

Wilderness for the Country Club

As I was listening to the panel discussions “for and against” wilderness for Dona Ana County at the S.1689 Hearing conducted by Senator Bingaman this past Monday at NMSU, it struck me that S.1689 is a perfect solution for the protection of the Las Cruces Country Club from development.

The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and their supporters should propose that the Las Cruces Country Club be included in the Organ Mountain-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act. By making the Las Cruces Country Club into Federal Wilderness, the fairways and greens would be kept free of any more houses being built and those who already have homes could keep them and their open space near the golf course. It would eliminate all of those golf carts from driving up and down the cart paths that exist on the golf course, as a consequence of the prohibition of motorized vehicles in Federal Wilderness, golfers would now have to carry their bags as they could not use a wheeled bag cart. Of course they would enjoy the game of golf more because they now walk and carry their clubs instead of driving or pulling a golf cart.

Federal Wilderness would create a problem of efficient care and transport of a golfer that may have fallen in a sand trap and broken his leg. Because it is not life threatening, the emergency medical services could not get a permit to land a helicopter or drive down the existing golf cart path to take the person to the hospital. The rescuers would have to walk down a path carrying the stretcher and could not use the stretchers on wheels (mechanized equipment is prohibited in wilderness) to rescue the injured golfer.

Does this all sound ridiculous? Yes. But that is exactly the kind of nonsense that will be applied to all Wilderness areas proposed in S.1689. Protection from development is the single biggest reason most people state in their support for “Wilderness” and our community appears to have overwhelming agreement that protection from development is the central issue.

Is there a solution with more common sense protections? Yes. Federal Wilderness designation is not the only land protection measure available. If you agree, you need to ask Senator Bingaman to consider appropriate and proven land protection measures (like those used in the Valle Vidal Act of 2006, supported by Senator Bingaman) that protect the land from development without the extensive prohibitions of Federal Wilderness designation, so that everyone can continue to enjoy our open space.