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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

April 14, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We are writing to you today to follow up on this committee's original letter written in September 2020. In it, we expressed our concerns with the Department of the Interior's decision to approve the Northern Corridor Highway (NCH) through Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (RCNCA) bordering the St. George metropolitan area in Washington County, Utah and detailed our recommendation to prohibit this project from progressing.ⁱ Now we write to you with an Administration that prioritizes conservation goals through the 30x30 Initiative and implore you to reverse the highway's approval.

On January 15, 2021, then-Secretary David Bernhardt approved the Northern Corridor Highway through RCNCA, including public lands containing the densest concentration of Mojave Desert tortoise in the entire region, a species protected under the Endangered Species Act.ⁱⁱ This approval has severe implications to the National Conservation Lands Program and threatened and endangered species. It also conflicts directly with the values of the establishing legislation and management mandates of the RCNCA.

The approved NCH would also negatively impact lands paid for and protected with taxpayer dollars through the LWCF. Since 1997, BLM has spent more than \$20 million in LWCF funds to purchase lands within the RCNCA, with \$7 million spent in RCNCA in 2019 alone. These lands, like all federal lands acquired under LWCF, were intended by Congress to be managed in perpetuity to protect exceptional landscapes, endangered species habitat protection, and enhance Americans' access to outdoor recreation resources.

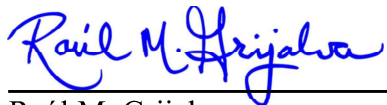
There has been pronounced public opposition to the Northern Corridor Highway as well. Due to the egregious nature of the NCH, eighteen environmental non-profit organizations came together to form the Red Cliffs Conservation Coalition in 2020 to protect RCNCA and all National Conservation Lands. Seven of these organizations filed suit in D.C. federal court challenging the NCH in June 2021. Thus far, 41,808 of their supporters have contacted the Department of the Interior or signed a petition opposing the Northern Corridor Highway.

In conclusion, the NCH violates the explicit intent of multiple environmental laws, most notably LWCF and NCL, and sets a dangerous precedent for all National Conservation Lands. Congress set out clear guidelines for how these lands ought to be managed; the NCH would adversely

impact the conservation, cultural, and recreational resources within RCNCA and would make any lands protected under the system of National Conservation Lands vulnerable to similar development.

Again, this committee writes to urge you to reverse approval of the NCH and maintain the intended protections for RCNCA.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress
Chair, Committee on Natural
Resources



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress



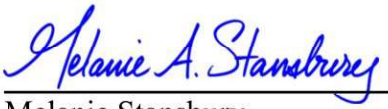
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Katie Porter
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Rashida Tlaib
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Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

¹ The House Committee on Natural Resources. (2020, September 24). House Democrats Comment Letter on Red Cliffs NCA and Road Construction. Retrieved from House Democrats Comment Letter on Red Cliffs NCA and Road Construction September 24 2020.pdf

² Bureau of Land Management, Interior; Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior. "Notice of Availability of the Records of Decision for a Highway Right-of-Way, Amended Habitat Conservation Plan and Issuance of an Incidental Take Permit for the Mojave Desert Tortoise, and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments, Washington County, UT." *Federal Register*, 15 Jan. 2021