Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 28, 2011

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

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We are writing to express our concerns about the Department of the Interior's (DOI) recent issuance of Secretarial Order No. 3310. This order implements a sweeping new wilderness policy for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands without congressional input. It has the potential to put an end to many traditional BLM land uses while setting aside vast areas of the American West as de facto wilderness. This directive will significantly impact western economies and rural communities, which depend on multiple-use access to federal lands.

The decision was announced the day after Congress adjourned and the day before Christmas Eve. Choosing to announce such a significant decision on such a date raises the question whether the intent was to escape both congressional and public scrutiny.

We are also concerned that because this action was taken without input from Members of Congress and local officials, who would be affected by the order, the prospects of a cooperative working relationship about wilderness have been damaged. As best we can tell, Congress was left in the dark regarding any process the DOI may have undertaken in the preparation of this decision. We are also unaware of any effort to reach out to Members until the day the announcement was made. Unfortunately, the DOI is sowing the same seeds that led to the distrust and contention that necessitated the Norton-Leavitt agreement.

This order gives the BLM immediate authority to "designate appropriate areas with wilderness characteristics under its jurisdiction as 'Wild Lands' and to manage them to protect their wilderness values." We believe this order represents a considerable departure from the method for designating lands as "Wilderness Areas" specified in the Wilderness Act of 1964.

As you know, the Wilderness Act gives the U.S. Congress -- and only the U.S. Congress -- the power to designate public lands as protected "Wilderness Areas." Secretarial Order 3310 appears to be an underhanded attempt by DOI to circumvent Congress and the federal rulemaking process by designating potentially millions of acres of publicly owned lands in western states as de facto wilderness under a new, loosely defined "wild lands" category.

The directive states, "In accordance with Section 201 of FLPMA, the BLM shall maintain a current inventory of land under its jurisdiction and identify within that inventory lands with wilderness characteristics that are outside of the areas designated as Wilderness Study Areas and

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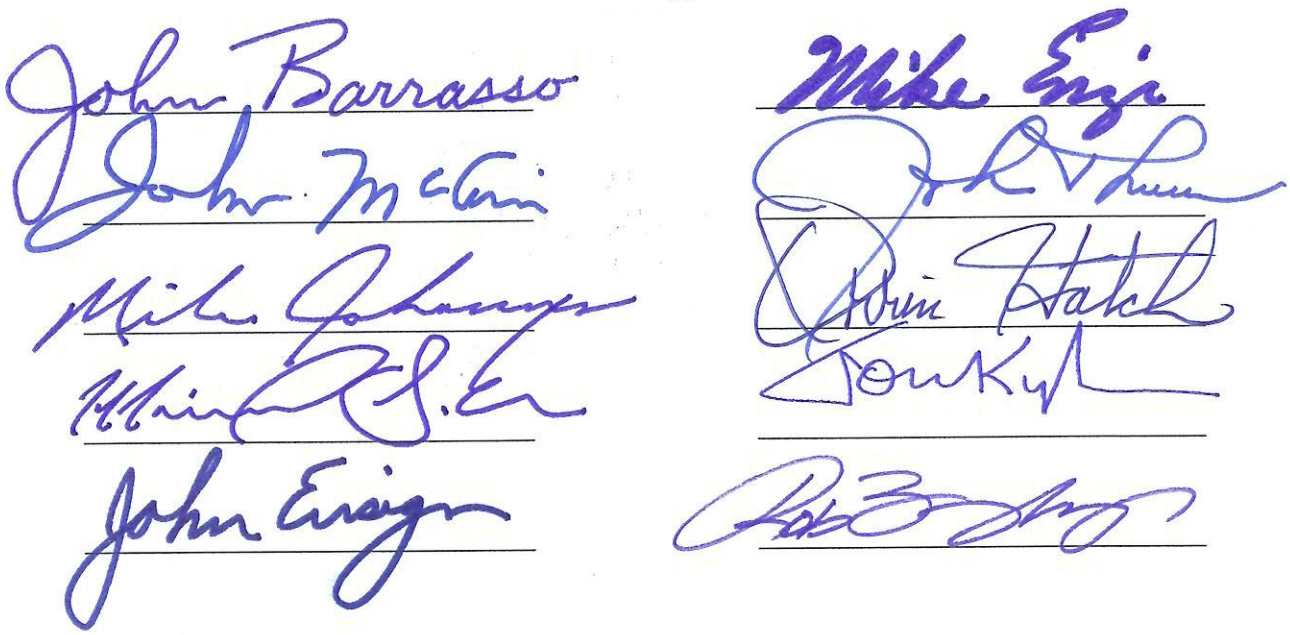
that are pending before Congress or units of the National Wilderness Preservation System." In fact, Section 201 of FLPMA directs an inventory of all resources and resource values on BLM lands and does not single out wilderness. By singling out wilderness characteristics, and ignoring other resources, Secretarial Order No. 3310 appears to be intentionally stacking the deck against multiple-use management. If a new inventory is going to occur, we suggest all multiple-use resources be included so a rational and responsible decision can be made on tradeoffs in management to best serve the public interest.

We believe public lands should be managed in a way that provides the greatest benefit to the public. The multiple-use philosophy -- which encourages the environmentally responsible use of public lands for conservation, recreation, and economic purposes -- is the best way to accomplish that goal. Multiple-use has been the bedrock for many rural western economies for decades.

Conversely, an ambiguous "wild lands" designation based on "wilderness characteristics" is not a good management approach. History shows this sort of arbitrary executive decision breeds conflict and acrimony and deters compromise. Indeed, we are convinced that proceeding with this order will only serve to create greater uncertainty, invite litigation, and create further division among the various public land stakeholders, environmental groups, and local communities.

We believe wilderness protection and economic activity can be accommodated, but discussion and compromise take time. If a portion of land is deserving of wilderness designation, the Administration should engage Congress, not attempt to work around it. This new "wild lands" policy introduces more uncertainty and will arbitrarily delay the reasonable use and development of our public lands. In order to prevent a collapse of several rural economies in the West and forestall continued uncertainty and job loss in western public land states, we urge you to withdraw Secretarial Order 3310 and work with Congress to devise balanced policies for our public lands.

Sincerely,



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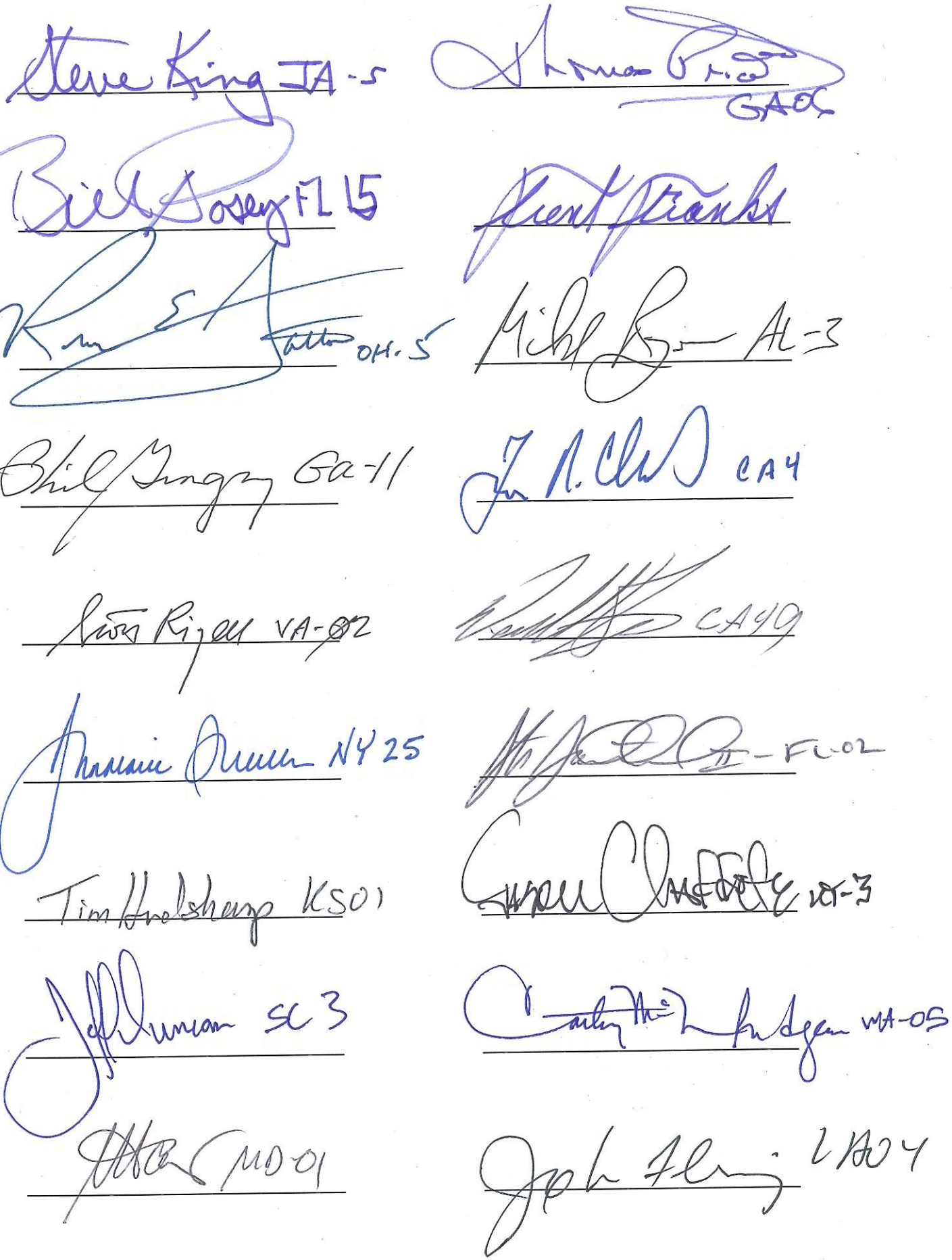

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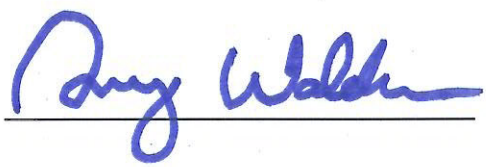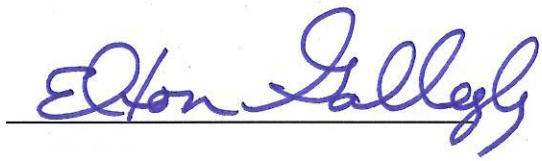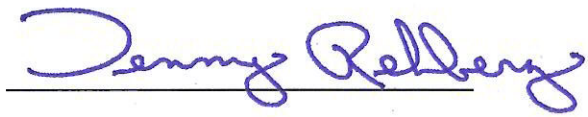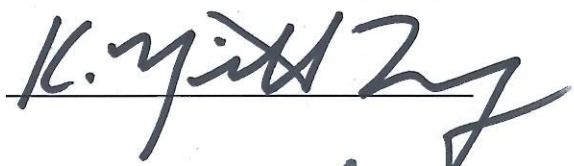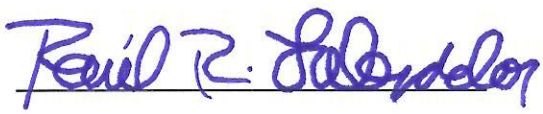
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