

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

June 15, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We write to you to express our support for New Mexico's national monuments designated under the Antiquities Act, and we encourage you to honor and preserve all of the national monuments you are charged with protecting. As Secretary of the Interior, you have a solemn responsibility to steward America's public lands for the benefit of all Americans and to ensure these lands are maintained for our children and grandchildren. The lands protected as national monuments are irreplaceable and provide a place where all Americans can connect with their history, hunt, fish, hike, and camp, and experience solitude and unparalleled natural wonders.

The Rio Grande del Norte and the Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks National Monuments, which were designated in 2013 and 2014 respectively, provide outstanding opportunities for recreation, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and seeing centuries-old petroglyphs. Each of these activities creates a deeper connection with our state's rich cultural heritage. We urge you to heed the overwhelming support of New Mexicans to preserve their irreplaceable national monuments as designated under the Antiquities Act.

The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument is at the heart of one of the oldest continually inhabited landscapes in North America. For over 10,000 years this extraordinary landscape of deep gorges, wild rivers, hot springs, and volcanic cones shaped the diverse ecological systems and human cultures that remain present today. The Rio Grande del Norte is part of the Central Migratory Flyway, a vital migration corridor used by tens of millions of birds. It is also an important corridor for large elk and antelope herds and provides key wintering grounds. The Rio Grande and its tributaries support a world-class trout fishery by providing essential riparian habitat, which draws anglers from across the country.

The Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks National Monument is also archeologically rich, featuring thousands of artifacts from the Folsom and Clovis cultures, the first people who lived in New Mexico, as well as other cultures that inhabited the area. Some of the areas within the monument are considered sacred by local tribes. The monument protects historic places such as the Gadsden Purchase boundary, Butterfield Stagecoach Trail, old West ranch houses, Billy the

Kid Rock, and World War II bombing targets. The congressionally-designated Prehistoric Trackways National Monument is adjacent to, and shares its paleontologically rich formations with Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, suggesting that this landscape could yield many more significant fossil discoveries. Fossil deposits in the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument have drawn the attention of the Smithsonian and other high-caliber scientific institutions. Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks stretches from Chihuahuan grassland to high elevation stands of Ponderosa pine and include some of the last intact Chihuahuan desert grassland remaining in the U.S. Hunters played a key role in the creation of the monument due to the importance of the landscape to quail, deer, antelope, and other wildlife populations.

Above is just a small sampling of the resources the monuments in New Mexico were designated to protect. Our national monuments encompass the smallest area compatible to protect and manage the high diversity of nationally-significant historic and scientific objects found within them. In fact, a number of areas were excluded from protection that could easily have qualified. Any changes to the boundaries or designations of Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountain-Desert Peaks National Monuments threaten the lands, values, and objects thousands of New Mexicans fought to protect.

The Rio Grande del Norte and the Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks National Monuments have decades-long histories of public support with numerous and diverse constituencies vocally advocating for their protection. The claim that the American people have not been heard on the designation of National Monuments does not accurately reflect the open and transparent process that established each monument. The foundation for legislation to protect the Rio Grande Del Norte began with public interest in the early 1990s and led to the introduction of the El Rio Grande del Norte National Conservation Area Establishment Act in 2009. The legislation was reintroduced several times by the New Mexico delegation but languished in Congress. In 2012, Secretary Ken Salazar participated in a public meeting with local residents; the near unanimous approval for a national monument designation expressed by the citizens at that meeting initiated the designation process. Over 1,200 written comments were collected, in addition to the public meeting held in Taos, detailing how the monument should be managed.

Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks also originated as a legislative proposal to conserve this special place, stemming from over a decade of community support and hundreds of meetings with stakeholders. In 2009, business and community leaders organized a conference to discuss the economic benefits of public lands. Then in the spring of 2010, over 600 enthusiastic supporters attended a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee field hearing in Las Cruces on the legislation. Two panels of local residents were asked to testify, giving all parts of the community a voice. The Committee also accepted comments from the public for a period of time after the hearing. After 15 years of campaigning by local residents and stalled legislative efforts in Congress, the community turned to the Administration for help. In 2014, Secretary Sally Jewell came to tour the southern portion of the monument with U.S. Border Patrol and participate in a town hall in Las Cruces to hear public input. Over 750 people attended the town hall to provide

their comments. The town hall confirmed the results of polling of Doña Ana County residents who overwhelmingly support the creation of the national monument. More than 15,000 petition signatures were collected in support of the Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks National Monument in the lead up to the proclamation. Since the monument was established in 2014, its popularity and the support have only grown.

Protecting our national monuments has been an important economic driver for New Mexico's regional and statewide economy. Outdoor recreation in New Mexico, as in most of the West, is a growing and sustainable industry that is revitalizing our local communities both around the monuments and statewide. Outdoor recreation generates \$6.1 billion in consumer spending and provides the state of New Mexico with more than \$450 million in state and local tax revenue and employs 68,000 people each year. Taos and Doña Ana Counties have benefitted from increasing numbers of visitors spending their hard earned dollars in our hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, restaurants, retail stores, and other services.

In the first year after the Rio Grande del Norte Monument was established, the Bureau of Land Management reported a 40% increase in visitors to the area. The same year, the Town of Taos enjoyed a 21% boost in tax revenue from stays in hotels, motels, and bed-and-breakfasts, and an 8.3% jump in gross receipts revenue in the accommodations and food service sector. In the three years since the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument was designated between \$8 and \$34 million in additional economic activity has been generated. There has been an estimated 152% increase in visitation to the monument over that same period. Lodging taxes for the City of Las Cruces have grown from \$1.87 million in 2013 to \$2.04 million in 2016. In January, Secretary Jewell attended a roundtable with local businesses to better understand the effects of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks on their bottom lines. She found increased sales, new products and services marketed around the monument, and, indeed, new businesses formed to take advantage of the monument's attraction of tourists. We are deeply concerned that efforts to shrink, revoke, or alter the protections for national monuments threaten the positive economic growth our communities have experienced.

In addition, we strongly disapprove of the review process initiated by the President's Executive Order and are gravely concerned that rescinding or shrinking New Mexico's national monuments will cause irrevocable harm to our treasured places, would jeopardize the objects and special values that are protected through the Antiquities Act, and impact positive economic growth in local communities. A credible review of the national monuments should include conducting public meetings to collect information from all stakeholders. A formal review, as done under a standard APA process should be conducted. We also note that the local Resource Advisory Groups in New Mexico can provide another conduit for input on these decisions, and find it alarming that you've halted their convening at exactly the time you need their input the most.

We are disappointed with your handling of the review of Bears Ears National Monument and strongly disagree with your interim recommendation to reduce the size of the monument. We

appreciate your extension of the public comment period for Bears Ears aligning it with the comment period for all monuments under review. As you make your final recommendation, we hope you will consider the overwhelming support for national monuments, including that more than 90% of the public comments you received during the initial 15-day period favored maintaining Bears Ears' designated boundaries. In your final report, you have an opportunity to change course and restore cooperation, respect, and trust with the sovereign tribes of the Bears Ears InterTribal Coalition and all of Indian Country by preserving the existing boundaries of all these important national monuments.

We urge you to engage with our local communities, businesses, and their elected officials at all levels, and we urge you to fulfill your obligations to respectfully consult with Indian Tribes as you conduct your review. The arbitrary 120-day review period for all national monuments, including the final review for Bears Ears, is grossly insufficient to collect the necessary information. The comment period, which relies heavily on internet access, puts Tribes and rural communities at a disadvantage because up to 80% of New Mexicans who live in Indian Country and rural areas do not have consistent access to broadband internet. Therefore, we request you extend the 120-day review period for all national monuments to accommodate the input from local communities and tribes in New Mexico who are concerned about the future of their beloved monuments that may be affected by this review.

We encourage you to fulfill your promise to faithfully uphold Teddy Roosevelt's vision that our treasured public lands should be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of all Americans now and for generations to come.

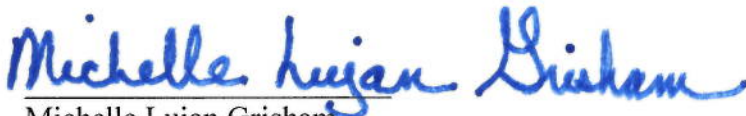
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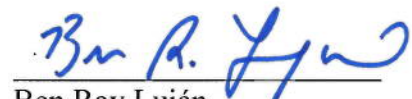
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