Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 24, 2014

The Honorable Sally Jewell, Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

We are writing in response to your recent comments about the Antiquities Act and your ongoing commitment to conservation and historic preservation on Federal land. Only Congress has the authority to establish National Parks, Forests, and wilderness areas, but there is a long tradition of the conservation initiatives spearheaded by the President. Since the 1906 passage of the Antiquities Act, Presidents have had the authority to establish National Monuments. This is an important tool that has led to the protection of some our most iconic landscapes and valuable cultural resources, including the Grand Canyon and the recently enacted Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument. Some initiatives require Presidential leadership and should not be bogged down by political infighting and paralysis, increasingly common characteristics of Congress.

In today's deeply partisan environment, it's becoming nearly impossible for Congress to make critical conservation decisions. The 112th Congress was the first Congress in 40 years that failed to permanently protect any of America's treasured landscapes. The current Congress is on a path to repeat that abysmal record. There are 37 land designation bills sitting before Congress that have broad public support. Unfortunately, Congress is failing to act. The House Natural Resources Committee has only held hearings on 8 of these proposals and only one has moved beyond markup and passed the House. With only 121 legislative days scheduled for 2014, the time to act is running out. Many of these proposals are excellent candidates for an Antiquities Act designation by the President.

On April 16, 2013, the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation held a hearing on a suite of bills designed to dilute the Presidential authority outlined in the Antiquities Act. The theme of the hearing was overreach with a strong emphasis placed on the need to make the National Monument process more inclusive by requiring Congressional approval. As you know, Congress already has the opportunity to take the lead but is choosing to shun this role. Conservation and historic preservation initiatives with broad public support should not have to be sidelined or stalled because of political paralysis. Gateway communities throughout the country benefit from Federal conservation efforts; resources are protected, visitor experience is enhanced, and local economies are enhanced. At National Parks alone, visitors spend more than $35 million per day. Our most significant resources deserve our attention.

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Again, we are encouraged by your enthusiasm, and we look forward to your leadership to help identify appropriate sites for conservation and preservation. When Congress is unable to advance conservation legislation, the importance of the Antiquities Act is increasingly apparent.

Sincerely,

Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Rush Holt
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Lucille Royal-Allard
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

Jim Moran
Member of Congress

Jim McGovern
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
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Sam Farr
Member of Congress

Sandy Levin
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Tim Walz
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Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

Gerry Connolly
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Carolyn Maloney
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Mike Honda
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Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

Bill Keating
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David Cicilline
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Mike Quigley
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Gwen Moore
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Diana DeGette
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Lois Capps
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Bennie Thompson
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