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Idaho Conservation League

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Senator Mike Crapo
251 East Front Street, Suite 205
Boise, Idaho 83702

September 18, 2006

RE: Owyhee Initiative Implementation Act

Dear Senator Crapo,

I am writing to express my organization's support for the Owyhee Initiative Implementation Act. We appreciate your leadership on this important issue. Permanently protecting 517,000 acres of Wilderness and 384 miles of Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers will leave an extraordinary legacy for future generations of Idahoans.

Needless to say, the Owyhee Initiative has been a challenging process for all involved, and it is a testimony to the dedication of the members of the Owyhee Working Group that we have come as far as we have. With legislation introduced, we have completed a remarkable process that brought diverse stakeholders together, kept them together, and created the work product captured in your legislation.

We now enter a new and no less challenging process: passing a bill in the US Congress. As we have learned in our work with Rep. Simpson and the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act, packages created on the ground in Idaho have considerable political strength drawn from the diversity of stakeholders involved. That said, our years of discussions are about national lands and diverse national interests will and should be considered as the bill moves forward in Congress. We look forward to being an active participant in Washington yet recognize, as we have seen with CIEDRA, that the legislative process will require a lot more work and that the bill is likely to evolve further as national interests are considered.

As you know, the bill contains elements that are controversial within our organization, such as the release of Wilderness Study Areas, the Science Review Panel, and narrowed Wild and Scenic River Corridors, as well as elements we did not support such as the compensation package and arrangements. We expect these provisions to draw considerable scrutiny in Congress. While some view these provisions as "deal breakers," we recognize that the Owyhee Initiative must be viewed as a whole, and for the good of the Owyhee Canyonlands and the future generations who will enjoy this part of Idaho as we do, we support moving this legislation forward, again recognizing the reality of the legislative process: as national interests are considered the bill will

likely evolve and this will require continued work on the part of all involved in the process thus far.

As we face upcoming challenges to passing this legislation, it is important to recall that designating the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness also contained compromises that garnered opposition from groups on both sides. My staff and I just returned from an amazing weeklong river journey down the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Today it is hard to imagine Idaho without the Frank Church, Selway-Bitterroot, Gospel-Hump, Sawtooth, Craters of the Moon, or Hells Canyon Wildernesses. These pristine areas reflect Idaho core values and provide opportunities to continually challenge and improve ourselves both as individuals and as a society. By linking preservation of the landscape with the values of those who live and work on the landscape, the Owyhee Initiative is bold step forward to achieving Wallace Stegner's vision for "a society to match the scenery."

Again, thank you for your leadership and vision on this issue, and for trusting the Owyhee Initiative Working Group to successfully navigate through these challenging issues. We look forward to helping move this place-based agreement forward and achieving permanent protection for the remarkable values of the Owyhee landscape.

Sincerely,

Rick Johnson
Executive Director

cc: Senator Larry Craig
Representative Mike Simpson
Representative Butch Otter
Governor Jim Risch