

January 13, 2025

The Honorable Steve Daines  
United States Senate  
320 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510



The Honorable Tim Sheehy  
United States Senate  
G55 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Delivered via email.

Dear Senator Daines and Senator Sheehy,

On behalf of the thousands of supporters of the Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund, I am writing to express our deep concern that conservation — in particular, the protection of public lands — has not been included in your priorities for the 119th Congress.<sup>1</sup>

Recent surveys of Montanans send a clear and powerful message: public lands are integral to both our economy and way of life. In fact, 89% of Montanans agree that national public lands in our state contribute significantly to our economy.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, 95% of Montanans visited federal public lands in 2023, and 81% support creating new national parks, national monuments, wildlife refuges, and tribal protected areas to safeguard historic sites and outdoor recreation spaces.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these overwhelming statistics, 89% of Montanans agree that the loss of our lands and waters is a problem. Further, 74% oppose stripping protections from national monuments, like the Upper Missouri Breaks, and other public lands to allow for more drilling, mining, and development. Additionally, 78% believe we should prioritize the conservation of wildlife migration corridors, providing crossings over or under highways, and limiting new development in these critical areas — rather than focusing on short-term, economically driven uses like oil and gas production or industrial expansion.<sup>4</sup>

Given these findings, it's clear that Montanans are strongly committed to ensuring our public lands remain protected for future generations. However, some political leaders have proposed dangerous efforts to transfer federal lands to the state or privatize them. One such effort that

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<sup>1</sup> KBZK Bozeman, "Daines talks Senate priorities for the new year as Sheehy set to be sworn in," Jan. 2025, <https://www.kbzk.com/news/local-news/daines-talks-senate-priorities-for-the-new-year-as-sheehy-set-to-be-sworn-in>. KTVH Helena, "Sheehy, Downing discuss priorities, expectations as they start first terms in Congress," Jan. 2025, <https://www.ktvh.com/news/sheehy-downing-discuss-priorities-expectations-as-they-start-first-terms-in-congress>.

<sup>2</sup> University of Montana Crown of the Continent and Greater Yellowstone Initiative, "2024 University of Montana Statewide Survey," April 2024, [https://www.umt.edu/crown-yellowstone/voter-surveys/2024/2024\\_surveyresults.pdf](https://www.umt.edu/crown-yellowstone/voter-surveys/2024/2024_surveyresults.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Colorado College State of the Rockies Project, "2024 Conservation in the West Poll," Feb. 2024, <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2024.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

played out is the case of *Utah v. United States*, where Governor Spencer Cox and Attorney General Sean Reyes spearheaded a lawsuit to seize control of over 18.5 million acres of Bureau of Land Management lands.<sup>5</sup> Though dismissed by the U.S. Supreme Court today, this lawsuit highlights the willingness of some individuals to undermine public lands and the people who rely on them for recreation, work, and cultural identity. Even though the case was rejected, the fact that these efforts continue shows that the fight to protect our lands is far from over.

We need you to stand with us and strongly oppose these reckless efforts to dismantle federal public land management.

Furthermore, as the confirmation hearing for Governor Doug Burgum as Secretary of the Interior approaches on January 14, we urge you to thoroughly assess his qualifications and ensure his record aligns with the core values and priorities of the Department of the Interior. The Secretary plays a critical role in managing America's public lands, national parks, wildlife refuges, and natural resources. It is essential that the Secretary prioritize conservation, sustainable stewardship, and the long-term health of these resources for the American public. Governor Burgum's track record on energy development raises concerns about his ability to balance conservation efforts with resource extraction. We remain hopeful that, if confirmed, Governor Burgum will recognize the vital importance of public lands to the nation's economy, culture, and future, and that he will lead the Department of Interior accordingly.

Montana's public lands are not just a backdrop to our way of life — they are the heart of who we are as a state. They define our economy, culture and identity. As your constituents, we call on you to make public lands and conservation a top priority in your work in Washington, D.C. We will be closely watching your actions to ensure that you are standing up for Montanans and protecting our outdoor legacy.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter. We hope to work with you to protect the Montana we know and love.

Sincerely,



Whitney Tawney  
Executive Director  
Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund

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<sup>5</sup> High Country News, "Why Utah is suing the U.S. for control of public land," August 2024, <https://www.hcn.org/articles/why-utah-is-suing-the-u-s-for-control-of-public-land/>.