

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 21, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
U.S. Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

On July 1 and July 13, 2010, the WildEarth Guardians filed lawsuits in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia against the Department of the Interior (DOI) related to leasing of federal coal in the Powder River Basin (PRB) of Wyoming and Montana. Separately, Wild Earth Guardians has filed a petition with the Interior Department to stop the Federal Coal Leasing Program, until a new system can be devised. We are writing to underscore the importance of the federal coal leasing program to the economy and energy security of this nation and to emphasize the need for the Department to undertake a strong defense of the federal coal leasing program. An efficient leasing program is critical to ensuring retention of high-paying jobs and affordable sources of electricity to meet our growing energy needs.

For example, the PRB alone currently supplies more than 450 million tons of coal per year. Its production accounts for 40% of the nation's coal, and its product is used in 38 states to generate electricity. States that use PRB coal generally have electricity costs that are 50 percent lower than states that rely on other fuels. During his visit to the PRB, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director, Bob Abbey, publically recognized the importance of PRB coal to the nation's energy portfolio.

Prior to leasing federal coal, the BLM engages in an extensive, multi-year process to assess and address every potential impact of the proposed mining operation. This process allows full analysis of both specific environmental impacts associated with leasing in that location, as well as broad analysis of wider environmental implications like climate impacts. WildEarth Guardians' allegations to the contrary are unfounded and should not be entertained by DOI. The lawsuits threaten to unravel the leasing of federal coal in the PRB.

A similar lawsuit filed by WildEarth Guardians on federal oil and gas leasing in Montana produced a settlement agreement resulting in the DOI's cancellation of 61 oil and gas leases covering over 30,000 acres and suspension of all future oil and gas leasing in Montana, North and South Dakota while the agency studies potential climate change impacts. If successful, or if DOI seeks to settle this case in a manner similar to the Montana oil and gas case, the result would delay or stop the 12 proposed coal leases in the PRB, leases which contain up to 5.8 billion tons of coal, and would jeopardize nearly 6000 high-paying direct jobs and \$2 billion in revenues to state and federal coffers.

The current leasing policy has served our nation well by providing a reliable and secure source of fuel to generate affordable electricity for all Americans and high-wage jobs that support communities throughout the region. Your agency possesses the rigorous analysis and the means to effectively fight against the unfounded claims of WildEarth Guardians. We believe that the public interest requires a vigorous defense of the Department's federal coal leasing program.

Sincerely,

Senator John Barrasso, M.D.

Representative Cynthia M. Lummis

Senator Michael B. Enzi

Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

Senator Bob Bennett

Representative Doc Hastings

Senator James Risch

Representative Nick J. Rahall II

Senator Orrin Hatch

Representative Glenn Thompson

Senator Christopher Bond

Representative Tim Holden

Senator James Inhofe

Representative Rob Bishop

Senator Jim Bunning

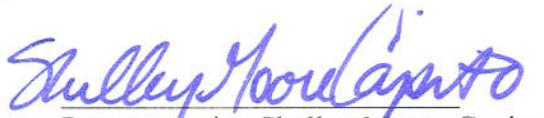
Representative John T. Salazar

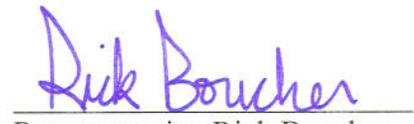

Representative Devin Nunes


Representative Doug Lamborn


Representative Jim Matheson


Representative Jason Chaffetz

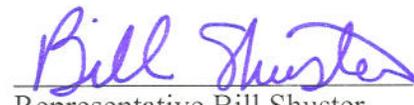

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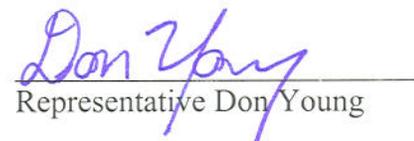

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Representative Ben Chandler


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Representative Don Young