

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 17, 2011

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

Dear Secretary Salazar,

Over the last few months, you and other officials from the Department of the Interior have visited various locations across the west to discuss potential designations—ranging from wilderness designations to National Conservation Areas. While we appreciate your commitment to our public lands, we are writing to reiterate our firm belief that all such actions should originate in local communities through an open and transparent public process and be presented to Congress by the impacted Members of the House and Senate.

We have written to you several times since your “crown jewels” wilderness solicitation letter of June 10, 2011. We are concerned that the issues we conveyed to you have fallen on deaf ears. Permanent public land designations have a significant impact on the surrounding communities, and those communities have the right to have input in a locally-driven process regarding the lands in their immediate area. Meetings conducted over the last month have not been open to the public at large and, in some cases, have fostered more problems than they attempted to solve.

We also remind you that we do not categorically oppose wilderness. In fact, we are actively engaged in the management of public lands in our respective states and will continue to offer measures that meet the needs of both the land and our constituents—including conservation proposals—at the appropriate time.

In the wake of the failed “wildlands” initiative, the Department’s new wilderness agenda is supposed to be built on state, local, and tribal input. That threshold cannot be met through any Washington-driven land proposal or designation. As federal elected officials, we have the tools and responsibility to make these determinations and it is our hope that we can work together on these efforts. We would hate to see any goodwill built up in our communities undone by top-down directives from Washington.

Sincerely,



DEAN HELLER  
U.S. Senate



JASON CHAFFETZ  
U.S. House of Representatives