



January 13, 2017

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

Dear Honorable Interior Secretary Nominee Ryan Zinke,

New Mexico has an incredible military history and a tradition of being home to a large veteran community. Armed forces service members come to military installations here like White Sands Missile Range and Kirtland Airforce Base and discover our state's rich opportunities for exploring the outdoors. Many veterans stay and make New Mexico their home because the state makes it a priority to conserve these natural treasures.

Veterans seek public lands as a place to recover from the stress of military experience and challenge themselves to overcome injuries. It is a place our warriors can reconnect with family and friends after long deployments without interference with modern distractions. Studies show that outdoor experiences improve recovery time of veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

That is why veterans played an important role in the diverse coalitions to protect Organ Mountain Desert Peaks (OMDP) and Rio Grande del Norte (RGDN) national monuments. In addition to being rich in culture and history, these landscapes offer a great range of recreation opportunities like rock climbing, rafting, hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, and camping. Veterans can adventure in the majestic spires of OMDP knowing that the history of Geronimo and Billy the Kid is preserved. We can run the Rio Grande in RGDN knowing that the watershed and critical wildlife are protected.

When we joined the service and took an oath to protect our country, it included our public lands, including national monuments. There is no better example of "land of the free" than our public lands. It is not surprising that another military veteran, President Theodore Roosevelt, signed into law the Antiquities Act to make sure our future leaders had the power to preserve these important wild spaces. Our citizens know that despite any dysfunction on Capitol Hill, the President will always be able to step in and protect our community's interest. That is why President Obama stepped in to conserve OMDP and RGDN after an overwhelming effort by New Mexico citizens from all walks of life.

Our New Mexico veteran community asks you now to be a defender of our wild spaces. Please ensure the continued existence, funding, and access to our national monuments. Be vigilant in stopping efforts to roll back the monuments we currently enjoy or reduce their size. Oppose efforts to weaken the Antiquities Act so future presidents retain the ability to act in the best interest of our communities.

Thank you for your time and your leadership managing our public lands.

Sincerely,

New Mexico Veterans

Bernie K. Digman
Las Cruces, NM

Kristan Grigsby
Albuquerque, NM

Dean Palma
Las Cruces, NM

Gene Sisneros
Raton, NM

Markus Podell
Angel Fire, NM

Eric Gonzales
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John Tischhauser
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Sheila Cooper
Albuquerque, NM

Kenneth Mayers
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Michael Bankson
Truth or Consequences, NM

Henry Rosoff
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Joseph Callan
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Harvey, Rosen
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Carl Hitchens

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CC:

U.S. Senator Tom Udall (NM)

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (NM)

Senate Natural Resource Committee Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (AK)

Senate Natural Resource Committee Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (WA)