

April 7, 2003

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

We request that the Bureau of Land Management immediately suspend any new wilderness reviews of public lands other than reviews specifically directed by an Act of Congress. The agency has no authority beyond that provided in Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy Management Act to pursue any additional wilderness study. Actions taken in the waning days of the previous administration to institute a new wilderness review effort is a contravention of Congressional intent.

All public lands have been subjected to at least one wilderness review and these reviews have sufficiently satisfied the Congressional requirements for inventory and identification of lands possessing wilderness values. Congress has been unable to act on many of the recommendations already submitted for consideration and there is a need to examine the current status of our national system, ascertain how well we have met the needs of our Nation and establish priorities for new designations, creating a National Wilderness policy more in tune with the needs of the 21st century.

Further wilderness review serves no beneficial purpose and frustrates current efforts to identify and open key areas on public lands for energy production, resolve access problems or the legitimate use of public lands for other than wilderness purposes including recreation uses. Nor has the lack of new wilderness review deterred efforts by proponents to legislate new designations. It has become commonplace in recent wilderness designations to go beyond the criteria established in the Wilderness Act and include areas with roads and structures which then must then be removed and rehabilitated. During the 107th Congress over 50 separate pieces of

legislation were introduced concerning wilderness.

The legislative history makes clear that when debating the Wilderness Act of 1964, Congress and the advocates for a National Wilderness Preservation System, envisioned a system of approximately 60 million acres. Unfortunately, Congress failed to legislate any limits and to date, Congress has established more than 107 million acres of wilderness. If the Nation's Wilderness lands were made into one state it would become the 3rd largest in the nation, larger than the State of California. In addition, there are over 50 million acres of wilderness recommendations yet to be acted upon. Efforts of the previous administration to implement a roadless rule is nothing short of an attempt to bypass Congress and add an additional 60 million acres as defacto wilderness. In total, these efforts would amass over 220 million acres, one third of the nations federal lands, well beyond any system ever envisioned by Congress.

The designation of certain Federal lands as wilderness has been beneficial to the American people. But millions of Americans who visit national parks, forests and other public lands also benefit from areas that provide environmentally sound and safe uses other than wilderness.

We remain ready and eager to assist the Administration on matters affecting public lands and resources, please feel free to contact us at any time

Sincerely,
