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Comments: This letter is in protest against the proposal to designate as wilderness certain Forest Service lands and grazing permits in the Mayhill, New Mexico Your compilation of more than three and a half inches is impressive, but I find myself perplexed that you seem to overlook common sense in favor of cultivated eloquence. I have lived in the area almost my entire life, as do several family members, and I am fairly well-versed with the lands and issues at stake.

The designation of the Mayhill area as wilderness will be a catastrophe. Although it conforms to your apparent trend of "re-naturalizing the landscape, it has several problems which must be addressed.

Fire management.

First, there is the issue of fire management. As shown by the Little Bear fire in the Ruidoso area eight years ago, management designation becomes an excuse for not fighting fires aggressively, and therefore wilderness areas are left to "burn naturally". As the past several decades of non-logging, "mature forestation", and non-maintenance of undergrowth show, forests need occasional controlled burns, shrub management, and flood control management in order to thrive. The lessons America should have learned from the Native Americans clearly weren't learned. Numerous books on the subject, like "1491: What the Americas Were Like Before the Arrival of the Europeans", show broad evidence that throughout North and South America, these "pristine forests" were in fact the product of cultivation and management, usually by controlled burns. When the first European ships sailed the northeast coast of what is now the northeast United States, the sailors were confident that the population was much greater than what it turned out to be, concluding that the great amount of smoke seen just inland had to be from cooking fires, when in fact it was from controlled burns. They declined to set ashore with their meager numbers and sailed on. Only decades later did they discover the folly of their assumption. Thereafter, the early colonists found that they could ride a horse at a full gallop through the woods, such was the fine condition of the landscape. They determined that it was a pristine forest untouched by man, allowing it to become overgrown and unkempt for the next 500 years, until we find ourselves today with shrubbed-up, overgrown, over-mature, aged-out forests that burn uncontrollably every summer. Now, tell me that's quality management. And the "wilderness areas" are clearly the crown jewel of this nonmanagement concept.

Recreation.

The big push in the past 50 years has been to open up and to develop the region's forests for public recreation and enjoyment. That means putting a limited amount of roadage and other improvements in the forests in order to allow the public access to those lands. Before then, only hikers and horsebackers could access much of those lands. Now people can come year-round and reach much more acreage than previously was available. As the nation ages, we find that relatively "easy" access more critical, and this comes at a time when we have a flourish

of eager, outdoor-oriented youth under 40 years of age who are reinvigorating the push to get outdoors. Only the hearty will be able to access closed-off wilderness areas, and those closed-off areas will continue to decline in quality because their mature forest growth will continue to "age our unfettered by man's manicuring effects of careful and thoughtful logging and controlled burning.

Lumber production

As alluded to above, forest management includes logging for lumber, which in recent decades appears to have been relegated to private mega-industry like Weyerhaeuser. Their privately-held forests and limited logging leaseholds continued to thrive, thanks to logging, until wildfires erupting in our publicly-held but limitedly-managed forests overran their lands as well, most notably in the past two years. The excess fuel in the form of mature trees and aged-out, dead trees in the forests have made the situation cataclysmic. I wonder how do the Spotted Owl Society enthusiasts feel now that their protected habitats are up in smoke. I wonder how the Forest Service really feels when people voice anger and point the finger at them for this accumulated result of non-management.

Livestock production.

In the past year, meat prices in the marketplace have skyrocketed, and economists are seeing no end to this newest wave of inflationary spiral. The American public has enjoyed its position atop the world's best-fed nations for decades, due in large part to a combination of America's bountiful crops in the Midwest and its abundant meat production most notably in the Western states. That meat production is due in no minor part to the production coming from agricultural grazing leases on U.S. Forest Service lands. Diminishing grazing production only feeds the satisfaction of anti-meateaters, and as a consequence the nation and the world will grow hungrier as they watch their wildernesses "remain pristine" from a distance.

In conclusion, I would encourage you to re-think this plan and to change course with your influence as the area supervisor. Designating these properties as wilderness will be adverse to the climate, to the quality and health of the forest, to everyone's enjoyment of the forest, and to the general character of the area for its citizens and visitors. It appears more a publicity ploy and career maneuver than a rational decision. The Forest Service is supposed to be managing its lands, not placing them into hands-off schemes that look posh but don't accomplish any positive management.