



Jamie Rappaport Clark
President & Chief Executive Officer

National Headquarters

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January 13, 2017

RE: Nomination of Rep. Ryan Zinke for Secretary of the Interior

Dear Senator:

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife and our more than 1.2 million members and supporters, I am writing to express deep concern regarding the nomination of Rep. Ryan Zinke for Secretary of the Interior. Rep. Zinke's overall voting record as a member of the House of Representatives suggests that he poses a serious threat to wildlife conservation, the protection of imperiled species, and management of the nation's spectacular public lands. During his upcoming confirmation hearing, we urge you to do everything in your power to gain assurances from him that, should he be confirmed as the nation's chief steward of our natural heritage, he will work to safeguard the natural resources Congress entrusts the Secretary of the Interior to oversee.

Rep. Zinke has had an extremely troubling record on the Endangered Species Act (ESA) during his short tenure as a Member of Congress representing Montana. He has voted on a number of occasions in favor of amendments that would block funding or protections for individual species including all gray wolves in the lower 48 states; Mexican gray wolves, of which there are fewer than 100 in the wild; lesser prairie chickens; and greater sage-grouse. He also voted for an amendment that would have blocked funding for any listed species for which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has failed to complete a 5-year review as required by the ESA even though the FWS' failure to do so is due to insufficient appropriations by Congress. This amendment would have devastated conservation and recovery efforts for as many as 850 species and possibly more. In addition, Rep. Zinke cosponsored legislation that would overturn the unprecedented multi-state, collaborative stakeholder agreement to conserve the greater sage-grouse and that would effectively transfer oversight of more than 60 million acres of federal lands to the states.

While Rep. Zinke is on record opposing the outright sale of federal lands and supporting needed funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, he nevertheless has supported targeted attacks on our public lands. He has repeatedly promoted increased logging, drilling, grazing and mining on federal lands throughout the country. He has consistently voted to advance harmful resource extraction and industrial energy development at the expense of wildlife. Time and again, he has voted to undermine the bedrock environmental laws that protect our national forests, national wildlife refuges and other treasured public lands. This disconnect between record and rhetoric raises serious questions that his appointment could jeopardize the ecologically vital habitats that support America's astounding diversity of wildlife and the multi-billion-dollar recreational economy that brings crucial revenue to local communities.

Rep. Zinke also has introduced and supported legislation to block or limit public access to our federal courts. His efforts to prevent citizens from exercising their legal rights to hold the

government accountable when it fails to abide by the law is extremely troubling. He has consistently supported legislation requiring citizens to put up exorbitant bonds to cover the government's legal expenses and then made it almost impossible for those citizens to be reimbursed --- even if they win the case on most but not every single argument. His vision would result in a pay to play system in which only deep pockets like industry will have the ability to object to government actions, leaving average citizens helpless despite impacts to their lives and livelihoods.

As a House member, Rep. Zinke has not demonstrated the level of commitment to preserving and protecting our nation's magnificent and irreplaceable natural heritage for the benefit of present and future Americans that we believe is essential in a Secretary of the Interior. Nevertheless, his potential shift from a U.S. Representative from Montana to Secretary of the Interior could cause him to reassess his natural resource stewardship obligations and assume a broader perspective. During his confirmation hearing, securing a better understanding of his openness and commitment to revising past positions as well as current thinking about his stewardship obligations will be a crucial signal as to whether this aspiration is realistic. We urge you to explore these questions thoroughly before determining whether Rep. Zinke would be a suitable Secretary of the Interior.

Thank you for your attention. Should you have any questions, please contact Mary Beth Beetham on my staff at 202-772-0231, mbeetham@defenders.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamie Rappaport Clark". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive, with the first name "Jamie" being the most prominent.

Jamie Rappaport Clark