

PEOPLE FOR PRESERVING OUR WESTERN HERITAGE
STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF OUR MEMBERS
RANCHERS OF DOÑA ANA COUNTY AND FRIENDS
IN RESPONSE TO WILDERNESS AND NCA PROPOSALS
July, 2007

As representatives of the ranching community which is affected by all decisions affecting federal lands in Doña Ana County, and as residents of the County, we have unanimously adopted the following position.

SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS

We believe that the federal lands in Doña Ana County are currently well-managed and protected by the BLM and the ranching community, while allowing public access, under multiple-use management. We believe that certain special features of the lands could benefit from designations recognizing unusual cultural, historical, and scenic values.

Accordingly, we support the designation of Special Management Areas for those areas that warrant special protection in addition to multiple-use management (such as areas with significant petroglyphs, Aden Lava Flow, and the areas presently within the three Wilderness Study Areas in the Organ Mountains). The areas should be limited to a reasonable size for protection of the special feature(s).

Special Management Areas could include designations such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or Outstanding Natural Areas. The designations must include provisions allowing the continuation of livestock grazing under multiple-use management and protection of all grazing preferences, easements and rights-of-way, access, and improvements.

SUPPORT FOR PRESERVATION OF OPEN SPACE
AND THE ORGAN MOUNTAINS VIEW-SHED

We support permanent withdrawal from consideration for future disposal of all federal lands from a point one mile East of Weisner Rd., lying South of Highway 70 and North of Dripping Springs Rd. including and bounded on the East by the federal lands lying within the three Wilderness Study Areas in the Organ Mountains, to prevent sale, exchange, subdivision and construction, and to preserve the Organ Mountains view-shed.

We will also support permanent withdrawal from consideration for disposal of other federal lands lying within the proposed wilderness and NCA areas which have been or which may in the future be determined by professional planners to be at risk for disposal and development. We believe it is in the best interest of ranchers and the general public to preserve open space essential to ranching and public access.

AREAS DO NOT MEET WILDERNESS CRITERIA

We believe that every wilderness designation should reflect respect for the Wilderness ideals and criteria set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964. The proposed areas in Doña Ana County do not, in fact or in spirit, meet wilderness criteria, if we consider the following:

- The existence throughout all of the areas of roads used for decades by the ranchers and the public, together with some or all of the following: fences; corrals; wells with windmills or other pumping devices; power lines; erosion control dikes and dams; earthen reservoirs; pipelines; water storage tanks; and drinking troughs;
- The presence of numerous mine sites, discarded mining equipment, and tailings dumps, especially in the Organ Mountains and the East Potrillo Mountains;
- The existence of the double-track trans-continental railroad and the noise of 60-80 trains which run daily near Aden Lava Flow and the N. boundary of the W. Potrillo Mountains WSA. The tracks, the trains, and the major natural gas pipeline alongside the tracks also require ongoing maintenance activities which further disrupt the solitude in the area;
- The frequent air traffic and associated noise over most of the areas;
- The constant Border Patrol and law enforcement presence in all of the areas due to the ever-present illegal border crossing and drug trafficking activities.

We support the return of the lands currently in the eight existing Wilderness Study Areas to multiple-use management, and the continuation of multiple-use management in the Broad Canyon and East Potrillo Mountains areas.

LAW ENFORCEMENT CONCERNS

Law enforcement and Border Patrol officials have very serious concerns about the impact of potential wilderness designations on their ability to enforce immigration and drug smuggling laws, and on homeland security issues. It is obvious that the agencies need permanent, unrestricted access, which would be largely lost with wilderness designation.

FLOOD CONTROL AND REUSE OF STORM WATER

Management of Elephant Butte Irrigation District has stated in part that “the need to plan for future flood control and appurtenances in our watershed below Caballo during the summer monsoon season could have a great impact on future wilderness designation sites”, and “there is much more work to be done on this proposal,” and “we should not rush into land use legislation that will have a huge impact on our county based solely on the proposals of wilderness activists without consideration of flood protection and the reuse of storm waters.”

OUR PERSPECTIVES

The public debate in Doña Ana County has made it clear that a large portion of the population want the lands to be easily accessible, and they want ranching to continue. The agenda of some of the principal wilderness advocates includes the effective elimination of meaningful public access to most of the acreages within the proposed areas, and elimination of all livestock grazing on the “public” lands. In their anti-grazing rhetoric, they ignore the many reports by professional range management specialists which document that well-managed livestock grazing is beneficial to the soil and to maintaining a healthy, vigorous plant community. The Animal and Range Sciences Departments at New Mexico State University are highly respected for their work in these areas. Their many publications are available on request.

Some people believe that the provisions in the Wilderness Act and the existing congressional grazing guidelines for wilderness areas protect and assure the future of ranching. They fail to realize that while the guidelines may be adequate in areas with land-based seasonal grazing permits, they do not allow for the conditions in our area where permits are year-long and are based on man-made watering facilities. Year-round inspection and maintenance is essential. Further, the distribution of feed supplements is not limited to distribution of salt and mineral, which must be distributed throughout the year. Our arid conditions also require protein supplementation as frequently as every other day for as long as six months, depending on actual rainfall.

To remain in business, ranches in Doña Ana County must retain all currently existing access, and the unrestricted use of vehicles and other mechanized equipment for normal ranching operations.

Many of our fellow citizens who would expect to visit and enjoy the proposed Wilderness areas realize that they could not access the vast areas without the use of motorized vehicles, and we believe their support for wilderness designation is predicated on the promise of “cherry stems” - roads that are actually inside the Wilderness, but are said to be outside the Wilderness by operation of lines drawn on a map. We believe that substantially violates the integrity of the Wilderness ideal. In addition, access afforded by the “cherry stems” which have been proposed is very limited.

We considered the merits of accepting the excessive Wilderness proposals with the conditions that our existing roads and improvements be excluded from the Wilderness through “cherry stem” designations. As a matter of principle and personal integrity, it would not be possible. True wilderness has not existed in Doña Ana County for decades, and we should not attempt to create it by lowering the standards for wilderness.

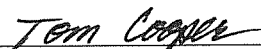
For too long, ranchers and the ranching community have been misunderstood. The truth is that ranching is fundamentally dependent on open space, and it is that same open space which lies at the heart of the current debate. It must be recognized that the Doña Ana County ranching community has been part of the landscape, existing hand in hand with and managing to create, preserve and even improve the conditions and the open spaces that are now proposed for “wilderness” status. Without open space, ranching will not exist. Without open space, “wilderness”, by any definition, cannot exist. It is time to accept, promote, and preserve the benefits of and the connection between the historically significant and heritage-sustaining

features of our county that we now enjoy – access to our vast open spaces and our ranching heritage.

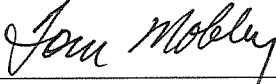
We in the ranching community need the support of our fellow citizens to continue preserving these lands, as we have for approximately 125 years, in a way which will continue to work for us while allowing the benefit of access enjoyed by the public for that same 125 years.

We believe implementation of the proposals set forth in this statement will preserve the open spaces valued by all of us while keeping it accessible to the public, will assure the protection of the special features and character of our rangelands, will respect the Wilderness ideal, and will preserve, enhance, and energize the future of Doña Ana County ranching.

For the Steering Committee
PEOPLE FOR PRESERVING OUR WESTERN HERITAGE



Tom Cooper
Co-Chairman



Tom Mobley
Co-Chairman

STEERING COMMITTEE

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Dudley Williams
Steve Wilmeth

We would appreciate receiving e-mails expressing support for our statement at info@peopleforwesternheritage.com, with copy to our congressional delegation at the e-mail addresses which follow.

Senator Pete Domenici

Callie_Gibson@domenici.senate.gov

Senator Jeff Bingaman

senator_bingaman@bingaman.senate.gov

Congressman Steve Pearce

Grant.Olson@mail.house.gov

For additional information, visit our web site at www.peopleforwesternheritage.com