

AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES
SMALL BUSINESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0603

July 9, 2014

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Jewell,

We are writing to express our concern regarding President Obama's use of the Antiquities Act to unilaterally designate massive blocks of land across the West as national monuments. The unilateral designation of millions of acres, without local input or support from surrounding communities, amounts to a complete disregard for the will of the American people and their ability to have their voices heard.

Recently, President Obama used the Antiquities Act to unilaterally designate a 500,000 acre national monument in New Mexico, despite local objections and a lack of local participation in the designation of the monument. What makes the unilateral action in New Mexico so alarming is that the area impacted signifies what could be just the initial phase to implement an internal Department of Interior document from 2009, titled *Treasured Landscapes*. This document includes information that the Administration may take unilateral action to lock-away an additional 13 million acres in Western States, including the Vermillion Basin in Moffat County, Colorado.

Locking away over 13 million acres of Western land by way of the Antiquities Act, without Congressional approval or public input, will restrict access for energy production, recreation, and other job creating economic activities. Given the breadth of this document and this Administration's use of the Antiquities Act to date, the local communities that surround Vermillion Basin are deeply concerned.

The designation of Vermillion Basin as a national monument would result in a lasting, if not permanent, adverse economic impacts on the communities of Northwestern Colorado, including their ability to sustain and create jobs. Local elected officials and stakeholders have recently sent letters asking that any consideration of the Vermillion Basin as a national monument be halted until broad consensus and community support from all sectors are secured.

Moffat County and the Vermillion Basin area residents have been intimately involved in the national monument conversation for the past 15 years with local solutions and compromise continually being sought. However, in 2000, various environmental groups proposed that the

Vermillion Basin should become a national monument without any input from local elected officials. In 2007, Colorado Governor Bill Ritter and Senator Ken Salazar embarked on a helicopter tour of the area to “envision” the basin for a special designation, again without seeking input from the community stakeholders and locally elected officials. Finally, in 2010, the local Bureau of Land Management (BLM) office and a diverse group of locally affected interests supported a plan to responsibly manage the Vermillion Basin by balancing multiple uses for the community with environmental protections. Years after the implementation of this locally driven compromise, the Washington, DC office of the BLM challenged and overturned the management plan that the local BLM office and the communities’ agreed upon.

The original intent of the Antiquities Act was to provide protections for at-risk lands facing an immediate threat. However, the lands the President is now targeting, such as the Vermillion Basin, already have such protections in place.

We are proponents of a bottom-up approach to public lands designations to ensure public participation from local communities. When the President unilaterally designates a monument under the Antiquities Act without local support, he is essentially imposing his will over the objections of the American people. This disconcerting development speaks to the urgent need to update the Antiquities Act and give the American people a voice in the process.

We respectfully request that any Presidential use of the Antiquities Act to designate public lands as national monuments, such as the Vermillion Basin, be fully vetted through a locally driven bottom-up process involving those affected by such a designation change. Additionally, we also request a list of lands being considered for national monument designation or any special designation by the President through the use of the Antiquities Act.

Sincerely,



Scott Tipton
Member of Congress



Cory Gardner
Member of Congress