

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2004

Gale Norton  
Secretary of the Interior  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Norton:

We are writing you to call your attention to an issue of particular importance to our home states, the Nez Perce Tribes of Idaho and the small community of Joseph, Oregon.

By way of background, the Wallowa Band of the Nez Perce led by Chief Joseph in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century staunchly resisted all U.S. government efforts to force the band onto a small Idaho reservation. After a long campaign ending in Montana, Joseph surrendered with the understanding that he would be allowed to return home. Joseph and his people were instead taken first to eastern Kansas and then to a reservation in what is now Oklahoma, where many of them died of epidemic diseases. Although he was allowed to visit Washington, D.C., it was not until 1885 that Joseph and the other refugees were returned to the Pacific Northwest – but separated from their homeland in the Wallowa Valley.

On February 12, 2004, the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners in northeastern Oregon approved a tentative plan for the development of 11 five-acre home sites on 62 acres bordering the Old Chief Joseph burial site on Wallowa Lake's terminal glacial moraine. Five appeals had been filed against the development. The appellants include the City of Joseph, several Joseph citizens, and the tribes of three Indian reservations, including the Nez Perce. All contended that, in addition to an archaeological study, a cultural survey should be conducted prior to the county's approval of the application. The Board decided further archaeological survey is necessary before development.

The archaeological and cultural survey would document the Nez Perce people's historic and ongoing connection to smaller portions of the site. We believe that before developing this land, an extensive survey should take place to determine the boundaries of traditional sites. The existence of cultural sites would be reason enough for all options to be explored, including federal purchase of the land at fair market value for the benefit of the tribe and local citizens.

To this extent, we ask that the Department of the Interior – with all appropriate agencies – begin working with and provide appropriate resources to the Nez Perce Tribe, the local community, and other stakeholders in this process.

The Nez Perce Tribe has a deep cultural heritage to Wallowa County and the State of Oregon. The prospect of bringing the Nez Perce back to Oregon, particularly to the town named for its patriarch, is truly historic. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

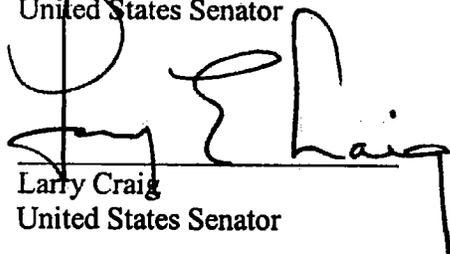
Warm Regards,



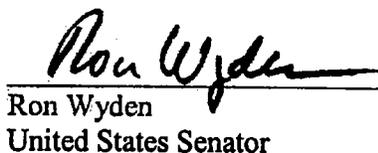
Gordon H. Smith  
United States Senator



Michael Crapo  
United States Senator



Larry Craig  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator