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New Mexico Land Grant Council

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Re: Comments Regarding Potential Wilderness

The New Mexico Land Grant Council is a state agency tasked with: providing a program of support for Spanish and Mexican community land grants; serving as a liaison between community land grants and other government entities; and for promoting legislation and policies that address longstanding community land grant claims in New Mexico.

The Council has been providing technical support to the community land grants within the Cibola National Forest region to ensure their participation in the forest plan revision process. As part of that role the Council through our staff helped facilitate a meeting of community land grants in the Cibola region on October 9, 2014 that was hosted by the Cañon de Carnué land grant. The purpose of the meeting was to begin the conservation regarding the process for evaluating potential Forest Service lands that should be considered for Wilderness Designation. The Council staff recorded comments made by land grant representatives at that meeting and has included those comments below.

In addition, the Council staff met with individual community land grants to review the maps developed by the Cibola NF concerning potential Wilderness and to ensure that those land grants provide input to the Cibola NF regarding their historical use and connection to Forest Service managed lands and their comments concerning any new proposed Wilderness. Having listened to the input and reviewed the comments developed by individual community land grants the Council has determined that the Cibola National Forest should not propose any new Wilderness or expansion of existing Wilderness in any areas within the Cibola National Forest that have a history of use by community land grant heirs for traditional purposes. Therefore the Land Grant Council respectfully requests that

the Cibola National Forest strongly considers the comments submitted by individual community land grants when developing the next series of maps demarcating areas with suitable Wilderness potential.

Input/Comments from Meeting held on Oct. 9 in Carnuel

Cañón de Carnué - one area that our land grant suffered is when they took away the forest. Our people made a living with timber cutting and we used to herd goats. We still rely on fire wood. As an example I cut four cords of wood for personal use every winter, a wilderness designation would limit our community's ability to access firewood for personal use. Firewood is critical to rural communities as a heat source. Wilderness puts a lot of restrictions on access and use of our former common lands.

Cubero - the heirs of the Cubero land grant use forest of the Mount Taylor Ranger District for hunting, fishing, wood hauling, camping and recreation. The region has the "Winter Quad", which is a big money maker for Grants and an economic boost for all of our communities. We would be concerned that the designation of a Wilderness in Mount Taylor would negatively impact our ability to use and access the forest.

Torreón - Our historical maps refer to La merced de la plaza de Torreon and the monte común, which meant that we considered the Manzano Mountains to be open for the common use of the community. Our community has continuously used the resource of the Mountains since we were established, expanding the Wilderness will affect our ability to continue using the Mountain.

Atrisco - Economic viability tied to control of lands, land loss has hurt our communities economically and culturally. The Federal government needs to concentrate on return of lands to land grants like has been done with the pueblos and the tribes and not the placing additional designations that can serve as a barrier for having those lands returned.

San Antonio de Las Huertas - The San Antonio de Las Huertas land grant is appreciative to the Forest Service for reaching out to the Land Grants. One of their main concerns is the importance of prescribed burns in the revision plan; Wants to better understand the pros and cons of wilderness designations prior to determining a position.

Manzano - according to our oral histories the Sandia's and Manzano's were never wilderness they were used by the land grant heirs for live stock, wood gathering, herb gathering and we created trails to access the uses. Those trails and roads existing in the forest now were created by us not the Forest Service. We were also the best managers of the land. We recommend that our communities be given their lands back. We are thankful for the Forest Service today for giving the land grants a seat at the table. The land grant was not asked when the Manzano Wilderness was established in the 70's.

Tomé - return wilderness designated areas in Manzanos to the Town of Tomé land grant.

No forest lands that are within the historic land grants/traditional use boundaries should ever be designated as wilderness. In the early 50's the land grant regulated the hunting not the state game and fish.

Chihene Nde Nation - Ours lands became Forest Service lands in 1910. Our families still lived there and they were forced to leave the land. The inclusion in the Forest displaced our ancestors. The Chihene Nde Nation has working relationships with the Gila and they now want to establish relationships with the Cibola. We would like to meet with Forest Service to give the history of the land as it relates to their creation story. The recent fires in Black Range have effected our traditional home lands.

Additional comment by President of the NM Land Grant Consejo - We are not talking about individual rights but community rights, our communities are a land based people, we have been here for hundreds of years and will be here for hundreds of years. In the past we were never asked about Wilderness designations and even though we may not always agree we are happy to be at the table.