

December 18, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
President-Elect of the United States
John C. Kluczynski Federal Office Building
230 South Dearborn St., 38th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear President-Elect Obama:

Please accept my congratulations on your election.

I am pleased to hear that you have chosen Senator Ken Salazar to be our next secretary of Interior. Last February, when our parks and forests director, Lisa Dardy McGee, and I were in Washington for the Senate subcommittee hearing on the proposed Wyoming Range Legacy Act, we heard Senator Salazar speak in favor of the bill. He drew parallels to local efforts in his home state of Colorado to safeguard iconic landscapes despite the increasing demands of development. I am excited about the implications of Secretary Salazar's post—specifically a greater emphasis on balance between energy development and natural resource and environmental protection—and I look forward to working with him and his staff as well as the others named to lead your administration's environmental, energy, and agriculture departments and agencies.

On behalf of the Wyoming Outdoor Council, a public-interest conservation organization whose members have worked to safeguard Wyoming's environmental quality, wildlife, and public lands since 1967, I write in hopes that you might consider some of our high priorities with respect to energy policy and public lands in Wyoming. Wyoming ranks second among states in natural gas reserves and fourth in oil. The state provides almost 40 percent of the nation's coal and houses the largest reserves of uranium in the United States. Current proposals for wind power could make Wyoming the third-leading wind energy producer in the nation. Without question, energy development is important, but its growing footprint on Wyoming's landscape is enormous. Without balance, the benefits of the boom will be overshadowed by the loss of our open space, clean air and water, and world-renowned wildlife. With this in mind, we would ask you to consider the following points as you work to solve the nation's energy problems while also protecting the nation's heritage landscapes and the fabric of local communities.

- Balance means developing our energy resources at the right pace and in the right places and with consistency among jurisdictions. It means respecting communities and the many uses of public lands. Balance also denotes protection for air, water, and wildlife where development occurs. Maintaining healthy communities and the wild character of the American West depends on regaining this balance.
- Our nation's large, iconic tracts of federal land—the places where Americans

recreate, hunt, fish, and spend time with their families—deserve protection from new energy development. In Wyoming, these heritage landscapes include

- All national forests;
- BLM areas of critical environmental concern;
- Citizens' proposed wilderness areas;
- National Conservation System areas;
- Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks;
- National monuments and national wildlife refuges;
- Beartooth Front;
- Fortification Creek;
- Jack Morrow Hills and Adobe Town in the Red Desert;
- Shirley Basin;
- Wind River Front; and the
- Wyoming Range.

We would note that even if these areas are completely protected from development (a difficult proposition given existing leases), many millions of acres of federal land would remain available for energy development.

- Categorical exclusions from environmental laws for energy development are not warranted and are detrimental to land, wildlife, and human health. These include the categorical exclusions from compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act found in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and similar exclusions adopted by the U.S. Forest Service.
- Communities in the West are burdened with the consequences of large-scale oil and gas development for local infrastructure and social services. It would be helpful if the federal government were to become more sympathetic to these problems and provide assistance. Ensuring a reasonable pace of development might be one solution.
- Oil and gas development creates threats to human health and safety. Ozone created by natural gas drilling—with its immediate and irreversible implications to lung health—is a major challenge for Wyoming. Another is groundwater contamination resulting from the underground fracturing or “fracking” techniques used in drilling operations. Stronger regulations are needed to ensure that local communities are protected—not only put forth by the EPA and the state but also by the Bureau of Land Management.
- The environmental implications for uranium mining are significant. Specifically, the in-situ leaching process threatens groundwater quality. Because much of the proposed uranium mining will occur on federal lands or involve federally owned minerals, the Department of Interior might work to ensure water quality is not threatened by this activity.
- Adequate agency funding and staffing are necessary to ensure monitoring and enforcement of regulations particularly with regard to reclamation. This will also help ensure that commitments agencies make in project-level records of decision are not ignored.
- Thank you for concentrating on a new, clean-technology economy and 2.5 million green jobs. The Western Governors' Association is leading interesting work on this, including planning for renewable energy and transmission corridors. I urge you to give priority to the development of renewable energy sources. As with fossil-fuel development, attention is

needed to prevent substantial environmental impacts. This can be done, and it will require careful planning. For example, with respect to wind development, turbines should be located to avoid large-scale wildlife disruption.

- A carbon tax or cap-and-trade system for managing greenhouse gas emissions will be an important element in energy policy, coupled with an ultimate push away from coal and other fossil fuels. A national standard might be a priority you consider.
- A viable energy portfolio includes energy efficiency and conservation with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with aggressive international protocol.

The nation needs a viable energy portfolio for the many reasons you articulated so well during your campaign. At the Wyoming Outdoor Council, we believe we need to have a *sustainable* energy policy that drives the economy and provides energy to the nation while respecting our nation's tradition of public land stewardship and environmental protection. Such a policy would ensure that energy states such as Wyoming are thriving with wildlife, open space, clean air and water, and healthy communities. We look forward to working with your administration to ensure the national treasures we know and love remain for future generations.

Sincerely,

Laurie K. Milford
Executive Director

Cc: Senator Mike Enzi
Senator John Barrasso
Congresswoman-elect Cynthia Lummis
Governor Dave Freudenthal