

From Sacramento, CA to Kanab, UT...

WESTERNERS OPPOSE THE PUBLIC LANDS GIVEAWAY

What do Elected Officials have to Say?

"...national parks, monuments, wildlife refuges and even portions of our coastline would be opened up to virtually unlimited vehicle use. This strikes at the very heart of the concepts of preserve and wilderness that Californians hold dear, and that they have come to expect from these federally protected lands. These claims impose burdens on state transportation planning, wildlife management, recreation, and habitat and environmental protection, and will expose the state to unnecessary liability and budgetary impacts... This flies in the face of your stated methods of operation—communication, consultation and cooperation—and threatens the ultimate goal that you and I both share: the conservation of our natural legacy for future generations."

- Letter from Mary D. Nichols, Secretary for Resources, State of California, to Secretary Norton, 5/16/03

"I write today to express my concerns about several Interior Department initiatives related to Revised Statute 2477 which contravene the clear direction of Congress and threaten the integrity of our national parks and other wildlands."

- Letter from Representative Diana DeGette to Secretary Norton, 1/28/03

"We are very concerned that these claims will be handled in a way that effectively precludes public involvement and that could lead to further restricting Congressional options to protect affected lands."

-Letter to Secretary Norton from 100 members of the House of Representatives, 5/23/03

"...we are disappointed that the Department developed this rule without greater consultation with Congressional members from impacted states. As you are aware, we have a strong interest in protecting California's wild places. In the future, please consult us regarding any rule changes that might impact areas in California."

-Letter from Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein to Secretary Norton, 3/3/03

What do Western Newspapers Say?

Salt Lake Tribune

"Most Utahns recognize that the jewels of the magnificent federal lands in this state—the towering red rock fins and canyons, the alpine fastnesses and the stark Great Basin vistas—should be protected. Any maneuvers that undermine that protection should be viewed with alarm." —Editorial 4/20/03

Arizona Daily Star

"Norton's policies will grease the track for companies in the oil and mineral extraction industries. The short-sighted shift away from wilderness is a shift toward commercial exploitation of public national resources. The resolution of these disputed road claims has, for nearly 30 years, been a political and ideological football." --Editorial, 4/21/03

Sacramento Bee

What's going on here? It appears that the entire West is being sacrificed by the administration as it moves to appease some development and pro-road elements within Utah and Alaska that want new thoroughfares on certain public lands. This isn't a case of opening the door for selective development. It's a case of taking the door off its hinges and welcoming any local government to file any claim about any alleged "road" that may or may not have existed on any public land. - Editorial, 2/2/03

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San Francisco Chronicle

“Talk about stealth politics. On Christmas Eve, as many Americans gathered with family and friends, the Bush administration decided to open long- abandoned cattle paths, mining trails and wagon roads to off-road vehicles.” – Editorial 1/7/03

The (Boulder) Daily Camera

“When is a cow track or a foot path a ‘highway’? When U.S. Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, Colorado Gov. Bill Owens and Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources Greg Walcher say it is. Trying to fly under the radar, the Bush administration has translated its antipathy for the environment into a series of rule changes that could permanently alter the nation’s natural heritage.” –Editorial, 6/3/03

What do Land Managers Say?

“For 24 years I helped manage some of the West’s most spectacular wild places, including 12 million acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land in Idaho, where I was State Director from 1995-2002. I experienced first hand the tremendous challenges faced by hard-working employees at the Park Service and BLM as they care for some of our country’s natural treasures. Thus, it is with dismay that I watch Interior Secretary Gale Norton make the land manager’s job of protecting these special places far more difficult. As an example, she has done so by reviving a 137-year-old repealed right-of-way law known as R.S. 2477.

-Letter from Martha Hahn to House of Representatives, 7/10/03

“The impact of RS 2477 rights-of-way in National Park units could be devastating... Possible RS 2477 rights-of-ways in NPS areas could cross many miles of undisturbed fish and wildlife habitat, historical and archeological resources, and sensitive wetlands.”

Memorandum from Martin Ott, Utah State Coordinator, National Park Service, 1/14/93

Private Landowners?

“With no notification, no explanation of the county's position, and certainly in violation of our constitutional right to due process, Kane County was claiming RS 2477 "highways" through our property.”

-Jana and Ron Smith, Kanab, UT; from Salt Lake Tribune, Commentary “Beware the Consequences of RS2477 Right-of-Way Claims,”6/21/03

“In 1997, my wife and I purchased vacant retirement property in southeastern Utah's San Juan County. Even though a primitive track crossed the property, we finalized the purchase when the title search showed no legal access across the property. In early 2002, we noticed an all-terrain vehicle had been driven on the track. The perpetrator took our locked gate off the hinges, drove on the track, then replaced the gate... Apparently, the county is asserting an R.S. 2477 claim and we, like the Smiths, may not be allowed our constitutional rights of due process. - Ken Platt, Helena, MT; from Salt Lake Tribune, letter to the editor, 6/30/03

**Our public lands belong to all Americans
Support the Udall-Gilchrest Amendment to
Stop the Public Lands Giveaway**