The following letter was sent to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell — Ed.

Critical junction

The following was addressed to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department commissioners and the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team — Ed.

On behalf of the more than 2,000 members of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, I respectfully request that you prioritize the National Park Service’s acquisition of two Wyoming-owned inholdings in Grand Teton National Park.

If the Interior Department fails to act by the Jan. 5, 2014, deadline, the alliance is concerned that state officials will sell these lands on the open market. The resulting development would mar an otherwise pristine landscape that brings millions of tourists to the local economy.

In 2010, the Interior Department struck a deal with Wyoming officials that allowed the department to purchase four state-owned inholdings in the park for more than $100 million. The deal was the result of more than a decade of work on behalf of the state of Wyoming and the Interior Department.

While the acquisition of the first two parcels was complete, work on the remaining two parcels — arguably the most difficult — remains unfinished.

At risk is 1,280 acres of spectacular habitat in Grand Teton National Park. Together these parcels serve numerous species including elk, bison, wolves, pronghorn and grizzly bears. The land is also important to numerous bird species, including sage grouse, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service deemed warranted but precluded from Endangered Species Act protection.

Both of these parcels lie in one of the last remaining places where American outdoorsmen witness firsthand wild animals living the way they did before the arrival of European settlers. One parcel, known as the gateway to the spectacular Gros Ventre River Valley and is immediately adjacent to the Path of the Pronghorn, the longest terrestrial migration in the lower 48 states.

In short, these parcels are integral to elk and its wildlife. They sit at the junctions of numerous migration corridors, including migration paths for elk and bison moving to the National Elk Refuge. These migrations linkages will become even more important as global warming changes habitats and park animals must move to seek out refugia.

Wyoming residents and Wyoming elected officials see the value in protecting these lands. These officials do, however, have a legal obligation to use these school sections to benefit Wyoming schools. If the Interior Department doesn’t purchase the next parcel by Jan. 5, 2014, the fate of some of Grand Teton National Park’s most important real estate will rest with the five-member Wyoming Board of Land Commissioners.

We’re at a critical junction, and I strongly urge you to engage with Congress to enact any of several solutions for this land acquisition.

Trevor Stevenson, Cory Hatch, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance