

November 20, 2007

Pete Domenici
U.S. Senator, State of NM
New Mexico – District 2
400 Telshor Ste E
Las Cruces, NM 88001

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

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

RE: Dona Ana Wilderness; Outfitter perspective; water

Gentlemen:

We have an outfitting business in Dona Ana County that provides horses and guided services for folks who want to enjoy the open spaces of this area. We operate out of the Corralitos Ranch and we are hopeful that this is a business that will only get better with time. We have a wide variety of people who want to experience an equine adventure set amidst the immensity of federal, state, and private lands that we have access to in this county. We have a fair understanding of the type of people that seek our services and it may surprise you that the majority of these people seek not wilderness, but simply open space. In their minds, the term wilderness is commingled and implicit in open space. Those of us who have duties and responsibilities on these lands, though, know there is a world of difference in official designation of wilderness and open space.

To our knowledge, there is only one naturally occurring permanent water source on the west side of the Mesilla Valley from the Rio Grande to the county line. There are several seasonal seeps, but they are not permanent in that they are reliant on periods of rainfall to appear. **All other waters, all of them, are there because ranchers have been involved in placing them and maintaining them.** We rely on these waters in this business and we know the significance of these waters to wildlife and livestock alike. When it is 100° in our country, every man and or beast knows that the life blood of that big old dry country is reliant on those rancher maintained waters.

You are contemplating a plan to put 300,000 acres of this land in wilderness status. We have heard the rebuttals of how the ranchers are going to be able to service all the waters that are on the proposed areas, but there is great trepidation on the part of people believing that. Aside from the fact what a shame it is that people don't believe their government, the better idea is to look at the rancher proposed alternative. The Rangeland Preservation Area seeks to maintain these open spaces into perpetuity. It allows the ranchers to manage these waters, and it attempts to maintain a tie to the social fabric that these lands have today. Give this a close look. Remember, in the eyes of the visitor to our lands, wilderness and open space are one and the same. Why not do something that has in mind the perpetuation of the true stewards of these lands?

Sincerely,

Billy Prewitt

Becky Biggs