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## Their View: Sen. Bingaman making mistake with dangerous wilderness bill

By Ron Arnold / For the Sun-News

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Sen. Jeff Bingaman is being called our worst border security threat. Angry Doña Ana County residents have branded the New Mexico Democrat's Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act as "Bingaman's Bandit Boulevard" for proposing a 50-mile-long safe haven for Mexican drug runners -- and worse.

John Hummer, former chairman of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, reminded his community of the no-motorized-vehicle clause in wilderness laws. The Border Patrol can't patrol.

Wilderness laws allow our own park and forest rangers to keep the cops out. That's supposed to protect nature, but ends up protecting drug cartels, illegal immigrants -- and terrorists.

Steve Wilmeth, fifth-generation New Mexico rancher, told me that Bingaman's north-south strip and two mountain clusters don't worry him for the inevitable Mexican intruders, but for the OTMs -- Other Than Mexicans.

A U.S. Border Patrol document obtained by The Examiner shows the nationality and number of OTMs arrested last year. A few samples: Afghanistan (12); Indonesia (95); Iran (42); Iraq (42); Jordan (52); Saudi Arabia (6); Somalia (70); Yemen (22).

Members of the National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers say they weren't smuggling

drugs. Retired Border Patrol Officer Zack Taylor said Bingaman's wilderness boundary is just a stroll from violent Juarez and El Paso.

Terrorists want terror, said Taylor - unexpected targets with severed body parts and dead babies. A dozen relays

of three sunburned hikers carrying big backpacks could trek unmolested up Bingaman's Boulevard, stockpiling materials to obliterate the balloon festival, the state Capitol, the Acoma Pueblo - anything we treasure.

Frank DuBois, a Reagan-era deputy assistant secretary of the interior, told me that interdicting criminals in wilderness is losing priority. Bingaman's bill makes his wilderness a "component of the National Landscape Conservation System." That's ominous.

In a previous Examiner report, I exposed Wendy Van Asselt's Wilderness Society campaign with Bureau of Land Management officials that led her to the House Natural Resources Committee, where she helped create that hands-off conservation system. (She resigned last month).

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has elevated the Office of the National Landscape Conservation System to the level of a directorate within BLM, with preservation its priority.

Given that newly exalted status, questions arise. First, who led the campaign for Bingaman's bill?

That's easy: the Albuquerque-based New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, a purist group out to "re-wild" and restore the Americas to pre-Columbus conditions.

NMWA has been more effective than its \$1 million

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revenue suggests. Its IRS Form 990 shows why: The "affiliations" disclosure shows NMWA "works together on ongoing basis" with three rich Big Green groups: the Wilderness Society (which led the campaign to create the conservation system), the Pew-supported Campaign for America's Wilderness, and, most importantly, the Sierra Club, which can spend limitless sums lobbying legislators.

But the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance dances on the strings of its foundation funders. The top donors are the Wyss Foundation, which also bankrolled Wendy Van Asselt's conservation system campaign for the Wilderness Society, and the Wilburforce Foundation, which specifically donated to "the Organ Mountains Wilderness Campaign."

Top donor Wilburforce (\$750,000), based in Seattle, is the money of Gordon Letwin, one of the 12 original employees of Microsoft -- which was born in Albuquerque and moved to the Pacific Northwest in 1978.

Letwin quit Microsoft in 1993 to "kick back" with his \$20 million fortune. His wife Rosanna now runs Wilburforce with the income from 300,000 shares of Microsoft stock as a money spigot for green groups.

The first of this month, Wilburforce hired Van Asselt as a program officer, giving her a credential on all three sides of an Iron Triangle - activist, government, donor - and illustrating the revolving doors of Big Green.

Washington Examiner contributor Ron Arnold is executive vice president of the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise. This article originally appeared in The Examiner.

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