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**THE COALITION OF
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
RETIRES**

Voices of Experience – Advocating Protection of America’s National Parks

June 18, 2007

Re: We strongly urge Congress to vote “yes” on Congressman Mark Udall’s amendment to the Interior Appropriations bill to stop road development across the National Park System.

Dear Member of Congress:

Membership in our coalition of former employees of the National Park Service numbers over 590. Many of us were senior leaders who received awards for stewardship of our country's natural and cultural resources. In our personal lives, we come from the broad spectrum of political affiliations. As park managers, rangers and employees in other disciplines, we devoted our professional lives to maintaining and protecting our national parks for the benefit of all Americans. We continue to devote time and expertise toward advocating for strong conservation policies and laws governing the National Park Service and educating the American public about the values and benefits of the National Park System.

Behind closed doors and without seeking input from Congress or the public, the Interior Department finalized a policy last year for reviewing and recognizing highway claims on federal public lands across the West, under a Civil War-era loophole known as R.S. 2477. Essentially, the new policy could make it easier for states or counties to perform landscape-changing highway construction in National Parks. This policy directly undermines federal protections for our Nation's parks and the very mission of the National Park Service.

The Interior Department’s policy could thoughtlessly turn over to counties unfounded highway claims, such as those on cattle paths, streambeds, and little-used or long-abandoned jeep tracks that have little connection to legitimate transportation needs. The National Park Service would be expected to cede management of these trails to counties. This could dramatically undermine the purpose of the National Park Service’s strong management principles.

Some particularly troublesome “highway” claims include:

- In Utah’s **Canyonlands National Park**, San Juan County is claiming that a streambed called Salt Creek is a highway under the loophole. The National Park Service considers the area the richest archeological area in the Park and significant wildlife habitat in this arid region.

5625 North Wilmot Road, Tucson, Arizona 85750-1216

Phone: 520-615-9417; FAX: 520-615-9474

EMAIL: bill_wade@npsretirees.org

WEBSITE: www.npsretirees.org

- Moffat County, Colorado has claimed that 240 miles of trails through **Dinosaur National Monument**, including part of the Yampa River itself, are highways.
- The state of Utah submitted a map to the Interior Department in 2000, claiming that 100,000 miles of routes, including every hiking trail in **Zion National Park** and routes across every designated wilderness in the state, are highways under RS 2477.
- In California, San Bernardino County has claimed that more than 2,500 miles of highways crisscross the **Mojave National Preserve and Death Valley National Park**, including more than 700 miles within designated wilderness. The great majority of these routes are ranch trails, cow paths, and other faint non-highway routes.

We strongly urge Congress to support Congressman Mark Udall's amendment to stop this policy before it causes damages National Park System units by allowing unnecessary "highway" development and undermines Park Service policy that is intended to protect and preserve America's most prized public lands. Please contact me for more information at 520-615-9417.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J.W. Wade".

J.W. "Bill" Wade
Chair, Executive Council

5625 North Wilmot Road, Tucson, Arizona 85750-1216
Phone: 520-615-9417; FAX: 520-615-9474
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WEBSITE: www.npsretirees.org