

Chairman Senator Leo Jaramillo, Representative Herrera, members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen:

My name is Melvyn Apodaca and I am the President of the La Merced de los Pueblos de Tierra Amarilla.

I am well aware that the theme of my presentation is Fire, Flood, and Drought response and recovery status of Land Grants/Mercedes.

In order for me to reach the designated topic, I must address serious problems which exist within the Tierra Amarilla Land Grant (hereafter TALG). First of all, you must be aware that the TALG has a unique standing within the land grant community. Take into consideration where the land grant issue came to the forefront if it wasn't in 1967, with the Tierra Amarilla Court House Raid. Beginning with this act of defiance, one of the most significant social issues came zooming into an awakening of the needs of the Hispano/Chicano community in many parts of Northern New Mexico.

The TALG is also unique in the fact that of the original 560,000 acres of land, the majority of these lands now rest in the hands of private land ownership. Legislators such as yourselves cannot continue to look for recovery by initiating programs which continue to feed these rich landowners with state monies and hope that legitimate safeguards will be initiated by these people. As I continue my presentation, I need you to think of "What is best for rural New Mexico."

Monies, if there are to be any, must go to the people of the area who settled the land grant in 1832 with seven original communities, which are still viable today. These communities are the caretakers of these lands and are the heart of this area in its religion, language, custom, culture, and heritage.

In order to achieve an equitable distribution of resources in rural New Mexico, the New Mexico Legislature must regain control of the newly named New Mexico Wildlife Department. The Director, Michel Sloane, has been intractable in his managing of this department. Take for example, the issue of Laguna Del Campo. Because of his objection in the process, it took almost seven years to accomplish this transfer. This is in spite of there being a Joint Resolution transferring the property and lake to the TALG. In addition, to this there was an order by the Chair of the Commission to transfer lake and property “lock, stock and barrel” to the TALG. So, your step to ensure an equitable recovery is to take the 44,000 acres of land from the New Mexico Wildlife Department and return it to its original owner. The heirs of the TALG. If this is done, then we can begin a serious discussion of Fire, Flood, and Drought response and recovery. In addition to this, you, as leaders of our great state would also be addressing the needs of rural New Mexico.

Rural New Mexico is in trouble. You, as members of the legislature are well aware of this. Let’s look at an area that was

devastated by a careless act of federal employees. The Hermit Peak and Calf Canyon fires.

After our congressional leaders fought for funding to help those affected by this tragic event and received resources of several billion dollars to help the affected, many in the area are still suffering. I refer you to a news release of August 21, 2026, from the office of U.S. Representative, Teresa Leger Fernandez. Many of the traditional population have never been helped and rural agencies continue to be ignored. You as leaders of our state must take control of situations like the Hermit Peak and Calf Canyon fires and ensure that these communities are given the help they deserve.

With your leadership the social issues which arose because of this tragic event can be addressed and rural areas can be served to overcome the social problems. Social problems such as loss of home, loss of livestock, personal injury, both physical and emotional, and the devastation of ranching and family lands. Let us work together to ensure Fire, Flood, and Drought response is a reality.

Finally, let me address the needs of the TALG. As many of you know, and something which was brought up earlier, the TALG now owns and manages the Laguna del Campo. We need your help in having a comprehensive inspection of the dam and should anything be wrong, we need help to correct the problem(s).

The forest in this area needs to be cleaned and grazing needs to be allowed. A youth program with summer employment may be the answer to this problem. Let's give our youth the opportunity to serve our community and take them out of harm's way, as to alcohol and drugs. Let's help our youth help themselves. A program such as the Youth Conservation Corp (please seek information at ENMRD.nm.gov) might be useful in setting up some future programs.

Our community must also be given a source of captured water. Although we have the El Vado dam and the Heron Dam, we have never been able to utilize these waters for community needs.

Let me conclude by saying that yes, it is important to see Fire, Flood, Drought Response & Recovery as a major issue, which needs our attention.

I also add to this the importance of returning the Sargent, Humphries, and Rio Chama to the TALG!

Should this be put to the wayside I don't believe we can have a serious Fire, Flood, Drought Response and Recovery Program within the TALG.

In my opinion, I also believe it (is) imperative that the New Mexico Wildlife Department be brought under the control of our State Government. Let us work together as a unified unit.

Your concern for rural New Mexico should also be shown by your continued support of the YCC Programs. Let's help our youth help themselves.

Thank you for your kind attention and I will take any questions if there are any.