



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

JUN 10 2011

The Honorable Dean Heller  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-2805

Dear Senator Heller:

As an integral part of our effort to conserve America's lands and wildlife for future generations, I will work with Members of Congress to identify public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management for permanent Wilderness protection under the Wilderness Act. In 2009, I worked closely with Congress in the designation of approximately 2 million acres of Wilderness, of which nearly 1 million are public lands managed by the BLM. I want to continue these efforts.

Both Democratic and Republican Members of Congress support providing permanent protection for some BLM lands under the Wilderness Act. In this current session of Congress, several Members have already introduced legislation to create new areas of Wilderness. For example: H.R. 41, the Beauty Mountain and Agua Tibia Wilderness Act from Representative Darrell Issa; H.R. 113, the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act from Representative Michael Simpson; S. 667/H.R. 1241, the Rio Grande del Norte Conservation Establishment Act by Senator Jeff Bingaman and Representative Ben Ray Lujan; and S. 766/H.R. 1413, the Devil's Staircase Wilderness Act by Senator Ron Wyden and Representative Peter DeFazio.

I believe these bills – and others that have been introduced with strong local support – provide a foundation from which we can build a strong, bipartisan wilderness agenda in this Congress. To help advance this effort, the Department of the Interior will, by October 15, 2011, submit to Congress a list of “crown jewel” areas that we believe are ready for immediate Wilderness designation by Congress. This list will include some areas that would be protected by bills that are currently pending before Congress and that have strong local, state, tribal, and congressional support. It may also include some areas that are not currently being considered for protection, but that the Department of the Interior believes have widespread support and are worthy of Wilderness designation.

To help inform this conservation effort, I respectfully ask that you identify BLM-managed public lands where there is strong support in the local community and among elected officials for permanent protection, and that you believe are ready for designation as Wilderness by this Congress.

Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes will also be working with the BLM and interested parties on recommendations for how the Agency should manage the millions of acres of public land that are not protected under the Wilderness Act, but that have wilderness characteristics.

Because public lands with wilderness characteristics can offer unique hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities – along with potential energy, mineral, and other resource values – it is important that the BLM have clear guidance when undertaking its multiple-use land management planning and when making project-level decisions that could impair wilderness characteristics. I welcome your input on this important policy matter as well.

Thank you in advance for your efforts to develop and advance a strong, bipartisan wilderness agenda for our children and our grandchildren.

Sincerely,

  
Ken Salazar