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Salazar;

As members of the Senate Western Caucus, we write in opposition to a recently released document from the Department of the Interior detailing a strategy to overhaul public and private lands in the West. The document outlines plans for presidential monument designations and land acquisition in 12 western states. Implementing this strategy would break trust with the people of the West.

Americans enjoy a variety of benefits from our public lands, but many westerners rely on public lands for their very livelihoods. For that reason, Congress has ensured that public land management decisions are made in a process that is both public and transparent. Pursuing the strategy outlined in the released documents would threaten western livelihoods and violate the multiple use management framework that is relied upon in western communities. Americans should never live in fear that the stroke of a pen in Washington could forever change their lives.

Land management is most successful when built from local consensus and stakeholder involvement. Grassroots conservation efforts are succeeding in communities across the West. In contrast, top-down land management directives from Washington are recipes for failure. Presidential designations often engender local strife and a loss of public trust. Conflicts over jurisdiction and private property rights continue to plague national monuments designated by the Clinton Administration. Embracing these failed methods would foster resentment in western communities and eliminate the potential for collaborative conservation efforts.

Expansion of federal land holdings and authority is an unsustainable policy. The bureaus of the Department of the Interior are already overloaded with acreage and responsibility. The Bureau of Land Management faces budget shortfalls annually, and the National Park Service faces a maintenance backlog on its existing facilities of over 9 billion dollars. Policy makers must focus on making responsible investments on behalf of the American taxpayer. With that priority in mind, there is no basis for expanding acreage and creating new management requirements for federal land across the West.

The Senate Western Caucus opposes the recently released Department of the Interior strategy for land designation and acquisition. Unilateral action will not be successful in the West. Western communities have a long, successful history of land stewardship. We urge the Department to defer to local land use decision-making and grassroots conservation efforts.

Sincerely,


John Barrasso


Orrin G. Hatch

Jon Kauf

Mike Johnson

Michael B. Eiji

John Eisinger

Robert F. Bennett