

Their View: Read monument proposal before voting on it

By Jim Harbison Las Cruces Sun-News

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As former Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi so infamously said, "We have to pass the bill so we can see what's in it," seems to be the mantra for resolutions of our local governments. It appears this was the philosophy of our elected local government officials concerning the wilderness or national monument proposals developed by the Wilderness Alliance and their employees Jeff Steinborn and Nathan Small.

These paid lobbyists have launched another campaign to lock up 600,000 acres of Doña Ana County forever. Why? After years of properly losing congressional debates on wilderness designations in Doña Ana County, they revealed their latest scheme to foreclose debate and bypass Congress in favor of a presidential proclamation. These environmental Pied Pipers have convinced otherwise reasonable elected officials to support their plan, which lacks details and contains numerous promises. Do, Doña Ana County residents have to wait for a presidential proclamation before we can find out what's in it?

What problem would be solved by this monument designation? Is it because BLM isn't properly managing these areas now? What are the unintended consequences? History in New Mexico and elsewhere demonstrates that there are always unintended consequences with governmental land use restrictions. Remember how many cattle ranches there were in the Gilas? Today, no one ranches in the Gilas. Why? Nothing in the wilderness land use agreements prohibited ranching. However, BLM policy, applied over time, made cattle ranching economically infeasible. So, now those forests are burning up because of misguided Forest Service policies and the absence of hard-working ranchers who had cared for these lands for generations. But, the Gilas are protected forever, right?

When the public learned that County Commissioner Billy Garrett was flying to Washington to brief the administration in support of this legislation, regular citizens were incensed and outspokenly opposed. Any pretense of unanimity disappeared as the village of Hatch trustees, local water and soil conservation districts, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, and border security organizations, along with regular people all publically announced their opposition. After hearing the public concerns and realizing that the militant environmentalists had not disclosed the adverse implications, three County Commissioners Karen Perez, Leticia Duarte-Benavidez and Dolores Saldana-Caviness announced they were rethinking their support for designating the Desert Peaks-Organ Mountains national monument. Thank you ladies!

Based on the comments of members of the County Commission, Las Cruces Mayor Miyagishima expressed momentary concern that the Council may not have been presented all the facts about the 600,000 acre land grab. One of the things wrong with our current generation of politicians is that they fail to do their due diligence to insure their decisions are based on all the information available. Instead, they pander to the information provided by activist special interest groups.

After meeting with the environmental lobbyists, the mayor has now assured himself that this advocacy group is objective. Really? Has the mayor shown the same deference to those who disagree? Is he truly concerned about the consequences of this proposal or is he repaying the environmental special interest groups that secured his re-election?

What's his rush to endorse this plan without proper analysis? Could further scrutiny disclose significant issues concerning the destruction of the valley's agriculture jobs and future, soil and water districts, border security and development and investment in Doña Ana County? Might the claims of a sudden rush of eco-tourism be a bit exaggerated? Is the public willing to have 88 percent of the county under government control? Does the public really believe there is a line of people just waiting for monument designation to flood our hotels and restaurants while they visit Billy the Kid Rock, which they can freely do now? Unlike some of our elected officials, the public is well aware of the history of government-administered land-use policies. They have always resulted in unintended consequences harmful to farming, ranching, water issues, individuals or border security. So often in fact, one must ask if these consequences are truly unintended. Do we want to permanently prohibit future development of Doña Ana County, deny future economic growth opportunities and endanger the economic vitality of our community?

Let's not wait until the "bill passes so we can find out what's in it." Perhaps it's time to let the people decide if this is the best way to protect our forests, our industries, our cultural heritage, and our wildlife. Let's have a referendum. I have confidence, that when the facts are revealed, common sense will prevail over demonstrably misguided environmental theories.

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