

June 20, 2007

Congressman Stevan Pearce
C/o Grant A. Olson
400 Telshor, Suite E
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88011

Richard E. Hays
Chief, Air Operations
U.S. Border Patrol (Retired)
P.O. Box 99
Hachita, New Mexico 88040

Re: Proposed Dona Ana Wilderness

Dear Congressman Pearce:

As the former head of flight operations for the United States Border Patrol, I was intimately involved in the protection of American interests along our border well before the Homeland Security Act was signed into law. Now, as a private, retired citizen I am compelled to call to your attention threats on the Border Patrol and other law enforcement organizations' ability to deal with the control and interdiction of traffic along the southern border of New Mexico.

The current effort to create Wilderness along the border in Dona Ana County and ultimately the expansion of such activities along the extended border is dangerous and ill conceived. As I understand the Homeland Security Act, I believe that the Border Patrol still has the authority to disregard Wilderness status currently, but other law enforcement agencies do not have that same authority. With that stated, I know very well the pressure that Wilderness groups have used to limit the Border Patrol access to areas that include Wilderness Study lands. One such example is the placement and operation of a sensor repeater on the top of Big Hatchet Mountain. I know one was put there because I flew the helicopter that placed it in position. Opposition for the device by environmentalists was so strong that the Border Patrol discontinued using it. Today, in the environment of post 911, there is not a sensor used in that all important section of our border because the Border Patrol bowed to the political pressure of using such a device in that primitive location. Likewise, you are probably familiar with the lawsuits filed by the same groups for the over flight of Wilderness areas by Marine Corps, Air Force, and Border Patrol aircraft.

If the current proponents are saying other things to expedite the process, just wait until the action is signed into law and the same folks will climb back out of the woodwork and start putting pressure on the Patrol. If historical precedence is the order, the Patrol's administration will capitulate, remote sensing and controls will be suppressed, and the

area, especially the West Potrillo area of the effort, will become a major funnel of illegal movement.

Finally, the creation of Wilderness will limit the all-important source of local intelligence. The presence of local citizens in big open areas is very important to the Border Patrol and to the limitation of illegal traffic. Local presence, local calls, local surveillance, and local knowledge of illegal movement are very important. The creation of Wilderness and the resulting and dramatic reduction of the accessing of such areas will reduce and or eliminate this critical source of information and intelligence. As an American citizen and a retired ranking Border Patrol official, that is very disturbing to me. Open space is one thing, but Wilderness is a whole other. Please fight this effort vigorously!

Richard E. Hays