

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries~Brethren Witness/Washington Office~Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office~Presbyterian Church (USA) Washington Office~National Council of Churches of Christ, USA~Union for Reform Judaism~Evangelical Lutheran Church in America~ Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Justice Peace/Integrity of Creation Office~ United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society~ Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life~ Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)~ National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd~ Arizona Ecumenical Council Earth Care Commission~ Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns, Marie Dennis, Director~ Friends Committee on National Legislation

February 2, 2009

Dear Representative,

Lands, wilderness, and open spaces have always been central to the Judeo-Christian tradition, playing a vital role in the spiritual journeys of Biblical individuals from Moses to Jesus. Lands are also an essential part of God's creation. Through the land, God nourishes life; provides the foundation of terrestrial ecosystems and human communities; supplies blessings of sustenance like soil, water, timber and minerals; and offers natural space for prayer and spiritual renewal. As a nation, we recognize and celebrate these blessings in the 623 million acres of public lands nationwide. These include our national parks and forests, wilderness and conservation areas, wildlife refuges, and other lands held in the public trust.

The western United States, with its vast deserts, rugged mountains, and majestic forests and wilderness, is home to some of the best known, wildest, and most stunning examples of God's handiwork. In June 2000, the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) - the most innovative American land protection system created in the last 50 years - was established to encompass the public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This new conservation system consists of more than 26 million acres, and includes: national monuments, National Conservation Areas, wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Scenic and Historic Trails.

Currently, NLCS has no Congressional recognition like the National Parks and Wildlife Refuges do. This means that each unit in the System stands alone, leaving individual units -- and the System as a whole -- vulnerable to being dissolved, under-funded and mismanaged. We call on you to codify the National Landscape Conservation System through Title II of S.22, the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act. NLCS has been administratively supported by the most recent Presidential administrations of both parties, but has not yet received a formal congressional authorization. The bill will provide overdue congressional recognition for NLCS, which contains some of America's most stunning lands and waters.

The Conservation System is focused on preserving the intact Western landscapes with historical antiquities in their original settings. These BLM lands have wild, rugged characteristics where visitors can enjoy a remote experience iconic of the American West. Approval by Congress would help ensure that the Conservation System is appropriately managed and would validate years of effort on the part of the many volunteers who have helped establish these places as world class destinations. And perhaps most importantly it would ensure that the lands are protected for future generations.

Stewardship of the lands and wild places that God has entrusted to our care is both a critical part of our call to protect creation and a responsibility shared by all citizens. We, as people of faith, call upon Congress to establish this kind of recognition, giving permanent protection to this vital part of God's miraculous creation.

Sincerely,

Arizona Ecumenical Council Earth Care Commission
Brethren Witness/Washington Office
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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