

Briefing to Land Grant Committee, July 14, 2021

Good morning Mr. Chair, Miguel Garcia and other members of the Land Grant Committee. My name is Bonifacio Vasquez. I am the President of the Santa Barbara Land Grant. I wish to introduce other board members:

Vicente Abeyta, the Vice President, Lorrie Garcia, Secretary, Manuel Trujillo, Treasure. Also here with me today is my grandson Dylan Vasquez and granddaughter Amanda Vasquez. I wish to extend greetings to all other Land Grant Board members, Board Members of the Land Grant/Merced Consejo, the Land Grant Council and all other guests.

I appreciate the opportunity that you, Mr. Chair and other members have given me to up-date you on the activities of the Santa Barbara Land Grant. We have a new district ranger at Camino Rael and anticipate to continue working with Forest personnel on the Carson National Forest Plan. The Santa Barbara Land Grant did submit comments on the Plan in the areas of:

- The Pecos Wilder Expansion
- Wild and Scenic River Act
- Special Use Permit on the Sipapu Ski Resort Expansion
- Health of the Santa Barbara and Rio Pueblo Watersheds
- Special use permit on hay cutting

- Other interest to secure traditional access to public land resources

In 2020, the Santa Barbara Land Grant worked with State Land Office, the Taos County Commissioner, and community people to obtain some firewood for people in the Penasco area. This was done after fruitless efforts with the Carson National Forest on wood cutting projects.

The new Camino Real Range District Ranger is Mr. Michael Lujan. We have had two meetings over the telephone and agree that more has to be done to improve our relationship and Camino Real must look for ways to better serve the needs of the community. Mr. Lujan would like to meet within the next few days to conduct a reconnaissance of a new firewood area called Ocito; and on July 28, 2021, several community members will meet in Taos to discuss other firewood initiatives in the Carson. Another objective is to research funding possibilities for several other projects in the National Forest. I did advise Mr. Lujan that the Santa Barbara Land Grant is still very concerned about the health of the Santa Barbara and Tres Ritos watershed and actions that should be taken to reduce the threat of wildfires in the Bear Mountain area. Many countless hours in meetings, field trips, and many other resources have been exhausted to address our concerns in the last three years just to face disappointments to promises made and not kept by the previous District Range Sean Ferrell.

For at least the last five years we all have been led down a rabbit hole by the Carson National Forest that the revision of the Forest Plan was the panacea to all our ills with the Forest Service. We at Santa Barbara Land Grant placed our trust on what we heard and have diligently expressed our points of view and public support on several issues. We have demonstrated that there is very little support or benefit to the expansion of the Pecos Wilderness into the Santa Barbara Land Grant. We have provided information on the negative impact to our Acequias and grazing rights if the Forest Service included the Santa Barbara River in its Wild and Scenic River proposal. We have asked the Forest Service and different State agencies to seriously consider the overall negative impact on the environment, potential violations of water rights, violation of special use permit provisions, and many other areas on the expansion of the Sipapu Ski Resort. We have expressed to the Carson National Forest administration the real need to maintain our forest to reduce the threat of wildfires and how their actions could help secure the health of our two most important watersheds, the Rio Pueblo and Santa Barbara. We have expressed the importance of traditional uses of forest resources. We are disappointed that our efforts, recommendations, questions, and concerns have been ignored. During the early part of 2019, the Camino Real office was closed due to a federal budget dispute. They, the Camino Rael staff, considered themselves “non-essential” employees and closed operations during a very important period of firewood permits. Then because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Camino Rael station was closed. In the last thirty plus months, the

Camino Rael Ranger Station may have been open for nine months. It has been extremely difficult to get anything done with Forest Personnel at the Camino Real Station. Not one person to answer the phone or return calls made to the station.

Not everything has been doom and gloom for the Santa Barbara Land Grant. With the help of Taos County Commissioner, Candyce O'Donnell, Taos County WUI Coordinator JR Logan, NM Forester, Mr. Mark Meyers; Juan Sanchez, Arturo Archuleta, Jacobo Baca, and Vanessa Chavez, with the Land Grant Council; Henry Lopez, the project Mayordomo, we were able to secure county and state agreements. These agreements resulted in some firewood for the community. The Copper Hill Forest Mayordomo Project was slow to start in 2021, but has some real promising potential for 2022. The firewood project is conducted in State Lands under the Acequia management concept. By clearing State Land of wildfire fuel, we are helping the Rio Embudo watershed, promoting traditional and cultural uses, and creating opportunity for workforce and economic development. It is a win-win situation.

On another positive note, the Santa Barbara Land Grant has been actively looking for a facility to serve as a community center and an administrative office. In 2019 we were successful in acquiring \$45,000.00 dollars of Capital Out-lay money. Thanks to the support of late Senator Carlos Cisneros and Representative Robert "Bobby" Gonzales.

In closing, the Santa Barbara Land Grant requests the Committee to write a letter to Mr. James Duran, the Carson National Forest Supervisor asking him to start a good faith and sincere dialogue with the Grant. We recommend this Committee to keep itself educated on what is happening in the Sipapu Expansion. Our State Engineer's Office must get involved on the water rights and water usage issue at Sipapu. The Environmental Department needs to start better monitoring programs at Sipapu. The States' Transportation Department needs to look at the safety of public traffic in the Tres Ritos corridor.

We must not let a federal agency, the Forest Service use its special use permit provision to undermine the rules, regulations, and laws of New Mexico. All in the interest of big money and pleasing the most affluent of our society with a playground.

Thank you for your time. Subject of your questions

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