

United States Senate

January 24, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

I am writing to you concerning the Department's recent announcement to undertake a massive reorganization effort and complete overhaul of the agency. Given the scope of the effort and scant available details on impacts to personnel, agency headquarters, and opportunities for public comment, I strongly encourage you to publish your proposal in the Federal Register, solicit public comments, and actively engage state and tribal governments before proposing this reorganization to Congress.

Reorganizing the Interior Department impacts over 415 million acres of public land, 70,000 federal employees, and \$12 billion in federal funding. This should not be done without significant public input and planning as the impact will be felt nationwide. The Interior Department plays a critical role in Montana's \$7.1 billion outdoor recreation economy and our state's thriving agricultural sector. From the first national park to projects irrigating tens of thousands of acres of agricultural fields, the Interior Department is a critical partner in managing public lands and water in our state. It is imperative that the Department engage with state, tribal, and local governments as it considers what would be one of the largest reorganizations in the last century. In addition, folks who work, play, and rely on public land for their businesses must have an opportunity to weigh in. From Glasgow to West Yellowstone to Columbia Falls, Montanans need to have certainty that the Interior Department will be responsive to their input on land, water, and wildlife management.

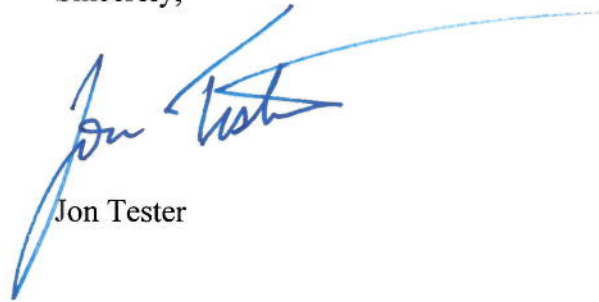
The Department of the Interior has an extremely close connection to our tribal nations and plays an essential role in upholding the federal government's trust and treaty responsibilities. Making any changes within the Department will undoubtedly impact tribes and requires rigorous and meaningful consultation. It is the Department's duty to uphold this special trust responsibility and to meet the obligations that arise from these unique government-to-government relationships. As such, in undertaking this reorganization effort, the Department has a commitment to engage in meaningful and high-level consultation with tribes across the country and involve tribal perspectives directly into the decision making process at all levels.

I am also concerned that the draft regional map would split management of public land in Montana between two regions. Currently, for agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the Bureau of Land Management, Montanans work with one regional district. Doubling the regions the state coordinates with does not seem to serve the Department's stated goal of increased efficiency and

better coordination in the field. I would encourage you to consider a regional model that better follows state boundaries and provides the opportunity for stronger working relationships between federal and non-federal partners.

The reorganization of one of our nation's most important departments should be an open and transparent process, and based on input from the people who rely on responsible land and water management for their way of life. I look forward to hearing how your reorganization proposal will incorporate their ideas and improve management of the resources that are a cornerstone of Montana's outdoor heritage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Jon Tester