

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 18, 2022

Chief Randy Moore
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Moore:

Protecting our public lands and waters for future generations means preserving the places our communities depend on every single day. To this end, we ask that the Forest Service, in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), begin the evaluation and administrative withdrawal process for the Upper Pecos Watershed from future mineral development, as requested by our constituents in the attached letter.

For decades, locals of the Upper Pecos Watershed have fought against mineral extraction in the watershed they rely on for their farms, livestock, and domestic water sources. Last year, we reintroduced the Pecos Watershed Protection Act to permanently prevent all federally managed minerals in the watershed from being developed. This legislation has received a hearing in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and awaits further action in the House.

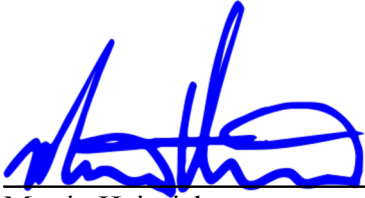
As a testament to the region's importance, the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission voted unanimously in July 2022 to protect the Upper Pecos Watershed as Outstanding National Resource Waters under the Clean Water Act. This historic designation, our delegation's legislation, and the associated campaign are supported by grassroots community organizations such as the Upper Pecos Watershed Association and the New Mexico Acequia Association, as well as the Pueblo of Jemez and local ranchers and farmers who depend on the Pecos River as a cultural and economic resource.

The Upper Pecos Watershed community knows all too well the impacts of disastrous, irresponsibly located mines. In 1991, a strong spring runoff sent toxic mine waste from the abandoned El Molino mine into the river, killing tens of thousands of fish across an 11-mile stretch. Today, these communities face the same threat from Comexico LLC's proposed Terrero Mine, which is currently awaiting approval for an exploration permit. As outlined in the attached letter – which has the support of American Rivers, New Mexico Wild, the National Parks Conservation Association, and 14 other advocacy groups and public officials – initiating and successfully completing the administrative withdrawal process is the logical next step to protect this region from future damage to its irreplaceable water resources.

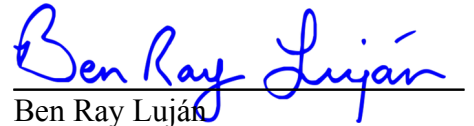
In November 2021, we wrote to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland urging the Department to begin the necessary withdrawal process. While we were pleased to receive a response, we recognize the joint jurisdiction inherent to administrative withdrawal procedures on national forest system land and request that your agencies work together to begin this work so that the Pecos Watershed community can rest assured that its water will be protected for generations to come.

We appreciate your partnership in our shared conservation goals and look forward to your swift action on this issue.

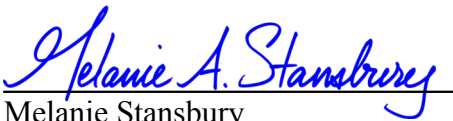
Sincerely,



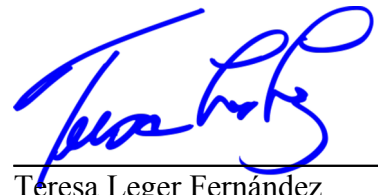
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress