

3007 Bowman St.
Las Cruces, NM 88005
July 23, 2007

Senator Pete V. Domenici
Attn: Callie Gibson
201 N 3rd St NW Ste 710
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Dear Senator Domenici,

I am writing to express my opinion concerning the current proposal to designate part of Dona Ana County, New Mexico as a national wilderness. I have lived in Dona Ana County 46 years and served on the faculty of NMSU for 39 years. I have worked closely with the livestock industry of the state, having served as a state extension livestock specialist for ten years and as Animal Science department head at NMSU for 15 years. I have heard or read about most of the reasons on both sides of the wilderness issue, and in my opinion, a wilderness designation of the areas in question would be a big mistake. It would not even serve the desires of the pro-wilderness group, and it would be a disaster for the ranches involved.

I have enjoyed real wilderness experiences in the Gila Wilderness and the Pecos Wilderness. For many years my department, through the efforts and supervision of Dr. Joe Armstrong, conducted packing and outfitting classes consisting of weeklong pack trips, usually to the Gila, in which participants gained tremendous knowledge and appreciation from a true wilderness experience. They also learned the care, use and packing of horses which enabled them to travel further and more comfortably than on foot. Only primitive trails exist and no motorized vehicle or equipment are allowed. Travel is strenuous and when injuries occur, help is seldom nearby.

I love the wildernesses we already have and believe that the proposed areas in Dona Ana County do not qualify for wilderness designation and would make a mockery of the Wilderness Act. These areas have already been studied for years for potential wilderness designation, but none meet the criteria outlined in the Wilderness Act. The old saying "you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear" well fits the current situation.

I, too, would hope to protect these areas from exploitation by uses that would be detrimental to the environment. The quality of life of our citizens to enjoy the open vistas and have the opportunity for access can be better accomplished by other means already being used to protect other areas. The withdrawal of the Valle Vidal in Colfax County is a good example of an area being protected from exploitation. I hope that common sense will prevail regarding this issue. It appears that many who advocate for a Dona Ana County Wilderness don't understand that the restrictions regarding use of wilderness would keep most people out of it. Sure they can look at it from the highway, but lacking motorized access, most would not be able to go there.

I speak as a concerned citizen who is well acquainted with environmental issues and the stewardship of our rangeland being provided by our ranchers. I don't want to see the criteria for "Wilderness" changed, just because poorly informed citizens see an opportunity to use such designation to accomplish some of their desires. The proposed areas should be considered separately and protected by the most appropriate means available for each site.

Sincerely,

Bobby J. Rankin, Ph.D