

State of New Mexico
Legislative Council Service

411 State Capitol, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501
(505) 986-4600
Raúl E. Burciaga, Director



July 14, 2016

Cal Joyner
Regional Forester
Southwestern Region
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Dear Mr. Joyner:

As a staff member of the New Mexico Legislature's Land Grant Committee, the committee has directed me to inform you of its opposition to new wilderness designations or expansions in either the Carson National Forest or the Santa Fe National Forest.

On July 5, 2016, the Land Grant Committee received a presentation by U.S. Forest Service personnel regarding the forest plan revision for the Carson National Forest, including the process by which potential wilderness designation recommendations are developed. The committee was told that the revision process is still in its early stages and that the completed revision, including the identification of areas suitable for wilderness designation, will take a couple of years before it will be ready to be submitted to the U.S. Congress. However, other presenters noted that, earlier this year, private organizations, including the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, publicized a proposal they are making to Congress to expand the Pecos Wilderness within the Carson and Santa Fe national forests.

The Land Grant Committee also received presentations from two land grants-mercedes within the Santa Barbara River watershed: the Santo Tomás Apóstol del Rio de las Trampas (Las Trampas) and La Merced de Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara). Leaders from these communities expressed concerns about existing use restrictions on U.S. Forest Service lands within the Santa Barbara watershed. They stated that most of the homes in the area are at least partially dependent on fuel wood to heat their homes in the winter, and they requested an increased number of

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woodcutting permits to meet this need and reduce the potential for forest fires. They also stated that the watershed is their source for potable and agricultural water, which heightens the consequences for their communities in the event of a major fire. Referring to these points, they expressed strong concerns about whether expanded wilderness designations would prevent effective fire prevention and response actions.

An additional issue raised by the leaders of Las Trampas and Santa Barbara was that the upper Santa Barbara watershed was part of the original grant of lands that established their communities in the 1700s. They expressed a concern that a wilderness designation would cut off any further discussions regarding those grants, as well as discussions about gaining traditional and cultural use access for community members.

Land Grant Committee members noted that, over the years, the committee has heard similar concerns from other forest-dependent land grant communities in connection to both the Santa Fe and Carson national forests. Concluding the committee's discussion of the issue, the committee voted nine to one to place on the record its opposition to any expansion of existing wilderness areas or the creation of new wilderness areas as part of the current forest plan revisions for both national forests.

Sincerely,



MARK EDWARDS

ME:kr

cc: James Duranes
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