

Statement of William H. Meadows
of
The Wilderness Society
In Support of the Nomination of
Senator Ken Salazar of Colorado
for
Secretary of the Interior
before the
Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources
January 15, 2009

Chairman Bingaman, Senator Murkowski and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer the views of The Wilderness Society in support of the nomination of Senator Ken Salazar of Colorado for the position of Secretary of the Interior. My name is Bill Meadows, and I am President of the Wilderness Society, an organization founded in 1935 and committed to ensure that future generations of Americans will enjoy the clean air and water, wildlife, natural beauty, and opportunities for recreation and renewal that pristine forests, rivers, deserts, and mountains provide.

Ken Salazar has been a bridge-building conservation leader in Colorado for over a decade, and was a personally committed land steward well before that. He understands the land, water, and people of the West and the intricate connections among those key features of our natural and social landscape. For our part, The Wilderness Society has developed an excellent working relationship with Sen. Salazar and his office, though we have not always agreed with the positions he has taken on every issue of concern to us. Nevertheless, in all instances we have appreciated the inclusive, thoughtful, and open-minded way in which he approaches those positions and discussions leading to them.

Days after he was elected to the United States Senate, Mr. Salazar asked The Wilderness Society and others for our recommendations for public land preservation—new wilderness designations, new national parks, and such. We delivered our list, and he has successfully negotiated and translated two key portions of that list into wilderness legislation that is now poised for approval by Congress.

During the detailed work on the Rocky Mountain National Park wilderness bill and on legislation creating the Dominguez-Escalante national conservation area and, within that, the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness, Mr. Salazar and his staff have been very responsive to our requests for strong and uncompromised protection, even as they were getting pressure from those who oppose those designations. In doing that, he has been able to use his style and his position to develop legislation that respects and accommodates a variety of interests, thus persuading many wilderness skeptics to support the measures.

Similarly, Senator Salazar has taken a deliberate and thoughtful approach to national energy policy. While recognizing the need for reliable energy supplies and while working to ensure those supplies, he has recognized that energy development should not override other public land and environmental priorities. He recognizes that there are some places on the public lands where oil and gas development is inappropriate, and other places where energy production is appropriate, but must be subject to safeguards that ensure the long-term health and beauty of our natural heritage, as well as the health of citizens who live near the oil and gas fields. Few in Colorado, or in Congress, have been more committed champions of sustainable, renewable energy supplies and of energy conserving measures.

This combination of perspectives—sensible energy production and other resource development with a sharp eye on the need to protect more enduring values and resources—hopefully will return our national public lands management to the true

principles of multiple use and sustainable yield, and away from the one-sided and destructive production-above-all-else approach of recent years.

Taking on the multitude of issues in the immense landscape that comprises America's publicly owned deserts, rivers, wetlands, mountains, forests, parks and wildlife refuges managed in trust by the Department of the Interior for all Americans is an enormous responsibility. However, our experience with Sen. Salazar suggests that he will take that responsibility on in a strong and effective way, bringing to the task at hand his practical policies of inclusiveness, open-mindedness, and fairness that have characterized his career as a public servant to date.

This combination of perspectives—careful energy and other resource development with a sharp eye on and commitment to protection of the more enduring values and resources of our common natural heritage—will return our national public lands management to the true principles of multiple use and sustainable yield, and away from the one-sided and destructive production-above-all-else approach of recent years.

We ask that you approve his nomination as soon as possible.

Thank you.