

MERCED DEL PUEBLO DE MANZANO
PO BOX 156
MANAZANO, NM 87036

November 21, 2012

Cibola National Forest
2113 Osuna Rd. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110

Below are the Merced del Manzano's comments to the Cibola National Forest concerning the Forest Plan Revision Wilderness evaluation phase.

The Merced del Manzano was officially granted in 1829 by the Mexican government, however settlement in the area dates back further than the written historical record of New Mexico and is evidenced by the Abó and Quarai Missions. In fact, by the time the grant was issued in 1829 there were already 170 families that had been residing within the land grant for more than 15 years, who were actively utilizing the natural resources of the Manzano Mountains for their survival. These original inhabitants of the Merced del Manzano were Indo-Hispanos, that is they were comprised of Mestizos (individuals of mixed Native American & Hispano blood) and Genízaros (detribalized and hispanicized Native Americans). These early residents were the ancestors of today's heirs of the Merced del Manzano. Today there are two distinct communities located within the patented boundaries of the land grant, they are Manzano and Punta de Agua. From inception until today the indigenous communities of the Merced del Manzano have relied heavily on the natural resources located both within the patented boundaries of the land grant and on the forested uplands, now managed by the U.S. Forest Service. These forested uplands are immediately west of the community starting from the western edge of the land grant all the way to the crests of the Manzanos. This area to the immediate northwest, west and southwest of the land grant encompass two separate watersheds that are critical to the residents of the land grant.

Our heirs have continuously utilized the forested uplands, currently located in the Cibola National Forest for over 200 years, for variety of uses. These uses include:

1. Wood gathering as:
 - a. building materials (vigas, latillas, puntales, postas) used for the construction of homes, community building, churches, barns, corrals and fences as well as for use in making furniture.
 - b. As materials for cultural and religious purposes such as constructing altars, carving santos (statues) and creating bultos (ornately framed and painted flat wooden traditional Spanish religious art),

- constructing luminarias for use in sacred religious and spiritual observances.
 - c. an energy source for heating and cooking;
 - d. an economic base for the community through the sale of firewood, ornamental trees and value added wood products to the general public;
 - e. for landscaping;
 - f. types of wood utilized include: Pinabete (Pine), Piñon (Pinyon), Encino (Oak), Sabina (Alligator Juniper), Cedro (One Seed Juniper) and Ocote (pitchwood used for lighting of lumiarias for sacred religious and cultural ceremonies and as a fire starter).
2. Collecting of earthen materials such as rocks, soils, clays and minerals for:
 - a. building materials used in the construction and maintenance of homes, community buildings, churches, walls, dams, hornos (ovens), soterranos (cellars) and norias (wells).
 - b. use in planting gardens and orchards.
 - c. use in landscaping
 3. Gathering of traditional plants, herbs, nuts, fungi, and other organic resources for:
 - a. Use in cooking
 - b. Use in remedios (traditional healing aids)
 - c. A partial listing of these include – Cardo Santo (Milk weed) Cota, Capulín (Choke Cherry), Indelo (Fenel), Jewel Weed, Malva (Mallow), Silver Sage, Gordo Lobo (Mullein), Oregano de La Sierra, Oshá, Manzanilla (Pineapple weed), Mordilla (Vervain), Hungos (Mushrooms), Piñon (nuts), Plumajilla (Yarrow) Poleo (Peppermint), Quelites Rosa de Castilla (Rose Hip), Trementina (Piñon Sap); Verdolaga (Purslane) Yerba Buena (Spearmint), Yerba de La Negrita (Scarlet Globermallow).
 4. Grazing of livestock, historically sheep and goats, more recently cattle and horses.
 5. As hunting grounds to provide food for our families.
 6. For recreational uses including hiking, camping, horse back riding.

Just as important as the utilization of the natural resources is the proper management and protection of those resources to provide for the health of the forest and the watershed and to ensure the availability of those resources for use by the future heirs of the Merced del Manzano. Additionally the health and density of forest directly affects the watershed and the quality and quantity of the water resources for our community. The Manzano Mountains are a critical recharge zone for the closed aquifer of the Estancia Basin. Increases in tree density over the past

40 years have resulted in less snow pack to recharge the aquifer. This is since less snow makes it to the ground, due to getting stuck in the trees thereby being more susceptible to evaporation. Since the Manzano Mountain Wilderness was designated the overgrowth of the forests and lack of restoration treatment has resulted a degradation of the quality and quantity of the water supplies for all the land grant communities adjacent to the Mountainair Ranger District. Specifically our community has seen a decrease in the amount of naturally occurring springs (ojitos) and flow of water from those springs. This has decreased the level of water in the Manzano Lake and affected our community's ability to utilize our acequia system for irrigation of fields. There has also been a decline in water availability for livestock ponds and for private drinking water wells. The designation of the existing Manzano Mountain Wilderness has severely hampered the Forest Service's ability to properly manage the forest, which as created a build up of fuels that resulted in two catastrophic wildfires within the past decade. This has affected the quality of drinking water, wildlife habitat and the amount of resources available for use by the heirs of the community land grants of Manzano, Torreon, Tajique, and Chilili.

Based on the long history of use of the of the Manzano Mountains by our community for their survivability and because of our desire to protect those uses for future generations the Board of Trustees of Merced del Manzano, in consultation with our heirs, hereby opposes the Cibola National Forest proposing any additional Wilderness Designations for all Cibola National Forest lands located within in the Mountainair Ranger District. This includes the parcels identified as D4_ADJ4 (7,388 ac) & D4_ADJ5 (9,874 ac) on the Mountain Ranger District map developed for public input into the wilderness evaluation phase of the Cibola National Forest plan revision. In addition, the Merced del Manzano opposes the expansion or creation of any Wilderness throughout the Cibola National Forest where a indigenous community such as another land grant has a history of accessing those lands for traditional uses.

It is our opinion that the expansion of any additional Wilderness designations in the Mountainair Ranger District would negatively impact our community. This opinion is derived not out of fear of the unknown but rather from first hand experience with the existing Manzano Mountain Wilderness. The land grant communities were not given any meaningful opportunity to engage in the conversations that took place regarding the designation of that Wilderness even though the effects of that designation have affected our communities the most. In our belief the Wilderness designation has hampered the Forest Service's ability to properly manage that area and as previously mentioned the negative impacts resulting from that mismanagement have been detrimental to all community land grants located in the Manzano Mountains. Furthermore, the ability to properly manage the Forest Service lands in the Manzanos, to mitigate catastrophic wildfires and protect the health of the watershed, directly impacts our community, our common lands and the lands privately held by our heirs.

Lastly the Board of Trustees of the Merced del Manzano requests that the Cibola

National Forest evaluates the existing Manzano Mountain Wilderness to determine if the restrictive management practices required by the Wilderness Act have impacted the Forest Service's ability to effectively manage and protect those lands. If it is determined that the Wilderness has impacted the ability to manage the forest then as a federal agency we ask that the U.S. Forest Service actively seek policy solutions relating to the Wilderness Act that would better facilitate the management of the forests and better serve the needs of the adjacent communities reliant on the Manzano Mountains.