

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 12, 2004

The Honorable Gale A. Norton
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C St., NW - 6156
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Norton:

As cosponsors of H.R. 1796, America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, we are writing to ask you to remove from the February 18 Utah Bureau of Land Management oil and gas lease sale all tracts that fall within the boundaries of areas that would be protected as Wilderness in this bill.

As you are no doubt aware, the disposition of the BLM's last remaining wild lands in Utah has been debated for a long time. We have attempted to resolve this issue by supporting legislation that would permanently protect areas that have been identified for their wilderness characteristics by the BLM itself, and additional areas deserving of wilderness protection identified by Utah citizens knowledgeable about their wilderness values.

Unfortunately, the policies being pursued by the Department of the Interior to open up more acreage to oil and gas exploration will result in the conveyance of the rights to transgress into these areas to the oil and gas industry before Congress has had an opportunity to act upon our proposal. We therefore ask that you (a) remove the lease tracts delineated by the February 18 Utah oil and gas lease sale that fall within the boundaries of H.R. 1796, and (b) direct the BLM to refrain from offering lease tracts within the boundaries of areas proposed for wilderness designation in H.R. 1796 in the future, pending Congressional action on America's Red Rock Wilderness Act.

We note that if the lease tracts are removed from the February 18 lease sale, the BLM will still be offering 34 tracts elsewhere on public lands in Utah, covering approximately 35,430 acres. By concentrating future oil and gas lease sales in Utah on areas outside those proposed for wilderness, you will be providing the oil and gas industry with opportunities for developing federal oil and gas resources in Utah without irretrievably committing federal resources in areas deserving consideration for wilderness protection. It seems to us the adoption of such a policy would restore balance to your stewardship of our public lands.

Thank you for considering our request, and we look forward to your decision to exercise your discretionary authority under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to "...preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition."

We look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

Maurice Dineen
W. L. G. G. G.

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Donald M. Payne

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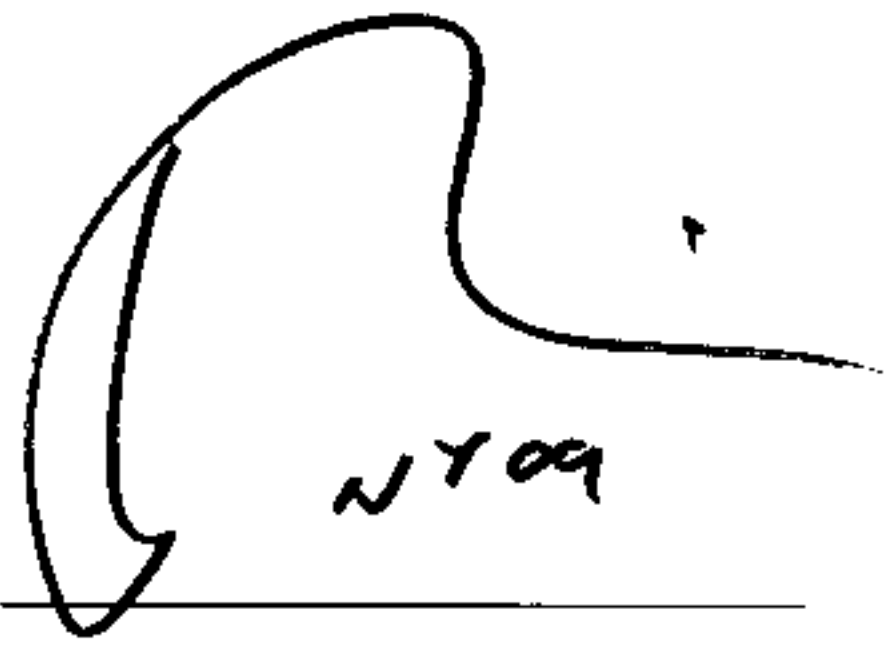
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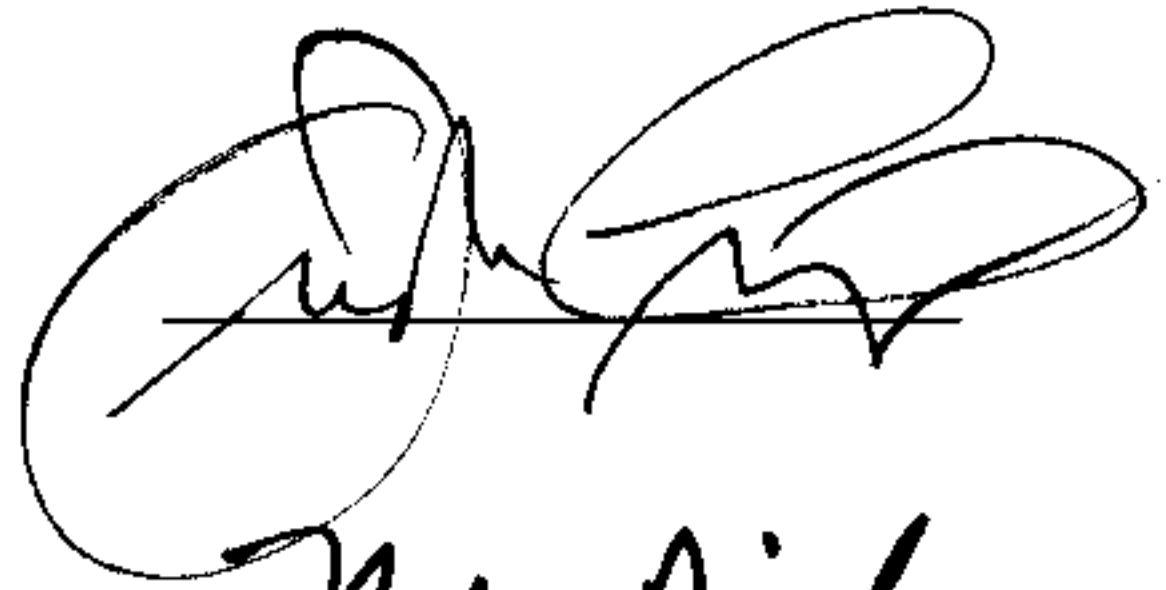
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