**New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau**

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 March 20, 2015

United States Forest Service

Cibola National Forest

c/o Elaine Kohrman

2113 Osuna Rd. NE

Albuquerque, NM 87113

**Re:** **Comments on the Needs for Change Statements and the Proposed Action Forest Plan**

Dear Ms. Kohrman,

New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau (NMFLB) submits these comments on behalf of our 18,000 member families. Our mission is to promote and protect agriculture in the State of New Mexico.

NMFLB is opposed to the current proposal by the United States Forest Service (USFS) of inventoried lands with wilderness characteristics to be classified within the Cibola National Forest. NMFLB is comprised of over 18,000 member families that hold traditions of farming, ranching and being stewards of the land. Many of our members are allotment owners and graze cattle in the Cibola National Forest; grazing can play an important role in healthy forests.

Additionally, several of the areas on the inventory map are listed as possible areas and are greater than 5,000 acres. A wilderness is defined under the 1964 Wilderness Act as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor that does not remain.” Many of the potential wilderness areas are not “untrammeled” by man. Contrary to the belief of the USFS, cattleman have to tend to their cattle. This requires the need to enter the forest and satisfy the requirements of the allotments. Designating wilderness areas in the Cibola National Forest where allotment owners graze, not only makes it near impossible to continue grazing, it also makes it very unsafe. Due to prohibiting motorized vehicles, individuals may suffer greatly when faced with a life threating injury.

Within the Mount Taylor area, people gather for bike riding, snowmobiling and a particular event called “The Quad.” Motorized vehicles are used to provide medical services for this event. Should this particular area be designated wilderness, this event cannot take place. Mount Taylor has also been used for uranium mining; this particular area is listed as a potential wilderness.

It is evident that the USFS is in need of field surveying in the Cibola National Forest to verify the areas that meet the definition of wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act. This process will limit if not omit the potential areas that may qualify for inventory. Several areas listed have been and continue to be utilized by people in their daily lives, traditions, beliefs and heritages.

NMFLB is aware there is a need to revise the current Forest Plan. Per your letter dated February 3, 2015 you stated, “the revised Forest Plan will provide strategic direction and framework for decision making during the life of the plan….The authorization of project-level activities will be based on the guidance/direction contained in the revised plan.” NMFLB will continue to be involved in this process and support the rights and lifestyles of our members.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Huerta

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Regional Director

New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau