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August 30, 2016

Elaine Kohrman, Forest Supervisor

Cibola National Forest & National Grasslands

2113 Osuna Rd. NE

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87113

Via email: comments-southwestern-Cibola@fs.fed.us

Re:Cibola National Forest Mountain Ranger Districts Plan Revision - Preliminary Draft Land and Resources Management Plan

Dear Ms. Kohrman:

Catron County values the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed revisions to the 1985 Plan. We unequivocally agree with and appreciate the characterization of our region on page nine (9), lines 1-11 of the Plan Revision. The areas of Forest within Catron County and the surrounding region are unique in the cultural, recreational, economic, historic, and scientific opportunities they provide. The Forest's commitment to preserving water sources, found on pages 56-57 of the Plan, such as the San Augustin Basin, is an objective common to Catron County and its residents as well.

After reviewing the Plan, the County finds the most merit in Alternative C. The designation of new wilderness areas will eliminate recreational vehicle use, decrease access, and expose the new areas to devastating wildfires due to limited access and over-growth of vegetation. The designation of expansive tracts as wilderness necessarily results in the diminution of the objective to permit variable uses of, and activities upon, federal lands. Additional designations within the Forest would negatively impact economic development and tax revenues due to decreased use of the Forest.

Alternative C also eliminates new Management Areas. Although Management Areas are laudably described as the specialized management of specific parcels with a common set of plan components, the potential for additional levels of unneeded bureaucracy weigh against the creation of such areas. It is unclear whether current funding is adequate to manage lands under the existing system, let alone whether there will be sufficient funding to manage additional, specialized areas. Without further designations such as Wilderness or Management Areas, additional law enforcement and other personnel required to manage such designations will not be required. As it stands, Catron County does not have a U.S. Fish & Wildlife officer assigned to the County. Extra levels of Management would be costly to the federal government and have undesirable consequences to the current management system, which is operating effectively, for the most part.

Alternative C gives due regard for the successful management of the Forest to date, and the significant contributions of both Federal agencies and land owners to effectively striking balance among multiple interests. This balance may be upset by the imposition of additional management areas and wilderness designations that are not well considered, sufficiently funded, or even necessary. Further, the other proposed Alternatives are startling in their potential impact upon landowners and the creation of unfunded mandates upon allotment owners.

Catron County is reliant upon the stable management of the Cibola National Forest, and favors the current management structure along with the future guarantees of continued stability that Alternative C provides. Please contact us with any further questions or concerns you may have in regard to our position.

Anita Hand, Vice-Chairperson
Board of County Commissioners of Catron County