Dear Interior Secretary Haaland,

We are writing to ask that you use the authority granted to you by Congress under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to help meet President Biden’s goal of “30x30” by protecting the nation’s remaining Bureau of Land Management unprotected lands with wilderness characteristics. Of the many tools at the Interior Department’s disposal to protect the Bureau’s wildest places, irreplaceable cultural resources, and native species, none has the sweeping potential and durability as designating new “FLPMA § 202 Wilderness Study Areas.” All Wilderness Study Areas are part of the Bureau’s National Conservation Lands and have established, off-the-shelf management practices already in place.
Protecting these lands in their natural, undeveloped state is crucial to combating the effects of climate change. These undisturbed lands provide real, quantifiable carbon sequestration and climate adaptation benefits and also serve to conserve scarce water resources and reduce fugitive dust emissions which exacerbate climate change effects.

Protecting public lands and resources as FLPMA § 202 Wilderness Study Areas will also keep fossil fuels in the ground, thus eliminating the release of climate damaging pollution related to the exploration, production and combustion of those resources; Wilderness Study Areas are statutorily closed to new oil and gas leasing.

These lands offer a respite from the sight and sound of modern society, a refuge for imperiled species and other native wildlife alike, protection of cultural landscapes and artifacts, and opportunities for families to picnic, fish, horseback ride, climb, hunt, and hike.

The West’s unprotected wilderness quality public lands are in dire circumstances. Prior administration policies and decisions, such as resource management plans and off-road vehicle travel plans, prioritized oil and gas development, motorized vehicle use, and livestock grazing over all other public land values. The spiraling impacts of climate change only exacerbates the ongoing damage from those decisions.

Now is the time for decisive action to protect these remarkable landscapes—places like the Vermillion Basin in Colorado, Hatch Canyon in Utah, Adobe Town expansion in Wyoming, Otero Mesa in New Mexico, Owyhee Canyonlands in southeastern Oregon, Granite Range in Nevada and Quayle Draw in Arizona. These lands deserve to become part of the National Landscape Conservation System via designation as Wilderness Study Areas and put on track to become congressionally designated Wilderness.

As you begin your tenure as Secretary of the Department of the Interior, we ask that you develop policy to advance utilizing FLPMA § 202 Wilderness Study Areas to meet the President’s 30x30 goals. Together, our organizations represent over five million Americans who—like you—care deeply about the future of our Nation’s public lands and resources and see the climate crisis as a call to action. We stand ready to work with you to preserve these incomparable landscapes for current and future generations.

Bobby McEnaney
Director, Dirty Energy Project
Natural Resources Defense Council

Alex Taurel
Conservation Program Director
League of Conservation Voters
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Title and Organization</th>
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