

July 16, 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

Dear Representative Pearce, Senator Domenci and Senator Bingaman:

I ranch on public lands in Grant County. I have been watching the developing proposal of wilderness creation in Dona Ana County and I am concerned. The study, "Economic and Social Importance of Cattle Ranching in Southwest New Mexico," was done by the Southwest Center for Resource Analysis at WNMU. Please review this study before you act on any legislation.

In the study, it was concluded that raising grazing fees on public lands "would jeopardize small and medium ranch operations, eliminating profits to small ranchers." One of the measurements of the study was to assess expenses and add them to AUM costs. The intent was to correlate AUM costs against other ranching location and ownership comparisons. One conclusion was that "the public land rancher is paying his fair share" as compared to other ranching ownerships. The report further concluded that "Cattle production is a viable base industry and an important corner stone to economic development in southwest New Mexico. The agenda before us is to work our ways to utilized the natural resources and provide opportunities - not restrictions- to capitalize on the human capital in resource use and stewardship. As Aldo Leopold noted years ago:

What conservation education must build is an ethical underpinning for land economics and a universal curiosity to understand the land mechanism. Conservation may then follow . . ."

The study has a profound bearing on the current debate of wilderness in Dona Ana County. Various writings found in the People for the Preservation of Western Heritage's web site describe why operating costs will go up on these wilderness areas. Those costs added to AUM costs similarly in the study will effectively drive up grazing fees and the Dona Ana ranchers, especially small and medium producers, will have profits eliminated. I must agree with the WNMU study. Ranches have a place in the social structure of Southwestern New Mexico. They are one of the few examples that have stood the test of time in Leopold's assessment of "an ethical underpinning for land economics and a universal curiosity to understand the land mechanism." We believe that what is happening in Dona Ana County will eventually affect all of us on public lands where the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance has inventoried wilderness candidates. We ask that you review this issue very carefully. Our livelihood and future are affected by your actions.

Respectfully,

Dusty Hunt

CC: Laura Schneberger, President of Grant County Cattle Growers Association

