

November 23, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Omnibus Public Lands Bill and Land & Water Conservation Fund

Dear Secretary Salazar:

The undersigned livestock groups are concerned with your recent endorsement of both an omnibus public lands measure and legislation to increase funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Both measures could threaten the livelihoods of livestock producers during a nationwide economic recession. During these final days of the 111th U.S. Congress, we ask that you support congressional oversight, limited federal spending, continued use of our natural resources, and local input in the decision-making process.

We cannot support an omnibus lands bill, which could restrict access to millions of acres of federal land across the west by creating new land designations such as wilderness areas and National Conservation Areas. Although reports vary as to the number of bills that would be included (we have heard between 60 and 120 separate bills), multiple-use on those lands could be threatened. Livestock grazing, oil and gas leasing, logging, mining, and other business activities important to rural economies would be jeopardized. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars would be spent administering the sweeping new special land designations, year after year.

Similarly, increasing funding to the LWCF will not only add to the national debt, but could harm productivity as well. Between 1965 and 2002, the LWCF—even without full funding and with the requirement of authorization from Congress for every expenditure—put \$8.7 billion toward federal acquisition and “conservation” of 4.5 million acres of land. It also gave around \$3.5 billion to state and local projects to set aside another 2.3 million acres. Current proposals would increase funding to the LWCF to a minimum of just under \$5 billion through fiscal year 2016—and would put a halt to the requirement of congressional approval on expenditures. Such a proposal would pave the way for federal acquisition and potential restriction of millions of productive, private acres without local stakeholder input. The federal government owns and struggles to manage nearly 650 million acres of land—almost 30% of our nation’s land area. Our country can ill afford the added costs of LWCF acquisitions, not to mention the removal of more natural resources from productive use in the rural West.

While we may not know how many bills would be included in an omnibus measure, this we know with certainty: every public land bill is unique and deserves thoughtful congressional deliberation and local input. While some bills may have the support of local stakeholders, others could be damaging and restrictive to the people who live adjacent to and work on that land. Furthermore, although we cannot know which or how many acres the LWCF would set aside, the citizens who comprise our rural western economies and who count on the natural resources on federal lands should be given a voice in these special designation decisions. Increasing federal

spending, heightening restrictions and regulations, and bundling together and forcing through Congress masses of federal lands bills are not legislative actions we deem appropriate or necessary.

Wise, beneficial use of our public lands' natural resources is a means of improving the lives of not only the families of the rural west, but of people across the nation and world. We appreciate your consideration of our desire to give voice to our hardworking rural citizens and ensure their continued ability to add value through responsible productivity on public lands.

Sincerely,

American Sheep Industry Association
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Public Lands Council

Arizona Cattle Growers' Association
California Cattlemen's Association
California Wool Growers Association
Colorado Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Public Lands Council
Idaho Cattle Association
Idaho Public Lands Council
Montana Stockgrowers Association
Montana Public Lands Council
Montana Association of State Grazing Districts
Nevada Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
Utah Cattlemen's Association
Washington Cattlemen's Association
Wyoming Stock Growers Association