

July 5, 2007

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

RE: Dona Ana Wilderness, **Attention Grant A. Olson**

Dear Representative Pearce:

Our Great great grandfather, Peter McKindree Shelley, trailed cattle from Texas through Dona Ana County and on to Grant County in 1884. He ranched on Mogollon Creek and ran cattle in what is now the Gila National Forest (and the Gila Wilderness) until his death in 1935. His story is an epic western saga as he faced drought, fought Indians, struggled with inadequate financing, faced ruin in the depression, built a mercantile business, extended credit, and fathered a family that in every sense reflects the spirit of native sons and daughters of the American West. His grandsons are featured in a New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum as the “Shelley Brothers” who worked through the depression to save the ranch, the 916, for no compensation. He preceded the Gila Wilderness, he faced the ravages of wolves and grizzly bears, he built a cow herd from wild cattle in that same wilderness, he knew the forest when it had essentially one forest guard, Henry Woodrow, and he built a family that remained awed by the allure of what true wilderness was before the Forest Service grew into the monster agency that it now is. It would be so interesting to see his reaction to the conditions that exist now.

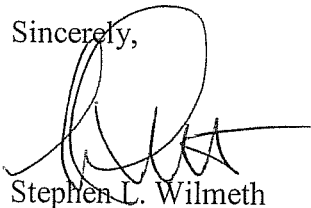
Today, 123 years after P.M. Shelley came to New Mexico there are still a few of his descendents trying to make a living in ranching, but they are largely scattered away from the Gila Valley. The wilderness had something to do with that result. My wife and I had to leave New Mexico for nearly 20 years in order to come home and try to ranch. We now ranch west of Las Cruces and face this new threat to our business, the Dona Ana wilderness proposal. We are well aware of the attrition that results when wilderness and ranchers collide. We are products of it.

Our ranch does not lay within any WSA or any current wilderness area proposals, but we do lie within the greater New Mexico Wilderness Alliance’s inventory of wilderness lands. We have every reason to believe that if the first wave is successful the second wave will get done and we will be in the same predicament that our colleagues face today. More specifically, we believe we will be impacted very profoundly with conditions created by those proposals. **First**, there is the issue of spill over from public access following the creation of 300,000 acres of wilderness. In this county and directly adjacent to it, there are Ft. Bliss, McGregor Range, White Sands National Monument, the Greater White Sands Missile Range (that includes Stallion, Oscura, etc.), the San Andres wildlife area, the Jornada, the NMSU ranch, and, if the proponents succeed, 300,00-600,000 acres of wilderness. Each of those entities has the right to close access. Those of us remaining stand there in the onslaught of remaining public access. We may have

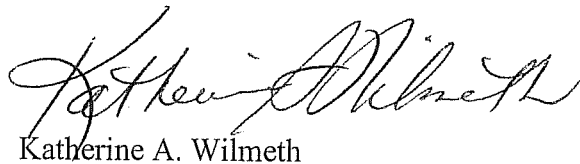
substantial amounts of private lands, but our ability to control access in the maize of checker boarding is greatly reduced and impossible. **Second**, we are aware of the reality of attraction and funneling of illegals that occurs when wilderness is established on the Mexican border (Cabeza Prieta in Arizona). We lay due north of the West Potrillo segment of the current proposal. Our ranch would feel the full impact of that funneling. The Uvas Valley and the town of Hatch would feel the further effects of the same. **Third**, we find ourselves yet again in the crosshairs of the United States and some conditionally valid reason to extract land from private enterprise activities. You know full well what the United States did to ranchers in the Tularosa Basin and at McGregor. They were all extracted for the greater good. We know what your position is on property rights therefore we can trust your actions and your judgment regarding them, but we do not trust the actions of the United States in the same regard. The track record in our part of the country has been criminal!

There is not an example that we are aware of where the long term sanctity of property rights has survived in the face of the general public versus ranchers or of the United States / wilderness versus ranchers. . . not one success (the Hage Case notwithstanding). That is extremely frightening to us and it should be to all citizens. We ask that you stand tough, but we are very pessimistic of this and other issues where the new fourth Branch of Government (the Radical Church of Environmentalism) operates.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen L. Wilmeth', with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

Stephen L. Wilmeth

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katherine A. Wilmeth', with a large, stylized initial 'K'.

Katherine A. Wilmeth

CC: Senators Bingaman and Domenici