

# United States Senate

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COMMITTEES:  
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TRANSPORTATION  
ENERGY AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES  
SMALL BUSINESS  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

May 24, 2001

Mr. Dan Lilja  
P.O. Box 372  
Plains, MT 59859-0372

Dear Dan:

Many Montanans have awaited the outcome of President Clinton's last minute executive order declaring the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument in Montana, an order that flew in the face of Montana citizens and the Montana Legislature. Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton and I have been reviewing this decision and have been searching for ways to make the outcome best for Montana.

The main issue deals with the haphazard drawing of boundary lines of the monument. Why do the boundaries stretch for so many miles beyond those established when the area was declared a Wild and Scenic River in 1976? Boundaries set by the Clinton Administration jeopardize farmers, ranchers, outfitters, and energy suppliers in the area. The current boundaries must be scaled back.

Even if the boundaries are scaled back, many other issues are brought to the table. With the stroke of a pen, President Clinton left Montanans waiting to find out the future of firefighting, aviation considerations, grazing permits, and water rights in the Breaks region. Uncertainty is still in the air for some about the future of their private property rights.

In the midst of a grid-wide energy crisis in the West, brought about largely because of the high natural gas prices, access to these supplies were threatened. At a recent Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing, of which I am a member, we heard facts about the large volumes of natural gas in the Missouri Breaks region. Natural gas has been and should continue to be extracted from this region. Natural gas wells leave a small footprint, and even former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt couldn't locate a pipeline hidden under the river when flying low over the area.

This issue goes beyond just the concerns of a shortage in natural gas, however. The people who have been farming and ranching, and thus protecting this land, must be involved in the land-use planning process with the Department of Interior. It is obvious that Montanans want to provide even greater protection through programs such as Undaunted Stewardship, which will protect the land, protect the local tax base, and allow for multiple uses. Representation of how Montanans have respected their land comes from as far away as the New York Times, where it was reported that the land looks the same as it did when Lewis and Clark toured the area. The best way to provide continued protection for the Missouri River Breaks is to respect and involve the very local citizens who have protected this area for hundreds of years.

With all of these concerns in mind, I will make recommendations for changes in the Draft Management Plan to the Bureau of Land Management and the Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton. Don't let anyone try and tell you that farmers, ranchers, landowners, and others are protected in the original design set up by the Clinton Administration. There are changes that must, and I believe will, be made.

Thanks again for contacting me. Please don't hesitate to call or write with any other questions or concerns you may have. If you have an opportunity, please visit my web site at <http://burns.senate.gov> for updates on issues of importance to Montana. When you visit my web site, you can also view my most recent e-Newsletter, an e-mail report that I regularly send from Washington, and you can add your name to the subscription list if you wish.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Conrad Burns". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "B".

Conrad Burns  
United States Senator