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COMMITTEE ON
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REFORM

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

October 29, 2012

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Interior
1951 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: BLM-Preferred Alternative of Gateway West

Dear Secretary Salazar:

I am writing to express my deep concerns with the Bureau of Land Management's recently announced preferred alternative of the route selections for the Gateway West through Ada, Canyon, and Owyhee Counties of southwest Idaho.

My concerns regarding the BLM's preferred alternatives are: 1) the line and tower placements within the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (MNSRBPNCA), and 2) the abandonment of the collaborative process by the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), which has management oversight of the MNSRBPNCA, in its ultimate selection of the preferred alternative. I believe my concerns merit the attention of your office and, in accordance with the enabling legislation for the creation of the MNSRBPNCA, use of your specific powers to reject the preferred alternative. Your Administration claims to be transparent when the collaborative agreement among my constituents was revoked due to your political overseers. We cannot stand for further delay of the Gateway West transmission line.

1. The preferred alternative entails the arbitrary and contradictory inclusions and exclusions of placements within the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area.

It is my understanding that Director Carl Rountree, Office of NLCS holds a "purist's" opinion of MNSRBPNCA holding characteristics of designated wilderness and is therefore opposed to any precedent which allows interior development. It is with this understanding that the stakeholders Proponent's Proposed Route through the MNSRBPNCA along the northern corridor, despite following an existing major transmission line, was rejected. Nevertheless, the BLM-preferred alternative (presumably approved by the NLCS) currently contains three separate incursions totaling more than of 15 miles through the MNSRBPNCA. How can the BLM justify this decision?

I believe these decisions to be arbitrary and at odds with the enabling legislation of the MNSRBPNCA, which specifically calls for the "maintenance and enhancements of raptor populations and habitats"

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[Sec 1, 5 (E)]. Sec 1, 12 also specifically references "facilities for the generation and transmission of electricity exist within the Snake River Birds of Prey Area.

2. The preferred alternative represents an abandonment of the collaborative process instituted under FLPMA and NEPA.

In 2009, the BLM, Idaho Power and Rocky Mountain Power first proposed new locations for the construction of Gateway West. They did so without first seeking the opinions of affected stakeholders, for which they were rightly and thoroughly criticized.

In the intervening three years, the local offices of the BLM, the power companies and all of the affected stakeholders (public and private) worked diligently to find alternatives to the 2009 proposals that fulfilled the needs and respective concerns of all parties. It should be noted that all stakeholders recognize the need for new power transmission lines to be constructed as a matter of national priority with minimal delay. Indeed, much lost time could have been averted had the lead agency adhered to the decades long accepted principle of employing the collaborative process as set forth in FLPMA and NEPA in respect to decision making concerning public lands.

By early 2012, after what can only be described as an extremely difficult application of the collaborative process by all stakeholders, the Proponents Proposed Routes were decided upon that private, local and federal partners on the ground agreed.

It was therefore devastating to learn that a decision was made by Director Rountree in the NCLS to ignore virtually all of the Proponents Proposed Routes that were a result of the collaborative process. We believe this to be a fundamental abrogation of established federal policy and one which will damage future efforts at preventing or resolving conflict between federal agencies and local and private entities. With record high energy prices my constituents cannot afford further delay of this transmission line. Committing to ignore the collaborative process which brought resolution on the ground would result in additional delays.

In summary, we would urge you to utilize the broad management and use powers of your office as delineated under Section 4 of the enabling legislation to review and reverse the decisions of the BLM and NCLS and accept the Proponents Proposed Routes for the construction of Gateway West without further undue delay.

I would appreciate a prompt response at your earliest convenience to our letter.

Sincerely,



Raúl Labrador
Member of Congress