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First name: Jon and Joan

Last name: Shively

Organization:

Title:

Comments: See attached letter

Forest Planner

Cibola National Forest and National Grasslands

2113 Osuna Rd NE

Albuquerque NM 87113

Forest Planner:

We live on a small ranch in Torrance Country and near the Town of Estancia. We selected this site for its rural setting and the ready availability of ground water. During the 12 years we have been here a number of groups have attempted to divert the water in the Estancia Basin to uses outside the county. The basin is a closed basin with rain and snow as the only sources of water to replenish the aquifer, The State Engineers Office closed the basin 20 years ago to new commercial wells for ranching and farming. The only new wells are for domestic use. The major ground water users are farms, ranches, and residences.

The citizens of the Estancia Basin have organized two major committees whose charters deal with water and water use, The Estancia Basin Water Committee and the Estancia Basin Resource Association. The Water Committee has issued a definitive report in 2011 on water use and the health of the aquifer. The Committee sponsored studies on the rate of decrease in the well levels in the Estancia Basin. They also conducted a study on the watershed health in the Manzano Mountains. These studies clearly showed that the aquifer continues to be depleted especially during drought years and that the watershed is vital to recharging the aquifer in the basin. In addition their studies on the watershed health showed that thinning of the forest areas in the mountains is needed to assure that the water recharges the aquifer. Otherwise, the trees in the mountains capture the rain and snow and prevent them from flowing down the arroyos into the basin.

The forest service recently announced plans to establish a new wilderness area in the Manzano Mountains in the Cibola National Forest. These plans are a serious threat to our life style and that of the citizens in Torrance County living in the Estancia Basin. Firstly, the allocation of additional Cibola Forest to a wilderness area will directly affect the watershed supplying water to the aquifer as a result of the absence of forest management, especially thinning. In the absence of water recharge, ground wells for farming and domestic use will rapidly deplete to levels that will force the abandonment of wells. Secondly, the allocation of a new wilderness area will also cause another major concern. A wilderness area is so restrictive on use of the land that camping and vehicle use are banned. This means that if a fire breaks out in the wilderness area, the fire fighting equipment will be prohibited from access to the area and the firefighters would be required to operate on foot with little use of auxiliary equipment such as chainsaws. Such a case would mean that the wild fire could move into populated areas adjacent to the wilderness area. This would also put the local fire personnel in greater danger in fighting a fire in the Cibola. Finally, people who live in the foothills of the Manzano Mountains have supported themselves and their families for generations by legally harvesting wood in the forest areas near their homes. If the forest becomes a wilderness area, these people will lose a primary source of livelihood.

Therefore we oppose the additional allocation 10,000 acres of Cibola National

Forest to a wilderness area according to your designations D4-ADJ 198 acres, D4-ADJ 2 184 acres, D4-ADJ 3146 acres, D4-ADJ 6 792 acres, D4-ADJ 7 358 acres, D4-ADJ 8 251 acres, D4-ADJ 5-9 874 acres, D4-ADJ 4 7388 acres, and 4of July 771 acres. Our opposition is based restrictions on land use in these areas that would severely threaten the watershed from supplying water from rains and snow from the Manzano Mountains, that would prohibit the fighting of fires with major pieces of fire equipment, and that would ultimately restrict or eliminate the livelihood of farmers, ranchers, and woodsmen living in the Estancia Basin.