

Their View: The common sense solution to protecting the Organs

*By Steve Pearce / For the Sun-News Las Cruces Sun-News
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Southern New Mexico is our home, and the Organ Mountains are one of the greatest natural treasures in this part of our state. We have a strong history of protecting our beautiful landscape. There is broad agreement that the Organs must be preserved. Protecting federal lands with unique natural characteristics is one of the legislative branch's greatest responsibilities, and I take it very seriously. I sponsored H.R. 4334, the Organ Mountains National Monument Establishment Act, for this very reason. This bill guarantees that the Organs will be protected from development for the rest of time. This bill permanently protects our right to recreation in pristine habitats, and does so in a fair, commonsense manner.

The bill includes important protections that other designations oftentimes omit. For instance, while this bill allows current roads to remain open, it prevents any new road construction. H.R. 4334 ensures that families with small children, senior citizens and the disabled will have the same access to the Organs as everyone else. It is vital that we allow our conservation districts access to our watersheds to ensure a steady water supply, so I made sure that nothing can be construed to prohibit the use of mechanized equipment or vehicles for the maintenance of flood control and water conservation systems. Just as importantly, agriculture is a key component of our local economy, and the bill keeps protections for grazing permits in place.

H.R. 4334 is the result of years of collaborative input from local officials, ranchers, conservationists, and business owners. It is a balanced approach that allows the maximum amount of public access while preserving the character of the Organs.

I have read the positions of interest groups and politicians who seek unilateral action by the president of the United States to list large swaths of Doña Ana County as a national monument. Having Washington decide what is best for Las Cruces is not the answer for us here at home in New Mexico.

This type of action has not been right in the past for other communities, and it is not right for southern New Mexico. Our community deserves to be at the table, voicing its concerns face-to-face with elected leaders — not relegated to sending generic opinion post cards to the White House.

I ask my fellow New Mexicans to join me in supporting the protection of our lands in a fair, open and democratic process for the benefit of current and future generations. H.R. 4334 is the common sense solution that brings all interests to the table, and protects southern New Mexico's scenic beauty forever.

On Friday, May 4, there will be a public dialogue on this proposal along with two others at the Farm & Ranch Museum in Las Cruces. I invite everyone to attend, and make your opinions heard.

Republican Steve Pearce is the U.S. representative for District 2, which includes all of southern New Mexico.