AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CONSERVATION COMMUNITY

CALLING FOR A MORATORIUM ON
DAMAGING PUBLIC LAND & WILDERNESS LEGISLATION

September 12, 2006

The undersigned organizations call on the conservation community to support a moratorium on bills currently pending in Congress that combine wilderness designation with harmful land and water development provisions.

This extraordinary request stems from our alarm regarding several bills detrimental to public lands heading toward fast-track passage in the U.S. Congress. Some support these bills for their wilderness designations, but the bills are laden with environmentally damaging provisions and land privatization schemes that have dire implications for future public-land and wilderness protection.

In recent years, there has been a transformation in the approach both Congress and some wilderness advocates have taken to formulating and gaining support for wilderness legislation. The new approach carries severely adverse consequences for both public lands and wilderness, and we believe the trend must be stopped now.

We ask those organizations that have been supporting these bills to recognize the danger the bills pose to public lands and join with us in opposing their passage. We ask for a moratorium on all wilderness legislation that contains non-wilderness-related provisions and special exceptions for uses inside wilderness.

The price is too high

A far cry from simple wilderness protection, the new trend—often called “quid pro quo wilderness”—is to insert wilderness designation into large, complex land-use development bills, offsetting wilderness protection with harmful provisions such as:

- sell-offs, even outright giveaways, of public land to local interests and developers;
- free public rights-of-way for sprawling water pipelines;
- direct conveyances of federal land (and land-sale proceeds) to states and counties;
- the formation of select groups to exercise local control over public lands;
- sanctioning motor-vehicle use, stream-poisoning, military maneuvers, and other incompatible and inappropriate uses in wilderness.

These provisions continually lower the bar on what constitutes wilderness protection; legitimize the idea that it is acceptable to sell off or give away public land; entrench the
concept of trading public land in one place for wilderness designation elsewhere; and undermine the larger struggle to protect all public land.

**A multiple-bill train wreck**

There are four bills pending in Congress that fit the *quid pro quo* mold, and which may end up combined for fast-track passage, with or without other wilderness bills:

(1) White Pine County Conservation, Recreation and Development Act of 2006, S. 3772

(2) Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act, HR 3603

(3) Washington County Growth and Conservation Act of 2006, S. 3636, HR 5769

(4) Owyhee Initiative Implementation Act of 2006, S. 3794

Just these four bills combined would sell off, trade, or give away more than 80,000 acres of public land; give away free public right-of-way for water pipelines and untold acres for other sprawl-enabling utility infrastructure; and release some 400,000 acres of Wilderness Study Areas.

Other bills include smaller (or no) trade-offs, but nevertheless create wilderness areas with special exceptions that allow inappropriate and damaging uses. One bill would codify an exchange of public National Forest land formulated by private parties to settle a private dispute.

Whether some or all, passed individually or together, and in whatever combination, these bills are dismantling public land protection and undermining the spirit and intent of the Wilderness Act.

**When the people lead the leaders will follow**

Since last fall, both the Bush Administration and the majority party in Congress have floated many proposals for large-scale privatization of public land, including schemes to sell 300,000 acres of “excess” land in our National Forests, auction off public land in the West, and sell National Parks. The public outcry has been swift and resounding—prompting even anti-federal-land ideologues in Congress to disavow the proposals.

The conservation and wilderness communities were united in opposing these privatization schemes. Yet *quid pro quo* bills are part of the same phenomenon and would accomplish the same result—divesting the public of public lands, treating them as an asset to be liquidated for the benefit of local and special interests.
It’s the worst possible time for fast-track wilderness

The current administration and Congress are promoting the most environmentally damaging policies the U.S. has seen in years. Public land liquidation and privatization are at the heart of their agenda.

When Congress re-convenes in September for a hasty wrap-up before the elections, there is a strong possibility that several individual privatization-development-wilderness bills could be thrown into one or more mammoth omnibus bills. Good bills may be thrown in with the bad to neutralize opposition and to try to belatedly burnish the green credentials of the party in power.

At the same time, there is a strong potential for change in the makeup of Congress—less than two months from now. This is not a mere naïve hope, but a possibility that is under very serious discussion.

The only prudent approach at this pivotal time is to abandon support for these severely compromised proposals. We must re-unify as a principled, public-interest movement, and fight for true wilderness and public land protection in the new year.

Rededicating ourselves to protecting public land

The ongoing and intensifying internal debate over quo pro quo wilderness is dividing what should be a unified movement to protect public lands and wilderness.

If we are to succeed in protecting public land we need to acknowledge the importance of the debate, make room for it, and work toward an agreement about principles and bottom lines. This discussion needs to happen sooner rather than later.

In the meantime, because any entrenchment of the quid pro quo trend simply narrows our options, we ask again for unified opposition to the passage of any more of these damaging wilderness bills this year, in this Congress, in this political environment.

Wilderness Watch
Missoula, MT
George Nickas

Western Lands Project
Seattle, WA
Janine Blaeloch

Western Watersheds Project
Hailey, ID
Jon Marvel

Friends of the Clearwater
Moscow, ID
Gary Macfarlane

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
Olympia, WA
Sue Gunn

Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Durango, CO
Veronica Egan

NREPA Network
Hailey, ID
Kaz Thea

Alliance for the Wild Rockies
Missoula, MT
Michael Garrity

Public Lands Foundation
Arlington, VA
George Lea

Idaho Sporting Congress
Boise, ID
Ron Mitchell
Animas Riverkeepers
Durango, CO
Dave Wegner

Assoc. of Veterinarians for Animal Rights
Davis, CA
Teri Barnato

Brister for Congress Campaign
Salt Lake City, UT
Bob Brister

California Oak Foundation
Oakland, CA
Janet Santos Cobb

Center for Environmental Equity
Portland, OR
Larry Tuttle

Center for Sustainable Living
Bloomington, IN
Lucille Bertuccio

Citizens Against Recreation Privatization
Southlake, TX
Greg Billingsly

Citizens Committee to Save Our Canyons
Salt Lake City, UT
Gale Dick

Citizens for Public Resources
Moscow, ID
Tom Giesen

Citizens for the Chuckwalla Valley
Desert Center, CA
Donna Charpied

Citizens Progressive Alliance
Littleton, CO
Phil Doe

Coalition of Retired Sawtooth NRA Managers
Hailey, ID
Scotty Phillips

Cold Mountain, Cold Rivers
Missoula, MT
Lance Olsen

Colorado RiverKeeper
Moab, UT
John Weisheit

Committee for Idaho’s High Desert
Boise, ID
Steve Jakubowics

Conservation Congress
 Lewistown, MT
Denise Boggs

Desert Survivors
Oakland, CA
Steve Tabor

Dona Ana Quality of Life
Las Cruces, NM
Stephen Fischmann

Fire Island Wilderness Committee
Brookhaven, NY
Joe Zysman

Forests Forever
San Francisco, CA
Paul Hughes

Friends of Bell Smith Springs
Stonefort, IL
Sam Stearns

Friends of the Agua Fria River Basin
Mayer, AZ
Peggy Titus

Friends of the Breitenbush Cascades
Salem, OR
Michael Donnelly

Friends of the West Clayton, ID
Dave Richmond

Friends of the Wild Swan Swan Lake, MT
Arlene Montgomery

Glen Canyon Institute
Salt Lake City, UT
Rich Ingebretsen

Heartwood
Brookport, Illinois
Ernie Reed

Hells Canyon Preservation Council
LaGrande, OR
Larry McLaud

High Sierra Hikers Association
South Lake Tahoe, CA
Peter Browning

Idaho Birdhunters Boise, ID
Russell Heughsins

Idaho Wildlife Federation Boise, ID
Kent Marlor

Indiana Forest Alliance Bloomington, IN
Drew Laird

Indian Nations Audubon Society Wagoner, OK
David Dyer

Key Deer Protection Alliance Big Pine Key, FL
Mick Putney

Kootenai Environmental Alliance Coeur d’Alene, ID
Barry Rosenberg

Lake Superior Greens Superior, WI
Jan Conley

Living Rivers Moab, UT
Owen Lammers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>City, State</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masilla Valley Audubon Society</td>
<td>Las Cruces, NM</td>
<td>Robert Tafanelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MidFORC</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>Mark Boyar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri Forest Alliance</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
<td>Jim Scheff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County Env. Health Division</td>
<td>Troy, NC</td>
<td>John Vinroot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Forest Council</td>
<td>Eugene, OR</td>
<td>Tim Hermach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada Environmental Coalition</td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV</td>
<td>Robert Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Cascades Conservation Council</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>Marc Bardsley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwoods Wilderness Recovery</td>
<td>Marquette, MI</td>
<td>Doug Cornett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Forest Coalition</td>
<td>Olympia, WA</td>
<td>Bonnie Phillips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Park Associates</td>
<td>Sequim, WA</td>
<td>Donna Osseward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozark Society Buffalo River Chapter</td>
<td>Gilbert, AR</td>
<td>Laura Timby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pack Rat Outdoor Center</td>
<td>Fayetteville, AR</td>
<td>Carolyn Crook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Lands Without Livestock</td>
<td>Binghamton, NY</td>
<td>Mike Hudak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Rock Forests</td>
<td>Moab, UT</td>
<td>Terry Shepherd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Assoc. of Concerned Environmentalists</td>
<td>Brookport, IL</td>
<td>Craig Rhodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailers of the Outdoor Industry</td>
<td>Asheville, NC</td>
<td>David E. Matz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Runners for Wilderness</td>
<td>Moab, UT</td>
<td>Tom Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save America’s Forests</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>Carl Ross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save Lake Atoka</td>
<td>Wagoner, OK</td>
<td>David Dyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selkirk Conservation Alliance</td>
<td>Priest River, ID</td>
<td>Mark Sprengel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shagbark</td>
<td>Paoli, IN</td>
<td>Andy Mahler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Environmental Center</td>
<td>Las Cruces, NM</td>
<td>Kevin Bixby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak Up for Wildlife Foundation</td>
<td>Calgary, Alberta</td>
<td>Brian Horjeisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sperling Foundation</td>
<td>Eugene, OR</td>
<td>Tom Pringle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan View Coalition</td>
<td>Kallispe, MT</td>
<td>Keith Hammer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongass Conservation Society</td>
<td>Ketchikan, AK</td>
<td>Gregory Vickrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Mountain Defense</td>
<td>Knoxville, TN</td>
<td>Chris Irwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Environmental Congress</td>
<td>Salt Lake City, UT</td>
<td>Kevin Mueller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley Watch</td>
<td>Evansville, IN</td>
<td>John Blair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginians for Wilderness</td>
<td>Staunton, VA</td>
<td>R.F. Mueller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasatch Mountain Club</td>
<td>Salt Lake City, UT</td>
<td>Will McCarvill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Wildlife Conservancy</td>
<td>Salt Lake City, UT</td>
<td>Kirk Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild South</td>
<td>Moulton, AL</td>
<td>Janice Barrett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Watershed</td>
<td>Santa Fe, NM</td>
<td>Sam Hitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WildWest Institute</td>
<td>Missoula, MT</td>
<td>Matthew Koehler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Wilderness</td>
<td>Bend, OR</td>
<td>Scott Silver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wilderness Guides Council  
Santa Rosa, CA  
Kathy Scout Tomyris

Wildlands CPR  
Missoula, MT  
Bethanie Walder

Zoar Valley Nature Society  
Gowanda, NY  
Julie Broyles