



## **NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION®**

***People and Nature: Our Future Is in the Balance***

July 14, 2003

Dear Representative:

I am writing on behalf of the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), the nation's largest member-supported conservation group, with over four million members and supporters nationwide. NWF seeks your support for Congressman Mark Udall's amendment to the Interior Appropriations bill. NWF supports the Udall amendment as a reasonable measure that will prevent irresponsible road construction and avoid irreversible losses to our nation's wildlife resources.

Our members and supporters use federal lands for wildlife viewing, photography, hunting, fishing and other activities. They have a deep appreciation for the recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat provided by our nation's remaining roadless, un-fragmented public lands. We recognize the importance of access to public lands and the legitimate transportation needs of local communities, but the Interior Department's latest actions could allow a massive number of unwarranted and unnecessary roads all across the public lands. Wildlands and native wildlife are rare and precious natural resources. Road construction on the public lands can result in numerous harmful impacts to wildlife and outdoor recreation. Such impacts include: direct loss of habitat; increased habitat fragmentation; lost hunter opportunity; decreased quality of recreational experience; spread of noxious weeds; decreased water quality; and increased illegal activity such as wildlife poaching.

We are deeply concerned that recent actions by the Department of the Interior may allow unchecked giveaways of rights-of-way for road construction across sensitive lands pursuant to an antiquated statute known as R.S. 2477. This 1866 statute, repealed in 1976, predates Congress's direction to the Department of the Interior to retain and manage the federal public lands to realize multiple benefits—including fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, and preservation of wild landscapes. Current law and policy places a high value on maintaining places for hunters, anglers, bird watchers, and others to enjoy. Unfortunately, the Department of the Interior's new regulation on the use of recordable disclaimers threatens to undermine these goals by forfeiting public lands to unsubstantiated claims and permitting road construction despite unacceptable impacts to natural resources and public lands recreation.

The current controversy over the role of ancient road claims in contemporary public lands management should be resolved by Congressional action, not by bureaucratic fiat under the Interior Department's new rule. Adopting the Udall amendment will give Congress time to resolve the controversy in a manner that balances resource protection and the public's expectations for using and enjoying public lands. Please vote YES on the Udall amendment to prevent permanent losses to our nation's public lands, wildlife, and outdoor recreation.

Sincerely,

Jim Lyon, Sr. Director, Congressional and Federal Affairs  
National Wildlife Federation