

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 24, 2012

The Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

*Re: The State of Utah's Attack on Federal Public Lands Warrants a Vigorous Defense.*

Dear Secretary Salazar:

As co-sponsors and supporters of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, which would protect the last remaining wild public lands in Utah, we are deeply troubled by the State of Utah's recent attacks on these remarkable places.

In late March, the state of Utah enacted an ill-conceived and unconstitutional state law demanding that the Department of Interior turn over federal public lands to the state for the eventual disposition to oil, gas, mining and other development interests. Such a transfer would upset the careful balancing of multiple uses mandated by Congress and destroy the unmatched natural beauty found on these lands – taking away from the American people tens of millions of acres of our common natural heritage. We commend you for condemning this ploy, which “defies common sense,” and “...is political rhetoric you see in an election year.” Your diligence on this issue needs to be extended to an even greater threat concerning the state's claim to own highways through these very same public lands.

Concurrent to the land grab statute, the State of Utah filed over twenty lawsuits alleging more than 18,000 highway rights of way totaling over 40,000 miles of “roads” across federal public lands under a long-repealed statute known as the R.S. 2477. As the wording of the statute indicates, Congress originally enacted R.S. 2477 in the mid-nineteenth century to facilitate transportation across federal public lands on legitimate, recognizable “highways.” The Utah litigation, however, seeks to establish thousands of new “highways” over nothing more than primitive tracks and trails.

Importantly, these R.S. 2477 claims cut across some of our most sensitive public lands, including the geologic and archaeological wonders in and surrounding Canyonlands National Park; the magnificent Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and lands recently protected in the Washington County Wilderness provision of Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009.

We urge you to make the vigorous defense of these iconic public lands against the state of Utah's attacks one of your highest priorities. We look forward to talking with you and your staff about the Department's efforts to ensure that the future of Utah's wildlands is secure in the face of this threat.

Sincerely,

Maurice King

Rail M. Gijaboa

Rush Holt

Charles B. Drake

Steven N. Datuna

Alvin L. Hastings

Jack Schatz

Bill Powell Jr

Barbara Deltete

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