

Their View: Facts on New Mexico national monuments

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It is difficult for me to understand how the supporters of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NMWA) Organ Mountain-Desert Peaks National Monument can be swept along with this new proposed 600,000-acre national monument and not question the all-encompassing promises and propaganda. In the race to endorse the proposal, have the many listed organizations read the proclamation or checked the facts on the New Mexico national monuments and their management?

We support protecting and preserving our Western heritage, which includes historic and cultural sites in Doña Ana County. But, do we need one-fourth of Doña Ana County tied up in a 600,000-acre national monument?

What is a national monument? A national monument "is intended to preserve at least one nationally significant resource. It is usually smaller than a national park and lacks its diversity of attractions." In New Mexico, there are 12 national monuments protecting basically a single nationally significant resource. White Sands, Aztec Ruins, Prehistoric Trackways, and Capulin Volcano are examples of national monuments in New Mexico which are preserving singular significant resources. Ten of the national monuments are managed by the National Park Service and two by BLM.

The NMWA Organ Mountains website proclaims that national monuments protect existing rights and uses. However, I suggest that they forgot to check on what is currently happening in the 12 national monuments in New Mexico.

There is no hunting in 11 of the 12 New Mexico national monuments. The Prehistoric Trackways National Monument is currently developing its management plan. Was this explained to the local hunting and sportsman groups in Doña Ana County before they agreed to sign as sponsors?

There is no grazing in 11 of the 12 New Mexico national monuments. Was this explained to the State Land Office, New Mexico Cattle Growers, New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau or the many ranchers impacted by the 600,000 acre lockup?

Fees are charged in nine of the 12 national monuments in order to enter and enjoy. Was this explained to all the families who currently have access free of charge to all the lands in the proposed national monument?

Pets are prohibited from entering national monument visitor centers (except guide dogs), ranger-led activities, using trails and all backcountry areas. In those instances where pets are allowed, they must be kept on a leash (less than 6 feet) at all times. The fines are from \$50 to \$250 and are strictly enforced. Was this explained to the hikers who currently take their dogs with them without leashes?

Horseback riding in Bandelier National Monument is limited daily to two groups of six horses. Does the horseman's group who actively ride in Doña Ana County without being limited as to how many can ride on any given outing know this fact?

No motorized vehicle use on trails. Baby strollers are prohibited on trails at Capulin Volcano, but backpacks are available at the visitor center.

National Parks Service policy is to not allow motorized vehicles on trails because they violate the soundscape resource with unnatural sounds.

There are many other disadvantages of the unseen and unread Executive Order proclamation. We all should want to read what is in the unpublished proclamation before we believe unwritten promises.

We support HR 4334 Organ Mountains National Monument Establishment Act as introduced by Rep. Steve Pearce, which very clearly spells out who will manage the national monument and what is being preserved and protected.

The legislation will permanently protect the Doña Ana Mountains area with its many historical and cultural sites. We strongly support the legislative process that allows for public hearings and debate. I hope you will check the facts.