

Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior

Interviewer--John Howe

Mr. Secretary let's start out by--there seems to be a historic conflict between wilderness preservation and development. How do you find balance with competing interests for the same resources?

Ken Salazar

You have to understand that we'll continue to develop our resources including our energy resources, but we have to have balance so that we're protecting also the landscapes from where these resources are being drawn, and so it's not appropriate for us to drill for oil and gas and energy exploration in every spot of America. There are places that are too special for that. On the other hand, we do need energy to continue to build our economy, and to make sure that we're transitioning over to a new energy frontier.

Interviewer--John Howe

Why is wilderness important and how can it be preserved?

Ken Salazar

Wilderness is important because it refuels the American spirit. T.R. Roosevelt, the greatest conservation president in our history, I think taught us that it's important for the people of this country to connect to the landscapes of America. Wilderness does that because it shows us the grandeur of our planet, and it's important to preserve that not only because it's important for economic engines, but also it's also important for the way that it refuels the American spirit.

Interviewer--John Howe

Describe the current situation with oil and gas leases in the west. Why were they put on hold from your perspective for future study? And what do you see for the future in terms of resolution of that issue?

Ken Salazar

We are looking at oil and gas leases in places like Utah, where we did set aside the lease sales that had occurred for areas that were too close to icons of America including Arches National Park, and Canyonlands National Park. In my view, it would be inappropriate to have oil and gas explorations occur in the vicinity of those areas. On the other hand, there are areas in Utah that were part of that lease sale which are located far away, and those places will be appropriate for development. We're in the process of taking the right steps to make sure that development doesn't occur where it should not occur, and that development can occur where it's appropriate for it to do so.

Interviewer--John Howe

You know there are some people in the west, and you've seen these--with some of these rallies that kind of look at the Federal Government as the enemy. How would you respond to that sort of us versus them mentality?

Ken Salazar

I think the reality is that the United States of America's a government belongs to all the people of this country, including the people of the west. And our best land conservation efforts have really been when there has been understanding of the local community and they've pushed for wilderness preservation. We have examples here in Utah, we have them all across America, and so my hope is that as Secretary of Interior that we'll be able to identify those great places that deserve wilderness designation, and that we'll be able to foment the local support. So it's a locally driven initiative to protect these very special places.

Interviewer--John Howe

You talked about it a little bit but tell me, is oil and gas development appropriate near National Parks and wilderness areas, and where is it appropriate?

Ken Salazar

You know it's appropriate where development has already occurred. I don't think that we should be doing anything that is going to impair these natural treasured landscapes that we do have, and so I don't believe that it's appropriate to have oil and gas drilling in the vicinity of our national parks and our very special treasured landscapes here in America. On the other hand, there are places where you have significant oil and gas development that has already occurred, and it would be appropriate for there to be development in those places.

Interviewer--John Howe

What would you say to rural economies dependent on oil and gas? One economically challenged worker said he was in jeopardy of losing his home, and everything he owns due to the leases being withheld. What would you say to him, and that kind of rural community, if you will?

Ken Salazar

I would say to that person that we are supportive of development of oil and gas even in the time that I have been Secretary of Interior we have made available over two point three million acres of land, which is public land, to be developed for oil and gas. And so we are supportive of development of our conventional resources, but as I said earlier, we also don't believe that we ought to be drilling everywhere. And I would say to that man that I understand his pain, and that we are doing things to develop our conventional fuel resources, but also that the future of our planet, the future for his own economic well being and that of his children and grandchildren will depend very much on how we sustain our treasured landscapes so that those treasured landscapes can continue to be economic engines of our country. When we look at the great places of America, tourism has become the most significant economic engine that we have in most places. Places like Montana and Utah, agriculture may be number one and that's very appropriate, but closely behind that are the great tourism dollars that come into our economies. Those tourism dollars come into the economies of places like Utah, and Montana, and Colorado and throughout our country and they create the foundation for the economic prosperity

that we have seen across the west. So, I would say that if we look at a sustainable economic vitality for the communities across our country that looking at these treasured landscapes is essential.

Interviewer--John Howe

Passions seem to run hot on both sides of the wilderness issue acts of civil disobedience. Did the Pariah Canyon protest ride break the law and what's your opinion of that? What do you think should be done?

Ken Salazar

I think with all of these places it's important that we uphold the law, and there's no person that is above the law, and I think that with respect to some of these activities that violate the law that we need to make sure that people are held accountable, and we will do that, within our public lands domain where we have the responsibility to do so, and we'll work closely with the Department of Justice and other law enforcement officials to make sure that the law is, in fact, honored.

Interviewer--John Howe

Discuss the Tim DeChristopher bogus bidding case a little bit, if you can. What do you think about what he did? What do you think should be done there?

Ken Salazar

It's inappropriate for people to break the law, and in that particular case there are laws that don't allow for the disruption of oil and gas leases, and other laws that may have been broken, and so that's a matter of which Colonel Lee the United States Attorney is involved in reviewing, and incitements have been filed and the United States Attorney will forward with the appropriate disposition of the case.

Interviewer--John Howe

One climatologist that we spoke with described the west as the epicenter of global warming. What is the impact of climate change in the west, and what do you think can and should be done about that?

Ken Salazar

Fires raging out of control, water supplies and run-offs being endangered, business communities that depend on skiing very much being impacted, the aesthetic values of our great forests being imperiled as we see millions of acres are devastated by pine beetles. So major changes across the west, but there are also changes across all of America whether it's the warming of Lake Superior by five degrees, whether it's places like Glacier National Park and the west now being in a position where by the year twenty-twenty we expect that the glaciers will be gone from Glacier National Park. So we will see the evidence of global warming and climate change on our communities all across the west and all across this country, and those changes are upon us. So the question then is what do we do? With respect to these significant changes are going to be very visible, which are now very visible with respect to climate change. Now what we need to do is we need to move forward with a new energy policy of the nation, climate change and

global warming really are symptomatic of a failed energy policy of this country for the last hundred years. We need to move forward towards energy and independence. We need to create jobs here in America, and we need to protect our children from the dangers of pollution, and that's why moving forward with President Obama's vision and work that we have been doing in the Department of Interior on developing a new energy frontier is an imperative of the twenty first century, and it's one that we cannot fail on.

Interviewer--John Howe

What do you see for the future of wilderness in the west?

Ken Salazar

Wilderness will have a very special place in the west. We have built an economy in the west today which is very dependent on tourism, and so what we do with respect to wilderness is going to be very much a part of the economic engine of the west, as well as protecting these pristine places so that our children and our grandchildren can know our planet in the way that we knew it and the way that our grandparents have known it. So, it'll continue to be a very important part of our agenda.

Interviewer--John Howe

Tell me just a little bit about congestion, especially in the national parks. Do we love these wilderness areas to death, in your opinion? And I want to talk about this because of Yellowstone and places like that in the summer. We were just up there last week, and of course it was jammed, is that a good thing?

Ken Salazar

You know it is a good thing that Americans love these very special places they are treasured places. We have three hundred and ninety one national park units across the country, and they're very important units, important that Americans get to go and see them. But with that also comes a responsibility, it's a responsibility of the American or tourist who actually goes and visits these places. It's also responsibility for us as the United States of America to make sure that we're taking care of these places. We have a nine billion dollar deferred maintenance back log list right now in the our National Park Service, and so in the years ahead it is my hope that as Secretary of Interior that we're going to be able to make significant progress in dealing with those uh huge back logs that we currently have.

Interviewer--John Howe

Discuss the potential de-listing of wolves and grizzlies. Do wolves belong in Yellowstone National Park, and why?

Ken Salazar

Wolves do belong there, and they do belong in our country and when you look at the species that we have been able to protect and to recover in this country we ought to celebrate the fact that we have been successful. Our children and ourselves will be able to see the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon and the whooping crane and lots of other species because of the fact that we took action to protect them. It's part of a legacy that

really started back in the days of President Teddy Roosevelt, and we continue it to this day, and it is important for us to have a wolf that is recovered, and we believe we have made very significant progress in the recovery of the wolf in the Great Lakes area as well as in places like Montana and Idaho. There's still progress that needs to be made and we will continue to monitor the progress on the recovery of the wolf.

Interviewer--John Howe

What would you say to ranchers in that area there that have been impacted by wolf re-introduction?

Ken Salazar

I would say to all of them that we have programs in place to deal with the economic issues and impacts from the wolf, and I don't believe that there have been the kinds of economic impacts to ranchers that have created the kind of hardship that would say we ought to go ahead and allow the wolf to go into extinction. We have ways in which we can compensate and provide assistance to ranchers who might be affected, and I think there is a co-existence here that can be a very good co-existence. I think we are doing it, and have done it in places like Montana and Idaho, and we'll continue to do it in the same way in other places.

Interviewer--John Howe

Discuss the situation of wild horses in the west, are the round-ups necessary, and why?

Ken Salazar

Wild horses are a beautiful part of the American story, and it's important that we tell America's story, but we also need to recognize that horses especially at the levels that we have them today are creating very significant problems for our public lands as well as being very expensive in order for us to be able to maintain them. We spend millions upon millions of dollars in different levels of dealing with the wild horse and border problem that we have across the country. In the coming weeks and months we will be announcing in the Department of Interior a program that will address this issue, and the components of that program will be first of all we recognize that there's some carrying capacity that we do have on our public lands and it's appropriate to have wild horses and burrows in on our public lands, but secondly we also need to figure out a new program moving forward so that we don't end up in this same situation that we've been in now for decades where we simply have a problem that seems not to have any solution. So, I'd look forward to having a program that is a complete program that will help us deal with this issue once and for all.

Interviewer--John Howe

Discuss the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge situation. Should it be opened to oil development or preserved?

Ken Salazar

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the very special places on our planet in my view it should not be opened up to oil and gas development. The President and I have

worked to make sure that it is protected and we'll continue to provide the protection to the Artic National Wildlife Refuge that is appropriate.

Interviewer--John Howe

Some consider the Green the wildest river in Utah; discuss the possibility of wild and scenic river protection status for the Green. Is it warranted and why?

Ken Salazar

We are looking at a number of places that require additional protection given the times that we are in now in two thousand nine with population growth, and wanting to protect the best landscapes that we have in America. As I said earlier in this interview, it is important for us to do so in a way where communities are supporting what we are doing, and I have not yet had an opportunity to take a look at the Green River and how we ought to move forward with whatever protection there is necessary. These are delicate issues, and in my work, including the passage of what I think is one of the most important pieces of legislation in the last thirty years where we passed the public lands bill, which was signed by the President in February. That bill which was supported by many senators and many members of the House of Representatives, is one of the landmark bills in my judgment that we will have accomplished in this administration, and many of the wilderness designations that were included in that legislation were all part of what had been efforts at the community level to reach consensus on what to do with respect to those areas. One area for example, in particular for me, was the Rocky Mountain National Park and the wilderness designation there was thirty years in the making, a vision that that President Nixon had with respect to Rocky Mountain National Park. We worked very hard with the local communities to develop a consensus approach to that designation, and today Rocky Mountain National Park is a wilderness area. We need to do a lot more of those kinds of designations based on that kind of collaboration and support from local communities.

Interviewer--John Howe

How does wild and scenic status do you think affect the world communities? Does it have an effect at all?

Ken Salazar

You know it can have an affect with respect to water rights and communities that are dependent on water and the agricultural uses from that water, and so it is something that has to be done with recognition that when you have those kinds of federal designations they can have an impact on local communities that have developed a certainty around a regime of water, and those have to be honored. And I believe there's a way in which we can do it so that we protect the treasured landscape of wild and Scenic River, but at the same time recognize that there are important economic needs that come, especially from water supply in the arid west. When you're west of the hundredth meridian.

Interviewer--John Howe

What do you think is unique about the Green River? Just from your perspective.

Ken Salazar

Green River, like I think every other river in America, is unique. I think every river in America is a special place, and I think we have been at a point now over the last decade and even moving forward where America's turning it's face to the river. Because for so long in the last several centuries we've turned our backs to rivers, and rivers have become essentially a dumping places for industrial waste and sewage, and that is no longer the case, in the last thirty years America has started to turn it's face to the rivers, and we have started to restore those rivers and make them a Renaissance for environmental restoration, as well as a renaissance for economic prosperity. We see that in places like the South Platte River in now Denver, Colorado, and we see it in a number of other places all around the west.

Interviewer--John Howe

Discuss the economy of ranching. That's probably something that's near and dear to you in the west, and what can be done to help ranchers in the current economic climate, do you think?

Ken Salazar

Ranchers, in my view, were some of the first environmentalists and conservationists because they knew as my family knew that if you take care of your land and your water, you're going to be able to sustain your economic well being for yourselves and for generations to come. And so it's important that we sustain and support the ranching way of life across America, it is part of our heritage. It also is a part of making sure that we have lands that are set aside and open space in that ranching tradition. I have been very heartened, as I have seen organizations like the Colorado Cattlemen's Association and other ranching organizations that have fully decided that what they want to do is to put their lands into conservation so that they can be kept into ranching forever. So that they won't be taken over by development that essentially would take away that aspect of what makes a part of our heritage so great here in this country.

Interviewer--John Howe

We were at a rally this weekend with an ATV rally and there was just tremendous anger, some of it going back to Grand Staircase and some of those kinds of things. What would you say to address some of those concerns? You probably have read about it or heard about it, I would think, there's about three thousand people that had an ATV rally on the capitol.

Ken Salazar

I simply would say to them 'chill, chill'. You know, it is important that we recognize your uses of our public lands, but it has to be done in a way where--there are places where it is appropriate for us to have ATV's. There are places where it is not, and we need to make sure that we're working together to find the a solution that addresses a protection of the public lands and the serenity that many people enjoy in our public lands, and on the other hand that those who do use ATV's also have appropriate places where they can use those ATV's for recreation.