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New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau which aimed to reserve 260,000 acres
Testimony on HR4334, "Organ Mountains National Monument Establishment Act"
Thursday, June 28, 2012

Chairman Bishop and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to voice our support of HR4334, the establishment of the Organ Mountains as a National Monument. My name is Matt Rush and I am the Executive Vice-President of the New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau. I represent all of the farmers and ranchers in Dona Ana County and speak for them when I thank Congressman Pearce for his efforts to protect the Organ Mountains.

Preservation of the Organ Mountains has been a long range goal of New Mexicans. In 2005, Senator Pete Domenici supported protection of the Organs -- until he found out the proposal negatively impacted the citizens of Dona Ana County.

In 2006, the Wilderness Alliance again proposed land for preservation but this time increased the ante from 217,500 acres to 325,000 acres. However, it was refused by community stakeholders. In 2009 Senator Bingaman introduced Senate Bill 1689 which aimed to reserve 260,000 acres. This bill died in committee. In 2011 the bill was introduced as Senate Bill 1024, this bill is still in committee.

Earlier this year the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance announced a proposal to designate 600,000 acres as a National Monument under the authority of the antiquities act. Although you have been told that there is broad-based support for national monument designation, the reality is that the majority of citizens do not want to designate a full 25% of our county as national monument.

Dona Ana County is awash in federal land as it is. Combined with the surrounding area, there is already 4.7 million acres in protected federal lands. Add to this another 1.5 million acres tied up in conditional access status. This totals 6.2 million acres when you add:

- Fort Bliss,
- To McGregor Range,
- To White Sands Missile Range,
- To White Sands National Monument,
- To Holloman Air Force Base,
- To the San Andres National Wildlife Refuge,
- To the Jornada Experimental Range,
- To existing Wilderness Study Areas.

Almost 75% of the entire county is under federal control. Less than 15% of Dona Ana County is privately owned. While that is a common situation across the West, as evidenced in this slide, we don't need to exacerbate the problem by designating even more land as National Monument.

Wilderness designation changes the customs and culture of a region. An integral custom in our state is ranching. Grazing cattle has been a livelihood in our state since the King of Spain awarded land grants in 1598. Ranching is what sustains our rural communities and it is no

different in our county. If alternative proposals are approved it would all but eliminate ranching in our county and a vital cowboy culture would be lost. The other fear that we have is that the people's voice will be lost with a simple stroke of the executive pen through the antiquities act. The people's voice needs to be heard.

That's why the majority of our citizens support Congressman Pearce's bill. They understand the economic impact of ranching and how ranchers make other services such as doctors, grocery stores and truck dealers sustainable. And ranching can continue under HR4334. Congressman Pearce has clearly defined the rights of ranchers to graze their cattle and the possibility of new permits being issued in the future. This bill does not get rid of water rights nor does it expand federal water rights. He also definitively allows for the use of mechanized equipment and motorized vehicles for standard ranching operations such as dredging stock tanks, repairing wind mills and checking fences.

This bill makes sense for the residents of Dona Ana County. It protects the Organ Mountains which are an iconic feature of our county, while protecting ranching which is an economic generator in our area. Thank you for your time.