

Editorial

Resubmitted bill to conserve Rio Grande del Norte promising to area

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Last week, our Congressional delegation reintroduced a bill to protect 236,000 acres along both sides of the Rio Grande as a national conservation area. We applaud their perseverance. This swath of dramatic landscape includes the Rio Grande Gorge, and the Ute and San Antonio mountains in Taos and Rio Arriba counties.

The so-called Rio Grande del Norte has long been used for such traditional uses as grazing, hunting, fishing and gathering firewood. The area also contains many religious and cultural sites.

The timing is right to ensure this land remains permanently for the use of the people. The creation of a conservation area would prohibit new roads as well as future mineral development.

And making Rio Grande del Norte a national conservation area would help attract visitors who, too, would want to enjoy these wild lands. This could be a welcome boost to the local economy.

Locally, strong support has been demonstrated, including by local governments, Taos Pueblo leaders, land grant associations and various community groups.

But an attempt at protection failed last year during the legislative deadlock.

Similarly, granting wilderness protection to 45,000 acres in the Columbine-Hondo area didn't go anywhere in Washington, D.C., despite broad local support.

Now, U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich (who was elected to Jeff Bingaman's seat last year) and Rep. Ben Ray Luján remain committed to conservation.

We agree that the natural resources of Northern New Mexico are worth protecting and offer them our support.