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10 N Post St Ste 305 | Spokane WA 99201-0705

Phone: 509.624.1158 | Fax: 509.623.1241

E-mail: nwma_info@nwma.org | Web: www.nwma.org

March 8, 2010

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The Northwest Mining Association (NWMA) has learned of an internal document that details Department of Interior (DOI) plans to lock-up vast expanses of land throughout the western United States by such means as National Monument Designations under the Antiquities Act and federal acquisition of thousands of acres of private lands. NWMA and our members have serious concerns with this proposal and the deleterious effect it would have on our nation and our ability to create jobs in the rural West, to supply the minerals needed to build a renewable energy infrastructure, and to lessen our unhealthy dependence on foreign sources of minerals.

NWMA is a 115 year old, 2,094 member, non-profit, non-partisan trade association based in Spokane, Washington. NWMA members reside in 40 states and are actively involved in exploration and mining operations on public and private lands, especially in the West. Our diverse membership includes every facet of the mining industry including geology, exploration, mining, engineering, equipment manufacturing, technical services, and sales of equipment and supplies. NWMA's broad membership represents a true cross-section of the American mining community from small miners and exploration geologists to both junior and large mining companies. More than 90% of our members are small businesses or work for small businesses. Most of our members are individual citizens.

NWMA believes any new land conservation designation should go through an open and transparent process that involves local input and acceptance. There is no legitimate reason that land use decisions cannot be made in an open manner which allows for public participation. Preferably, new land designations should go through the legislative process in Congress during which the pros and cons of such designations can be thoroughly debated. If DOI moves forward with the plans outlined in the internal document, transparency and openness will have been cast aside for a process that deliberately prevents local citizens most affected by a designation from having an opportunity to be heard before the lands where they live and work to support their families are closed to productive use.

In a time of budget deficits and an enormous national debt, it does not make sense to spend taxpayer money purchasing land, adding to a federal land base with a maintenance backlog of \$19 billion, according to the GAO. DOI has a difficult time managing and properly maintaining their current holdings. Not only would acquisition of these lands be costly to the taxpayer, but the management costs would further stress an already underfunded agency. This will exacerbate the under-funding dilemma facing America's National Park jewels like the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, the Statue of Liberty and the National Mall.

Instead of focusing on creating jobs, this vast lock-up of land will diminish available jobs in rural America, contrary to the stated goals of your Administration. These designations would jeopardize job creation, mineral and energy production, recreational opportunities and tax revenue for local governments. Equally as dangerous and disturbing, precluding resource development on the lands outlined in the DOI document will increase our reliance on foreign sources of energy and minerals.

The U.S. can and should be more self-reliant for the minerals we need. Despite reserves of 78 important mined minerals, the United States currently attracts only seven percent of worldwide exploration dollars. As a result, our nation is becoming more dependent upon foreign sources to meet our metal and minerals requirements, even for minerals with adequate domestic sources.

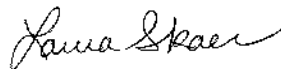
According to the U.S. Geological Survey, America is 100 percent dependent on foreign sources for 19 minerals commodities and more than 50 percent import reliant on 38 commodities. Increased import dependency causes a multitude of negative consequences, including aggravation of the U.S. balance of payments, unpredictable price fluctuations, loss of high paying jobs and vulnerability to possible supply disruptions.

A number of the sites listed in the DOI proposal, especially those in Nevada, are tied to old mining districts, and therefore are likely to have significant mineral potential. However, a National Monument designation would exclude mineral entry. Mineral deposits are rare, difficult to find, and we do not get to choose where they are located. Designations that arbitrarily block access to resources needed for our economic well-being and independence from foreign sources should be avoided.

Historically, the mining industry leads the nation out of recession; and is poised to do it again. Mining projects provide an economic stimulus package that won't require deficit spending or cost taxpayers a dime. Blocking access to our nation's mineral deposits through misguided proposals such as those outlined in the DOI internal document will frustrate job creation and be detrimental to our economic recovery.

We believe DOI should abandon any and all efforts to further restrict access to mineral deposits through Monument designations, land purchases or otherwise. We ask for your commitment that local citizens and their elected officials will have ample opportunity to be heard before any restrictive designations are acted upon.

Sincerely,



Laura Skaer
Executive Director

Cc: Interior Secretary Ken Salazar