

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 21, 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 today on behalf of our constituents, who are committed to keeping the Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monuments intact as established under the Antiquities Act. These national monuments showcase the abundance of natural beauty and archeological wonders of New Mexico -- that bring locals and visitors from across America together.

As you saw firsthand during your visit to New Mexico, these two national monuments enjoy broad public support and are important engines for our local jobs and economies. In Las Cruces, more than 600 local residents, sportsmen, veterans, Hispanic leaders, members of tribes and faith groups, and business and community leaders packed a town hall meeting to share their stories and express how much they cherish these special places. The voices of New Mexicans could not be clearer – our national monuments are vitally important to our history and are part of the living culture of local tribes and pueblos. Our local communities worked for decades to ensure that permanent protections for our national monuments would be in place for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

We have shared our support for these national monuments in their current form with you through letters, Congressional hearings, phone calls, staff-to-staff communication, and meeting you personally in New Mexico. You invited the American people to participate in two public comment periods and over 90 percent of the more than 2.7 million responses supported keeping or expanding our existing national monuments. The public has spoken loudly and clearly to protect -- and not alter or eliminate -- national monuments.

The American people have a strong sense of pride and deep connection to our public lands. Our national monuments have been thoughtfully conserved by presidents of both parties for more than 100 years. The vision of the leaders who protected our most wild lands, darkest skies, rare ecosystems, scenic landscapes, historical sites, and culturally significant tribal resources was for all Americans to enjoy and learn from these amazing places.

We encourage you to end your review with a recognition and renewed commitment to properly care for and manage all of our national monuments as designated under the Antiquities Act, and not to make changes that would damage and degrade their unique values. And we strongly

urge you to honor the views from New Mexicans who love the Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monuments.

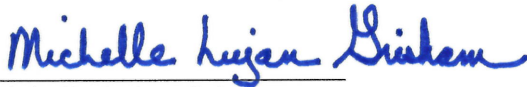
Sincerely,



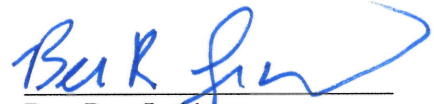
Tom Udall
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Michelle Lujan Grisham
United States Representative



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Representative

Attachment:

**QUOTES FROM NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY LEADERS AND OTHERS IN SUPPORT OF
ORGAN MOUNTAINS-DESERT PEAKS AND RIO GRANDE DEL NORTE NATIONAL MONUMENTS
August 21, 2017**

Business Leaders

“Small businesses stand in strong support of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. People come to visit and ultimately want to stay thanks to our incredible historic sites and natural resources that we are blessed to have in Doña Ana County. The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument has drawn people here, and I hope Secretary Zinke does not undermine our bottom line.”

- Renee Frank, Realtor, SMART LIVING Team at Keller Williams, Las Cruces

“Our proximity to Rio Grande del Norte National Monument is an asset and we mention it in our marketing. It’s very exciting because the monument is one more asset to attract visitors and create jobs in our community.”

- Dan Irlion, Co-Founder, Taos Mesa Brewing Co.

“Because of the OMDP designation, Las Cruces and Mesilla have happily been graced with increased economic opportunities driven by the rise in visitation and attention of the national press. Lonely Planet, the largest travel guide book publisher in the world, listed Southern New Mexico as one of the top 10 places to visit in 2016, in part because of OMDP. I also have seen firsthand the economic benefits our region has received since the monument’s designation through the founding of my own business, Organ Mountain Outfitters.”

- Chris Lang, Founder of Organ Mountains Outfitters, Las Cruces

“The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument has been wonderful for our business. It’s definitely impacted our business in a positive way. I can with confidence send them to those trails and know they are going to have a good time and be safe.”

- Afra Bond, Owner, Gearing Up Bicycle Shop, Taos

“Thanks to the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks designation, I have seen more interest in outdoor tourism and as a result, have expanded the menu of services I offer – including mountain bike tours and wilderness first-aid classes. Clearly, the monument has allowed my business to grow. We are quickly becoming an outdoor recreation destination and a place people want to live thanks to our protected public lands.”

- David Crider, General Manager of Southwest Expeditions, Las Cruces

“One of the main reasons people visit the Taos area is to explore our Río Grande del Norte National Monument. Thanks to the national monument, we have seen our tourism and outdoor recreation sectors flourish. Fly-fishing and sportsmen opportunities in the monument are world-class and my business would not be where it is today without the Río Grande del Norte National Monument.”

Nick Streit, Owner, Taos Fly Shop

“According to data from the Bureau of Land Management, the managing agency overseeing OMDP, there was a 102 percent increase in visitation to the Monument from 2015 to 2016. This translates into more people coming to our community, spending money in our local businesses and stores, and contributing to our lodger’s tax.”

- Carrie Hamblen, CEO/President, Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce

“The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument is a huge attraction for our region. We have seen a five-fold increase in visitors to our website searching for the national monument, and our new ‘Monuments to Main Street’ initiative has become one of the top priorities for promotional events to help bring more tourism dollars to Las Cruces.”

Jennifer Bales, Executive Director of the Las Cruces Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Elected Officials

“The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument put Las Cruces and the surrounding areas on the map. We are seeing a renaissance in Doña Ana County because people are choosing to invest in our community thanks to our national monument. People come to live, visit, and work here. We are open for business, but rescinding or resizing our national monument would essentially shutter our doors.”

- Nora Barraza, Town of Mesilla Mayor

“With the level of support we have once again seen for our [Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks] National Monument, it’s clear our citizens have spoken and they would like our National Monument to stay protected the way it is. I hope Secretary Zinke and President Trump listen to our communities, and they listen to our citizens’ desire to keep these lands protected.”

- Ken Miyagishima, Las Cruces Mayor

“There have been four resolutions passed by our local government [Dona Ana County, Las Cruces, Mesilla, and Anthony] opposing any changes to our Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks] National Monument since President Trump issued his Executive Order. At the County Commission meeting it was the largest attendance we have ever had. The support for the Monument was as overwhelming then as it has been in all the communities in Doña Ana County for years. Our people love the Monument and want these lands protected.”

Billy Garrett, Doña Ana County Commissioner

“New Mexicans have spoken – we love our national monuments. Our communities depend on Río Grande del Norte for their livelihoods, and people choose to visit and live here because of it. I stand with my neighbors in urging Secretary Zinke to preserve Río Grande del Norte as it is today.”

Mark Gallegos, Village of Questa Mayor and Taos County Commissioner

“I represent the people of Taos, and they want Secretary Zinke to ensure no changes are made to the Río Grande del Norte National Monument. The real-life economic benefits of the national monument cannot be overstated.”

Tom Blankenhorn, Taos Commissioner

Faith Leaders

"Having grown up in Vado and working with so many local residents, I believe we are entrusted with defending the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. We worked as a community to ensure that this area was protected for future generations, and we pray that Secretary Zinke honors our years of dialogue and reflection."

- Sarah Nolan, Executive Director of CAFÉ

"Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks is full of God inspired meaning. The mountains, the water, the wildlife—declare the glory of God and are gifts from God (Psalm 148). Scripture also says, 'I make you trustees of My estate, so care for My creation...' (Genesis 1:28 The VOICE). We have been given the holy call to be trustees of the earth. It is our responsibility to care for and defend places like the Organ, Potrillo, and Robledo Mountains for the glory of God and the sake of past, present and future generations."

- Pastor Robert Reed, Sonoma Springs Covenant Church

Hispanic Leaders

The Río Grande del Norte National Monument safeguards our precious water that is vital to our wellbeing. Waters that flow to our acequias are protected by the national monument. I urge Secretary Zinke to preserve our water – the lifeblood of our community—and preserve Río Grande del Norte as it is today."

Ester Garcia, President of the San Antonio del Rio Colorado Land Grant in Questa

"My family has been grazing in northern New Mexico for hundreds of years, and we depend on the Río Grande del Norte National Monument for our livelihoods. I ask Secretary Zinke to ensure that my children and grandchildren are able to continue the traditions passed on to me by my father and grandfather."

Erminio Martinez, Taos County grazing permittee

"Hispano and Latino leaders came together and worked for years with many other constituencies on behalf of our newly-established national monuments, including the Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks national monuments in New Mexico. President Trump and Interior Secretary Zinke would do a tremendous disservice to our nation if any of these monuments were to be rescinded or altered. With land agencies being stretched and their budgets being slashed, it's shameful that tax dollars and valuable time is going into this monuments review."

- Ralph Arellanes, New Mexico State Director for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Sportsmen and Sportswomen

"The wise use of our natural resources should not be up for political debate, nor should our national monument be the center of the Trump Administration's attack on public lands. The unique landscape of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument holds critical wildlife habitat and corridors, vast recreation opportunities, and tells the story of thousands of years of natural and human history in the Mesilla Valley. It would be foolish and misguided for Secretary Zinke to go against the will of the vast majority of Doña Ana County residents and recommend altering our monument in any way."

- Gabe Vasquez, Southern New Mexico Coordinator, New Mexico Wildlife Federation

“The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument put a star on the map, and our community is reaping the economic benefits. Our monument means business, and I hope Secretary Zinke doesn’t undermine our bottom line.”

- Fernando Clemente, owner of Clemente Taxidermy and New Mexico Specialized Wildlife Services in Las Cruces

“The elk on our ranch depend on the water that is safeguarded by the wildest places in the Río Grande del Norte National Monument. In addition to sustaining our family, we see hunters, fisherman, and other folks come to experience all that the national monument has to offer....”

Marty Torres, Laguna Elk Ranch

“The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument conserves critical hunting grounds valued by sportsmen across New Mexico. Rescinding or resizing the national monument would take hunting places like the Sierra de Las Uvas and the Potrillo Mountains out of public hands and our time-tested traditions in this area could be gone forever.”

- John Cornell, New Mexico Representative, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

“As a sportsman, the Río Grande del Norte National Monument is a sacred place for me. If the national monument is rescinded or the boundaries adjusted, I know future generations will not have the same experiences I have today. I stand with other sportsmen in urging Secretary Zinke to keep the Río Grande del Norte National Monument the way it is.”

Mark Casias, Blue Creek Outfitters, Ranchos de Taos

Tribal Leaders

“Our community celebrated after our spectacular lands and cultural treasures were protected through national monument designation. For years we had been working with our elected officials to protect our culture and way of life, and we were able to do so, thanks to the Antiquities Act. Any effort to change the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument would go against the will of our people.”

- Rafael Gomez, Jr., Tribal Councilman of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo

“These [Organ Mountain-Desert Peaks] lands, they’re very, very special to us. They have a lot of tradition and culture. To see them come in and do something to these mountains would just devastate all of us as Native American people.”

Gabe Aguilar, Vice President, Mescalero Apache

Archaeologists

“The Desert Peaks Complex’s known sites are incredibly rich and diverse, including ancient hunting and gathering villages dating back several millennia, through Apache Conflict sites, right up to aerial bombing practice targets used in World War II. These are cultural resources that record our history as a state, as a country, and as a people. And we’ve only just scratched the surface in terms of the number of sites that have been discovered, yet alone given a proper archaeological investigation.”

- Myles R. Miller, Archaeologist

“We have already witnessed damage [in Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks] to several rock sites, irreplaceable records of our history and past beliefs, because sufficient protections didn’t yet exist. This is precisely the monument designation would present a very real danger to these sites, many of which haven’t even been discovered yet.”

- Lawrence Loendorf, Archaeologist and renowned rock art expert

Veterans

“Veterans recognize that when our sons and daughters are fighting overseas, they’re fighting for so much more than our freedoms. They are also fighting for our land and our nation’s sacred places. To Southern New Mexicans, the craggy peaks of the Organ Mountains and the surrounding desert Sky Island mountain ranges are such sacred place. In fact, I would say protecting our public lands’ heritage is one of the most patriotic things we could do.”

- Peter Ossorio, Doña Ana County veteran

“Protected public lands like Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument have always been a source of strength and resilience for veterans returning from war. Our shared natural heritage is ingrained in our American ideals, and an attack on our lands and waters is an attack on our values. I fought for our country, I fought to protect Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks as a national monument, and I would do it again without hesitation.”

- Nate Cote, past commander, Disabled American Veterans Chapter 10

“We believe the designation of the new [Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks] national monument has no bearing on our nation’s security. The portion of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument near the U.S.-Mexico border—the Portillo Mountains—has not been a problem area for illegal border crossings, and will similarly not be one in the future. Highway 9, which runs just north of the border in this area, is paved, well-maintained, and well-patrolled, enabling Border Patrol to react quickly to any incursions. In addition, this area is remote, dry, and wild country where covering large distances on foot is very difficult.”

Letter from 68 Retired Generals with 2,290 total years of service to our nation