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December 9, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

America's public lands belong to all of us. I commend you for your actions to protect our public lands with the interests of the American taxpayer in mind. Since taking the reins of the Department of the Interior, you have undertaken a thoughtful review of some of the most controversial decisions to lease public lands for oil and gas development. To be sure, development of oil and gas is a legitimate and important use of our public lands. Natural gas, in particular, is a relatively clean-burning fossil fuel and has an important and necessary role to play in our nation's transition to a low carbon economy. I support developing these resources in an environmentally-responsible way that protects the American taxpayer.

Many of these decisions to lease for oil and gas drilling in sensitive areas and close to national parks were made in haste in the waning hours of the previous administration. The Department's deliberate review is entirely appropriate, and I look forward to reviewing your final recommendations for changes needed to ensure responsible management of our public lands.

The Department of Interior has made tens of millions of acres of public lands available for oil and gas drilling. More than 2.7 million acres have been leased in 2009 while over 65% of the acres leased in 2008 have not yet been developed. Moreover, according to BLM there are over 47 million acres of public lands leased for oil and gas development, but only 14.5 million acres in production -- leaving over 32 million leased acres not in production. Energy development on our public lands will continue, but we must also consider the impacts of this development and determine if there is a more responsible way to proceed with future development that avoids costly and timely delays and protects other uses of our public lands.

This land is our land. It's our heritage. Once again, I commend you for your common-sense and balanced approach to managing it.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator