

July 19, 2007

Stevan Pearce
Member of Congress
New Mexico – District 2
400 Telshor Ste E
Las Cruces, New Mexico
88001

Pete Domenici
U.S. Senator, State of NM
201 3rd Street, NW
St. 710
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Jeff Bingaman
U.S. Senator, State of NM
Loretto Town Centre
505 S. Main, St 148
Las Cruces, NM 88001

RE: Dona Ana Wilderness

Gentlemen:

I am a retired Deputy Chief of both the United States Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. I served the USDA for over 32 years in a succession of capacities. Twenty of those years were spent in Washington, D.C. including three years on the staff of the Secretary of Agriculture. I had direct contact with two of you during my time there.

I have been made aware of the effort to create 300,000-600,000 acres of wilderness in Dona Ana County, New Mexico. Since I am a native of southwestern New Mexico, I have a pretty fair idea of the nature of the land proposed, but my letter is not intended to debate those wilderness characteristics. My letter and concern stem from my experience with wilderness designation in terms of how lands are administered. Senator Domenici, you, perhaps more than anyone, knows how wilderness legislation has worked. Each designation is a new Act of Congress and each has specific requirements that have made the administration and management of that area extremely difficult. There is such an absence of consistency that Forest Service policy (and BLM and Park Service as well) is essentially rewritten for that particular designation. What a difficult position this has created for the land management agencies. The relationships with stakeholders and the public alike have suffered. The only constant is the distrust that each group has built in the relationship they have with the agency. To recognize this you only need to review the amount of budgets that are tied to litigation. At a minimum, our country has expended more capital in all forms than any of us ever imagined in the nominal effort to preserve special features of our land.

The Dona Ana situation is really very complex. There is already a retirement of several thousand sections of land for government use, and there is a very real issue of national security along the Mexican border. As a now retired, private citizen who has roots in that area for nearly 125 years, I, too, would love to see the Organs preserved along with the open space that makes southwestern New Mexico special. The wilderness creation, however, is a divisive designation that has a better alternative for those on both sides of the equation that must both administer and live with the results.

Sincerely,

William L. Rice
USDA, Retired

CC: People for the Protection of Western Heritage