November 21, 2014

RE: COMMENTS REGARDING EXPANDING WILDERNESS IN MOUNTAINAIR
RANGER DISTRICT

The Merced de Torreón was established in 1841 by the Mexican government as a community land grant. Since that time the community has continuously used the natural resources of the adjacent Manzano Mountains. Historically the community considers the Mazanos and its forest to be part of the common lands from which the resources necessary for the survival of the community can be obtained. Although the Mexican government did not issue a grant until 1841 the community was established well prior to that period as an initial defense for the settlers of the Merced del Manzano against Indian raids from the north and east. This is evidenced by the fact that the petition for the settlement of the Manzano land grant in the 1820's references Torreon as its northern boundary. In addition the original grant documents for Torreon reference existing farms as boundary markers for the grant. The name Torreon derives from the Spanish term for watchtower. In fact the community originally had several torreons situated throughout the area. For at least the past 175 years the heirs of the Merced de Torreón have utilized the forests and natural resources of the Manzano Mountains to sustain the community. The traditional uses of the forest include but are not limited to: wood cutting for personal use to heat homes and for cooking, for use in religious ceremonies, for construction purposes, for retail sale to the surrounding communities; hunting and in the past fishing when the flow of water from natural springs in the forest kept water in the streams throughout the Spring and Summer; Herb gathering of traditional herbs such as Cañutillo, Cilantro/Corriander, Anise, Quelites del Campo, Quelite U, Oshá, Manzanilla and Hierba Buena as remedios and for use in cooking; grazing and watering of livestock; piñon picking. More modern uses of the forest include camping; hiking; horseback riding; cruziing around the forest in motored vechicles; and educational school field trips.

The fires of recent years have had a detrimental affect on our community. Initially threatening lives and property and then in the aftermath impacting water quality and the livelihood of the community due to the destruction of valuable natural resources. The Merced de Torreón Board of Trustees and our community recognizes the direct link between the recent fires and the Manzano Mountain Wilderness. Lack of authority to implement any meaningful restoration treatments to reduce fuel loads in the Wilderness directly created the conditions that lead to the two catastrophic wildfires in the Manzanos. A condition that still exists on all area within the Manzano Mountain Wilderness that have not yet burned. These untreated conditions have also lead to the

poor health of watersheds surrounding our community, which has decreased our water supplies. As mentioned under the use our community arroyo's use to run long enough that they were able to be fished.

Therefore given the long history of our community's connection to and dependence on the natural resources of the Manzano Mountains the Merced de Torreón is **opposed** to the expansion of any Wilderness in Mountainair Ranger District. Particularly the Merced is opposed to parcels D4_ADJ4 and D4_ADJ5 as well as any parcels on the Western Slope that might impact the Town of Tomé land grant. The Merced de Torreón Board of Trustees believes that the expansion of the existing Wilderness would be detrimental to our community's ability to meaningfully access the forest for the uses we've previously listed above. We believe that it is our fiduciary duty and responsibility to protect those uses not just for the current generation of heirs but for future generations of heirs to come. Furthermore we do not believe that any of the areas identified as potential wilderness on the Mountainair RD map would qualify as a Wilderness under the Act given the long history of use by all the land grant communities in the Manzanos.

Respectfully,

La Merced de Torreón