

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 23, 2003

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Norton:

We are writing to express our concerns in response to a letter sent to you on May 8 by several members of the Utah and Arizona congressional delegations directing you to exclude the Colorado River corridor from the National Park Service wilderness recommendation for Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP) and requesting that their view be expeditiously sent to Congress as your recommendation.

Elimination of the Colorado River corridor from the existing National Park Service recommendation in response to the May 8 letter would undermine the current public consultation process being conducted by the National Park Service (NPS) as part of the Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP) for the Grand Canyon. Over 50,000 public comments on GCNP management have been collected in this CRMP update process.

This is only the latest phase of a designation process that began with the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, which instructed the Secretary of Interior to review roadless areas for wilderness designation. The first public hearing held on GCNP wilderness designation, as required by the Act, was held in 1971. In 1977 the National Park Service first recommended designating more than one million acres of the park, including the Colorado River, as potential wilderness.

The main issue that has blocked wilderness designation of the Colorado River corridor has been the presence of motorized boats, and this was the central concern of the May 8 letter.

Due to the presence of motorboat tours on the Colorado River, the corridor has been classified as potential wilderness, a designation for areas that "do not themselves qualify for immediate designation due to temporary, non-conforming or incompatible conditions." NPS policy is "to seek to remove from potential wilderness the temporary, non-conforming conditions that that preclude wilderness designation."

In January 2002, a settlement agreement resolved a lawsuit filed against the Secretary of the Interior and the Superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park challenging the superintendent's decision on a wilderness plan and revised Colorado River Management Plan and charging the National Park Service with failing to protect the wilderness qualities of the Colorado River.

The settlement, which the river concessionaire trade association was a party to, included a list of issues for National Park Service to address in a renewed planning process. This list included the use of motorized boats on the river. The court and stakeholders have agreed to engage in this public process in an effort to resolve this issue. To circumvent this process would undoubtedly lead to additional legal challenges.

We feel that the recommendation to include or exclude the Colorado River corridor should be a true result of the designation process and not congressional intervention. We are concerned that as a result of the May 8 letter, this process will be evaded.

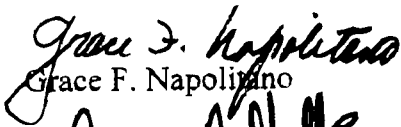
Congressional requests to abbreviate or jettison established public processes for a specific outcome, however politely phrased, are inappropriate. Such requests are detrimental to the process of public consultation and marginalize the opinions of the citizens who have invested their time and consideration in this process.

Sincerely,

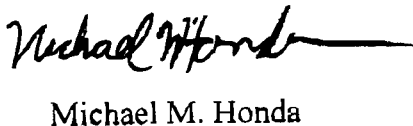

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Marcy Kaptur


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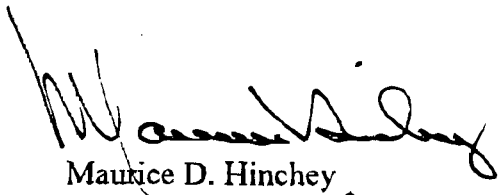

Lloyd Doggett


Dennis J. Kucinich

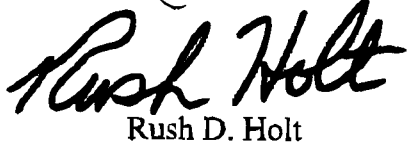

Betty McCollum


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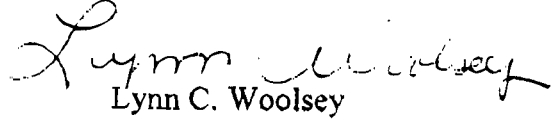

Maurice D. Hinchey


George Miller


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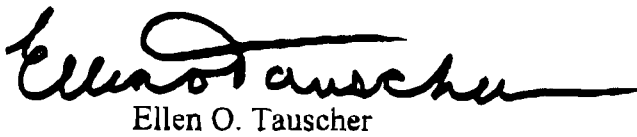

James P. McGovern

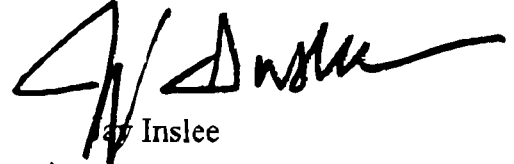

Linda T. Sanchez


Lynn C. Woolsey

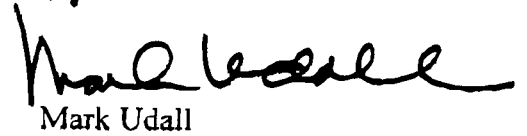

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