

Testimony for HR 4334

Congressman Steve Pearce

National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee Hearing, June 28, 2012

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to testify in support of HR 4334, the *Organ Mountains National Monument Establishment Act*. The Organ Mountains are a true natural treasure in Southern New Mexico, and one of our state's most pristine, recognizable sites. Everyone believes they must be preserved. And that is the intention of this bill.

One of the most important aspects of this legislation is the strong local support for its end goal. It is imperative that any land management declaration have the backing of the local community. Ranchers, conservationists, public officials and business owners have strong agreement with the aims of this bill. The Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce is supportive. Two witnesses you will hear from today, Dr. Jerry Schicketanz and Matt Rush, live and work in the community, and have played a key role in garnering support for HR 4334. It is a local solution.

Unfortunately, we see the ramifications of monument declarations by presidential edict and the effect they have not only on the economic base of a community, such as the ongoing dispute over cattle grazing in the Grand Staircase-Escalante Monument in Utah, but a declaration with little public input causes the strain and cynicism between individuals the federal government to fester.

Plus, the US Constitution grants the power to determine land management plans to the legislative branch under Article IV. This constitutional authority lends more credibility to the legislative process as a mechanism for making monument and other determinations. It serves as a check on the federal government, and keeps it from abusing local authorities. The legislative process is a highly democratic method of making decisions with long-term policy implications.

It is in this spirit that I sponsored HR 4334. It protects the Organ Mountains permanently from disposal. The Monument will forever be a part of the National Landscape Conservation System. Mineral exploration will be banned permanently. It also allows for motorized vehicles to stay on existing roads and trails designated for their use, allowing the elderly, families with small children and the disabled to access this pristine area. It also allows for the use of mechanized equipment for standard ranching operations and to make repairs to earthen dams for the sake of our watersheds.

The agricultural community shows strong support for this legislation as well. The bill protects current grazing permittees, and ensures that future grazing permits will be issued. This injects regulatory stability into an industry that is oftentimes left behind in the Washington game of special interest posturing. Our local ranchers deserve a regulatory framework that takes their interests into account along with the need to protect our lands.

Existing water rights are also protected, and federal water rights are not expanded. Private landowners who have property surrounded by the monument will have access to their landholdings. The state government will continue to have jurisdiction over fish and game permitting, so that our sportsmen can continue to enjoy the outdoors.

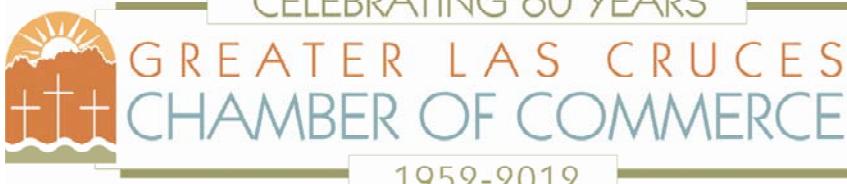
In short, the bill creates a framework for responsible recreation and expanded access all at once. It protects our resources, while guaranteeing that our sportsmen and other outdoor recreational activists

can enjoy this natural area to the greatest extent possible. There are currently 12 national monuments in the state of New Mexico. In 11, there are no weapons or hunting allowed. This is a right that must be protected in any management plan.

Another aspect that the federal government must take into account is the need to ensure law enforcement personnel can access federal lands in pursuit of criminals and for other emergency response needs. The close proximity to the Mexican border makes it even more important that we work to keep this area from becoming a drug or human smuggling corridor. We see in the Organ Pipe National Monument on the Arizona-Mexico border that Park Rangers have to carry weapons, and that tours are often limited to the daytime with armed Parks Service personnel guides. Many parts of the Monument are kept off limits from American tourists because of the danger of running into members of a drug cartel or human smugglers. The environmental degradation of these areas caused by gangs leaving trash and human waste behind is disturbing and sad for those of us who want to enjoy our natural heritage. Seeing what has happened Arizona, and wanting to keep it from happening in New Mexico, the Dona Ana County Sheriff, Todd Garrison, has endorsed HR 4334.

Several potential amendments to the bill have been suggested by citizens in the county to enhance the hunting and security aspects of it. I welcome those suggestions, and am happy to accommodate. Similarly, it has been suggested that a name change to the Organ Mountains-Cox Family Memorial National Monument be considered. The Cox family is a local ranching pioneer family in Dona Ana County, and has been in the area for more than a century. I would gladly consider such a change, along with strengthening recreation language to ensure the greatest amount of responsible access.

Once again, I would like to thank the Chairman, Ranking Member and the rest of the Committee members for the invitation today, and your willingness to consider the Organ Mountains National Monument Establishment Act. I look forward to your questions.



Richard Haas
Chair of the Board

June 26, 2012

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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee of Natural Resources
The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman

1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Bishop:

I am writing in support of H.R. 4334 *Organ Mountains National Monument Establishment Act* currently being introduced by Congressman Steve Pearce (NM-02). This bill is in line with our current position regarding the protection of the Organ Mountains. The Organ Mountains are one of the most widely visible landmarks in the state of New Mexico. H.R. 4334 helps protect and preserve these mountains by establishing them as a National Monument. While there are other proposals in New Mexico that would protect these mountains, H.R. 4334 is the most appropriate way of preserving our heritage for the following reasons:

- It does not compromise our nation's border security
- It preserves the ecological integrity, livestock, watershed and educational resources in the monument area
- It ensures the greatest amount of public recreational access while guaranteeing access to emergency personnel with motorized vehicles
- It allows for continued grazing and the issuance of future grazing permits
- It protects water rights and watersheds
- It promotes economic growth that is vital to our nation's prosperity

It is imperative that we protect our natural treasures from degradation, and that we do so in a democratic process with the greatest amount of public input. As has been our practice, we will continue to listen and vet all perspectives on this issue. We greatly appreciate your support in helping this important legislation take effect soon.

Sincerely,

Richard Haas
Chair of the Board

cc: Committee of Natural Resources
The Honorable Raul M. Grijalva
Ranking Member

Las Cruces District office of Congressman Steve Pearce (NM-02)
Peter Ibarbo
Outreach Director