

My Turn

Preserving Columbine Hondo close to our hearts

PENNIE HERRERA WARDLOW

The Taos News, 7/12/2012

As a member of the Arroyo Hondo Arriba Community Land Grant, I am writing to express my deepest thanks to Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall for introducing a bill which will forever protect our Columbine Hondo Wilderness from industrial development and motorized and mechanized use.

I also want to thank all the members of the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Coalition who have worked hard on this effort — especially our local groups Taos Pueblo, Arroyo Hondo Arriba Community Land Grant, San Antonio del Rio Colorado Community Land Grant, Rivers and Birds, and Amigos Bravos.

For those of us with ancestral roots in these mountains, the family memories of this area are intricate, colorful and rich. This beautiful wilderness, which includes the high points of Lobo Peak, Flag Mountain and Gold Hill, has been a foundation for our community for centuries.

Our ancestors lived well here thanks to the nourishment provided by the Columbine Hondo Wilderness — the clean fresh water it provided, the forage for our livestock and food resources such as wild and medicinal plants.

My own great-great grandfather, Carlos Prandi (now called Prando), ran his livestock in one drainage of these mountains, now named the Italianos Trail, after our family's traditional use of that area.

Grandfather Prandi also had a flour mill run by the Rio Hondo with water from these wilderness headwaters. That mill was located in the vicinity of upper Valdez and many local families from nearby villages such as Valdez, Des Montes and Arroyo Seco ground their wheat at that mill.

Hunting game provided an important supplement of protein for our subsistence ancestors.

Today my dear sister Nora Herrera Oest serves as mayordomo of the Acequia de los Prandos for the community of Valdez. This is an acequia that is fed by the Rio Hondo and water from the Columbine Hondo Wilderness mountains.

Today, with all the development that exists at the base of these mountains as a result of population growth, refuge for our local wildlife species is now limited to these wilderness mountains. These steep mountainous wilderness areas are so critical to the survival of our birds, elk, bighorn sheep, deer and black bear populations.

We in Taos County are so fortunate to still have such beautiful wildlife in our community.

I want to encourage everyone to contact our senators to thank them and give them the moral support they need now to get this bill passed through Congress, this 2012.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman's phone number is: 1-800-443-8658.

His email is senator_bingaman@bingaman.senate.gov. Sen. Tom Udall's phone number is: 1-202-224-6621 or email him via his website at:

www.tomudall.senate.gov/contact/contact.cfm.

This is a simple but powerful way to thank the mountains and honor our ancestors and help ensure that the Columbine Hondo Wilderness is protected for future generations of all species.

Here in Taos County, we are all interconnected in a deep way to these Sangre de Cristo Mountains through the sheer beauty they express in our valley and through their rain and snow and run off that makes it possible for us to live here.

Our Arroyo Hondo Arriba Community Land Grant is proud to be part of this work for the Columbine Hondo Wilderness protection. We invite you to join us!

Preservation and conservation were so important to my parents and aunts and uncles — as their lives were an intricate part of this land.

Preservation of the Columbine Hondo Wilderness for all future generations would have been at their heart — as it is at mine.

Thank you for reaching out!

Pennie Herrera Wardlow, is a member of the Arroyo Hondo Arriba Community Land Grant and a community advocate for children and animals in Taos County.