

STATE CAPITOL
PO Box 110001
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001
907-465-3500
fax: 907-465-3532



550 West 7th Avenue #1700
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
907-269-7450
fax 907-269-7463
www.gov.alaska.gov
Governor@alaska.gov

Governor Sean Parnell
STATE OF ALASKA

October 29, 2009

The Honorable Kenneth Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I understand the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) may be considering adding a wilderness study provision to resource management plans prepared for BLM lands in Alaska. I urge you not to adopt this approach. Alaska already hosts approximately 57 million acres of designated wilderness, which is over half of all Congressionally-designated wilderness in the United States.

As you know, in deference to the protracted, sensitive negotiations that involved all interests, nearly all Secretaries of the Department of the Interior since passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980 have not pursued the discretionary option in Section 1320 to conduct wilderness reviews on BLM lands in Alaska. The State of Alaska strongly supports retention of this policy. ANILCA intended, and Alaskans deserve, finality regarding conservation designations.

Wilderness designations tie the hands of managers, making it more difficult to support the continuation of activities that are protected by ANILCA. For example, ANILCA provides for motorized access necessary for subsistence purposes, but a wilderness overlay could pressure managers to unnecessarily curtail that access. Wilderness enthusiasts unfamiliar with rural life in Alaska tend to advocate for unrealistic management objectives, which in turn polarizes the debate and overshadows all other issues in any planning process.

Wilderness managers also increasingly constrain the conduct of administrative activities, such as tagging of fish and wildlife by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Under Title XI of ANILCA, wilderness designations automatically elevate authorization of transportation and utility corridors to Congress, thus reducing administrative flexibility to improve Alaska's fledgling infrastructure. In addition, BLM lands are the only truly multiple use lands remaining in Alaska – an important contribution to the state's complex matrix of land management.

All of these issues will generate heightened conflict and controversy if wilderness recommendations are addressed in BLM plans. Alaskans lived through the rancorous debates leading up to ANILCA, and now we would prefer to move forward in developing sound approaches to land use and conservation within the existing policy framework.

The Honorable Kenneth Salazar
October 29, 2009
Page 2

I recognize the need to identify wilderness values in BLM planning documents. The BLM is already enhancing the consideration and adequate protection of wilderness values in resource management plans. Additional wilderness designations are not necessary. The State of Alaska will strongly oppose formal wilderness studies, wilderness suitability inventories, or other interim products normally developed to support wilderness recommendations.

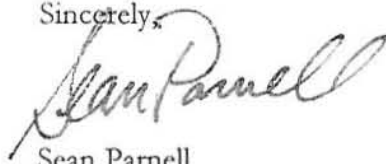
Lastly, maintaining the status quo with respect to BLM wilderness recommendations honors the spirit of ANILCA's "no more" clauses, such as Section 101(d):

This Act provides sufficient protection for the national interest in the scenic, natural, cultural and environmental values on the public lands in Alaska, and at the same time provides adequate opportunity for satisfaction of the economic and social needs of the State of Alaska and its people... Congress believes that the need for future legislation designating new conservation system units... has been obviated thereby.

For all these reasons, I urge you to retain the existing policy, which refrains from conducting wilderness reviews on BLM lands in Alaska.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sean Parnell
Governor

cc: The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, United States Senate
The Honorable Mark Begich, United States Senate
The Honorable Don Young, United States Congress
Wilma Lewis, Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals Management, United States
Department of the Interior
Pat Pourchot, Special Assistant to the Secretary for Alaska Affairs, United States
Department of the Interior
Kim Elton, Interior Director of Alaska Affairs, United States Department of the Interior
Bob Abbey, National Director, Bureau of Land Management, United States Department of
the Interior
Thomas Lonnie, Alaska State Director, Bureau of Land Management, United States
Department of the Interior
John W. Katz, Director of State/Federal Relations and Special Counsel, Office of the
Governor