

August 23, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As people of faith we recognize that God's glory is revealed to us by the beauty and majesty of God's creation as well as through the study of history. Our U.S. national parks, monuments, and other public lands hold a diversity of species, ecosystems, and stories. By conserving public lands, wilderness, and antiquities for our children, we pass down a rich heritage of memories, values, and traditions rooted deep in the land itself.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, we ask you to spark a cultural shift within public land agencies to emphasize diversity and inclusion. Our public lands—the places where we play, pray, and take Sabbath—need to be a full reflection of the faces of our country, should respect different cultures and histories, and should engage *all* people. As people of faith committed to justice and caring for God's creation, we ask you to incorporate these principles in the management of the United States' public lands.

We want to thank you for your leadership in designating new monuments that recognize stories of communities of color and women – including and especially the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument in Maryland. Significant work has been done and we ask that your Administration emphatically continue identify and preserve sites of historical significance to diverse communities.

Our national parks, monuments, and public lands should be accessible and welcoming for all. Yet in practice, not all communities have been encouraged to feel an equal sense of belonging and stewardship over public lands. Now is the time to extend proactive messages of welcome to people whose relationship with public recreation spaces has historically been wounded, be it through forcible removal and confinement to reservations, forced or unjust labor practices, or segregation. As we think about the legacy we want to pass onto our children, we know the critical importance of empowering *all* children to develop their own authentic relationships with God's creation on public lands, and to value the importance of cultural as well as ecological preservation.

We know that the National Park Service and other public lands agencies can and must champion diversity and racial justice. Our religious organizations hear God's call to environmental stewardship, reverence for all cultures, and the need to care for and love our neighbors and our

children. We know that our natural heritage is inseparable from our cultural heritage, and how we take care of our public lands is part of how we take care of each other.

Signed,

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
Baha'is of the United States
Caretakers of God's Creation, a Mission of the United Methodist Church
Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
Creation Justice Ministries
Disciples Center for Public Witness
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Center
Green Chalice Ministry, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Hazon
Lutherans for Restoring Creation
National Baptist Convention of America
Presbyterians for Earth Care
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team
Union for Reform Judaism
The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

CC: Honorable Sally Jewell, Secretary, Department of the Interior

Christy Goldfuss, Managing Director, White House Council on Environmental Quality