San Juan County
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SAN JUAN COUNTY
COMMISSION

Phil Lyman - Chairman
Rebecca M. Benally - Vice-Chairman
Bruce B. Adams - Commissioner
Kelly Pehrson - Administrator

May 3, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As the elected Board of Commissioners of San Juan County, Utah, we are concerned that a Presidential designation of a national monument of significant acreage in San Juan County may be made prior to the end of your administration. Such a unilateral designation would not be supported by this Commission nor would it be favorably accepted by a majority of San Juan County residents.

San Juan County has been actively involved the past few years in preparing a citizen's proposal for land designations to be included in the Public Lands Initiative (PLI) sponsored by Congressmen Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz. The impetus for this Initiative is to provide greater certainty and local management of federally managed lands by resolving long-standing and highly controversial land management issues. The Commission supports locally-driven planning and in that spirit appointed a council of citizens from various parts of the county representing a variety of interests to develop a proposal. The resulting proposal was endorsed by this Commission. This proposal included, among other things, the designation of two National Conservation Areas and several wilderness areas. This proposal was submitted to the Congressmen for inclusion in the PLI for eastern Utah. This PLI is currently being reviewed by Congressional staff preparatory to introduction into Congress for passage into law.

Governor Herbert has expressly asked that Presidential designation of a national monument not be considered in Utah while the PLI process develops. He was assured by your office that such a designation would not occur while this process works out but if such unilateral designation is considered, it would not be exercised without first involving the local citizenry in a public, transparent process including locally-held hearings. This assurance of an open public process on a local level was also reaffirmed by Bureau of Land Management Director Neil Kornze in testimony given in a March 23, 2016, hearing of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Furthermore, it has been the practice of your administration to exercise this authority only where it is widely supported by local residents.

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We trust that these assurances will be honored and that the current open and transparent process of developing a Public Lands Initiative will continue. It is our hope that such a locally-driven process will be the basis for resolution of land management issues that have long festered and polarized all sides of the issues.

Sincerely,

Phil Lyman
Commission Chairman

Rebecca M. Benally
Commission Vice-Chair

Bruce B. Adams
Commissioner

cc: Secretary Sally Jewell
BLM Director Neil Kornze
Senator Orrin Hatch
Senator Mike Lee
Congressman Rob Bishop
Congressman Jason Chaffetz
Governor Gary Herbert
Senator David Hinkins
Representative Mike Noel