

January 21, 2007

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An open letter to the New Mexico Congressional Delegation

Dear Senators and Representatives:

I am honored to be an advisor and member of Doña Ana County's **People for Preserving Our Western Heritage** and its **Coalition for Preserving Our Western Heritage and Open Space**. I am well acquainted with a number of the members. I am also familiar with their efforts, and I am impressed by the support shown by the community for the coalition and their proposed legislation.

Most of the support for Federal Wilderness and National Conservation Area (NCA) designations in Doña Ana County seems to have come about in late 2005 and early 2006. It came from people who had heard only one side of the story, the side of the "wilderness" proponents claiming then as now that Federal Wilderness and NCA designations are the only way to protect the land and preserve the open space of certain lands in that county. Today, the pro wilderness coalition lists approximately 220 businesses compared to some 170 a year ago.

By contrast, the **Coalition for Preserving Our Western Heritage and Open Space** has grown very rapidly in the past few months and now includes an impressive listing of endorsements from land management professionals, including two former presidents of New Mexico State University, plus a number of former NMSU department heads and high level Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service officials. Organizational endorsements include New Mexico and Dona Ana County Farm and Livestock Bureaus, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, Farm Credit of New Mexico, the 840-

member Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, Las Cruces Four-Wheel Drive Club, Mesilla Valley Sportsmen's Alliance, New Mexico Cattle and Wool Growers organizations, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, Paragon Foundation, National Association of Former Border Patrol Agents, La Union Soil and Water Conservation District, and other organizations. In addition, the listing currently reflects in excess of 550 businesses, including many of the major businesses and employers in Las Cruces and the county. The list continues to grow as the citizens hear the other side of the story and learn the facts.

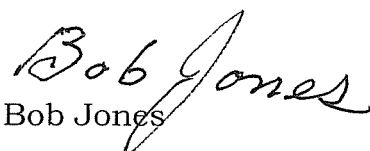
I believe it must be recognized that the business community in Dona Ana County strongly supports this effort. The legislation was drafted based on the concerns and expectations of the community for the retention of open space, community growth and development, and the management, access, and use of the affected lands, without the imposition of restrictive Federal Wilderness designations.

The proposed legislation, titled **DOÑA ANA COUNTY PLANNED GROWTH, OPEN SPACE AND RANGELAND PRESERVATION ACT** was submitted to you, our Congressional delegation, on December 5, 2007 by **People For Preserving Our Western Heritage** and is supported by its coalition. The legislation is unique and innovative in its approach and comes from the public and the ranchers faced with the possibility of enormously more restrictive land designations in the presence of a growing community opposed to such restrictions. It has huge implications for Doña Ana County, but it doesn't stop there.

The act introduces the concept of Rangeland Preservation Areas and Special Preservation Areas and offers flexibility in land protection measures previously unavailable to local citizens. Specific provisions of the Rangeland Preservation Areas and Special Preservation Areas can be modified based on the local circumstances and conditions anywhere federal lands dominate the landscape. **The concept offers hope to those who are impacted and hope to those who believe that certain land characteristics need more specific management or protection.**

This is a concept that the West needs. I implore you to work to bring about introduction and passage of the proposed legislation. **Its time has come . . .**

Respectfully submitted,


Bob Jones

Rancher, Otero County, NM
President, Paragon Foundation, Inc.
Past President, NM Cattle Growers Assn.