

Senate Bill 1689 Written Testimony  
February 18, 2010  
Jerry G. Schickedanz, Chairman  
People For Preserving Our Western Heritage

I wish to have this written testimony entered into the official record of input for Senate Bill 1689, Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act.

The People For Preserving Our Western Heritage supports the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce position as stated in their letter to Senator Bingaman, October 20, 2009. We do not support S. 1689 as it is currently written for the following reasons.

First and foremost, the lands proposed for Wilderness designation do not meet the intent of the 1964 Wilderness Act. These lands represent open space that New Mexico and the western states are noted for, but fall short of meeting the letter of the law contained in the 1964 Wilderness Act. These lands were evaluated by the Bureau of Land Management and extensive acreage was not recommended for Wilderness designation. Currently S. 1689 includes lands that were not deemed adequate to be evaluated for wilderness designation such as Broad Canyon. Therefore, we do not support S. 1689 as written.

Further, if protection is what is desirable for these open spaces, then we strongly suggest that other means of protection be utilized. For example, Senator Bingaman and then Congressman Udall supported a bill to protect the Valle Vidal acreage in 2006. This bill withdrew the federal land from disposal, mineral exploration. Access was allowed on designated roads. This was touted by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance as a means to protect these lands forever. We suggest that land in Dona Ana County can be protected in the same manner without wilderness designation.

In addition, when the wilderness designation prohibitions of no motorized or mechanical equipment are enacted, it leads to another set of problems. Law Enforcement and Border Patrol do not have easy and full access to these lands. This creates a multitude of problems with creating a safe haven for illegal entry, catching illegal drugs and people. The reduced access decreases the ability of Law Enforcement and Border Patrol to protect our nation from potential terrorist attacks.

Further more, the reduced access leads to resource protection and improvement becoming difficult or non-existent, the potential loss of revenue on state lands, and the inability to adequately manage flood waters is increased.

For these and additional problems and concerns, I strongly ask the committee negotiators to come back to Dona Ana County and sit down with leadership on all sides of this issue and prepare amendments to S.1689 that will more adequately address local concerns on access, border security, flood water management, grazing, ecosystem management and alternative land protection.