



March 1, 2011

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman, House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20215

The Honorable Edward Markey
Ranking Member, House Committee on Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20215

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Markey:

On behalf of The Wilderness Society I am writing to express our strong support for the Bureau of Land Management's new Wild Lands policy, as set forth in Secretarial Order #3310 issued by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar on December 22, 2010. The Wilderness Society's mission is to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places; and this Order, like our mission, is an important tool for safeguarding our national treasure of wild lands.

Secretarial Order #3310 reverses the flawed policy adopted by former Secretary Norton and the state of Utah to vitiate the BLM's responsibility to inventory, designate and protect millions of acres of public lands that harbor wilderness characteristics. In issuing the new policy, Secretary Salazar recognized the Department of Interior's legal obligation under Section 102(a)(8) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to, among other multiple use objectives, "... preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition..."

For decades after passage of FLPMA, Republican and Democratic Administrations acknowledged the BLM's continuing responsibility within its land use planning authority (as set forth in Secs. 201, 202, and 302 of FLPMA) to inventory lands harboring wilderness characteristics, designate them as Wilderness Study Areas, and apply appropriate management prescriptions to such areas to protect their wilderness values. Under Interior Secretaries as diverse as James Watt and Bruce Babbitt, the BLM utilized its authority under FLPMA to inventory and designate Wilderness Study Areas. It was not until former Secretary Norton entered into an agreement with the State of Utah in

William H. Meadows

2003 – an agreement which applied to all BLM lands throughout the country – that the BLM lost its authority to designate and protect WSAs.

Although Secretary Salazar's Wild Lands policy does not restore the BLM's authority to identify and designate Wilderness Study Areas in the manner prior to the Norton/Utah agreement, it does clarify the BLM's responsibility to identify and protect certain lands in their natural state as "Wild Lands". However, BLM will make these important decisions in land use plans with ample opportunities for the public to contribute their views. Further, this Order does not in any way abrogate the paramount and unique authority of Congress to designate Wilderness Areas under the Wilderness Act.

We believe the new Secretarial Order is an appropriate policy for assuring the administrative protection of some of America's most stunning public lands, and recommend its support to Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William A. Meadows". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

William A. Meadows