

## My Turn

# A Rio Grande del Norte national monument makes economic sense

**Adriana Blake**

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The north central part of New Mexico thrives on the beauty of the land. It sustains our culture and way of life.

Business owners in this area are more aware than ever of how important it is that people experience the mountains, waters and wildlife that make Northern New Mexico so special.

Just 30 miles northwest of Taos, there is another treasure: Rio Grande del Norte. This area has long been known for the awe-inspiring Rio Grande Gorge, the soaring Ute Mountain and the vibrant Taos Plateau.

Today, I support the movement to ask President Obama to protect this special place by designating it as Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. Rio Grande del Norte offers exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities. People near and far come to Rio Grande del Norte to hike, swim, paddle, camp, bike, horseback ride, fish and hunt.

Rio Grande del Norte serves as a nesting ground and migratory route for a variety of bird species, such as wild geese, sand hill cranes, golden eagles and peregrine falcons.

It is also home to bighorn and pronghorn sheep, elk and deer. The animals and people alike benefit from the clean water that stems from the Rio Grande, providing acequias and farmers with needed water supplies.

It is for all these incredible resources that Northern New Mexicans from all walks of life are working together to protect Rio Grande del Norte.

Over 100 businesses, in addition to the Taos County and Mora Valley Chambers of Commerce, sportsmen, ranchers, the Taos Town Council and Taos County Commission, members of local traditional communities and local, state and federal elected officials are searching for a way to protect this treasure in Northern New Mexico.

Northern New Mexicans are asking for a Rio Grande del Norte National Monument because it makes economic sense. According to a recent study by an economic research firm, a national monument could add \$15 million annually to our local economy and create 279 jobs. This growth is on top of the \$3.8 billion that outdoor recreation already contributes to New Mexico's economy annually and the 47,000 New Mexico jobs it supports.

Senators. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall and Reps. Ben Ray Luján and Martin Heinrich have been working on legislation to protect Rio Grande del Norte. However, the bills are stalled in Congress, so our elected officials have asked President Obama to protect the area by using the Antiquities Act.

The president of the United States can protect special natural and cultural places with the Antiquities Act, a law that is over 100 years old.

American icons, like the Statue of Liberty and the Grand Canyon, have been protected by the Antiquities Act, as have the Aztec Ruins and Bandelier National Monuments right here in New Mexico.

People come to Northern New Mexico to experience all that our great outdoors have to offer. Making sure that Rio Grande del Norte is protected as a national monument would only increase the value of our land, boost our local economy, and protect our home for future generations to enjoy.

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