

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 30, 2007

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary
US Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Kempthorne:

We are writing to request your intervention to protect cultural resources and wilderness values in Utah's canyon country from damaging off-road vehicle use, specifically on the desert lands that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has inventoried and found to have wilderness character.

Since 2000, Congress has funded the BLM's multi-million dollar effort to better plan for the future of cultural resources, wildlife, recreation, and development on our western public lands. Some of the first plans under this effort are near completion in Utah and, therefore, could set a precedent for other plans across the West.

In particular, the BLM is proposing off-road vehicle (ORV) routes in lands that it has inventoried and acknowledged as possessing wilderness values, such as Fisher Towers, Labyrinth Canyon, Goldbar Canyon and Beaver Creek. By officially designating off-road vehicle routes in Utah's roadless areas, the agency is not protecting unique cultural artifacts and wilderness values. As a result, these ORV plans will be devastating to some of the most magnificent public lands and prehistoric cultural resources in the country.

The BLM currently recognizes 3.3 million acres of Utah BLM roadless areas as possessing important wilderness characteristics. These lands, known as Wilderness Character Areas, are also rich with significant and extremely rare archaeological resources. These archaeological resources, including remnants of prehistoric settlements, rock art, and artifacts that date back to the ancient mammoth hunting communities, are often located in remote areas which provide protection from harm. Their existence is generally unsurveyed and undocumented by federal agencies. Therefore, we are specifically concerned that the off-road vehicle plans under consideration by the agency recommend extensive networks of motorized off-road vehicle routes that could result in increased damage – including intentional vandalism, looting, and unintentional damages – to archaeological sites and artifacts, and areas of importance to present-day Native Americans.


Federal regulations require that BLM manage off-road vehicle use to protect public lands and resources, minimize the impacts of off-road vehicle use to those resources, and to

minimize conflicts with other users. Furthermore, the National Historic Preservation Act requires that BLM conduct meaningful consultation with Native American tribes about the impacts of agency actions, such as designation of ORV routes, on cultural resources. We are concerned that the agency is not seeking to actively protect these wilderness and culturally rich lands, as directed by Federal regulations, and prohibiting damaging off-road vehicle use from these areas.

We ask that you take action to protect Utah's exceptional archaeological and wilderness resources by immediately protecting Wilderness Character Areas from off-road vehicle use. We understand that the Utah BLM intends to complete six ORV plans for 11 million acres of public lands covering most of canyon country by next year. These plans will govern off-road vehicle use for the next two decades or beyond. By taking action, you will demonstrate BLM's commitment to its multiple use mandate and will inspire confidence in other planning efforts throughout the West.


Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your future actions to address this issue.

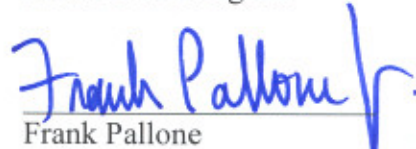
Sincerely,



Timothy V. Johnson
Member of Congress

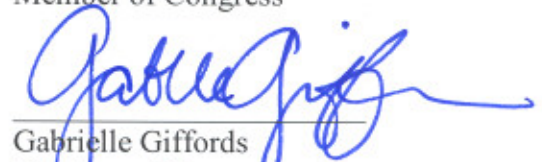

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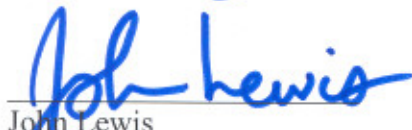

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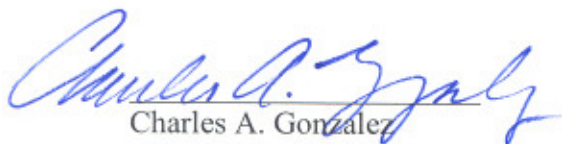

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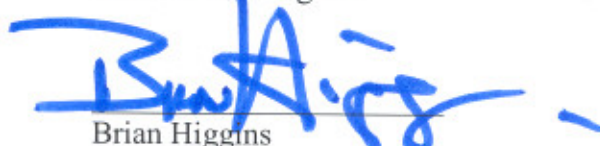

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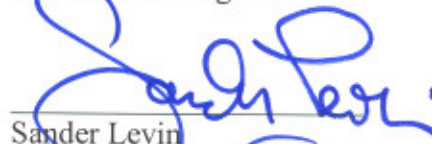

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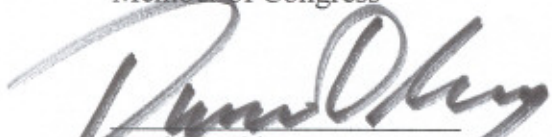
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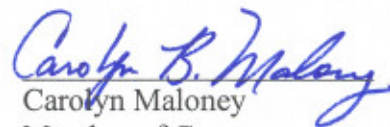
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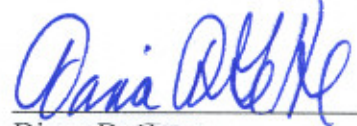
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cc: Director James L. Caswell, Bureau of Land Management