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First name: Adren

Last name: Nance

Organization: Catron & Socorro Counties

Title: County Attorney

Comments: Catron and Socorro Counties are political subdivisions of the State of New Mexico with those powers necessary and proper to provide for the safety, preserve the health, promote the prosperity and improve the morals, order, comfort and convenience of any county or its inhabitants. See, NMSA 1978, § Section 4-37-1 (1975). A large portion of the Cibola National Forest lies within the boundaries of Catron & Socorro Counties.

The Counties appreciate the Forest Service's difficult task of trying to balance the Wilderness Act, P.L. 898-577 with its other legislative mandates including but not limited to the Multiple Use - Sustained Yield Act of 1960, P.L. 86-517;; the National Forest Management Act, P.L. 94-588; the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act, P.L. 95-313; and the Forest and Rangelands Renewable Resources Planning Act, P.L. 95-307.

In regard to Phase 2 the Counties believe that the wilderness designation goes too far in allowing the Wilderness Act mandate to overshadow the other mandates of the forest service by too greatly removing access to natural resources and recreational opportunity. Catron & Socorro Counties are opposed to the addition of lands designated in the Phase 2 inventory as wilderness.

The inclusion of the lands as wilderness will directly and negatively affect the economies and the quality of life for County inhabitants. Moreover, it will directly affect County budgets with a foreseeable reduction in taxes from grazing as well the irreversible future loss of timber revenue, recreational opportunities, etc.

Of particular concern regarding the Phase 2 designation is the exclusion of the most vulnerable persons in our communities from the use of the proposed wilderness areas. The elderly and persons with disabilities will not be able to enjoy or utilize the area without the use of motorized transportation. Persons with disabilities will be particularly affected as they will not be able to hunt in the wilderness areas without the use of motor vehicles as is allowed by New Mexico law. Due to a 1986 interpretation of the Wilderness Act, the Phase 2 designation will even prevent recreational mountain bikers from utilizing the designated areas. Another important consideration is that this designation will effectively eliminate any fuelwood cutting that is essential to the basic heating needs of the inhabitants of both counties and especially the inhabitants of the Alamo Navajo Reservation in Socorro County. The lack of motorized access prevents persons who depend on fuelwood from retrieving it from the wilderness areas. The loss of woodcutting eliminates an effective tool of the USFS for maintaining a healthy ecosystem with the removal of dangerous fuel.

Catron & Socorro County respectfully request that no more land be designated as wilderness or that the proposed areas be greatly downsized. Alternatively, if any areas are placed into wilderness, the Counties insists that grazing of livestock be permitted to continue as required by the Wilderness Act at Section (4)(d)(4)(2), and that other uses of the forest not be reduced.