

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 1, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
522 Hart Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Chairman Murkowski:


We write to you today about reconciliation instructions included in Fiscal Year 2018 budget resolution requiring the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to reduce the deficit by \$1 billion in the next ten years. We strongly believe we must tackle our debt but are concerned this partisan, fast track process could be used by those in Congress who support selling off our public lands. We strongly oppose these efforts and respectfully urge you not to allow any such legislation to move forward.

America's public lands are an economic powerhouse and are the backbone of our country's \$887 billion outdoor recreation economy. We see direct economic benefits from protecting wildlife habitat for hunters and hikers to enjoy, and clean water for anglers to fish. Ranchers have access to important grazing lands for their livestock, which helps keep family ranches competitive in the market. Responsible timber harvests support our mill towns and rural communities. Even faraway towns and cities rely on public lands to protect the headwaters that supply them with clean drinking water. These resources are publicly owned, and they provide an immense benefit to people from all walks of life, generation after generation. Selling or transferring these lands would be devastating to the outdoor economy, and would trade one of our nation's greatest investments for short-term financial gain.


Reaping the benefits of public lands means investing in their management. Selling or transferring public lands threatens our way of life and our economy. Responsibly overseeing our public lands means supporting planning, management and maintenance, working with local communities, and responding to natural disasters. Over the last fiscal year, the federal government spent \$2.9 billion fighting wildfires. Payments to counties under the Payment In Lieu of Taxes program totaled \$464 million. The deferred maintenance backlog across our National Park Service sites alone is \$11.3 billion. There is no one else with the available resources to meet these upfront demands for managing our public lands. States would struggle to meet the up-front costs, and would be forced to sell or transfer lands in turn. Once public lands are out of public hands, we would lose the management, access, and planning that makes these places a critical part of our outdoor heritage and our economy.

We need to find responsible ways to rein in our deficit and cut our debt, but selling our public lands would only stifle an economic engine. We opposed the language that left the door open for a sale to happen, and we urge you to oppose any transfer or sale of public lands as the House and Senate reconcile differences between their budget resolutions.

Sincerely,




Jon Tester
United States Senator



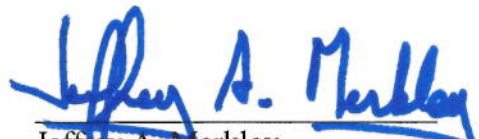
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



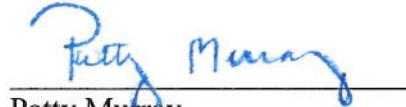
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator