

## **Jerry G. Schickedanz: Claims of monument supporters not backed up by existing evidence**

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By Jerry G. Schickedanz

Recently, I have noticed several articles in the Sun-News promoting the designation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks as a national monument. Some have touted that the designation would improve or enhance the economy of Dona Ana County. Others seem to indicate an urgency to have President Obama use his executive powers to designate over 600,000 acres (one fourth of Dona Ana County) as a national monument. Some have seemed to feel that this massive area was in jeopardy of being destroyed for future use by citizens. I have heard the argument that just by designating the area as national monument tourism and jobs would increase.

There was an guest column in the 11-10-13 Sun-News Opinion page by Dr. Randy Simmons and Dr. Ryan Yonk, economists from the Utah State University system, who questioned the validity of using economics to justify designation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks as a national monument. Their conclusions were in direct conflict with other economic studies touting the enhancement of the local economy with tourism and jobs. The article concluded that economics should not be a major justification for designating land for national monument status.

The most recent national monument in Dona Ana County, the Prehistoric Trackway National Monument, was established by Congress in March, 2009. I looked at the BLM brochure for the monument and noted that the "site contains the most scientifically significant Early Permian Trackway Sites in the World." I was impressed, and this should bring in the visitors. I inquired at the Bureau of Land Management office if they had any data to show an increase in visits to the area. They did not have any data to show either an increase or decrease in the number of visitors to the site.

I then went to my trusty computer to see what someone who was anticipating visiting or moving to Las Cruces might find on the internet. I plugged in "Las Cruces Tourism Things See Do" and looked at the first 10 website listings to see if the Prehistoric Trackway National Monument was on the list of top things to see and do in Las Cruces. I was shocked to find that not any of the 10 listings included the Prehistoric Trackway National Monument as something to see or do in Las Cruces. This included the Las Cruces Visitor Center and the Las Cruces Convention and Visitor Bureau website. There went using the "build it and they will come" philosophy as a justification.

The federal lands proposed for protection, in my estimation, are already adequately being protected under many federal laws, such as the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, National Environmental Policy Act and many others. The Organ Mountains and many of the areas are being protected under the BLM Resource Management Plan which is currently being updated with public input and review. These areas are not in danger of being destroyed for future use and enjoyment, but have been protected in the past and will be protected in the future.

There appears to be groups working in the community that are trying to create an emergency to justify creating a large national monument by presidential proclamation instead of open dialogue and legislative

action by which all citizens have the opportunity for input and review. Why not get behind a legislative bill already in Congress, HR 995 "Organ Mountains National Monument Establishment Act" which would permanently protect 58,412 acres of the Organ Mountains, that we all should be able to agree on.

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