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Secretary Salazar, Senator Cantwell Hear Broad Support for Proposed San Juan Islands Conservation Area at Town Hall

ANACORTES, WA--During his second visit to the Anacortes area today, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar heard growing support and enthusiasm from local community members to create the San Juan Islands National Conservation Area (NCA). Home to bald eagles, orca whales, harbor seals and other rare species, the San Juan Islands have been identified as one of [18 areas](#) Interior recently highlighted as deserving protection by Congress as national conservation areas or wilderness areas.

In releasing the report in November, Secretary Salazar called on Congress to pass a bipartisan public lands bill to protect areas like the San Juan Islands, where there is significant local support for Congressional protection.

Joined by U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell at the town hall, Salazar also received updates from Interior agencies on the development of a proposal aimed at enhancing conservation and recreation opportunities on the Interior-managed lands in the San Juan Islands.

“With the support of the San Juan Islands community, we continue to make great progress in implementing a long-term conservation vision for the area,” said Secretary Salazar. “It is great to hear that the passion and dedication of those here today is as strong as ever when it comes to making sure that this Northwest treasure is preserved for generations to come.”

“The San Juan Islands are one of Washington state’s most beautiful natural treasures,” said Maria Cantwell (D-WA). “This designation would keep existing federal land in its natural state and protect public access for generations to come. The local commitment to protecting the San Juan Islands is inspiring and continuing strong. I will continue to work in Congress to make this legislation a reality.”

Currently, Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 1,000 acres of the San Juan Islands, providing an opportunity for visitors to experience the natural beauty of the undeveloped landscape the chain encompasses.

Last April, Secretary Salazar directed the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to engage with local communities, Members of Congress, tribes and other partners to develop a unified plan to complement a National Conservation Area proposal which would require legislation to be established.

Under the leadership of Karen Kelleher and Daniel Picard of the BLM, the Interior team has held multiple workshops to brainstorm on short-term and long-term action items for joint restoration projects and recreation opportunities.

The BLM currently manages over 245 million acres of land nationwide, primarily in 12 western states. Since the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, Congress has designated approximately 8,700,000 acres of BLM land as wilderness – equating to just roughly 3.5 percent of the land that the BLM manages.

Public lands managed by the Department of the Interior draw more than 400 million visits a year. According to some recent non-governmental estimates, outdoor recreation supports as many as 6.5 million jobs and provides as much as \$1 trillion in annual economic benefits. Congressional designations, such as national conservation areas and wilderness areas, attract additional visitation, tourism, and visitor spending in local communities.

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