

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 23, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Haaland,

On June 2, 2022, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced its largest Wyoming land purchase in history, a 35,670-acre acquisition of private property spanning Carbon and Natrona counties. The BLM purchased this land using \$21 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). No prior notice was given to local, state, or federal officials, stakeholders, or Wyoming citizens.

We steadfastly respect private property rights, and the rights of individual landowners to sell to willing buyers. We also understand the desire to increase access to our public lands so that all Americans can enjoy them. However, because the federal government already owns and controls nearly half of Wyoming's lands, we question the BLM's need to purchase and acquire vast amounts of additional lands in our state—especially if such acquisitions are not accompanied by equivalent federal land disposals. Also, we are troubled that there appears to have been no coordination or communication between BLM and state and local officials prior to the purchase and acquisition, and that no notice was given prior to the June 2 announcement. We supported former Secretary Bernhardt's requirement in Secretary's Order 3388 for any federal acquisitions made using LWCF funds to be supported by the affected Governor and local county or county government-equivalent.

While federally-owned lands can offer opportunities such as recreation, tourism, and wildlife habitat, they can also yield costly drawbacks. For instance, when the federal government owns land in a county, the county cannot collect property tax on that acreage and such losses need to be offset by additional federal spending through the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Program. In addition, in spite of major recent investments, federal land management agencies continue to struggle to adequately address significant maintenance needs. Consequently, additional federal acquisitions only serve to add to this backlog, further diminishing land management agencies' ability to effectively manage lands and assets.

We are also troubled by this Administration's policies regarding management of public lands. The so-called 30 by 30 initiative, though ill-defined, appears to be intended to grow the federal footprint and expand federal control over western lands. In fact, in its announcement of the land acquisition, BLM stated that the project supports the Administration's initiative "to conserve 30 percent of the nation's lands and waters by 2030," further confirming fears that 30 by 30 will be 'achieved' through land acquisitions.

In Wyoming, we know that private landowners and local officials are the best stewards for lands within our state. Federal ownership of land has not, and never will be, equivalent to conservation. I would urge both the Department and the Bureau to make decisions based upon what's best for the land, not what might be in the Administration's political interests.

For the above-mentioned reasons, we urge you to neutralize BLM's recent expansion of the federal footprint in Wyoming by identifying equivalent disposal opportunities elsewhere in the State. We further urge you to reinstate former Secretary Bernhardt's policy to ensure local and state approval prior to federal land acquisitions. Finally, in cases where determinations have been made to purchase and acquire new lands, we implore you to provide better notice to relevant officials, stakeholders, and citizens, and quickly and adequately counteract losses to local revenues.

Sincerely,

  
U.S. Senator Barrasso

  
U.S. Senator Lummis

  
U.S. Congresswoman Cheney

cc: The Honorable Tracy Stone-Manning, Director of the Bureau of Land Management