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December 3, 2013

Federal Lands Interim Committee
c/o Legislature Services Office
Research and Legislation
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720-0054

Re: Public land and the Idaho Legislature

Dear Committee:

Idaho's public lands belong to all Americans and need to continue to be managed by land managers with more than 100 years of experience. These lands were set aside during the last century as a result of the work of many caring Americans and are to be held in trust and protected from development. The Forest Service and the BLM manage them in trust for the benefit of all of us. They are managed in such a way that we, the people who care about them, can use them. Privatization, which is where the Legislators are headed with this, will prevent our use of these lands. The Legislators have no interest in management of these lands and will sell them off to private interests with impunity.

What kind of people will we be if we sell off the land we hold in trust for all Americans. Once disrupted and roaded, ecosystems that have functioned very well without our interference will never be whole again. That once developed, these ecosystems will never again provide the vast open space, the beauty and the ecological integrity that Wild and roadless places offer. What kind of people will we be if we take our wildlands from future generations and sell them for private gain?

Our public lands provide clean water, healthy forests where migrating wildlife can continue their ancient routes, and open spaces that offer regeneration of a human spirit in need of solitude and silence. They are places where we can remember our relationship to nature.

Currently there is a shortage of funding for state parks – and it shows. Most of them must find needed funds in leasing the land to farming and grazing. And the newest trend is to work with the Idaho Transportation Department and increase motorized recreational use in the parks. They are not managed as opportunities to appreciate nature. And Idaho State Lands are managed for the sole purpose of providing funds for public education. There is no incentive to keep and “manage” these lands. So they are sold to neighboring entities with interest in grazing, logging, and mining.

We must look carefully at the treasure that we have in public lands. Central Idaho is the largest contiguous roadless area left in the lower 48. Evidenced by the popularity of our national parks, forest lands, and wilderness areas, it is clear that the peace and quiet of open space is a tremendous draw for the nature-deprived masses. Nature, peace and quiet are resources that are becoming rarer and scarcer as our population grows. We must not deny future generations of these most precious public resources.

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Conservation biologists have concluded that in order to sustain wildlife diversity, we must have connection between wilderness core areas, corridors where wildlife is safe from roads and human-caused mortality and preserve ancient migration routes.

Michael Soule, a founder of conservation biology, calls the Rocky Mt. region the "Spine of the Continent". (Mary Ellen Hannibal has written a fine book about that vision.) The Spine that is the Rockies, stretching from Mexico to the Yukon is important to the entire continent. Idaho lies in the heart of this region. But I fear for the entire spine if Idaho's public lands are taken over by the Legislature with suspect intentions for those lands.

Please leave those lands in the hands of the federal land managers who work very hard to balance uses and maintain the integrity of natural systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chris", written in dark ink.

Christine Gertschen