

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

February 9, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

We are writing to commend the Department of the Interior's (DOI's) work in publishing proposed rules for overseeing oil and gas operations on National Park Service (NPS) and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) lands. Our national parks and wildlife refuges are some of the crown jewels of our public lands, and deserve all the protections we can afford them. Existing rules governing oil and gas operations in parks and refuges are inadequate, putting these precious lands and the wildlife that depend on them in unnecessary danger. The proposed rules are a major improvement that will provide additional safeguards for lands, wildlife, and the American taxpayer, and we urge you to finalize them at the earliest possible opportunity.

As you are well aware, a number of parks and refuges overlie private mineral rights either because those rights existed prior to the creation of those parks and refuges, or because of private land that still exists within their boundaries. It would probably surprise the general public to learn that there are over 530 oil and gas operations in 12 units of the National Park System, and over 5,000 oil and gas wells on over 100 wildlife refuges, with 1,665 of those wells still actively producing oil or gas. While the rights of the mineral owners must be maintained, it should not be at the expense of the sensitive lands, resources, and wildlife habitat that have been specifically set aside by Congress for special protection.

Unfortunately, previous administrations have prioritized access to private oil and gas rights over protection of parks and refuges. Existing NPS regulations, for example, exempt more than 60 percent of all operations in park units, and contain a woefully inadequate bonding limit that puts the taxpayer on the hook for cleaning up an oil and gas company's mess in a national park. FWS regulations, meanwhile, are over 50 years old and their ineffectiveness has been highlighted by a number of critical reports by the Government Accountability Office (GAO)<sup>1,2</sup> and DOI's Office of Inspector General (OIG).<sup>3</sup> The GAO found that there were "substantial" environmental impacts in refuges due to oil and gas activity, while the OIG reported that refuges were "littered with orphaned or abandoned oil and gas infrastructure", and pointed out that "FWS' management of oil and gas development activities on national wildlife refuges is inconsistent." Furthermore, there is no requirement that oil and gas operators within refuges post any bonds at all, creating a

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *National Wildlife Refuges: Opportunities to Improve the Management and Oversight of Oil and Gas Activities on Federal Lands*, GAO-03-517, August 2003.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Opportunities Remain to Improve Oversight and Management of Oil and Gas Activities on National Wildlife Refuges*, GAO-07-829R, June 29, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of the Interior, *Oil and Gas Development on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuges*, Report No. CR-EV-FWS-0002-2014, March 2015.

significant financial risk to taxpayers, in addition to the environmental risk faced by people and wildlife within and near refuges.

Given these findings, and the importance of these lands for wildlife and future generations, we are strongly supportive of the recent improvements proposed to NPS and FWS regulations, which would, among other things, remove the unnecessary NPS exemptions, establish clear and consistent permitting requirements for refuges, and establish bonding levels that would cover the full reclamation cost. These improvements are long overdue, and we commend both the NPS and FWS for moving forward to protect the lands under their purviews, which are entrusted to them on behalf of the American people.

Thank you for your continued attention to this important issue.

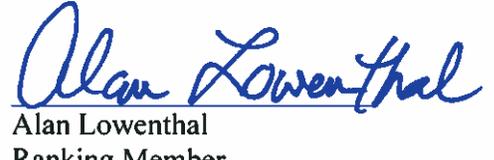
Sincerely,



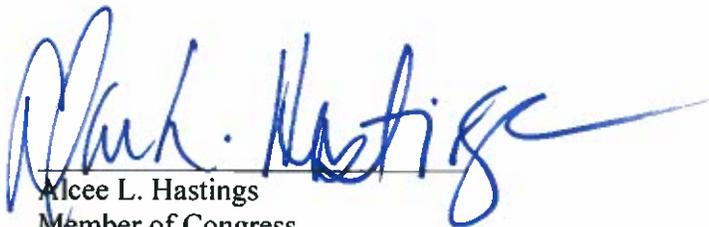
Raúl Grijalva  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on  
Natural Resources



Niki Tsongas  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on  
Federal Lands



Alan Lowenthal  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on  
Energy and Mineral Resources



Alice L. Hastings  
Member of Congress



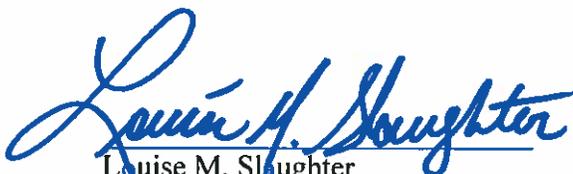
Sam Farr  
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



Michael M. Honda  
Member of Congress



Louise M. Slaughter  
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier  
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Kathy Castor  
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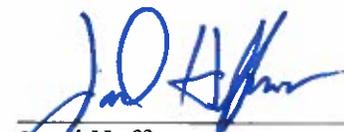
Paul Tonko  
Member of Congress



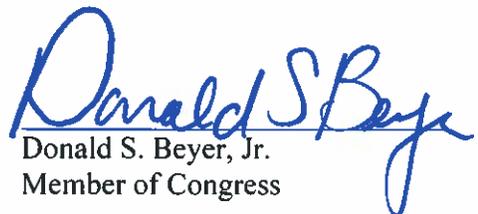
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Member of Congress



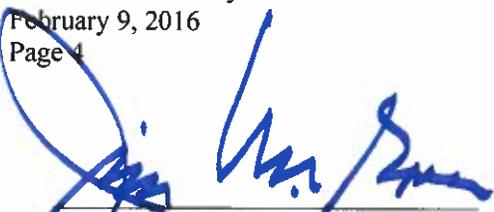
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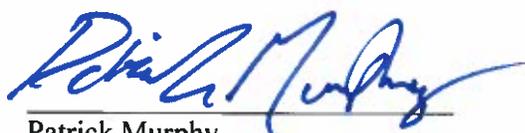
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James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



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Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress



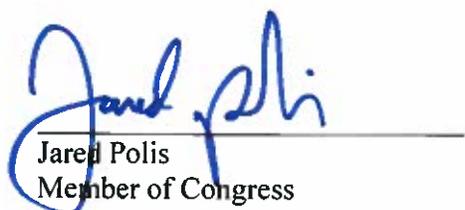
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Patrick Murphy  
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Marcy Kaptur  
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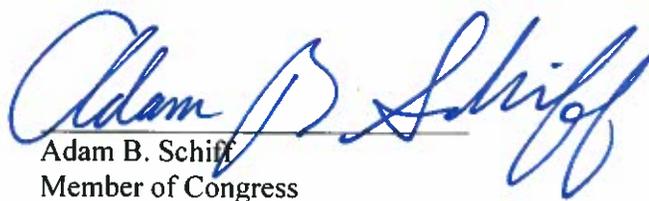
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Adam Smith  
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Diana DeGette  
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Suzanne Bonamici  
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Anna G. Eshoo  
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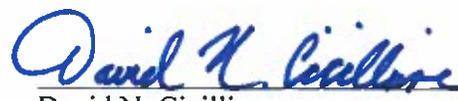
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Lois Capps  
Member of Congress



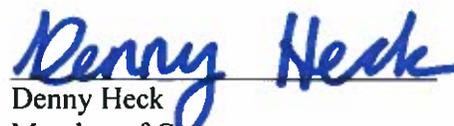
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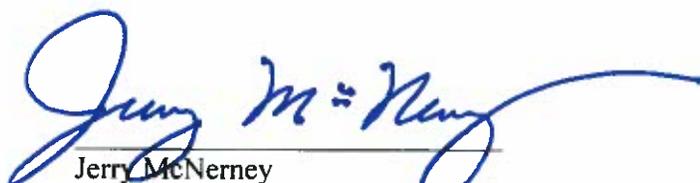
David N. Cicilline  
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Gerald E. Connolly  
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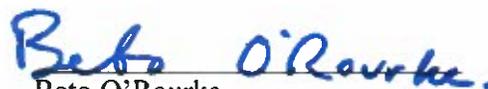
  
Wm. Lacy Clay  
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cc: Karen Hyun, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks