

The Honorable Secretary Ryan Zinke

Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

May 11th, 2017

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We write to you today with grave misgivings concerning recent actions by the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) to remove public input and discussion from public lands management.

As former and current members who served on the Bureau of Land Management's Western, Central, and Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Councils (RAC) the unprecedented suspension of these crucial citizen-advisory groups has caught us by surprise.

Resource Advisory Councils are a time-tested citizen engagement tool intended to help guide the Bureau of Land Management in the management of public resources issues. They are an important tool that helps ensure transparency and local input in many land-use decisions. RACs are made up of hard-working folks who volunteer their time to help guide land management decisions at the local level.

By itself, this decision to suspend citizen-input seems ill-advised at best. However the action is even more suspicious when measured alongside another high-profile DOI decision to reconsider historic wildlife habitat and cultural protection accomplished through the Antiquities Act. With the current suspension in place, the 120-day review of past national monuments designations, including Montana's Missouri River Breaks, would be completed without the participation of local Resource Advisory Councils. The DOI, under your leadership, is now moving toward less public land and less public input which threatens the very fabric of the West.

Citizen input via Resource Advisory Councils was crucial to the designation process that led to the Missouri River Breaks National Monument in Montana. In 1999, before the Monument was designated, the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council provided recommendations to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. These consensus-based recommendations expressed the sincerest intent of its members to preserve the natural, wild, and historic values of the Missouri River Breaks. This was further reinforced by the well-documented participation of thousands of Americans and Montanans in support of Monument designation.

Secretary Zinke, the robust public-participation that led to the creation of the Missouri River Breaks Monument runs counter to the current process the DOI has laid out. It seems your intended purpose is to use taxpayer money to reopen a public process with one hand while handicapping public participation with the other. Any findings or decisions that may arise from this top-down model would lack integrity and transparency. We fear it could even have the

end-result of erasing the robust public process which led to the designation of the Missouri River Breaks in 2001.

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument is a special place and many of us collectively volunteered on a citizen advisory council to help see its future secured through a transparent and open public process.

We take it personally when we see the federal government using taxpayer dollars to both negate the robust public input we provided while also silencing the valuable citizens advisory councils. We urge you to reconsider these bold actions that could result in less local input and less public land.

Best Regards,

Randy Gray (former Central MT RAC member)
Stan Meyer (former Central MT RAC member)
Tony Bynum (former Central MT RAC member)
Mary Sexton (former Central MT RAC member)
Mary Fay (former Central MT RAC member)
Mary Frieze (current Central MT RAC member)
Larry Epstein (former Central MT RAC member)
Hugo Tureck (current Central MT RAC member)
Ralph Knapp (current Central MT RAC member)
Bill Cunningham (former Central MT RAC member)
Aart Dolman (former Central MT RAC member)
Jeff Sheldon (former Central MT RAC member)
Rita Harding (current Eastern MT RAC member)
Bernie Rose (former Eastern MT RAC member)
Cal Cumin (current Eastern MT RAC member)
Mike Aderhold (former Central MT RAC member)
Pat Johnson (former Western MT RAC member)
Mary Jones (former Central MT RAC member)
Arlo Skari (former Central MT RAC member)
Ron Moody (former Central MT RAC member)
Jean Belangie-Nye (current Western MT RAC member)
Margaret Gorski (current Western MT RAC member)