

February 18, 2010

To: The Honorable Senators Bingaman and Udall

First, I would like to thank you for taking testimony on Senate Bill 1689 and for holding the hearing in Las Cruces, NM.

My family has lived and worked in southern New Mexico since the 1890's.

As a rancher and a descendent of a ranching family, we've had a lot of experience with "public lands" and the federal land and wildlife management agencies tasked with managing the wildlife and the federal lands.

I've been forced to become some-what of an expert on the federal laws that have changed the way our lands are being managed. Many of these laws, i.e., Federal Land Management Policy Act, Endangered Species Act and Wilderness Act were passed by Congress with the best of intentions. However once the rules were promulgated by the federal agencies tasked with administering these laws and regulations were developed by the federal bureaucracies, somehow the good intentions became onerous "rules" and "regulations" to those who must now live, work and try to make a living under them.

Such is the case of the Wilderness Bill. The intent of the Wilderness Bill was to protect roadless areas of 5000 acres or more. It was also supposed to be an area that was "untrammelled by man", where man himself was a visitor who did not remain.

According to this definition, BLM determined many proposed wilderness areas did not fit the definition of wilderness and recommended they not be included in the wilderness system. Eventually these areas became known as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Unfortunately, it was left up to Congress to make the final determination on the status of these areas. They did not. So today we have wilderness proponents again pushing for wilderness, but this time they are expanding their demands as exemplified by the proposed wilderness areas around Las Cruces.

Because the definition of wilderness and the process has been convoluted through time, I believe the recommendations as proposed by Frank DuBois and the **People for Preserving our Western Heritage makes the most sense.**

It's time Congress come up with an alternative to wilderness that includes clear language protecting grazing, allows "mechanized" uses such as wheel chairs, various climbing equipment, chainsaws, hang gliders, strollers, and bicycles and allows for future mineral development, when done in an ecological sustainable manner.

The only area in Senate Bill 1689 that should be considered for wilderness is the Oregon Mountains. None of the other areas belong in the bill.

I am opposed to Senate Bill 1689 as it is currently written and ask you to reconsider your bill based on the historical definition of wilderness and the true intent of the Wilderness Act.

However, the best alternative would be to work with the People for Preserving our Western Heritage and come up with another designation for these areas we would all like to protect from subdivision and development.

Sincerely,

Judy Keeler