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March 6, 2008

The Hon. Pete Domenici  
The Hon. Jeff Bingaman  
The Hon. Heather Wilson  
The Hon. Tom Udall  
The Hon. Steve Pearce

**Re: The Proposed Dona Ana County Planned Growth, Open Space and Rangeland Preservation Act**

Dear Senators Domenici and Bingaman and Representatives Wilson, Udall and Pearce:

As Chairman of the Coalition for New Mexico Wilderness, it was my great pleasure to work with the New Mexico Congressional delegation and their staffs on the Ojito Wilderness Act. That legislation was the first citizen-initiated wilderness legislation for New Mexico in nearly 20 years. We built a supporting coalition of over 400 businesses and organizations, including the 1,000-member Albuquerque Visitor and Convention Bureau. We benefited tremendously from the hands-on participation and support of local landowners, ranchers and the Pueblo of Zia. By working carefully and respectfully with all stakeholders, and addressing each of their concerns and interests from the outset, we were able to fashion a legislative package that enjoyed no real opposition of any kind.

That was four years ago. I am no longer Chairman of the Coalition for New Mexico Wilderness, but have continued to watch with interest efforts to promote other wilderness legislation for our state. I have observed with great concern the efforts of the Coalition for Dona Ana Wilderness. That effort suffered from inception because it was driven by wilderness "professionals" who sought to impose their wilderness agenda on the local community without first taking into consideration and responding to the needs and desires of that community. As a result, the efforts of the Coalition for Dona Ana Wilderness have not exhibited any real staying power in the face of hard questions relating to law enforcement, agriculture, urban growth and water management issues. It also failed to include in the deliberative process key elements of the local community and was quite hostile to, or at least dismissive of anyone, particularly ranchers, who raised objections to plans to surround Las Cruces with a large wilderness area.

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Underlying the problems with the Dona Ana County wilderness campaign is the fact that the persons ultimately calling the shots, behind the screen of a legitimate-seeming coalition and local organizers, hail from the most radical wing of the environmental movement. They include persons who founded and participated in EarthFirst, the nation's first eco-terrorist group. They justified using violence to achieve their ends with the motto "No compromise in defense of Mother Earth." That is not the sort of mindset that makes legislation possible, and helps explain why the wilderness community has produced so little new wilderness legislation in New Mexico over the past two decades.

If the wilderness campaign had any positive effect, it was to mobilize the agricultural and business leaders of Dona Ana County. As a result, a very innovative and promising proposal has emerged, originating solely in Dona Ana County, to address the desires of the people of Dona Ana County to preserve their open space, while also respecting the interests of ranchers, farmers, water managers, law enforcement, and others.

I write to ask your support for the Dona Ana County Planned Growth, Open Space, and Rangeland Preservation Act that has been proposed by People for Preserving Our Western Heritage. This proposal would achieve all the conservation objectives of preserving open space in Dona Ana County without causing the logistical and political problems associated with formal designation under the 1964 Wilderness Act.

I attended a presentation of this proposal to the Las Cruces City Council by Frank DuBois, the former New Mexico Secretary of Agriculture. I was impressed with the thoughtfulness and integrity of the presentation. He explained, and I came away convinced, that the Dona Ana County Planned Growth, Open Space, and Rangeland Preservation Act honors all the interests expressed during the stakeholder meetings conducted by the City of Las Cruces.

Lastly, I am very impressed by the strong and meaningful support this proposal is receiving in Dona Ana County. The Coalition for Dona Ana Wilderness "scored" quick endorsements when the community was unaware of problems with wilderness designation and the fact that open space could be protected by other means. Once aware of the alternative proposed by People for Preserving Our Western Heritage, a growing number of initial wilderness supporters have changed their position. The Village of Hatch and the La Union Soil and Water Conservation District are two examples. Additionally, the Coalition for Dona Ana Wilderness, relying on paid staff and a significant advertising budget, amassed only about 200 business and organizational

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supporters (many of whom are now changing their minds). Relying solely on volunteer efforts, People for Preserving Our Western Heritage has won the endorsements of over 650 businesses and an additional significant number of community leaders and important organizations, including the respective Las Cruces and Hatch Valley Chambers of Commerce.

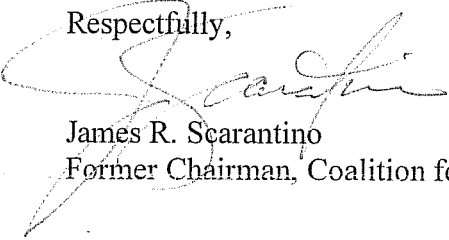
With the possible exception of the effort to protect Valle Vidal, there is more support for the proposal from People for Preserving Our Western Heritage than New Mexico has seen for any other conservation effort in decades,

The Dona Ana County Planned Growth, Open Space, and Rangeland Preservation Act has what is needed for successful conservation legislation. It is exciting to see conservation proposals advanced from unexpected quarters. Professional environmentalists should not be granted a monopoly on conservation efforts. New Mexicans want their beautiful state protected, and we should encourage responsible and innovative local volunteer initiatives like this.

Please consider introducing and working for passage of the Dona Ana County Planned Growth, Open Space, and Rangeland Preservation Act.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and your service to our state and its people.

Respectfully,



James R. Scarantino  
Former Chairman, Coalition for New Mexico Wilderness