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My Turn

Wilderness protects air, water and recreation

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A diverse grassroots coalition of conservation minded forest professionals, business owners, nonprofit organizations, State and Tribal elected officials and New Mexicans from all walks of life, are hard at work to advocate for the designation of 120,000 acres of The Pecos Wilderness as Federal Wilderness or Special Management Area. This designation will protect the clean air, fresh water and recreational area that the counties Santa Fe, San Miguel, Taos, Mora and Rio Arriba counties have come to enjoy. A landmark of New Mexican culture and tradition, the Pecos is of tremendous value to surrounding towns, neighboring tribal groups, acequia organizations, land grant communities, sportsmen, ranchers and outdoor enthusiasts. Its 150 miles of streams and more than 15 lakes are part of a watershed that is essential to surrounding communities and the acequia systems that irrigate the lands. Opponents! believe that a designation prohibits all public enjoyment of the area. The opponents are wrong. A wilderness designation simply means that access to the area must be non-mechanized and create minimal impact on the landscape. A designation of wilderness or Special Management Area is not something to fear. The addition of the land to the Pecos Wilderness would not only protect major watersheds for the state, but would also ensure the conservation of wildlife habitat and therefore, the wildlife that brings thousands of hunters and anglers to the state this time of the year. Opponents will say "the mismanagement of wilderness areas a threat to safety, such as controlling wildfires?" This is fear mongering. Had opposition taken the time to read The Wilderness Act, they would know that it states "... such measures may be taken as may be necessary in the control of fire, insects, and diseases ...". Furthermore, federal fire policy states, "firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity." Preserving this land for future generation should be the goal of all New Mexicans. But is it enough to sit back now that this essential portion of the state is unspoiled by development? There are over 120,000 additional acres that have not seen the cut of a road. These roadless areas could and should be added to the Pecos Wilderness.

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