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HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

April 30, 2013

Via Electronic Transmission

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

The Department of the Interior, with an annual budget of approximately \$11.5 billion and 70,000 employees, has been entrusted to manage nearly 30 percent of the entire land mass of the United States.¹ This includes responsibility for managing the National Park System, a great source of pride for every American. These parks represent enduring symbols of what makes our nation great with majestic landmarks that attract millions of visitors from around the nation and globe creating countless jobs. Last year, 282 million people visited America's national parks.²

I believe the Department can continue to maintain this same level access even under sequestration. To accomplish this, the Department must prioritize its core mission, eliminate unnecessary, wasteful, and duplicative programs, and find innovative ways to do more with less.

The opening of Yellowstone National Park this spring, in fact, is a sequestration success story from which other departments and communities could learn lessons to ensure core functions and essential missions can continue. When the park's opening this spring was threatened because sequestration delayed plowing snow from park roads, local businesses and organizations banded together to clear the park's roads. The superintendent of Yellowstone National Park said "their actions will allow us to have almost no impact on visitor services this spring."³ I applaud the community and the Department for working together to ensure access to Yellowstone National Park is not compromised by the fiscal failures of Washington.

Yet, while Yellowstone was finding solutions, the Department posted a video on YouTube on March 1, 2013, with dire warnings about sequestration's impact on the nation's

¹ Sean Reilly; "Interior outlines potential plan to cut 5,000 jobs by October 2013," *Federal Times*; April 24, 2012; <http://www.federaltimes.com/article/20120424/AGENCY01/204240303/Interior-outlines-potential-plan-cut-5-000-jobs-by-October-2013>

² Mark Harden; "More visitors at Rocky Mountain National Park," *Denver Business Journal*, April 3, 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2013/04/03/more-visitors-at-rocky-mountain.html>

³ Caroline Porter, "Businesses Pay to Plow Yellowstone National Park," *The Wall Street Journal*, page A2, March 16, 2013; <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324392804578362661456737542.html>.

parks.⁴ The video, entitled “This Week at Interior March 1, 2013,” mentioned the potential “devastating” impacts of sequestration which would affect communities “coast to coast.”⁵ Specifically, Department officials warned national parks around the country would suffer from reduced hours of operation, shorter seasons and the possible closures of campgrounds, hiking trails and other recreational areas.⁶ The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is also threatening to shut down hundreds of flood warning gauges across the country.⁷

We have witnessed from the Department’s success opening Yellowstone that with creativity and public-private partnerships, more can be done with less. A good place to start is with simply setting priorities and complying with sequestration by cutting lower priority spending and stopping new spending to ensure our parks remain open and flood gauges are maintained. There is no shortage of potential savings within the Department to ensure core and crucial missions are not compromised.

Counting Sheep While Flood Waters Rise

The USGS plans to shut down “more than 100 crucial gauges that warn of imminent flooding or lack of needed water,” some in “states threatened with spring flooding,” according to a recent Associated Press report.⁸ The Chief Scientist for Water of the USGS, a bureau of Interior, called this a “life and property issue” and “a safety issue.”⁹ While USGS is planning to shut down vital flood gauges, the agency is planning to expand its use of unmanned aerial drones, obtained from the military,¹⁰ to survey the habitat of pygmy rabbits in Idaho in August, observe Elk in Washington in July, and count sheep in Nevada in October.¹¹ While these studies may provide some interesting information about rabbits, sheep and other animals, cancelling or delaying them is not life threatening. Yet shutting down vital flood gauges, by the agency’s own admission, could be. By sequestering lower priority spending within the agency, these gauges—which only cost the federal government \$29 million last year¹²—could be maintained. I would, therefore, recommend canceling the sheep counting and other drone studies and redirecting the savings towards maintaining flood gauges.

⁴ USInterior. March 1, 2013. This Week at Interior March 1, 2013 [Video file], accessed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Cm5YZ_PSTjk

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Seth Borenstein; “Spending cuts may deep-six crucial flood gauges,” *The Associated Press*, April 25, 2013; <http://www.boston.com/news/weather/2013/04/25/spending-cuts-may-deep-six-crucial-flood-gauges/7qiSPaKixExNFZ6YolByiK/story.html>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Grace Hood; “Over Grand County Drones Are Bird Watching, Not People Watching,” KUNC, April 25, 2013; <http://www.kunc.org/post/over-grand-county-drones-are-bird-watching-not-people-watching>.

¹¹ “USGS UAS Missions: Planned,” U.S. Department of the Interior, Geological Survey website, accessed April 26, 2013; <http://rmgsc.cr.usgs.gov/UAS/missions.shtml?current=3>.

¹² Seth Borenstein; “Spending cuts may deep-six crucial flood gauges,” *The Associated Press*; April 25, 2013; <http://www.boston.com/news/weather/2013/04/25/spending-cuts-may-deep-six-crucial-flood-gauges/7qiSPaKixExNFZ6YolByiK/story.html>.

Creating New Park Sites While Visitors Wait in Longer Lines to See America's Greatest Treasures

Since sequestration took effect March 1, the National Park Service (NPS) has announced the designation of 13 new national historic landmarks, including a whiskey distillery,¹³ as well as three new national monuments.¹⁴ The establishment of the three new park units, including First State National Monument in Delaware, brings the total number of national park sites to 401.¹⁵ The Vice President justified creating the new monument in Delaware, which is expected to cost taxpayers \$4 million a year, "because this state is an incredible state."¹⁶ That may be true and each of the others also boasts its own unique contribution to our nation's history and culture. But, it makes little sense to expand the number of sites at the same time the budget of every other park is being cut and visitors are being turned away from visiting the White House.

It is not just the creation of new sites causing a further strain to the Department's shrinking budget, but also the expansion of others. Less than two years ago, Great Falls in Paterson, New Jersey was designated a national park and today the NPS "is working to acquire land around the waterfall," which the president of the Hamilton Partnership for Paterson, who lobbied Congress to approve the fall's designation, admits "virtually no one has ever heard of."¹⁷

I would urge you to cease the designation of all new parks, monuments, and other sites and stop the expansion of existing parks until access to our greatest and most visited national treasures—such as the Grand Canyon where "visitors can expect longer lines" and shortened hours at the visitor center this summer¹⁸—has been restored. Please provide a list of all new parks, monuments, affiliated areas and sites designated along with any special resource studies initiated since sequestration was enacted March 1, 2013. Please also provide a list of planned land acquisitions at existing National Park units where expansions are planned.

Department Employees Travel to Conferences While Parks Are Closed to Travelers

The Department could save millions of dollars this year to help meet sequestration spending reductions without restricting access to our national parks by simply reducing unnecessary travel and conferences.

13 "AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS: Secretary Salazar, Director Jarvis Designate 13 New National Historic Landmarks," National Park Service Press Release, March 12, 2013; <http://home.nps.gov/news/release.htm?id=1444>

14 "Secretary Salazar Applauds Establishment of Delaware's First State National Monument," National Park Service Press Release, March 27, 2013; <http://home.nps.gov/news/release.htm?id=1453>.

"Secretary Salazar Hails Establishment of National Monument Honoring Harriet Tubman," National Park Service Press Release, March 27, 2013; <http://home.nps.gov/news/release.htm?id=1454>.

15 "Secretary Salazar Applauds Establishment of Delaware's First State National Monument," National Park Service Press Release, March 27, 2013; <http://home.nps.gov/news/release.htm?id=1453>.

16 Jonathan Starkey, "Biden marks historic 'moment'; VP visits newly designated monument," The News Journal, April 1, 2013; <http://www.delmarvanow.com/article/20130402/DW01/304020010>.

17 Samantha Henry, "N.J. city hopes to capitalize on storied stadium," Chicago Daily Herald/Associated Press, April 21, 2013; <http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20130421/entlife/704219989/>.

18 Clara Beard, "Sequestration cuts to affect Grand Canyon employees more than visitors," Williams-Grand Canyon News, March 19, 2013; <http://www.grandcanyonnews.com/main.asp?SectionID=1&SubSectionID=717&ArticleID=10345>.

Last year, the Department spent about \$7.8 million hosting or sending participants to 32 conferences, each of which cost more than \$100,000.¹⁹ There are a number of upcoming conferences sponsored by the Department that could be canceled.

The National Park Service is a partner and on the planning committee of the National Outdoor Recreation and Forests for the People Conference scheduled for May 19-23 in Traverse City, Michigan. The conference organizers acknowledge “budgets are tight and travel restrictions abound” and provide a sample letter that can be used “to justify attending the conference.”²⁰ There is no justification for this conference at this time when access to outdoor recreation and forests is being curtailed by budget reductions.

The National Park Service is also sponsoring the National Covered Bridge Conference in Dayton, Ohio, June 5- 8. With two other federal agencies, the Federal Highway Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, also sponsoring the meeting, it is clearly unnecessary for NPS to be a sponsor as well.²¹ This is not the only conference a Department agency sponsored this year that was already being supported by other Departments. The State of the Beaver 2013 Conference, held at the Seven Feathers Hotel and Casino Resort Convention Center in Oregon several months ago, was sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as the USDA Forest Service, the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and the Department of Commerce’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.²²

In 2011, the Department of Interior’s Inspector General (IG) found DOI could save up to \$22 million in travel costs *each year* if department employees utilized video teleconferencing equipment more often. Overall, in fiscal year 2009, the department spent about \$206 million on travel with almost \$63 million spent on airfare alone. The IG made five recommendations to achieve these savings. Please provide an update on any actions the Department is taking regarding these recommendations along with providing updated travel expense numbers.

Horsing Around With Taxpayer Dollars

The Department continues to spend millions each year rounding up wild-horses that roam on public land. The Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) wild horse program reportedly captured 40,000 horses over the past four years. Half of the program’s budget is being spent to maintain more than 46,000 horses and burros in temporary corrals and privately owned pastures.²³ As a result of this program, more wild horses are living in captivity than in the

¹⁹ <http://www.doi.gov/pfm/upload/Report-of-DOI-Conference-Expenses-FY2012.pdf>

²⁰ 2013 National Outdoor Recreation Conference website, accessed April 26, 2013; <http://www.recpro.org/2013-sorp-ffp-conference>.

²¹ Kris Vidos, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Center for Preservation Technology and Training website, “Second National Covered Bridge Conference,” February 14, 2013; <http://ncptt.nps.gov/blog/second-national-covered-bridges-conference/>.

²² “The State of the Beaver 2013 Conference Sponsors,” The SURCP Beaver Advocacy Committee website, accessed April 29, 2013; <http://www.surcp.org/beavers/sponsors.html>.

²³ Martin Griffith; “Wild-horse advocates rally vs. roundups, slaughter”; *The Associated Press*. April 28, 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.chron.com/news/science/article/Wild-horse-advocates-rally-vs-roundups-slaughter-4470853.php>

wild.²⁴ This program is not just rounding up horses, but also taxpayers' dollars.²⁵ Its budget has nearly doubled since 2008 and is now more than \$76 million, which covers the costs of the corrals, feed lots and pastures for the horses.²⁶ The BLM should explore more cost efficient alternatives to controlling the population of wild horses and burros.

Acquiring Hundreds of New Cars and Vehicles

The Department is planning to replace up to 300 vehicles. Just this week, the Department announced it will be receiving a fleet of hybrid vehicles from the General Services Administration (GSA).²⁷ DOI is the first agency to participate in GSA's Fleet Consolidation Program and GSA will fund the cost to replace consolidated vehicles with new hybrid cars, according to the press release. At a time of when the Department is threatening to close public access to national parks it is not the time to upgrade the vehicle fleet for bureaucrats.

Maintaining Unnecessary Offices

About a year before sequestration took effect, on April 24, 2012, *Federal Times* described how the Department examined solutions to rein in its ballooning budget.²⁸ According to the article, a 30-page document was sent to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) detailing how the Department could cut almost 5,000 jobs by October 2013.²⁹ These cuts would be accomplished through early retirements, buyouts and field office consolidations.³⁰ OMB ordered the plan in November 2011 in an effort to study options for a seven percent headcount reduction by the end of fiscal 2013.³¹ OMB now claims the document was part of a "planning exercise" and clarifying that it is not pursuing such a policy.³² Please provide a copy of the 30-page study.

It is clear these findings were not implemented and another approach was taken to deal with sequestration. Instead, in a draft memo to employees, the Department said it would cut "travel, training, facilities, supplies, and other operational and administrative costs to save money."³³ While I applaud the initial spending reduction efforts, I am concerned about why the initial study was ignored and request further understanding of why the study was shelved.

²⁴ Dave Phillips; "All the Missing Horses: What Happened to the Wild Horses Tom Davis Bought From the Gov't?"; *ProPublica*. September 28, 2012. Accessed at: <http://www.propublica.org/article/missing-what-happened-to-wild-horses-tom-davis-bought-from-the-govt>

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Secretary Jewell and GSA Acting Director Tangherlini to Announce Interior as First Federal Agency Updating to Hybrid Vehicles. April 23, 2013; <http://www.doi.gov/news/mediaadvisories/secretary-jewell-and-gsa-acting-administrator-tangherlini-to-announce-interior-as-first-federal-agency-updating-to-hybrid-vehicles.cfm>

²⁸ Sean Reilly; "Interior outlines potential plan to cut 5,000 jobs by October 2013," *Federal Times*, April 24, 2012. Accessed at: <http://www.federaltimes.com/article/20120424/AGENCY01/204240303/Interior-outlines-potential-plan-cut-5-000-jobs-by-October-2013>

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² Andrew Lapin; "Interior: No plans to implement 7 percent staff reduction," *Government Executive*, April 25, 2012. Accessed at: <http://www.govexec.com/management/2012/04/interior-no-plans-implement-seven-percent-staff-reduction/55398/>

³³ Stephen Losey; "Agencies to outline sequester plans soon"; *Federal Times*; February 5, 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.federaltimes.com/article/20130205/AGENCY04/302050007/Agencies-outline-sequester-plans-soon>

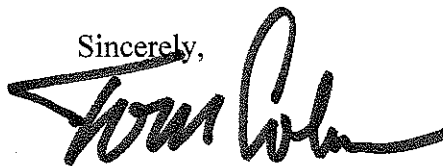
To better understand what the Department found in the 30-page study and what actions the Department has taken concerning sequestration please respond to the following questions:

- 1) Does the Department believe it could have implemented a seven percent headcount reduction by October 2013?
- 2) Does the Department believe implementing the findings of this study would put the Department on a better financial footing then executing the cuts in sequestration?
- 3) Did the Department identify any cost savings measures other than early retirements, buyouts and field office consolidations?
- 4) Has any part of the 30-page study been implemented due to sequestration?
- 5) Please list the top twenty-five most visited National Parks along with a detailed explanation of the reduced hours of operation, closure of camp grounds and hiking trails.
- 6) To deal with sequestration has the Department approved early retirements, buyouts and field office consolidations? How many full-time employees have been affected due to sequestration?
- 7) Has the Department followed through with its plan to cut travel, training, facilities, supplies, and other operational and administrative costs to save money? Please explain in detail.
- 8) Provide a list of all vehicles, broken down into make and model, in the Department's fleet, each year, since Fiscal Year 2010.

I believe your background in the private sector can assist the Department in avoiding many of the dire warnings that have been announced.

Please provide a response to this letter by no later than May 14, 2013. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Brian Downey of my Committee staff at (202) 224-4751 or brian_downey@hsgac.senate.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Coburn", with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Tom A. Coburn
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs