

Pearce submits modified legislation for Organ Mountains National Monument designation

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A copy of House Resolution 995 introduced Wednesday by Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M.

A map of the proposed Organ Mountains National Monumentsubmitted by Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M., with HR 995

Rep. Steve Pearce's website: <http://pearce.house.gov/>

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument website: www.organmountains.org

LAS CRUCES - A somewhat modified version of a resolution establishing the Organ Mountains as a national monument was introduced Wednesday into the U.S. House of Representatives.

Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M., introduced House Resolution 995, the Organ Mountains National Monument Establishment Act of 2013. Almost a year ago, Pearce submitted House Resolution 4334 which also proposed to make the Organs into a national monument.

But after meeting with constituents across southern New Mexico during the past year a few changes were incorporated into the legislation.

"This legislation was developed with close involvement and significant input from local ranchers, business owners, conservationists, sportsmen and other constituents" Pearce said. "All New Mexicans want to protect the Organ Mountains. This proposal achieves our shared conservation objectives and ensures economic health by making sure that this national treasure is protected without threatening local jobs. We can find common ground through the legislative process with input from the community."

Pearce's bill protects the rights of ranchers, hunters and law enforcement to access the monument. It also permanently withdraws the land from mineral exploration, and ensures that new roads will not be constructed without the consent of the Interior Secretary.

The federal legislation also reduces the area of the proposed national monument to 54,800 acres, stipulates that hunting and fishing would be allowed, and that law enforcement will have access.

State Rep. Jeff Steinborn, D-Las Cruces, who has spearheaded efforts for more than a year to establish the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument did not immediately comment on Pearce's legislation, as he was reviewing the latest version.

When efforts began in early 2012 to establish the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument as much as 600,000 acres surrounding Las Cruces were initially included in the monument's proposal. A coalition of 175 entities, including southern New Mexico politicians, business owners, educators and interested residents endorsed the creation of a national monument.

However, numerous ranchers and land owners within the proposed monument expressed concerns and opposition to the large amount of land designated for the monument.

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National monument

Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M., submitted congressional legislation Wednesday to establish the Organ Mountains National Monument.

The proposed legislation is House Resolution 995

It modifies legislation Pearce introduced a year ago.

Some of changes in the newer legislation include: designating 54,800 acres for the proposed monument; allowing hunting and fishing within the monument; and allowing access to law enforcement.