

## MY TURN

### Honoring the land for the greater good

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As a member of the Arroyo Hondo Arriba Community Land Grant I would like to express my land grant community's support and concern for permanent protection of the Columbine Hondo wilderness area.

Most of the members of our land grant live in the village of Valdez. Our family roots go back hundreds of years.

We have always lived with a sense of connection to the land and natural world that surrounds us. The word "wilderness" was not in our vocabulary.

We referred to the Columbine Hondo simply as

*la tierra o las monta-as* — that our lives were part of. Our instincts were for land conservation since we survived by the good Earth's plentitude.

We have livestock in this wilderness. We hunt in this wilderness. We gather herbs in this wilderness. We get water for our pasture, livestock, gardens, and our families from the rain and snow harvested by the Columbine Hondo mountains.

After hundreds of years of these activities, you can see that this Columbine Hondo wilderness area is still very pristine. We have always respected the mountains as the foundation for our agricultural subsistence. It was an unspoken value that the land was to be respected.

It is with sadness that we observe condominiums and sprawling developments where we once had open common lands.

Today our Arroyo Hondo Arriba Community Land Grant is just a small fraction of what was formerly a large common area extending from the Rim Road all the way up to Lobo Peak on the west side for communal benefits.

We strongly support permanent protection for 46,000 acres of the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Study Area. Today the Upper Arroyo Hondo Community Land Grant believes that this is the best current option to ensure that this greater common land remains protected for the benefit of all.

When newcomers arrive, we understand that most of them do not know that some of us have

been here for centuries. When the mountain bikers ride into these mountains illegally, they are probably not aware of our *antepasados*

(ancestors) who have cared for these mountains.

As they ask to leave 9,000 acres out of wilderness designation to assert their mountain biking use, they preempt the traditional uses, as well as the intention of Congress and the greater community.

Members of the Arroyo Hondo Arriba Community Land Grant try to respect newcomers and their differences but we also expect these newcomers to learn about the traditions of our local community such as the 30 years old Wilderness Study Area and respect these local traditions for the greater good.

This stance of the mountain bikers regarding the Columbine Hondo wilderness designation is the kind of situation that makes population influx in Taos unpleasant for us old timers. Please be sensitive to our cultural tradition of honoring the land for the greater good.

*Dr. David Argüello, resident of Valdez, is president of the Arroyo Hondo Arriba Community Land Grant and associate professor at New Mexico Highlands University.*

*The Italianos Ca-òn in Columbine Hondo was named after his Italian-Hispano family ancestors who used that canyon as part of their subsistence lifestyle.*