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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504

<http://feinstein.senate.gov>

March 3, 2009

Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

As the author of the California Desert Protection Act, I am writing to express my strong opposition to the leasing of former railroad lands in the eastern Mojave Desert by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). I also want to make you aware that I am currently preparing legislation to ensure the permanent protection of these lands, which were donated to the federal government for conservation.

As you may know, hundreds of lease applications have been submitted to the BLM for the development of renewable energy projects in the California desert. While I strongly support renewable energy, it is critical that these projects move forward on public and private lands well suited for that purpose. Unfortunately, many of the sites now being considered for leases are completely inappropriate and will lead to the wholesale destruction of some of the most pristine areas in the desert.

Following the passage of the Desert Protection Act, I worked closely with the Department of the Interior, the Wildlands Conservancy and Catellus (the real estate arm of the Union Pacific Railroad) to develop a plan to conserve hundreds of thousands acres of privately held land that checker-boarded much of the eastern Mojave. As part of that agreement, Catellus reduced the selling price of its land, the Wildlands Conservancy contributed \$40 million in private donations, and the federal government provided \$18 million in Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars to acquire and donate approximately 600,000 acres to the Department of the Interior. As you can see in the attached map, these lands generally cover the area between the Mojave Preserve and Joshua Tree National Park.

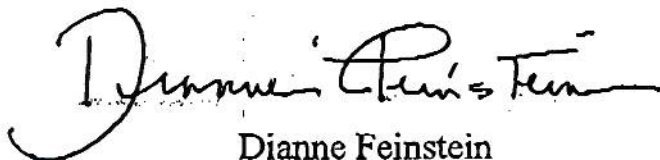
The significance of the Wildlands Conservancy-Catellus agreement cannot be overstated. It represents the largest nonprofit land acquisition donated to the American people in United States history. This included the donation of nearly 100,000 acres of land to the National Park Service, over 210,000 acres in 20 BLM wilderness areas, and hundreds of thousands of acres of important habitat for threatened and endangered species. Beyond protecting national parks and wilderness from development, the conservation of these lands has helped to ensure the sustainability of the entire desert ecosystem by preserving the vital wildlife corridors.

Though the Wildlands Conservancy-Catellus agreement and the use of federal conservation funds demonstrated the clear intent of all parties to preserve these lands in perpetuity, I have been informed that the BLM now considers these areas open for all types of use except mining. This is unacceptable! This policy has also led the State of California to include large swaths of former Catellus lands as potential renewable energy zones as a part of its Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative draft proposal. It is important the Department of the Interior act as soon as possible to rectify the situation before more time, effort and money is wasted by government agencies and private industry pursuing projects on these lands that will never come to fruition.

I urge you to direct the BLM to suspend any further consideration of leases to develop these former railroad lands for renewable energy or for any other purposes. Furthermore, I would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department of the Interior on legislation to protect these areas and encourage energy development on more suitable lands within the California desert.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my request. I look forward to working with you on these issues.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Cc: Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
DF: jp