

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 15, 2023

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St., NW – 6156
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

In order to combat the climate and biodiversity crises, we encourage you to shift the focus of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to emphasize conservation by utilizing all the administrative tools at your disposal. These tools include designating Wilderness Study Areas, meaningful protection for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), and connecting landscapes for safe travel for wildlife. We urge you to use your statutory authority established by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to provide protections for our public lands and waters and drastically increase the opportunity of overcoming these crises.

Under FLPMA, the Department of the Interior has the authority to update inventories of the resources it manages—including areas that qualify for wilderness designation, ACECs, and other conservation areas. Under section 202 of FLPMA, once such inventories have been completed, the Interior Department may then move to administratively protect lands as new Wilderness Study Areas. Managing these BLM lands in a wilderness-like state would help achieve President Biden’s goal to protect 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030.

Our remote lands are frequently overlooked in conversations about addressing the climate crisis, but their contributions will be crucial. Public lands not only support complex ecosystems, but also can sequester carbon and make areas more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

The largest opportunity to protect our public lands lies with the BLM. For years, DOI and the BLM have not utilized their ability to protect these lands, leaving critical habitats vulnerable to degradation of their unique resources. Without proper protections, these lands face many threats that could jeopardize wilderness-quality values the BLM stated these lands have.

FLPMA directs the BLM to give priority to the designation and protection of ACECs. These are places where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes. For decades, this designation has gone largely underutilized, with inconsistent identification, designation, and management. If fully embraced, ACECs can preserve and protect historical and cultural resources and sites as well as promote public access and enjoyment of the open air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the nation.

Protecting new Wilderness Study Areas and ACECs in a durable way as envisioned in FLPMA would be a significant step to mitigate climate change and reach the administration's 30 x 30 goal. Thank you for your commitment to the stewardship of our nation's public lands.

Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



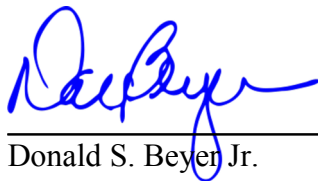
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

André Carson

André Carson
Member of Congress



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



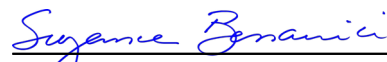
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Katie Porter
Member of Congress



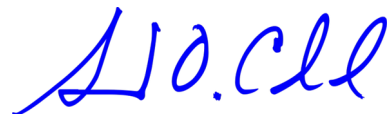
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress




Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



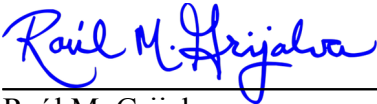
Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Mike Levin
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



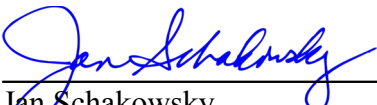
Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



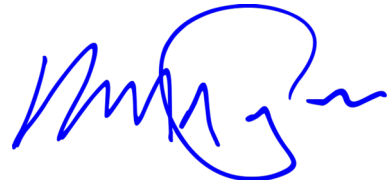
Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress



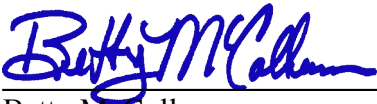
Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Brittany Pettersen
Member of Congress



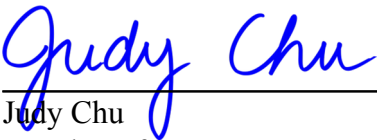
Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress



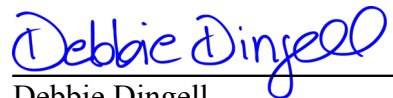
Judy Chu
Member of Congress



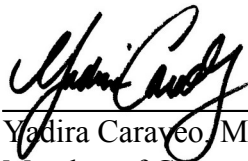
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Yadira Caraveo, M.D.
Member of Congress



Jason Crow
Member of Congress

Kevin Mullin

Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress

Sara Jacobs

Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress