

**Wilderness Press Conference Statement  
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Dona Ana County Rancher  
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**I have here copies of 5 resolutions adopted early last year by the county commission and the governing councils of Las Cruces, Hatch, Mesilla and Sunland Park. Individual members of the commission and councils consider the resolutions moot because Senator Domenici who proposed federal lands legislation in 2005 rejected them.**

**Yet the resolutions are officially still in force. And wilderness proponents still cite them as evidence of support for their own proposals.**

**It's no secret that all the resolutions were adopted based solely on information provided by wilderness activists without notice to or input from the ranchers where proposed wilderness and national conservation areas would be located. I simply cannot understand why our elected officials would not want input from ranchers who have the most knowledge of those areas.**

**What is interesting about the resolutions is that all of them, except the one from the county commission, ask for *“a collaborative effort to consider and come to consensus on which lands to designate as wilderness and which lands to include in the National Conservation Area”*.**

**Then every one of them proceeds to specifically request legislation to designate ten wilderness areas that collectively contain over 325,000 acres, plus more than 100,000 acres of national conservation areas. How could any process to find consensus be successful when the process was prejudiced from the beginning by the unqualified endorsement of specific legislation by the same documents that asked for a consensus finding?**

**Ranchers contended through out the process that none of the areas were really suitable for wilderness and that NCA proposals were too nebulous. We felt the only way to make those determinations was to thoroughly review and discuss each area individually. We were led to**

believe that would happen, but when the process ended not a single area had received meaningful review.

After 17 meetings consisting of presentations from outside “experts” and generally philosophical commentary, the process ended on February 8, 2007 with no consensus for the designation of any wilderness or NCA. However, there was almost unanimous support for maintaining our Organ Mountain views and our open spaces throughout the county. We can do that with legislation other than wilderness that does not restrict our access and prohibit legitimate ranching activities.

In spite of opposing views, I personally am optimistic that this community can find agreement, working with our senators and our congressman, for a plan for each of our special federal land areas. The plan for each area can retain that area’s own special character in a manner that allows us to utilize all its natural resources including forage, wildlife, natural views and recreational values.