

February 28, 2018

Ryan Zinke  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

**Re: Your Attacks on Transparency Strike at the Heart of Our American Democracy**

Dear Secretary Zinke:

The undersigned organizations write to express deep concerns over your Bureau of Land Management's ("BLM's") suggestion that the Freedom of Information Act and government transparency are inhibiting effective public lands and resource management. We demand you affirm your support of the Freedom of Information Act and commit the Department of Interior to full transparency and accountability to the American public.

Recent news reports have revealed the BLM is or will soon be recommending to Congress that the Freedom of Information Act be amended to "Limit the number of FOIA requests from any one group, requiring more stringent justification for fee waivers, and increased search and redaction fees so agency can recover all of its direct costs." See "BLM Report in Response to Secretarial Memorandum on Improving Planning and NEPA Processes and Secretarial Order 3355" at 14, available at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4374829/BLM-Report-on-Improving-Planning-and.pdf>.

This recommendation is shocking. Americans from all walks of life, including our organizations, utilize the Freedom of Information Act to learn about federal government operations, to shine light on decisions and deliberations, and to engage in democratic processes. The media, local governments, businesses, landowners, public interest organizations, academic institutions, industry trade associations, and many individual Americans rely on the Freedom of Information Act as a hallmark of democracy. The law enshrines our federal government's commitment to transparency and accountability to its citizens.

The notion that the Freedom of Information Act is an obstacle to public lands and resource management insinuates that American engagement in the activities and operations of their federal government is a problem. It is an affront to the bedrock of democracy that the agency would suggest asking Congress to make changes to the law in order to limit requests for information, impose burdensome fees, and otherwise seek changes that are clearly meant to stymie, not promote, public engagement.

That the U.S. Department of the Interior would condone any effort to limit transparency and to attack the Freedom of Information Act is especially abhorrent because all Americans have a direct stake in the management of public lands and resources. The Department should not

advance such blatant disregard of the role of all Americans in the management of their lands and resources and our right to be informed of the operations and activities of our government.

We demand that you immediately and publicly state that the U.S. Department of the Interior and the agencies within it do not support changes to the Freedom of Information Act, or other initiatives that would erode transparency of federal government operations and activities. Further, we call on you to immediately direct the BLM to rescind its recommendations that the Freedom of Information Act be amended.

Please defend the Freedom of Information Act, which strengthens our democracy.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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