

Congress of the United States

Washington D.C. 20515

June 12, 2023

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St., NW – 6156
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

On April 3, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) published in the Federal Register a draft “Conservation and Landscape Health” rule. The draft rule provides tools for the BLM to improve the resilience of public lands in the face of a changing climate and biodiversity loss; conserve important wildlife habitat and intact landscapes; plan for development; and better recognize unique cultural and natural resources on public lands. We strongly support the progress and direction of BLM’s long-overdue draft rule. We believe the final rule should build upon the draft to ensure that the rule achieves its potential to balance various multiple uses of BLM lands for the benefit of current and future generations.

The draft rule laudably:

- Clarifies conservation as a legitimate land use, alongside other land uses, and prioritizes lands to be managed for conservation.
- Promotes restoration of our lands and waters, empowering federal land managers and state partners to leverage federal dollars from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, towards restoration and improving land health.
- Includes regulations for Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which are areas where special management is required to protect important natural, cultural, and scenic resources, or to protect from natural hazards.
- Provides for nomination of ACECs by tribes and members of the public.

The BLM oversees some of our nation’s most spectacular landscapes, more than 85 percent of which remain in their natural state. These lands provide connectivity corridors and habitat for wildlife, allow for natural carbon sequestration, and provide clean water and air for local communities. Protecting our public lands also provides increased opportunities for recreation, including hunting and fishing.

Lands managed by the BLM are often overlooked in conversations about addressing the biodiversity and climate crises, but their contributions are crucial. Sustainable and resilient public lands are critical to Western economies and great quality of life. This draft rule provides an important framework to modernize BLM’s conservation regulations and can be strengthened.

We encourage Interior to implement the draft rule by:

- Conducting an inventory of intact natural landscapes.
- Ensuring that identification and consideration of ACECs is prioritized and that ACECs are properly managed.
- Identifying and protecting habitat connectivity.
- Restoring streambeds and riparian areas.
- Protecting mature trees from a myriad of growing threats, including uncharacteristic wildfires and climate change.

In addition, the BLM should coordinate with tribal governments to refine the rule and ensure that it:

- Advances opportunities for co-stewardship.
- Incorporates Indigenous knowledge.
- Respects tribal sovereignty and treaty rights.
- Protects tribal cultural sites.
- Carries out tribal consultation in ways that honor tribes' unique historic and contemporary connections to public lands.

We support your commitment and stand ready to work with you and communities across the West to conserve public lands for generations to come. We look forward to the completion of this important rulemaking.

Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



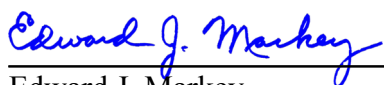
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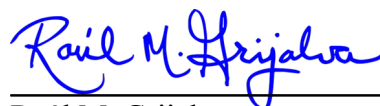
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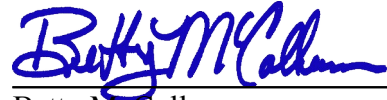
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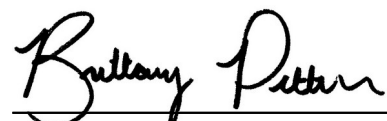
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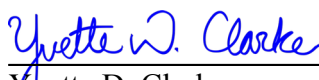
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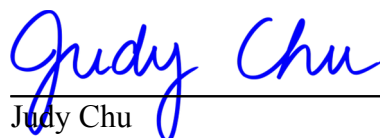
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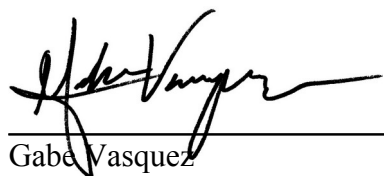
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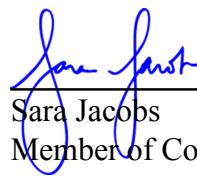
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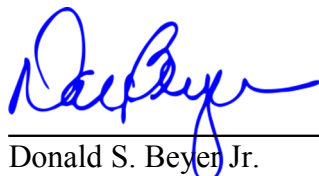
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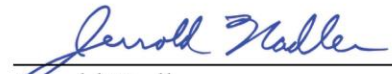
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