

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2008

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Jim Caswell
Director, Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Kempthorne and Director Caswell:

We urge you to ensure that land use and travel plans now being developed by the Utah State Office of the Bureau of Land Management provide appropriate protection for the remarkable wilderness-quality landscapes in Utah's Colorado Plateau region. Utah includes some of the most spectacularly scenic and culturally significant landscapes in the West. They are rich with archaeological treasures, threatened wildlife and habitat, and scarce desert riparian areas. The BLM land use and travel plans represent a unique opportunity to preserve millions of acres of this nation's wilderness heritage.

Utah BLM is developing six Resource Management Plans and travel plans for 11 million acres of public land in the Colorado Plateau region. Within this area is approximately three million acres of roadless land that the BLM has identified as having wilderness character. This land should be managed in a balanced manner to protect its wilderness value.

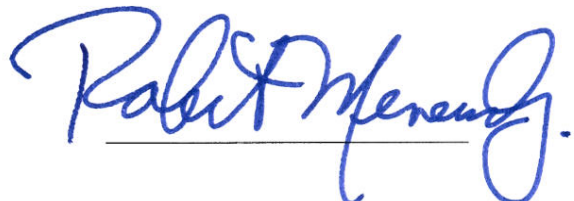
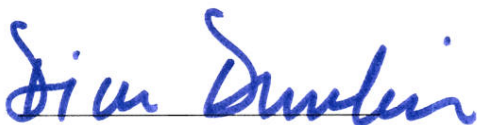
Unfortunately, the preferred alternatives in the draft plans offer virtually no protection for these three million acres. These roadless areas would be vulnerable to damaging off-road vehicle use; oil, gas, and hardrock mineral development; and other development threats. Indeed, the BLM's preferred plans would authorize nearly 1,000 miles of off-road vehicle routes in these roadless areas. Eighty-six percent of this land would be open for oil and gas development.

Alternative management scenarios exist, however. In particular, the draft plans identify "conservation alternatives" that would provide a measure of protection for these roadless areas. We urge you to protect the areas identified by the BLM as "non-Wilderness Study Area lands with wilderness characteristics" by adopting the most protective management prescriptions described in the draft Resource Management Plans. Decisive action at the highest levels of the Interior Department is necessary to ensure that these iconic roadless lands of the Colorado Plateau are protected from the scars of off-road vehicle routes and energy development.

Before issuing a Record of Decision on Utah BLM's six Resource Management Plans and travel plans, we request that you brief our offices on the plans and the rationale behind the decision.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Whitmore

Ben Cardin

Ben Sanders

Kevin Feingold

Joe Vitale

Maria Cantello