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## Tea party protests federal Wilderness Act

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The Las Cruces Tea Party protested the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act, a legislative proposal supported by Democrat Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, Monday outside of Corbett Center.

The Tea Party, a non-partisan group dedicated to promoting individuals' freedoms, wanted to voice the consequences that would erupt if the new wilderness bill passes.

The bill proposes to designate certain land as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System and National Landscape Conservation System, including areas in the Organ, Robledo, Doña Ana and Potrillo mountains.

However, Tea Party members said they believe more harm will come to the land instead of proper preservation the act intended to do.

Jerry Clark, a Tea Party member, said the public needs to have more access to land for their enjoyment and for the well being of the land.

"We want the government to manage the land, not close it," Clark said. "There will be unintended consequences that will affect the environment tremendously [if the bill is passed]."

According to the bill, all motorized vehicles are prohibited, including those operated by Border Patrol, Drug Enforcement personnel and other law enforcement officers. For law enforcement to pursue criminals on the land, officers would have to go by horseback or foot.

Along with the potential of higher criminal activity, the lack of mechanized equipment also will make it more difficult to keep the land clean and in good condition, Tea Party protestors said.

In a hearing testimony on Oct. 8, 2009, Jerry Schickedanz, former New Mexico State University dean of Agriculture, told the Congressional Committee the proposed legislation would jeopardize security on the United States/Mexico border, according to a press release.

"We have grave concerns about giving wilderness designation to land adjacent to the border," Schickedanz said in the press release. "There are viable alternatives [to protect the land]."

According to the People for Preserving our Western Heritage Web site, the bill would have a major impact on more than 200,000 citizens and nearly 400,000 acres of land in Doña Ana and Luna counties.

Doña Ana County lands need to be protected, but not under the designation of wilderness or the requirements of a Wilderness Bill, Tea Party protestors said.

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“We need our freedom,” Clark said, “and to help, we have to get this information out for support.”

According to [nmpolitics.net](http://nmpolitics.net), hundreds of people attended the hearing on Monday. Proponents and opponents voiced their concerns about the proposed bill during the public hearing, which lasted more than three hours.

For more information on the Wilderness Bill visit [www.bingaman.senate.gov](http://www.bingaman.senate.gov) and for more information on the Las Cruces Tea Party, visit [www.lcteaparty.org](http://www.lcteaparty.org).

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