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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

BARBARA CUBIN

WYOMING—AT LARGE

June 26, 2008

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The Honorable Ed Schafer  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Schafer,

I write to express my deep and growing frustration with the failures of your Department to properly manage the Rainbow Family gathering within the Bridger Teton National Forest in Wyoming. As such, I urge you to take formal action to offset the lost revenue and resources experienced by Wyoming's local communities, as well as law-abiding public lands users, and take steps to ensure better management decisions will be made in the future.

It is my understanding that due to the informal organizational structure of the Rainbow Family, your Department made a decision to waive enforcement of the long-standing permitting process for this gathering. While I recognize the challenge in working with a group of this nature, your decision has set a dangerous precedent through the unequal treatment of different public land users. More importantly, however, your failure to react appropriately when the Rainbow Family refused to consider an alternative site has resulted in serious conflicts with numerous law-abiding public lands users in my State.

As you are aware, the Boy Scouts of America has been formally approved by the U.S. Forest Service to conduct a national service project, in planning since 2004, on the Big Sandy site within the Bridger Teton. In contrast to the Rainbow Family, the Boy Scouts coordinated with the Forest Service regarding site selection, and completed the appropriate permitting process. That project is now in jeopardy because your Department lacked the administrative will to enforce its own regulations when dealing with the Rainbow Family – regulations in place to protect our forest lands from misuse and the right of the general public to enjoy them.

Grazing permits, recreational activities, and access to private property by local residents have also been significantly impacted by your Department's mismanagement. I realize that significant Forest Service personnel have been deployed to focus on containment of the Rainbow Family gathering. However, conflicts continue to arise. It seems to reason that these conflicts will only grow in number and scope as the attendance of the Rainbow Family gathering peaks over the next several days.

For these reasons, I request that you immediately deploy additional resources as necessary to ensure that containment and conflict avoidance is achieved for the duration of the Rainbow Family gathering. In addition, please respond in writing with the steps your Department is taking to ease any financial or logistic costs the Boy Scouts, private land owners, permittees, and local residents are now experiencing as a result of the unauthorized use of forest service lands by the Rainbow Family. Finally, I request you take whatever administrative action necessary to ensure consistency in how your Department enforces its own regulations so that similar conflicts do not arise in the future.

While I realize your Department did not "invite" the Rainbow Family to gather in Wyoming, I feel strongly that many of the conflicts my constituents are now experiencing could have been prevented if stronger enforcement measures had been authorized by your Department from the start.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Cubin".

Barbara Cubin  
Member of Congress

cc: Mark E. Rey, Undersecretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources & Environment