Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2013

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom McClintock
Chairman, Water and Power Subcommittee
House Committee on Natural Resources
1522 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairmen:

Thank you for your continued leadership in seeking answers to local concerns regarding the Department of the Interior's designation of the White River watershed as a National Blueway. Although the designation has been rescinded, we still have concerns about future designations and why the region initially received the Blueways status without local input.

We need to better understand the Interior Department's process for naming regions to the National Blueway System, and want to ensure an opt-out mechanism exists for the Blueways system in other areas of the country and for any future land designations that might arise. Many local elected leaders in the affected counties expressed their opposition to the White River designation, and are worried that future designations would lead to increased regulatory activity and threats to private property rights. Others have emphasized that conservation should be locally led, not driven by "Secretarial Orders" out of Washington.

We need answers to the following questions: (1) how states can opt-out of the Blueways program, (2) how much the program costs and how the Department is paying for it, (3) the legal authority that the Administration is using to justify the unilateral creation of this program, (4) the alleged benefits of the program, and (5) an explanation for the insufficient, closed-door review process that was used to justify the White River designation. These questions are important not only for the citizens of the White River watershed but also for those that could be subject to future Blueways being pursued around the country.

This issue – and other federal natural resource matters affecting our districts -- deserve congressional attention. As such, we invite you and the House Natural Resources Committee to conduct a field hearing in the White River watershed to hear directly from those who live in and conserve the watershed. We stand ready to work with you in any way possible to help facilitate this important visit and hope we can continue to work together to protect the rights of private property owners.

Sincerely,

Jason Smith
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Billy Long
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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