

February 1, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Paul Ryan,
Speaker
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Rob Bishop,
Chairman
United States House Committee on
Natural Resources

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski,
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on
Energy and Natural Resources

The Honorable Mike Lee
Chairman
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and
Mining

CC: Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and the Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader Pelosi, Chairman Bishop, Chairman Murkowski, Subcommittee Chairman Lee,

As landowners and ranchers who own and manage deeded and leased public lands across the West, we oppose HR 621 and HR 622. We recognize that there are situations in which public and private land exchanges are mutually beneficial and can resolve legitimate access and management issues. Checkerboard ownership patterns, for instance, can pose significant challenges on all sides, as well as to wildlife. Where established processes are followed, the values contained within these lands are protected and the public interest is served, we believe such transactions are appropriate. However, we do not support outright disposal of federal lands.

The blanket sale of federal lands poses the risk of putting those who ranch or depend on public lands out of business, undermining our local economies, and diminishing opportunities for our citizens to interact with wild, intact, natural places thereby lessening the connection (and associated learning and understanding) needed to sustain them. While our membership largely depends on these lands for agricultural operations and to sustain the West's significant agricultural economy, we understand they are cherished by our fellow Americans for their scenic beauty and as places to recreate, hunt and fish. Recreation and tourism is also a growing and tremendously large sector of the national economy and critically important to local

western economies. In Utah, outdoor recreation generates \$12 billion in annual consumer spending. In Colorado it generates \$13 billion in consumer spending. In Montana, New Mexico and Wyoming it generates approximately \$5 billion per state each year. Nationally, outdoor recreation is an economic powerhouse, each year generating \$646 billion in consumer spending and 6.1 million direct jobs.

Most importantly, we need these landscapes kept intact to supply the water resources, forests, rangelands, habitats and ecosystems that sustain all of us today and will sustain our children tomorrow.

We don't always agree with the ways in which federal lands are managed, but this is not a reason to dispose of them. Instead, we need to focus our efforts on improving their management through better collaboration and administration. Doing so provides the opportunity to bring people together on this common ground, and at a time of increasing and dangerous divisiveness.

Neither do we support the removal of federal law enforcement in favor of block grants to states as proposed by HR622. Those of us who operate daily in these contexts fully understand the challenges and complexity of law enforcement in remote and often rugged landscapes. The federal system draws from a national workforce and provides ongoing recruitment and training compatible with natural resource management laws, policies and priorities. We need these qualified, well trained and dedicated civil servants on our commonly owned lands to enforce the law and protect the public estate from damage caused by reckless use and vandalism such as illegal ATV activity, cut fences, poaching, rustling, trash dumping, wood cutting, theft, illegal campfires and arson, to name just a few.

We call for an end to this unproductive debate over the transfer or sale of public lands and for a renewed national commitment to their better management and stewardship. This requires investment, collaboration and improved public dialogue.

Our public lands have been entrusted to us for the benefit of ALL Americans, for the species that inhabit them and to inspire future generations with their grandeur and vastness. It is from these lands that the core values that make us great as a people were formed. These lands are not only part of our shared national heritage, they are vital to our businesses, our communities, our families and our future.

Sincerely,



Jeff Laszlo
Chair



Lesli Allison
Executive Director