



MY TURN

What the Rio Grande del Norte means to me

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Across the West, there are examples of communities that have lost their natural areas and access to prized hunting and fishing areas and river ways because of reckless development. If this were to happen here, it would leave a scar, not only on our lands, but in our hearts. Let us keep the Rio Grande del Norte the way it was intended so our kids and grandkids can also stand around the campfires and pass on the stories they heard, along with their own stories, to the next generations to come. Let us permanently protect these lands and rivers along with their given names that go as far back as the time of the Spaniards.

The Rio Grande del Norte is not only important to local cultural traditions and history; it is also a national treasure that clearly deserves protection. With that in mind, I want to thank Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall for their work to protect this area, including asking President Obama to designate Rio Grande del Norte as a National Monument. This is the right thing to do to protect and preserve our heritage for generations.

I am Mark Casias, a user of these lands, as a kid and adult. I feed my family with game, rabbits, deer, elk and antelope, and I use the wood for winter heat.

To me, the Rio Grande del Norte means star-filled nights, standing around the fire in hunting camp, listening to our dads telling stories about their childhood experiences with friends and family: How they hiked down the bajada of the Rio Grande to fish, how they hunted for the winter supply of venison that they dried because there was no refrigeration.

They also hauled wood in “carro de caballo,” using just axes. This was their money for “gold,” not the gold we know now, but gold as in corn that they traded with the Taos Pueblo Indians to feed their hogs, chickens and other farm animals.

These lands are my family’s heritage, our livelihood and survival.

Mark Casias grew up in Northern New Mexico and has been a hunting guide here for the last 30 years.



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