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Date: MAR 13 2013

Mr. Dolan Irvine
President
Pocahontas County Commission
900 Tenth Avenue
Marlinton, WV 24954

Dear Mr. Irvine:

Thank you for your letter of January 15, 2013, to Agriculture Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack regarding the locally-generated proposal to establish a National monument. We are pleased to continue this dialogue with the Pocahontas County Commission. We have not been asked to review a specific proposal; therefore, we can provide only general insight to the process and management considerations associated with Forest Service National monuments. Secretary Vilsack has asked me to respond to you. I apologize for the delayed response.

Overall, every monument designation is unique and reflects the needs and opportunities of that particular situation. Monument designations typically complement the underlying forest management plan, which is developed with public input. Regarding your questions on various management activities—hunting, fishing, trout stocking, camping, vegetative management treatments, etc.—what is permitted under the current forest plan would typically continue as a National monument. If such activities are recognized and prioritized under the forest plan in place at the time of monument designation, then there's no reason that a national monument designation wouldn't allow for the continuation of such activities. Similarly, National monuments explicitly preserve all valid existing rights and do not enlarge or diminish the existing jurisdiction of any State wildlife and fisheries management agencies.

Regarding your question about when regulations governing a monument are written, the legal document that designates a monument (i.e., the proclamation) includes broad guidance on many management provisions, for example, the preservation of valid existing rights, vegetative treatments, etc. As I noted in my letter to Mr. Fleming, should leaders in the local community and the state continue to have an interest in discussing monument designation, an open, transparent public process in partnership with local residents, governments and any other interested parties would be a critical step in consideration of a national monument proposal. In addition to any management guidance provided in the proclamation itself, a management plan for the monument would be developed post-designation in accord with all public outreach, notice and public input required of any National forest management plan.

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act directs how the Forest Service may charge limited fees for specific situations, such as highly developed campgrounds or significant visitor centers. Designation as a national monument does not automatically lead to new fees. Our interest is in encouraging use of National monuments. Likewise National monument designation itself would not impact payments such as those made pursuant to the Secure Rural Schools Act.



The Forest Service currently manages seven National monuments and there is no reason that a potential monument on the Monongahela National Forest would not also continue to be managed by the Forest Service.

The Obama Administration places a high priority on supporting conservation efforts that encourage a strong recreation and restoration economy. National monument designation can bring many public benefits including increased visitation and additional opportunities for potential federal resources to be matched by other federal, local and private resources for broader restoration objectives. And, because monument designation is statutory, it ensures the permanent viability of the very attributes for which a particular place was designated, whether historical and cultural access and resources, unique fish or wildlife communities, or other aspects of scientific interest.

Again, thank you for writing and I look forward to working with you as your community considers conservation of this important area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas L. Tidwell". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief