November 30, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As economists and academics in related fields, we believe that federal protected public lands are essential to the West's economic future. These public lands, including national parks, wilderness areas and national monuments, attract innovative companies and workers, and are an essential component of the region's competitive advantage.

The West's public lands contribute to our economic well being in a variety of ways, including resource extraction and recreation. These activities can and must coexist with expanding protections for America's world-class natural amenities.

The U.S. is now predominantly a service-based economy, and the fastest-growing regions are those that have been able to attract talented workers, entrepreneurs, and investors across all sectors of the economy. In the West especially, public lands play a pivotal role in attracting and retaining people and businesses. This is the case for all sectors, including manufacturing.

The rivers, lakes, canyons, and mountains found on public lands serve as a unique and compelling backdrop that has helped to transform the western economy from a dependence on resource extractive industries to growth from in-migration, tourism, and modern economy sectors such as finance, engineering, software development, insurance, and health care.

Today, one of the competitive strengths of the West is the unique combination of wide-open spaces, scenic vistas and recreational opportunities alongside vibrant, growing communities that are connected to larger markets via the Internet, highways and commercial air service.

Increasingly, entrepreneurs are basing their business location decisions on the quality of life in an area. Businesses are recruiting talented employees by promoting access to beautiful, nearby public lands. This is happening in western cities and rural areas alike.

Together with investment in education and access to markets, studies have repeatedly shown that protected public lands are significant contributors to economic growth.

America's public lands can be used responsibly while expanding protections for the nation's world-class natural amenities. We urge you to create jobs and support businesses by investing in our public lands infrastructure and establishing new protected areas such as parks, wilderness, and monuments.

Sincerely,

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Randall K. Wilson, Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania
Maggie Winslow, Presidio Graduate School, California
Michael W. "Mick" Womersley, Unity College, Maine
Richard O. Zerbe, University of Washington, Washington

Cc:
Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
U.S. Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar
U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack