

Wilderness Press Conference Statement
Tom Cooper – Doña Ana County Rancher
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We believe the federal lands in Doña Ana County are currently well-managed and protected by BLM and the ranching community under multiple-use management. We also believe the public wants these lands permanently protected, that they want to retain access, and they want ranching to continue. Accordingly, we will support permanent withdrawal now or in the future of federal lands lying within the proposed wilderness and NCA areas which are determined by professional planners to be at risk for disposal and development. These lands could never be sold or exchanged, and will remain as open spaces and protection for the Organ Mountains view shed which we all cherish. The New Mexico Congressional Delegation recently protected the Valle Vidal by such a method, and we believe that same method would be appropriate for certain lands in Doña Ana County.

There were approximately 18 ranching families in the Gila Wilderness when it was created. That's the same number of ranches in Doña Ana County with grazing allotments partially or entirely within proposed wilderness areas. Today there are no active allotments in the Gila, even though specifically allowed by the Wilderness Act. The ranchers there were driven out by restrictive regulations, also authorized by the Wilderness Act. We believe the same thing will happen in Doña Ana County if wilderness is imposed on us.

For decades, out of necessity, we have used trucks daily to haul tons of salt, mineral and protein supplements, to check and repair wells, water lines, storage tanks, troughs and other improvements, and check on the cattle. Livestock trailers are used regularly to haul horses and cattle. Dozers, blades, and loaders are used as needed to keep roads passable and to clean and repair earthen reservoirs.

Existing congressional grazing guidelines for wilderness management are simply inadequate for the large Chihuahuan Desert ranches on which we operate. The guidelines provide for only **occasional** use of motor vehicles and equipment. We need **daily** use that is not delayed by permits that require comment by "interested parties" before issuance.

Together, we can preserve our open spaces, the public's access, use, and enjoyment, and the economic viability and historic significance of our cattle ranches. For more information, please see our alternative proposal which has been made available to you, titled "STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF OUR MEMBERS".