

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK
GOVERNOR



MIKE COONEY
LT. GOVERNOR

June 23, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

I am writing in response to your May 12, 2017, letter requesting comments as part of the Department of the Interior's review of National Monuments, which includes the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument in Montana.

I strongly recommend that no change in the size or to the designation of the Monument should be made. The Upper Missouri River Breaks is an iconic landscape with significant historical and cultural importance to Native American tribes and to the history of the United States and Montana. The Missouri River Breaks also offers world-class, once-in-a-lifetime public lands hunting opportunities for trophy mule-deer, elk and bighorn sheep.

It has been 16 years since the designation of the Monument in Montana. Overall, the effects of the 2001 designation are positive. Ranching remains much as it did before the designation. Existing and valid oil and gas leases remain. And public recreational use has greatly increased.

Today, the area attracts over 130,000 visitors per year, providing an annual influx of approximately \$10 million to the local economy. The local economy has come to depend on this. There are now 23 commercial permits where outfitters are providing "historic" river trips through the Breaks. The Bureau of Land Management has documented this increase in commercial and recreational use of the Monument. Gateway communities like Fort Benton and Lewistown see the direct benefits from the steady to increased public use of the Monument. Most summer evenings a person walking into the Grand Union Hotel in Fort Benton will find a group meeting with their river guide, anticipating one of America's most historic canoe trips through the Monument. Fort Benton and Lewistown have seen investments in interpretive centers and management offices adding attractions and boosting local employment. In addition to attracting more visitors, the region has sustained growth in many measures of local economic health and prosperity since the 2001 designation, including a 23% increase in real per capita income.

Beyond serving as an economic driver for local communities, the Monument also safeguards significant cultural and historic assets for Montana and the Nation. To date, 439 cultural sites have been identified within the Monument, and the region is rich in paleontological sites. Native Americans have lived and traveled through this landscape for centuries. In modern history, peace councils were held near the confluence of the Judith River and the Missouri River. In 1877, a band of the Nez Perce Tribe crossed the Missouri at Cow Island, a significant feature of both the Nez Perce National Historic Trail and within the Monument.

The river corridor through the Monument led to the early settlement and development of the Montana territory, starting with the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805. The Upper Missouri River Breaks is one of the few reaches of the Lewis and Clark Trail that remain much the same as when the expedition first recorded their journey through this region in 1805.

"The hills and river Clifts which we passed today exhibit a most romantic appearance. [1] The bluffs of the river rise to the hight of from 2 to 300 feet and in most places nearly perpendicular; they are formed of remarkable white sandstone ... As we passed on it seemed as if those seens of visionary inchantment would never have and end; for here it is too that nature presents to the view of the traveler vast ranges of walls of tolerable workmanship, [3] so perfect indeed are those walls that I should have thought that nature had attempted here to rival the human art of masonry had I not recollected that she had first began her work." Meriwether Lewis, May 31, 1805.

Responding to growing interest in protecting this river corridor, Secretary Babbitt visited the area and held several public meetings in 1999, bringing focus to how BLM should protect and manage this unique landscape. During this trip, the Secretary requested the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council prepare recommendations for the Secretary on this subject based on four meetings held and over 400 written and oral comments. This process helped identify shared objectives around public engagement, maintaining public access for hunting, fishing, and recreation, retaining agricultural livelihoods and protecting private property that alongside a commitment to the long-term conservation of the Breaks, informed the Secretary's final approach and decision. When Secretary Babbitt made the decision to recommend National Monument designation to the President in December of 2000, he was informed by nearly two years of public discourse and agency analysis. Any notion that the monument designation was done in a vacuum and was a last-minute surprise of an outgoing Administration is simply not supported by the facts.

Following formal designation of the monument, the BLM conducted an extensive review process that enabled Montanans to help shape and inform the management plan for the site. This robust process took seven years to complete and was worth the investment. There has been little conflict in management of the Breaks.

Process is important, and an extensive process of public involvement and environmental review was conducted at each step in the decision to designate and manage the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument. Under the criteria of the review the Department is conducting, I believe both the designation and the lands designated are supported.

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The Missouri Breaks has remained largely unchanged for over 200 years. The monument designation helps keep it that way for our children and grandchildren. For these reasons, I recommend no change be made to the designation of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Bullock", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

STEVE BULLOCK
Governor