



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

March 9, 2006

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for inviting me to be part of your Administration for a meaningful and rewarding five years. It has been a difficult decision, but the time has come to submit my resignation effective at the end of this month.

With your support and leadership, your team at Interior has accomplished great work in the face of hurricanes, record-setting wildfires and droughts, acrimonious litigation, and expanded post 9-11 security responsibilities. The Interior Department has conserved millions of acres of public and private lands and steered the nation toward cooperative conservation by working with landowners and local groups. Hundreds of communities are better protected from catastrophic wildfire. State and local officials have a greater role in federal land decisions affecting their jurisdictions. More than 6,000 projects for improving our national parks are completed or underway. Millions of Americans have more certain water supplies through historic agreements that are ending decades of uncertainty and water conflicts in the West. We have re-engineered our Indian trust system to provide better service to beneficiaries. We are on track to meet the tasks Congress and you set in the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

Mr. President, this department has climbed the mountaintop in terms of achieving the goals we set out to accomplish. In that process, I have shaped six departmental budgets, encouraged cooperative conservation in travel all across America, implemented your management agenda and testified in Congress many times. Now I feel it is time for me to leave this mountain you gave me to climb, catch my breath, then set my sights on new goals to achieve in the private sector. Hopefully, my husband and I will end up closer to the mountains we love in the West.

There will never be a perfect time to leave. There is always more work to do. My leaving now gives you the opportunity to appoint a new Secretary to accomplish the goals you set for the rest of your Administration.

I have had great experiences as Secretary of the Interior. I released into the wild a bald eagle that had been injured and was nursed back to health by a local wildlife group. It was amazing to hold the eagle in my arms, then launch him skyward and see his mighty wings carry him back to freedom.

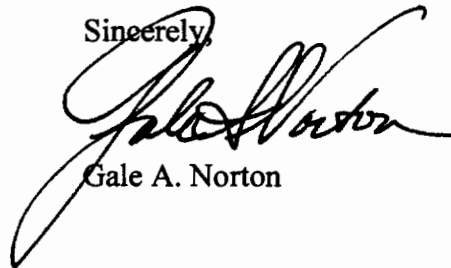
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I was reminded of this two weeks ago when Interior announced, along with several conservation partners, that we were taking the next steps necessary to remove bald eagles from the list of endangered species. Five decades ago, barely 400 pairs of eagles survived in the lower 48 states. Today there are more than 7,000. Decades of cooperation with state and local governments, conservation partners and private landowners made this success possible. This shows that, just like the eagle I released, cooperative conservation occurs one acre, one stream, one salmon, one grizzly bear, at a time. As Secretary, it has been my privilege to encourage this vision of cooperative conservation across the United States. More than five million acres of lands and 10,000 miles of stream and shoreline miles have been restored or protected through the voluntary initiative of thousands of Americans across this nation.

As a person deeply committed to bipartisan and civil public discourse, one aspect of Washington I will not miss is the divisiveness that too often prevails. Nonetheless, I will treasure my time serving in your Administration, working with you, the Vice President and my fellow members of the Cabinet. I will treasure the time we spent discussing the results you wanted to achieve for healthy forests, providing America the energy it needs, making government worthy of its citizens and improving the national parks that Mrs. Bush and you so dearly love. As I leave the mountaintop of service in your Cabinet, I will always remember the time in 2001 when we climbed Moro Rock in Sequoia National Park and saw for ourselves America the beautiful.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gale A. Norton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "N".

Gale A. Norton