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Center for Native Ecosystems • Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation
Citizens for the Chuckwalla Valley • The Clinch Coalition
Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection
Coastal Law Enforcement Action Network (CLEAN) • Community ORV Watch
Connecticut River Watershed Council • Conservation Northwest
Conservation Voters New Mexico • Conservation Science Institute
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Friends of Ironwood Forest • Friends of the Owls • The Fund for Horses
Fund for Wild Nature • Gila Conservation Coalition
Gila Resources Information Project • Grand Canyon Trust
Grand Canyon Wildlands Council • Gravel Bar • Great Old Broads for Wilderness
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Higher Ground–Animal Advocates / Alabama Wildlife Advocates
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Mountain Cats Trust • New Dawn Montana Farm Sanctuary
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance • Ocean Revolution • O’Neill Sea Odyssey
Orange County People for Animals • Oregon Wild • Oregon Wildlife Federation
Other Nations Working Group • Pacific Biodiversity Institute
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility • Public Lands Without Livestock
Red Rock Forests • RESTORE the North Woods • The Rewilding Institute
Rio Grande Restoration • Save Our Shores • SOFAR
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance • Southwest Environmental Center
Spirit of the Sage Council • Sustainable Communities/ZERI-NM
The Animal Protection Voters • T & E, Inc. • Tucson Audubon
Umpqua Watersheds, Inc. • Upper Gila Watershed Alliance • Vegetarian Advocates
Western Nebraska Resources Council • Western Watersheds Project
Western Wildlife Conservancy • Wetlands Defense Fund

Whidbey Environmental Action Network
White Mountain Conservation League • WildEarth Guardians • Wildlands Project
Wildlife Alliance of Maine • Wildlife Watchers • Wild Wilderness
World Temperate Rainforest Network • 10,000 Years Institute

December 8, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
President-elect of the United States
John C. Kluczynski Federal Office Building
230 South Dearborn St., 38th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Conservationists Support Raúl Grijalva for Secretary of the Interior

Dear President-elect Obama:

As you make appointments to your Cabinet, we encourage you to consider Congressman Raúl Grijalva for Secretary of the Interior. The new Secretary of the Interior must bring strong, focused leadership to the position in order to ameliorate the devastating effects of the Bush administration's eight years of failed environmental policy. We strongly believe that Congressman Grijalva's background and record show him to be a leader ready for this challenge.

As Arizona's congressional representative, Congressman Grijalva has shown a broad range of passion and expertise for conservation and management of public lands. He has highlighted the Bush administration's attempts to undercut science in favor of industry interests and sought ways to work with agencies and environmental groups to better protect public lands. For this, Grijalva has gained respect in the environmental community for his clear and decisive positions on sometimes complicated issues.

As a member of the Pima County Board of Supervisors, Grijalva was responsible for leading one of the largest counties in the United States. With large urban areas, vast expanses of federal land, rapid population growth, a high density of endangered species, a shared border with Mexico, and an ethnically and politically diverse populace, Pima County is microcosm of the issues a Secretary of the Interior must be capable of managing. In this position, Grijalva demonstrated not only knowledge of the issues, but a natural ability to bring differing interests together to reach mutually acceptable agreement. He was a leader in the development, approval and funding of the precedent-setting Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Bringing federal, state and county governments together with conservationists, developers and scientists, Congressman Grijalva helped forge one of the most far sighted endangered species protection plans in the nation.

One of the immediate tasks for the Secretary of the Interior will be to deal with growing national water problems. Management of drought and the ability of the Secretary to bring powerful, conflicting interests to the table will be essential, as evidenced by the recent crises in Georgia and Florida, the continuing controversy on the Klamath River, and the scientific consensus that the Colorado River is dangerously over-allocated. Grijalva has long been involved in drought management on the San Pedro, Santa Cruz and Colorado Rivers and is well-prepared to tackle these issues on a national level.

Grijalva's record of anticipating and working to address growing environmental problems will also be an important asset in the Secretary of the Interior position. Expanding forest fires, the melting of the Arctic, drought in the interior West and Southeast, loss of endangered species habitat, rangeland degradation, and permitting of coal mines, coal plants, and other traditional and alternative energy projects all point to global warming becoming the central issue for DOI lands and jurisdiction. Grijalva has been a leader in pressing Interior and other federal agencies to integrate global warming issues into their planning and permitting.

Grijalva's experience in key environmental Congressional caucuses has prepared him to lead the full range of agencies within the Department of the Interior. In addition to his chairmanship and work on public lands, he has worked closely with Native American communities — his district includes seven sovereign nations — and has served on the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs. Also, as a Representative from the arid southwest he is intimately familiar with the responsibilities of the Bureau of Reclamation.

Further, Grijalva's leadership in the labor and Hispanic communities has allowed him to move beyond the long-held false dichotomies of environment vs. jobs and species vs. rural communities to promote better management and use of public lands. This is especially important because Hispanics are the fastest growing users of public lands in the West. Their interests have been largely ignored to date, even when those interests are harmed by federal land development and extraction and access policies. The Interior will benefit from Grijalva's ability to bring these interests to the table.

Grijalva's demonstrated keen knowledge of procedural issues regarding public lands will also be an asset to the Secretary of the Interior position. In 2008, he led efforts to stop damaging mining on BLM lands and other federal lands where the Secretary of the Interior, BLM and Minerals Management Services have permitting authorization. This was largely due to his innate ability to understand and compellingly explain how poorly planned mining threatens local communities and water supplies.

In the last decade, central management issues on public lands — including logging, ORVs, fire management, grazing, mining and water conservation — have changed from deeply rural issues to an urban interface. Grijalva's experience in the major urban center of Tucson has provided a hands-on understanding of the new urban-edge dynamic and an appreciation of the resulting political constituencies that are emerging.

The next Secretary of the Interior must have a nuanced understanding of the complex issues involved in protecting and stewarding our natural resources and lands. With the recent economic downturn, there will be calls for increased energy production at the risk of significant environmental destruction. We believe that Congressman Grijalva's demonstrated strength in navigating these sensitive issues and his commitment to science-based decision-making will serve the Interior well as it moves beyond the Bush administration's policies.

As organizations dedicated to protecting imperiled animals, plants and our wild lands through sound science and enforcement of environmental laws, we regularly interact with federal agencies within the Department of the Interior. It is with this perspective that we heartily endorse Raúl Grijalva to be appointed as its Secretary.

Sincerely,

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