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SPECIAL EDITION ON BINGAMAN'S WILDERNESS BILL

Today Senator Bingaman will present his Wilderness bill, S. 1024, to the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests. This legislation would designate as Wilderness over 240,000 acres on or near our border with Mexico.

Since most folks don't have the opportunity to testify or to meet with the Senator, we put out a few emails and asked folks for their comments. The response was overwhelming.

There's no way I could post them all, so I've tried to eliminate duplicates (although Border Security is mentioned by almost everyone) and emphasize comments from Dona Ana County or its environs, or from those who have experience with border issues. Plus I've just run out of time.

What follows are sometimes edited comments, plus excerpts from letters opposing S. 1024 sent to the Subcommittee by the National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers, the Dona Ana County Sheriff, the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce and the Dona Ana Soil & Water Conservation District.

My family has been called the "First family of Wilderness" because they were the first family in the nation evicted from federal wilderness. I am told that their mistreatment is the reason that grazing language was inserted into the Wilderness Act. What am I supposed to believe? Is it Mr. Bingaman's word that grazing will continue in his border bill, or is it what the government did to my family?...**Mayci McKindree Lee, 14 year old, seventh generation New Mexican ranching descendent and great-great-great-great granddaughter of pioneer Gila wilderness rancher, Peter McKindree Shelley**

My Dear Senator; Please listen to the voices of reason and common sense! Securing the NM Border is a top priority. The designation of additional Federal protected land will only make it harder for law enforcement to monitor the increased criminal activity on the NM Border. Concentrate on job creation not a legacy of creating vast stretches of land designated for Wilderness...**William Mattiace, Former Mayor, City of Las Cruces, NM**

I am opposed to S1024 because it ignores the BLM wilderness studies conducted pursuant to FLPMA. The Las Uvas WSA and the Robledos WSA were found not suitable for Wilderness designation. The Broad Canyon area between those two WSAs was found to have insufficient wilderness characteristics to warrant WSA designation and further study. These three areas included in S1024 for permanent Wilderness designation are major Rio Grande watersheds that contribute to frequent downstream flooding. They have been identified as probable non-point sources of e coli bacterial contamination of the river during storm event runoff. Experts associated with the Paso del Norte Watershed Council are studying the feasibility of designing and constructing series of small drainage retention devices throughout the watershed in lieu of traditional large earthen dams to mitigate both flooding and bacterial contamination. These innovative practices would not be allowed under Wilderness designation...**Tom Mobley, Rancher**

The National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers is opposed to S. 1024. This legislation seeks to create 242,000 acres of wilderness designations on or near our border with Mexico and deny all but the most minimal use of motorized vehicles, even for routine patrol. Prohibition against the use of mechanical equipment will consequently prevent the deployment of mobile surveillance systems, remote cameras, electronic detection devices and other tools critical to maintaining operational control of the area in question. Approval will restrict unfettered access to Border Patrol Agents and their equipment to a strip of land only five miles wide from the border. By Federal statute the Border Patrol has the right to enter private property within twenty-five miles of the border and we find it astonishing that Congress would choose to limit this to five miles on Federal property...**Letter to Subcommittee Chairman Wyden from Kent Lundgren, Chairman, National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers**

I am against S.1024. If the Potrillos are made wilderness, the Lazy E will become the doormat from Mexico. My home will be signpost on the trail north. Reckon these senators will request armed guards when they want to have supper with me?"...**Leonard Goad, Ranch Foreman, Butterfield Trail Ranch**

While I agree we should ensure the lands defined in Senator Bingaman's Wilderness Bill should never be developed, I strongly feel the Wilderness designation is too restrictive jeopardizing Border Security, public safety and flood control of surrounding population centers, and meaningful public access. These lands can be protected in more reasonable and less restrictive ways....**Tom Hutchinson, Restaurant Owner, former Chair, Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce**

I am opposed to Senate Bill 1024 because of my personal knowledge of and field experience with the rangeland of southern Dona Ana county, New Mexico. This area needs ecosystem inputs to mitigate woody plant encroachment occurring on these rangelands. Active management inputs are functionally not allowed under wilderness designation. S. 1024 relegates these lands to a future of continual grassland degradation, soil exposure and erosion, resulting in a deteriorated watershed and a downward spiral in rangeland health...**Chris Allison, Dept. Head, Ext. Animal Sci. & Nat. Res., NMSU**

The federal government has been derelict in its constitutional mandate to protect the borders of the United States. S1024 is reckless and irresponsible legislation which will further jeopardize our national security. There is already evidence of human and drug smuggling in the prescribed area (which does not meet the criteria of the Wilderness Act of 1964), and a wilderness designation will guarantee an increase in illegal activity which endangers public safety. This administration and Congress cannot be trusted to honor any MOUs or promises to law enforcement; therefore, I urge you to defeat S1024...**Carol P. Richardson, Retired School Teacher**

As the duly elected Sheriff of Dona Ana County, New Mexico, I write in opposition to S. 1024 which would designate over 240,000 acres as Wilderness in southern New Mexico. The Wilderness Act of 1964 prohibits the use of motorized vehicles, mechanical devices and structures in all Wilderness areas. Such prohibitions would stymie my department's efforts to protect the public safety. Furthermore, given the recent problems of drug and human trafficking from Mexico, it would seem the height of folly to place such restrictions on law enforcement in this border area...**Letter to Subcommittee Chairman Wyden from Todd Garrison, Dona Ana County Sheriff**

I am opposed to S. 1024 because it will cause the loss of access to wilderness areas by all segments of the population, greatly hamper efforts by the Border Patrol and law enforcement to carry out their missions, impose severe limits on ranching and grazing operations, severely limit recreational opportunities, endanger sensible flood control projects, cause severe restrictions on firefighting and search and rescue operations, and greatly limit potential future growth opportunities on federal land. The areas that are proposed to be wilderness do not qualify as wilderness due to the historical use of, and access to, these allotments. The major proponents of this bill are those that oppose free enterprise, and seek to greatly reduce, if not nearly eliminate any private or public use of federal lands. That is clearly not a sensible, prudent approach to land management, in this time of severe economic crisis worldwide, and less and less U.S. access to resources in an increasingly hostile world. If we are to survive as a nation, we must protect our borders from foreign, illegal encroachment, and develop the natural resources we possess in this country...**Phil Harvey, Jr., Mesilla Business Owner**

I am strongly opposed to S.1024 for many reasons, including the fact that it would create Wilderness in two Wilderness Study Areas totaling about 30,000 acres which Interior Dept. determined are lacking in Wilderness characteristics and recommended they be returned to multiple use status (the Las Uvas and Robledo Mountains areas). In addition, S.1024 would create Wilderness in two areas which Interior Dept. studied and left in multiple use status, also totaling about 30,000 acres, again due to lack of Wilderness characteristics (the E. Potrillo Mountains and Broad Canyon areas). S.1024 would override these realistic conclusions of the Interior Dept. drawn after studying the areas for 15 years, from 1976 to 1991, and would ignore the strong opposition of the real stakeholders. With more than 100 million acres of Wilderness already created, why is Senator Bingaman so determined to ignore his Dona Ana County constituents and force S.1024 on us with staged committee hearings falsely claiming broad community support? We deserve better! Please stop S.1024 from moving forward...**Tom Cooper, Rancher**

Taking the word "wilderness" out of the title of S 1024, does not change the fact that this bill is a wilderness bill that is attempting to create and restore lands to wilderness characteristics. This bill is an insult to Wilderness Act of 1964. Wilderness areas are supposed to be already pristine and untouched by man. This bill completely ignores the very basic fact that most of the 242,000 acres in your bill were carefully and professionally studied by unbiased professionals and declared as unfit for the designation as wilderness. But, you know that and do not care. This bill and your one sided "hearing" is just catering to the green gangsters that do not care one bit about the security of our borders, our economy, and want to close all of our precious public lands to most Americans. Hopefully, this perversion of the Wilderness Act will be stopped in the House of Representatives. Please retire early...**Fred Huff, Outdoor Recreation**

The Greater Las Cruces, NM Chamber of Commerce, representing approximately 1,000 businesses, has strongly opposed Senator Bingaman's efforts to designate our community's lands as "Wilderness" in the former S. 1689 and now its current reincarnation of S. 1024...Until Senator Bingaman can answer our concerns regarding these important issues, we stand in strong in opposition to S. 1024...**Letter to Subcommittee Chairman Wyden from John Hummer, Government Affairs, Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce**

I am opposed to the wilderness bill S.1024 because the bill as written does not allow for routine access by law enforcement personnel. The proposed wilderness areas on the border will become safe sanctuaries for human and drug smugglers. Law Enforcement Officers in Dona Ana County face many problems in carrying out their duties and to have another unnecessary law forced on them will be devastating...**LeeAnn Evans, Spouse of former law enforcement employee**

I am opposed to S.1024 because of the severe restrictions it places on law enforcement efforts and the negative impact it will have on border security for our community. I am also opposed to this legislation because of the severe restrictions on access to the areas involved, and because of the harmful restrictions placed on the ranchers that operate in these areas...**Jodi Denning Horse Owner/Breeder**

Senator Jeff Bingaman's bill S-1024 is a further government intrusion into the rights of all citizens by depriving them access to areas covered by this unacceptable bill. It is a "land grab" and would be very detrimental to our state and nation...**Mary C. Fuller, businesswoman**

I am opposed to S. 1029 because it's unnecessary as the land is already protected and further restricting it and depriving it's routine use to law enforcement is contrary to border security. Also, as one who uses some of this area for recreation and exploring, I'm concerned that if I should fall or encounter some other catastrophe no one can come to my aid except on foot or horseback. It is a bad and short sighted bill with no "up side." **W.J Haynes, Sportsmen**

The addition of more Wilderness land designations on or near the border between the United States and Mexico is one of the most ill conceived ideas that Congress will ever be asked to consider. What could possibly be the rationale to effectively legislate away the lawful presence of the Border Patrol and all other law enforcement agencies to the extent that they are denied all but the most insignificant access to areas so critical to the defense of our national security and the health and safety of our citizens. Passage into law of this proposed legislation is not in the best interests of our national security and must be opposed by all legitimate means...**Gene Wood, Border Patrol Chief Patrol Agent (Ret.), Trustee of the National Border Patrol Museum, Dona Ana County Resident**

Senator, close to 85% of Dona Ana County and this District is federal land under the management of the Bureau of Land Management. The Lower Rio Grande Watershed includes all lands that drain into the Rio Grande from Caballo Dam to the Texas state line near El Paso, TX, the majority of which are federal lands. Our concern is about access. Your Senate Bill 1024 will eliminate the District's access to key areas of this watershed to perform any watershed restoration projects aimed at improving watershed health and/or providing for effective stormwater management to preserve our natural resources and provide for the safety and welfare of our public and property...**Letter to Subcommittee Chairman Wyden from Joe Delk, Chairman, Dona Ana County Soil & Water Conservation District**

I am opposed to S.1024 because it will become a super highway for illegal entry into the USA and deny access to the Border Patrol and other law enforcement. This area will become another Organ Pipes Cactus National Monument as in Arizona. Secondly, I am a sportsman and hunter. My access to prime quail area would be denied...**Patrick Dunnahoo**

The membership and Board of the Las Cruces T.E.A. Party (Doña Ana County) stand firmly in opposition to passage of S.1024. We believe the members of organizations, businesses, and individuals opposed to the legislation greatly outnumber those in favor of the legislation, many of whom are not even residents of Doña Ana County. Our members are greatly concerned about the impacts of S.1024 including loss of access, on border security, on our ranching community, on health of the land, and on recreational opportunities, flood control, and beneficial use of flood waters. S.1024 is seen by our members and by our citizens as potentially extremely detrimental to our community and our agricultural heritage. We ask that the legislation be withdrawn from any further consideration...**Debra White, President, Las Cruces T.E.A. Party**

I am opposed to S1024 because it is not widely supported by the citizens. The government controls too much land in Dona Ana county already. The bill will put too much pressure on our farmland for future growth and the land in question needs to be accessible for multiple uses.
Martin Porter, business owner

I am vehemently opposed to S1024. This bill has been pushed by our two Senators in an attempt to confiscate public land and take it out of our reach. There are a number of reasons to not make this a Wilderness area: 1) The southern border needs to be protected from those who want to enter our country illegally. 2) The area needs to be made available to companies and private enterprise that can make use of the resources and bring revenue into the state treasury . 3) The federal government already has confiscated too much of our state. 4) The way of life of those living in the area needs to be protected over the animals and plants that live there. 5) The politicians need to listen to the citizens of this area who have repeatedly said they don't want this to be a wilderness and are happy with the present disposition of the land as a managed area. These are only a few of the reasons that this bill should be tabled. I, as a long time New Mexico resident, am greatly offended by Senator Bingaman 's " my way or the highway" attitude."...**Scott LaFon, TorC**

I am opposed to S.1024, as it will be putting our nations security at risk, If wilderness designation is implemented in southern Dona Ana County along the US New Mexico border, we then may be facing the same devastation as southern Arizona. More jeopardy & expense for our citizens...**Brenda Allen, Rancher, Realtor**

S.1024 is the same bill as the original Wilderness Bill with only minor changes. New Mexicans in the majority rejected S.1689 despite Bingaman and Udall's claims otherwise. It's a travesty that we in NM must fight again against a bill that will shut us out of land that for the most part doesn't even meet the criteria for Wilderness. The new bill does not address border security and therefore will create a brand new Drug Corridor for the Southwest...**Betty Russell, Business Owner**

I'm opposed to S.1024 simply because it ranks border and national security below the desire to preserve public lands too near the border. Areas where the Border Patrol cannot have free access do NOT belong ANYWHERE near our borders...**Claude E. Guyant, retired US Border Patrol Agent, former Immigration Attache, Central & South America, Dona Ana County Resident.**

I write in opposition to S.1024 which would limit law enforcement of the New Mexico/Mexico border, lock up natural resources, and shut down access to public land...**Crystal Diamond, Sierra Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisor**

As the wife of a Potrillo corridor rancher, border wilderness scares me to death. Think of the implications of that . . . why does any American have to fear the actions of his or her government? I am against S.1024."...**Kathy Wilmeth, wife of Potrillo Mountain corridor rancher, Steve Wilmeth.**

S.1024 is very much a concern to all of us who make a living on or near the border. The more we learn about Arizona, the more alarmed we become regarding prospects of violence on ALL expanses of federal lands that limit full and unencumbered access by Border Patrol. At this time, ALL plans for federal lands status changes in Hidalgo, Luna, and Dona Ana Counties, New Mexico must be put on hold. This is a matter of national security and we ask that you consider the dangerous situation in which we find ourselves.”...**Walt Anderson, Rancher, Hidalgo Soil & Water Conservation District**

And our friends in Arizona issue a warning.

My beloved southeast Arizona homeland has been devastated by federal government policy starting with the designation of federal Wilderness. Senator Bingaman's S.1024 will only hasten the expansion of the same smuggling corridors that we now have in Arizona. Wake up Congress!...**Joe Dreyfuss, Tucson area businessman and talk show host**

A wilderness area on the US - Mexico border is a cruel joke. There is no way the United States government can protect the supposed wilderness values of land along the border when the countryside is overrun with illegal aliens and drug smugglers. We have the Pajarita Wilderness Area just west of Nogales. The area is covered with illegal immigrant trails, empty water bottles, discarded backpacks, and littered with spent automatic weapon bullet shells. At the end of last May illegal aliens started what they claimed was a "distress fire" which burned most of the wilderness area to ashes. Wilderness Areas impede securing our border. No new roads can be constructed, the fence cannot be completed, and Border Patrol access is limited to horseback and foot travel. Wilderness areas are open doors into the US for illegal aliens and drug smugglers. Large areas of federal-managed lands are damaged as a result of putting protecting alleged wilderness areas ahead of protecting national security. Those who advocate wilderness areas at the border are really opposing protecting national security from the Mexican drug cartels...**Hugh Holub, an attorney who blogs at the Tucson Citizen newspaper.**

Posted by Frank DuBois at [4:49 AM](#)