

January 11, 2017

Congressman Ryan Zinke
U.S. House of Representatives
113 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Honorable Interior Secretary Nominee Ryan Zinke,

As leaders of faith, we write to express our support for New Mexico's national monuments and to encourage you to continue to protect America's public lands.

As the Psalms remind us, "the Earth is the Lords and all that is in it" (Psalm 24). We hold the earth in sacred trust and are called to be responsible stewards of God's creation. As God's faithful tenants, we are called to live in right relationship with creation and to develop responsible attitudes, behaviors and practices to how we use the earth's land, water, and natural resources. As we care for God's creation, we also affirm that creation cares for us. Indeed, with grateful hearts, we acknowledge that the gift of our public lands help sustain our livelihood by providing us with clean air, water, wildlife and recreational opportunities. Through America's public lands we encounter not only the beauty of creation and the majesty of the creator, but also acknowledge that our public lands provide everyone--whether rich or poor--with the opportunity to experience the wonder, joy, silence, solitude, and healing power of God's creation.

As the "Land of Enchantment," New Mexico is blessed with a rich and diverse tapestry of history, culture, and sacred traditions that are rooted in the land and God's creation. We are all owners — and keepers (Gen 2:15)— of this unique, rugged, beautiful and spiritual place. A place that's home to our families, our history and our collective spirituality. No place in New Mexico represents the unique and sacred intersection between history, culture, spirituality and land more than the recently designated Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains Desert Peaks national monuments. As faith leaders, we acknowledge that these national monuments are invaluable to our state's history, culture and religious identity.

Located in northern New Mexico, the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument contains the incredible Rio Grande Gorge that will leave one truly humbled and in awe of God's creation. As one of America's most iconic landscapes, the Rio Grande del Norte is an important wildlife corridor and contains various sacred sites representing the rich and diverse history of New Mexico: from pre-contact Native American cultural and archaeological sites to Spanish, Mexican, and American settlement. Some of New Mexico's oldest churches are located in the area and hundreds of petroglyphs, dating from pre-contact time and the Spanish colonial era, can be found in the monument as well as the area contains numerous irreplaceable Native American cultural, religious and sacred sites.

As an area of profound historical, archaeological, and environmental significance, the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument contains the incredible biodiversity of the Chihuahuan Desert wild lands. With unique cultural sites and Native American petroglyphs important to New Mexican and American history, the area also offers ample opportunities for individuals and communities to explore the spirituality, solitude and beauty of the high desert.

Whether prayerfully meditating at the edge of the Rio Grande Gorge, mindfully hiking the Organ Mountains, contemplating while fly-fishing the Red River, or giving gratitude for the diversity of God's creation while observing New Mexico's wildlife, the Rio Grande del Norte and Organ

Mountains Desert Peaks national monuments provide an incredible environment for solitude, self-reflection and to grow in communion with oneself, God, others and all of creation.

Thanks to the designation of these national monuments under the Antiquities Act, local faith communities and tribes continue to access and use these sacred lands as they have for generations. Whether gathering herbs, interpreting petroglyphs, collecting firewood, picking piñon nuts, grazing, hiking, fishing, hunting or prayerfully meditating on the beauty of God's creation, protecting the monument designations for the Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains Desert Peaks will continue to safeguard New Mexico's and America's rich cultural and spiritual heritage.

As leaders of faith and stewards of God's creation, we urge you to work to ensure the continued existence of, funding for, and access to America's public lands and not allow efforts to rollback or shrink these national monuments to succeed.

With Gratitude,

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CC: U.S. Senator Tom Udall (NM)
U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (NM)
U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK)
U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (WA)