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RE: Dona Ana Wilderness; where wilderness, land management agencies, environmental groups, and ranchers collide, ranchers lose

U.S. Senator Pete Domenici

In the letters and the web site of the People for Preserving Our Western Heritage, there are references to the conflict that arises when wilderness is designated on federal lands. In particular, the statement reads, "Where wilderness, land management agencies, environmental groups, and ranchers collide, ranchers lose". I understand that statement intimately because I have lived life in that conflict.

I am a descendent of Peter M. Shelley who settled in the Gila 15 years before the area was declared a forest reserve. P.M. Shelley arrived when there were no fences, no infrastructure, no nothing. . . He was one of the forces in building this community and establishing the ranching industry in southwestern New Mexico. He was a man of integrity, a man who extended credit to the community to the point of his own jeopardy, and left a legacy that few will understand. He fought the ravages of weather, Indians, no markets, wild cattle, financial collapse, predation, and such uncertainty that fewer yet will ever comprehend. The most negative constraint in our ability to persevere for the past 123 years on this same ranch, though, has been the Forest Service and the implications of ranching on federal lands. For example, in a move at the end of the depression (a time we could ill afford the loss), the Forest Service, by the stroke of a pen, removed 90 sections of land at the head of Mogollon Creek from our allotment. A similar action was taken at the head of Sycamore and the East Fork of Mogollon Creek. Our operation has long ceased to exist in the core of what is now the Gila Wilderness. In fact there isn't a cow there and there are few cows in historic allotments around that core.

We can't live long enough to understand the whole picture, but we know that there is a world of difference in our ability to ranch and make long term strategic decisions from those of our counterparts on private lands. We don't have the ability to expand water systems, we can't develop enterprise alternatives that would keep us healthier financially so we could capitalize and we will never develop wealth adequate to fully install the management systems that our experience and understanding of this land suggests. Every avenue we turn to there are federal constraints or outright road blocks. Those of us who understand this recognize the benefits that are lost in the process. We have survived by becoming very good at operating

with one hand tied behind our backs.

This is my home. I won't leave, but I see a very difficult future for those that come after me. Wilderness, wolf reintroduction, escalating environmental demands, and a relentless turnstile of land agency managers make this a task of despair at times. At the end of the day, though, I know that my presence is important in the greater scheme of things. On my watch we will not sell out or subdivide. We will maintain the high ground in our steadfast belief that this land must have stewards that are committed to the long run. We arrived here before the Forest Service and we have prevailed, but "where wilderness, land management agencies, environmental groups, and ranchers collide, ranchers (one by one) lose." It's a fact.

Sincerely,


Terrell Shelley

916 Ranch, Grant County, New Mexico