

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS.com

Wilderness bill opponents map out alternative plan

By Diana M. Alba Sun-News reporter

Posted: 11/25/2009 12:00:00 AM MST
To view the group's letter [click here](#).

LAS CRUCES - A group of opponents to a federal wilderness bill for Doña Ana County gathered Tuesday to outline its alternative to the proposal and ask New Mexico's senators to hold a field hearing locally about the matter.

The group, including ranchers, off-road vehicle users, the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce and the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, in a letter to the senators have asked that several regions be removed from consideration for wilderness and instead granted other less-restrictive designations.

Under the group's proposal, developed by a Chamber of Commerce panel, the following areas now proposed for wilderness would become national conservation areas:

- Potrillo Mountains Wilderness - 143,450 acres
- Aden Lava Flow Wilderness - 27,650 acres
- Cinder Cone Wilderness - 16,950 acres
- Whitehorn Wilderness - 9,600 acres

The areas are clustered in southwestern Do-a Ana County, near the international border. Frank DuBois, a former state agriculture secretary who has opposed the wilderness legislation, said the group

is asking for the change to keep from hindering officers who are enforcing immigration laws.

Wilderness is the most-restrictive land designation granted by Congress. It prevents mechanized travel in most cases. National conservation areas are a designation in which the land-use parameters are tailored to match each region.

Also, a 13,900-acre wilderness region proposed for Broad Canyon, south of Hatch, would be removed from consideration, under the opposition group's plan.

"The chamber found this area to be too important for utility and energy corridors, flood control and other economic growth and public safety factors to have access restrictions legislatively imposed," said DuBois at a news conference.

Jude McCartin, spokeswoman for U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., reiterated that the senator in developing the legislation, S. 1689, attempted to accommodate concerns of stakeholders. She pointed to several revisions that were made to an earlier wilderness proposal that had been circulating in the community. One of those revisions was the removal of 16,000 acres that had previously been slated to become wilderness along the border, to better accommodate law enforcement.

Opponents have said the ban against mechanized travel would keep border agents from adequately patrolling the area. Supporters of the wilderness legislation, however, have said they don't believe that would be the case, mostly because of a cooperative agreement between federal agencies that allows federal agents to access the land, under certain conditions.

But Gene Wood of Las Cruces, a retired chief patrol

Advertisement

TARGET WEB COUPON **EXPIRES 2/27/10**

25¢ each
with purchase of twenty-five
4x6" Kodak instant prints





This coupon is intended for use by the original recipient only and is void if copied, scanned, transferred, purchased, sold or prohibited by law. Limit one offer per transaction. GiftCards and tax will not be included in determining purchase total. No cash value. Offer available at Target One Hour Photo Labs. Go to target.com/photo for the location nearest you. One Hour service limited to machine capacity.

9856-0113-1882-4674-0306-4005-84

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS.com

agent with the Border Patrol, contended Tuesday that the agreement "doesn't work at all" because it requires that agents be "in hot pursuit" of illegal activity. He also said the proposed buffer zone won't do much good.

"When would that ever happen in the Potrillos?" said. "If you can't go there and see them, how would you chase them?"

Wood said a the international border fence has helped to reduce cross-border traffic, but it also has pushed it to wildlands.

A group in favor the Senate bill continued to express its backing for the measure.

County Commissioner Scott Krahlng in a statement said there's a "high level" of support in the community.

"This legislation has been thoroughly thought through at the local level, and many compromises have been made to accommodate all involved," he said. "Wilderness and national conservation areas will protect many of our most important local public lands, and it will also be good for our economy."

In addition to other modifications, DuBois said the group is asking that access to flood control structures a proposed Organ Mountain National Conservation Area remain open and that language changes to protect grazing in the national conservation areas also be adopted.

John Hummer, Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce president, who signed the letter, said the group isn't opposed to protecting land, but doesn't believe the wilderness designation is necessary in all cases. He said more public debate is needed on

the measure, why the group is requesting a Senate field hearing be held in the county.

The group opposed to wilderness released a version of its letter before the news conference that included the list of people who'd sign. But supporters of the wilderness bill were quick to point out that two of the people listed - Gilbert C. Apodaca, president of the Hispano Chamber of Commerce and Margie Huerta, president of Do-a Ana Community College - were actually in favor of S. 1689 as it stands.

In a statement, Apodaca described himself as a "proud and enthusiastic supporter" of the current version of the bill. Huerta, too, said she backs the legislation.

DuBois said the names were included because of a misunderstanding.

DuBois said the group isn't opposed to three of the proposed wilderness areas: the Organ Mountains Wilderness, Sierra de las Uvas Wilderness and Robledo Mountains Wilderness.

Bingaman and U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M. introduced the Organ Mountains - Desert Peaks Wilderness Act into Congress in September. The bill would create 259,000 acres of wilderness and 100,850 acres of national conservation area in Do-a Ana County.

A debate about wilderness in the county has been ongoing since December 2005, after an initial proposal by former U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., came to light.

Diana M. Alba can be reached at dalba@lcsun-news.com ; (575) 541-5443.

Advertisement

GEVALIA Home is where it happens

**3 Boxes, 3 Bucks,
No Kidding!**

for ONLY **\$3** plus FREE SHIPPING!

CoffeeClubValues.com

Plus Free Travel Mug



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS.com

By the numbers

Proposed land protection for Do-a Ana County under the proposed Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act (S. 1689)

Designation

- Organ Mountains Wilderness - 19,400 acres
- Aden Lava Flow Wilderness - 27,650 acres
- Potrillo Mountains Wilderness - 143,450 acres
- Cinder Cone Wilderness - 16,950 acres
- Whitehorn Wilderness - 9,600 acres
- Robledo Mountains Wilderness - 17,000 acres
- Broad Canyon Wilderness - 13,900 acres
- Sierra de las Uvas Wilderness - 11,100 acres
- Organ Mountains National Conservation Area - 67,250 acres
- Desert Peaks National Conservation Area - 33,600 acres
- Wilderness study released from temporary wilderness - 16,350 acres

Source: U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M.

Opposed

The following people signed a letter asking for changes to a federal wilderness bill under consideration in Congress:

- Gerald Thomas, New Mexico State University, president emeritus
- Richard Johnson, U.S. Forest Service, ret.
- State Rep. Andy Nu-ez, D-Hatch
- Judd Nordyke, mayor of Hatch
- John Hummer, chairman of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce
- John Hadley, Building Industry Association of Southern New Mexico
- Gary Esslinger, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
- John Allen, Do-a Ana County Flood Commissioner
- Gene Wood, National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers
- Ralph Ramos, Mesilla Valley Sportsmen's Alliance
- Joe Delk, Do-a Ana Soil and Water Conservation District
- Jerry Arp, Las Cruces Four Wheel Drive Club
- Juan Colquitt, Fort Selden Water Co.
- Marcia Nordyke, Hatch Chamber of Commerce

Advertisement

30-Year Fixed Rate \$200K loan for \$1,060/mo.

866-945-4410

or YourQuickRefinance.com

Quicken Loans The Easiest Way to Get a Home Loan®

*Rates can change. Act now!

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics™**

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS.com

- Tom Hutchison, Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce Issues panel chairman
- Jerry Schickedanz, chairman of People For Preserving Our Western Heritage
- Ed Provencio, South Valley Small Farmers Cooperative
- Sherry Blake, Chaparral Agriculture and Livestock Association

Source: People for Preserving Our Western Heritage

Advertisement

30-Year Fixed Rate \$200K loan for \$1,060/mo.

Quicken Loans The Easiest Way to Get a Home Loan[®]

866-945-4410
or YourQuickRefinance.com

*Rates can change. Act now!

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™