

November 12, 2007

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RE: Dona Ana Wilderness; the Rangeland Preservation Area concept

Gentlemen:

In our effort to structure something that would protect the Dona Ana County lands proposed for wilderness without having the sledge hammer effect on our operations that wilderness designation would bring, we studied and debated alternatives extensively. Our conclusion was that there was not another steward friendly land designation, period. This was reinforced in discussions with former land agency administrators. In particular, the advice of William L. Rice, the former Deputy Chief of the Forest Service, and, whose family should be one of the classic case studies of the effects of wilderness on social fabric of a community, was taken to heart. He indicated that if a land designation could be perfected that protects the resource and at the same time is dynamic enough to bridge the gap between stakeholders and the land agency the West would be much better off. The Rangeland Preservation Area (RPA) was the result.

Our approach was to go back to discussion points of the Dona Ana Stakeholder meetings. We assembled what we came to call **Standards of Expectations** that were consistently stressed by all parties. We identified eight standards and added a ninth and that was to remain “True (to the) Fidelity of historical Wilderness concepts, and law”.

You are in receipt of the draft legislation, the map of the proposals, and the executive summary from our group, People for Preserving Our Western Heritage, that describes the draft and arrays the **Standards of Expectations**. I think that is important, however, for you to have additional insight into the thought process that is implicit in the RPA concept. As an individual, I am writing to do that.

The **Standards of Expectation** were:

1. Retention of open space;
2. Provision for planned economic and population growth;
3. Unrestricted application of Homeland Security and law enforcement activities;
4. Prevention of unlawful use of off-road vehicles;
5. Continued access for all segments of the public;
6. Perpetuation of historical ranching operations;
7. Access for flood control and water capture projects;
8. Enhancement of wildlife and rangeland health; and,

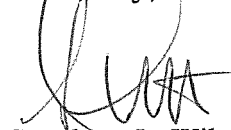
9. True fidelity to historical Wilderness concepts, and law.

The debate of structuring the RPA concept continued with the following bullet points:

- RPAs will not discriminate against the ethical enjoyment of these lands by any segment of the public.
- RPAs provide the full measure of protection against development, trade, mining, or fee mineral extraction that the wilderness designation precludes.
- RPAs strictly prohibit the unlawful use of off road vehicles.
- RPAs elevate national security to a prescribed character of the land designation.
- RPAs allow full, unrestricted access by the Border Patrol for the interdiction of illicit traffic.
- RPAs celebrate the marriage of good stewardship and permanent open space preservation.
- RPAs allow the implementation of good science when that science is perfected.
- RPAs allow the planning and improvement of water conservation and recapture projects.
- RPAs allow the community benefit of flood control and early warning systems.
- RPAs allow the improvement and the expansion of water distribution systems for wildlife and livestock alike.
- RPAs recognize the importance of livestock in wildlife habitat improvement efforts.
- RPAs elevate social fabric issues into the designation that no other land designation even references.
- And, in the Dona Ana County RPA designation, a method to thoughtfully use federal lands on the current disposal list for future growth plans allowing farmland to remain in production and undeveloped is prominent in the draft.

Without saying, the fidelity of wilderness is not breached in this effort. RPAs can be used for full protection of open space without modifying the spirit of wilderness to a point it is unrecognized in terms of the original wilderness characterization of Leopold. It is an honest attempt to bridge a gap that has huge implications to a wide range of stakeholders. Please consider the impact it can bring to the West.

Sincerely,



Stephen L. Wilmeth

Rancher and member of PFPOWH