

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 10, 2012

Honorable Ken Salazar
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20005

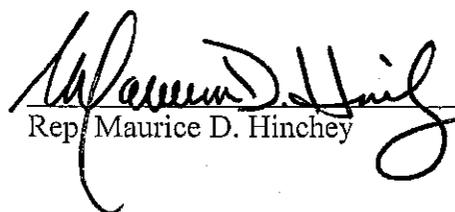
Dear Mr. Secretary,

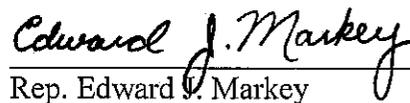
We are writing to you to express our concern over the effects on wilderness of the preferred alternative identified in the recently released Gasco final environmental impact statement. Under the Department's current preferred alternative for this project, a substantial portion of the Desolation Canyon proposed wilderness – an area the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and conservation groups agree is a wilderness caliber landscape – could be devastated. This iconic western landscape is a key component of H.R. 1916, America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, a piece of legislation we have long championed and that enjoys substantial support in the Congress. Protecting this area is a matter of preeminent importance to us.

Though the BLM recognizes that Desolation Canyon is a wilderness resource, the area is managed under a significantly flawed plan finalized in the last administration and those values are not being upheld. You, Deputy Secretary Hayes and Director Abbey have all stated publicly that the decisions made in the Vernal resource management plan regarding wilderness – made without the benefit of any wilderness guidance whatsoever – should not be the final word on how to manage this critical resource. "Alternative E" would protect the Desolation Canyon proposed wilderness while still allowing significant natural gas development. According to the BLM, under "Alternative E," the company would drill 1,114 new natural gas wells, compared with 1,298 under the agency's preferred alternative. Therefore, we urge you to select "Alternative E" for the Gasco project, which will better balance the need to protect these special areas while allowing for the responsible development of our natural gas resources.

In its comments on the draft environmental impact statement, the Environmental Protection Agency urged the BLM to adopt Alternative E because it would allow the company to aggressively develop its leases while minimizing the project's footprint. Alternative E is also the choice of Utah's important outdoor recreation industry, conservation organizations, and thousands of Americans, including many of our constituents.

Most importantly, Alternative E is consistent with the President's commitment to develop our nation's natural gas resources in a way that does not sacrifice clean air, clean water, or our wild public lands. We fully support that commitment which is best embodied by this win-win alternative.


Rep. Maurice D. Hinchey


Rep. Edward J. Markey

Jim Moran

Rep. James P. Moran

Raúl M. Grijalva

Rep. Raúl Grijalva

Diana DeGette

Rep. Diana DeGette

Rush Holt

Rep. Rush D. Holt