

January 27, 2015

Dear President Obama:

Those of us who worked for the late U.S. Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) find ourselves with each passing year truly in awe of his political courage. He was on the front lines of many high profile issues, foreign and domestic, national and Idaho-specific, during his 24 years in the Senate. But one that he tackled throughout his career was the protection of America's most beautiful open spaces.

The recent 31st annual Frank Church Conference on Public Affairs at Boise State University focused on Senator Church's successful efforts to designate as Wilderness some of Idaho's most treasured landscapes – the Sawtooths, Hells Canyon, and the iconic River of No Return Wilderness, later re-named the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in his honor—to name a few. Idahoans of today and Idahoans of tomorrow will always owe a debt of gratitude to Senator Church for his efforts to ensure that some of Idaho's remaining “crown jewels” of wilderness will always remain that way.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, and across the state Idahoans have celebrated those lands and reflected on the leadership role of Frank Church in the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964.

Senator Church looked for opportunities to chart the future of Idaho's, and the nation's, wild lands while making sure that the opinions of a broad spectrum of Americans were considered.

Such a discussion is occurring right now in Idaho, focusing on the future of the Boulder-White Clouds. Senator Church and his wife Bethine loved these mountains and recognized early on that this landscape was special. In the 1970s Senator Church bought the White Clouds a much needed “time out” from the threat of an open pit molybdenum mine which would have destroyed the east side of the range. Senator Church fully expected that one day the Boulder-White Clouds would receive the recognition and permanent protection that these mountains deserve. One of Bethine's last acts of public advocacy was to add her voice to the growing number of Idahoans supporting national monument designation for the Boulder-White Clouds.

National monument designation for the Boulder-White Clouds would complete this effort started more than 40 years ago to permanently secure the future of this incomparable landscape. Despite Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson's dedication and tireless efforts over the past decade to pass legislation to protect the White Clouds, there is no real indication that the next session of Congress will resolve the future of the Boulder-White Clouds.

The goal of national monument designation for the Boulder-White Clouds is to embrace the larger landscape that makes this area special, extending beyond the high peaks. The Boulder-White Clouds mountains are spectacular, but just

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as important to the long term future of this land is the East Fork Salmon River that drains the east side of the range and supports some of the farthest ocean-going salmon populations left on the planet. Any effort to secure the future of the Boulder-White Clouds has to include protection of Jerry Peak and Herd Peak, areas which provide essential year-long habitat for elk, bighorn sheep, and other wildlife species. Compared to what we knew in the 1970s, the future of a wild, thriving place like the White Clouds requires protection of the "high country" peaks as well as the lower elevation, diverse forests and grasslands that provide some of the best remaining wildlife habitat in Central Idaho.

Make no mistake: Senator Church's efforts to preserve the wildest parts of Idaho were challenging. Each of these efforts was incredibly controversial at the time. Yet today, with the benefit of a longer term perspective, Idahoans across the state take pride (and economic benefit!) in the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, Hells Canyon, the Sawtooths, and other places where it was ultimately acknowledged that the best future for such lands is for them to remain unspoiled yet protected for our children and grandchildren to access and enjoy. .

The same will be true for the Boulder-White Clouds. After the dust settles, national monument designation for the Boulder-White Clouds will be recognized as one of the finest efforts undertaken by Idahoans to protect another of the state's incomparable landscapes.

We, as former Church staff, urge you to ensure that the beauty of Idaho that Frank and Bethine Church devoted their lives to protecting will remain that way for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Balfour
Marilyn Bickle
Marylin Bitner
David Blackwell
Jan Inscore Boswell
Sally Blackwell
Jerry Brady
Stephen Brown
Chris Burke
Chase Church
Rick Claussen
Cleve Corlett
Tom Dine
Ira Dorfman
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cc: U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack
U.S. Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell
U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Natural Resources
and Environment Robert Bonnie
Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Tom Tidwell
Acting Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality Mike Boots
U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
U.S. Senator Jim Risch
U.S. Congressman Raul Labrador
U.S. Congressman Mike Simpson