



Heinrich's remarks as prepared for the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument 10th anniversary celebration are below.

Thank you, Councilor Bencomo, for that kind introduction.

And thank you to Patrick Nolan and everyone at the Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks for hosting this amazing celebration.

It's hard to believe that it has been a decade since many of us gathered here in Southern New Mexico to celebrate President Obama's historic designation of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument.

That momentous achievement was the result of decades of work from a diverse coalition of local stakeholders.

There are far too many folks to name who worked for many years to make the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument a reality.

But I want to start by remembering one person whose hard work and dedication made this designation possible.

As a fellow mechanical engineer, I may have been especially taken by how David Soules thought through complex issues with an eye for precision and detail.

Over years and years—alongside many of us gathered here today—David helped to map out all of the cultural resources, historic sites, and natural wonders that helped us make the successful case for National Monument designation.

David taught many of us in this room to better appreciate all the wonders housed within the public lands that surround us here in his hometown of Las Cruces.

Over many years, David steered so much of the behind-the-scenes work behind the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument proposal.

He surveyed broad swaths of the Bureau of Land Management public lands that were ultimately included in the National Monument.

And right after President Obama designated the Monument, David literally helped to write the first book on exploring it.

To David's siblings, Bill and Merrie Lee, we all miss your brother.

But please know that his legacy truly lives on in this National Monument that he played such a large role in creating.

I first got acquainted with these incredible places back in the mid 1990's when I helped with surveying work with a volunteer organization that we now know as New Mexico Wild.

Back in those days, many of us would never have dreamed that these places would be protected as part of a National Monument.

I clearly remember what it was like to first discover what folks who lived in this region have long known.

This region of New Mexico is home to some of the most intact Chihuahuan Desert habitat, unique volcanic geology, and some of the most beautiful places on Earth.

Not just in the iconic Organ Mountains.

But also in the Robledos, the Doña Anas, the Sierra de las Uvas, the East and West Potrillos, and the Aden Lava Flow.

All of these places were absolutely worthy of protection and clearly deserved a place on the map as must-see American outdoor recreation destinations.

It's important for us to remember that our successful proposal for monument designation literally took decades of work.

That's something conservationists in New Mexico and across our country must keep in mind as we pursue any potential new monument proposals going forward.

Progress—especially durable progress—is never linear.

These things take time.

This community's campaign to designate Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks started in when my predecessor, Senator Jeff Bingaman, was still in office.

We worked for years to build a strong and broad local coalition of monument supporters.

And we had to sit down and iron out all of the details with both enthusiastic and skeptical local stakeholders.

All of that hard work made it possible for Senator Tom Udall and me to present President Obama's second Interior Secretary Sally Jewell with an offer that was too good to say No to.

It took time and difficult conversations in the field and a lot of poring over maps to reach that point.

But the results were well worth the effort.

Not all of the impacts of monument designation are quantifiable.

But the parts we can quantify have defied even our most optimistic projections from a decade ago.

A report released last year by the Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce found that visitation to this region has more than tripled since 2012—before monument designation.

That exceeds even our boldest predictions back in 2014.

All of this new visitation has supported hundreds of new jobs.

And it's fueled more than \$234 million of economic impacts in the region.

According to the report, 3 out of 4 of those non-local visitors to this area cited the National Monument as the reason they traveled to Southern New Mexico.

Those visitors are generating important economic activity in our local communities like Las Cruces, Hatch, and Deming.

But I'm even more excited that more than 60% of the total visitors to the Monument have been local residents.

This is proof that on top of showing the world how amazing this region is, monument designation has also encouraged more New Mexicans to get outside and explore our own public lands.

In Washington, I often point to the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument as an example of what locally-driven, grassroots conservation looks like.

This community has truly embraced its monument.

You can see this in everything from the new name for Organ Mountain High School to local products like the apparel made by Organ Mountain Outfitters.

I've heard from so many small business owners over the years about what the Monument has meant for them.

And it's not just the new business our hotels and restaurants are seeing by one-time visitors.

Local realtors like Renee Frank have pointed to the National Monument as a real selling point when they are convincing folks to move to Las Cruces and nearby communities.

Events like Monuments to Main Street Month encourage local businesses to offer OMDP-related products and promotions.

And local organizations like the Friends of OMDP and Visit Las Cruces have organized everything from hiking trips and stagecoach rides to Yoga on the Monument.

If you want to see what the National Monument means for this community, just visit the Las Cruces Farmer's Market on a Saturday morning.

You can see how much local pride there is in the artists and vendors selling screen printed T-shirts, photographs and paintings depicting the Monument.

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument has instilled a real pride and shared ownership of the mountains that have always made up the backdrop of the communities in this region.

Thanks to all of the continued community engagement surrounding the Monument, many more local families have felt invited to make new memories on these public lands that belong to all of us.

That enhanced and authentic connection to this place has been such a special phenomenon to watch develop.

And it has driven me in my work to keep building on what we achieved with the initial monument designation.

In the decade since President Obama signed the monument proclamation for OMDP, I have worked alongside many of you to pass historic federal public lands legislation to complete the full vision for this Monument.

Five years ago, we passed a Public Lands Package that included legislation to help complete our community visions for both Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.

That law established 10 new wilderness areas within Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks.

This was new wilderness protection on a scale our state hadn't seen in nearly four decades.

Nothing has even been comparable since the New Mexico Wilderness Act of 1980.

We ensured permanent protection for the wildest places within the Monument - including the Organs, the East and West Potrillos, the Uvas, and the Robledos, as well as the Aden Lava Flow and Broad Canyon.

The new wilderness we established within just the East and West Potrillos is only smaller in size than the Gila, the Aldo Leopold, and the Pecos Wilderness Areas.

We followed up that historic Public Lands Package by passing the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act.

That law fully and permanently funded the Land and Water Conservation Fund that has helped New Mexicans protect iconic landscapes all across our state like the Valles Caldera and Ute Mountain.

Not long afterward, LWCF made it possible for us to complete a key land acquisition that secured permanent public access to the entrance of the Achenbach Canyon Trail in the Organs.

But that's not the only part of the Monument that's evolving.

Just last month, the BLM Las Cruces District Office released its proposed Resource Management Plan for the Monument.

This is an important step for the agency's long-term planning for the Monument's future visitor infrastructure, recreation access, and resource protection.

I encourage everyone here to engage in the public comment period that is open now.

And please tell your friends and neighbors to engage as well.

Our local BLM managers need to know what resources we value the most in our Monument, how we think they can improve visitor experiences, and what they should prioritize moving forward.

I am so proud of how far we have come in the last decade.

But I am even more excited about where we will go from here.

With the right long-term approach, we will dramatically improve visitor infrastructure, create more public access for recreation, and protect important habitat and cultural resources for future generations.

The legacy of our work will outlive us all in the unforgettable experiences that our kids, our grandkids, and future generations will enjoy in our National Monument.

That's what this is all about.

Finally, I want to emphasize again just how critical it was that Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks was a locally-driven and grassroots effort.

It was the homegrown love of Southern New Mexico's public lands that was the key to securing monument designation in the first place.

And it was that local pride in this place that helped us fight back against the Trump administration's attempt to erase our Monument from the map.

As we continue to support the Monument's future, we cannot become complacent about our hard-won protections.

One of the first moves that former President Trump made when he was in the White House was to threaten erasing protections for many of our national monuments—including OMDP and the Rio Grande del Norte in New Mexico.

Another Trump administration could easily mean that much of our progress to protect our public lands would be reversed.

Regardless of who sits in the Oval Office, it will require our continued focus to steward our National Monument into the next ten, and the next 100 years.

But if these last ten years are any indication of how much this monument can deliver for Southern New Mexico, I can't wait to see where we'll go from here.