

## My Turn

### **'These lands are in our very DNA'**

**Darren Córdova**

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**My** family has lived in Taos County for generations. This land forms the core of our cultural heritage and it is the source of our livelihood.

It is because of this intimate long-term connection to that land that I am incredibly pleased the new Rio Grande del Norte National Monument will preserve our heritage for all New Mexicans. President Obama and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, in response to proposals put forth by Sen. Bingaman, Sen. Udall, Rep. Luján, and Sen. Heinrich, worked with our local community to ensure that, in protecting about 240,000 acres of public land in and around Taos County, the concerns our of community were addressed.

The Rio Grande del Norte is an area of extraordinary cultural, recreational, and scenic value. Maintaining this wonder of the natural world is important to New Mexico's identity. As stated in the resolution adopted by the Taos Town Council last fall, people today enjoy the Rio Grande public lands for a multitude of recreational uses, including: hiking, camping, river rafting, photography, and mountain climbing.

The Rio Grande del Norte is also where many locals graze their cattle or collect firewood and pi-on nuts for use at home. It is a place where people go fishing and hunt for elk to feed their families. For many people in this region, the Rio Grande del Norte is more than a great place to visit — it is a way of life.

So in addition to attracting new visitors for recreational purposes, the new Monument will help Northern New Mexico's traditional ways of living remain viable.

My own family has enjoyed this majestic landscape for decades, and thanks to the President's decision to create the National Monument, I can be sure that my children and grandkids will enjoy it in the years to come as well.

Perhaps most important, these uses of the public lands of Taos County are a vital part of our state's economy. Already, outdoor recreation contributes \$3.8 billion to New Mexico's economy annually and supports more than 47,000 jobs for New Mexicans, according to the Outdoor Industry Association.

And, a report from BBC Research & Consulting says protecting Rio Grande del Norte as a National Monument will provide an important economic boost locally to the tune of \$15 million in new revenue and 279 new jobs. That is a big impact in a small community, and it should stabilize the region for decades to come.

Permanently protecting these public lands also better protects their scenic, ecological, economic, cultural, and recreational values from the adverse impacts of future development. The designation means that the Rio Grande del Norte will be preserved for the sake of the many traditional forms of recreation and subsistence already mentioned.

For Northern New Mexicans like me these lands are in our very DNA and the National Monument designation means our way of life can continue for all time and for all New Mexicans.

*Darren Córdova is the mayor of Taos.*