

NEWS RELEASE

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Economists Urge President to Create New Protected Areas Such as National Parks, Wilderness, and Monuments

Letter, Including Three Nobel Winners, Asserts That These Lands Are an Essential Component of the West's Competitive Advantage

Bozeman, Mont. – More than 100 economists and academics in related fields from across the country today sent a letter to President Obama urging him to “create jobs and support businesses by investing in our public lands infrastructure and establishing new protected areas such as parks, wilderness, and monuments.”

The list of signers includes three Nobel laureates: Kenneth Arrow, Stanford University; Robert Solow, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Joseph Stiglitz, Columbia University.

The letter also notes: “We believe that federal protected public lands are essential to the West's economic future. These public lands, including national parks, wilderness areas and national monuments, attract innovative companies and workers, and are an essential component of the region's competitive advantage.”

The letter and signatories are available at

<http://headwaterseconomics.org/land/reports/economists-president-public-lands/> and the full text is printed below.

“This letter clearly shows broad agreement that protected public lands are important to attracting and keeping jobs, entrepreneurs, and investment,” noted Ray Rasker, Ph.D., who organized the letter and serves as the Executive Director of Headwaters Economics and is Affiliate Faculty with Montana State University. “During a time of both budget and economic difficulties, it is important for the President and Congress act to preserve one the West's economic engines: its world-class natural amenities. Federal public policy should strive to preserve and build on this special resource and the benefits it provides to communities across the region.”

“The frenzy of national elections is not the time for hasty changes to public lands and their management: both of which form the foundation of the American West's economy and environment,” noted Walt Hecox, economics professor and director of Colorado College's State of the Rockies Project. “The large and vital service and recreation/tourism sectors in the American West directly depend upon healthy public lands and a clean environment: employers, employees, and visitors alike increasingly are ‘foot loose’ in deciding location, a competition overwhelmingly won in the Rockies today.”

"The American West is a special place to Americans as well as people visiting from throughout the world—and the public lands are what make it so," says Gundars Rudzitis, Professor of Geography at the University of Idaho and author of *Wilderness and the Changing American West*. "Americans have made areas surrounding wilderness and national parks the fastest growing areas in the nation for the last 40 years."

"We need to invest in our national lands to continue this tradition of growing and maintaining the American West as a beloved part of our national identity," continued Rudzitis. "The current Great Recession, like the Great Depression of our parents and grandparents generation, could become remembered as a time when people were put to work building trails, roads, infrastructure and extending the national heritage of our parks, wilderness regions, and other public lands that make the American West unique."

Earlier this year, a public opinion survey on behalf of The State of the Rockies Project at Colorado College of voters in five Rocky Mountain States (CO, MT, NM, UT, and WY) found that 77 percent agreed with the statement: "We can protect land and water and have a strong economy with good jobs at the same time, without having to choose one over the other." [http://www2.coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/Conservation_West_Survey/ConservationWestSurvey_02_20_11ev1.pdf (page seven)]

The letter, also sent to Speaker Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Reid, was signed by 104 experts from 31 states, more than half of them from the West.

About Headwaters Economics

Headwaters Economics is an independent, nonprofit research group that assists the public and elected officials in making informed land management and community development decisions, <http://headwaterseconomics.org/>.

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Text of Letter to President Obama

Mr. President,

As economists and academics in related fields, we believe that federal protected public lands are essential to the West's economic future. These public lands, including national parks, wilderness areas and national monuments, attract innovative companies and workers, and are an essential component of the region's competitive advantage.

The West's public lands contribute to our economic well being in a variety of ways, including resource extraction and recreation. These activities can and must coexist with expanding protections for America's world-class natural amenities.

The U.S. is now predominantly a service-based economy, and the fastest-growing regions are those that have been able to attract talented workers, entrepreneurs and investors across all

sectors of the economy. In the West especially, public lands play a pivotal role in attracting and retaining people and businesses. This is the case for all sectors, including manufacturing.

The rivers, lakes, canyons and mountains found on public lands serve as a unique and compelling backdrop that has helped to transform the western economy from a dependence on resource extractive industries to growth from in-migration, tourism, and modern economy sectors such as finance, engineering, software development, insurance and health care.

Today, one of the competitive strengths of the West is the unique combination of wide-open spaces, scenic vistas and recreational opportunities alongside vibrant, growing communities that are connected to larger markets via the Internet, highways and commercial air service.

Increasingly, entrepreneurs are basing their business location decisions on the quality of life in an area. Businesses are recruiting talented employees by promoting access to beautiful, nearby public lands. This is happening in western cities and rural areas alike.

Together with investment in education and access to markets, studies have repeatedly shown that protected public lands are significant contributors to economic growth.

America's public lands can be used responsibly while expanding protections for the nation's world-class natural amenities. We urge you to create jobs and support businesses by investing in our public lands infrastructure and establishing new protected areas such as parks, wilderness and monuments.

Sincerely,

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