

## My Turn

# A community success: ¡Viva El Rio Grande del Norte!

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*The Taos News, 3/28/2013*

Today the news came after 25 years that an American President will recognize the Rio Grande in Taos County as a national and natural treasure. The news comes with relief and awe. The river and canyon is far more than a topographical feature or natural characteristic but it is a spiritual bond that has brought together generations of people who live here on the Taos Plateau.

Its very existence has attracted communities to settle along its tributaries for time immemorial. The Taos Pueblo, our oldest American community, is inextricably tied to the mountains, streams and river canyon of the Rio Grande. The acequias divert from the river and its streams. Cultural, physical and spiritual needs cannot be separated from our communities and that magnificent canyon out on the mesa.

Many of us were born into this land or many of us have stories of what brought us here. All are filled with stories of wonderment of the landscape and nature's wonder and character that touch our lives as we live here. Tribal members, parcientes along the acequias, cowboys, painters, hunters, fisherman, boaters all have a deep bond to this landscape and river canyon that Congress and the President now also recognize and respect the Rio Grande Gorge as the treasure that it is.

My relationship with the river began as a volunteer field biologist for the BLM documenting the eagles and falcons that find a nesting home in the canyon. I was quickly overwhelmed and ultimately consumed with the wonderment for the connection of all living things that climaxes in the canyon.

Few places in America are home to eagles, falcons, hawks, owls, wild trout, turkey, fox, elk, deer, bear, cows, antelope, big horn sheep, otters, muskrats, beaver, passerine birds and waterfowl all within a 50-mile river corridor that serves as a migratory flyway. In America's rich natural heritage the Rio Grande Canyon is an exemplary piece of a diminishing resource, which are large tracts of land that work as great ecosystems that includes ranchers, farmers, hunters and fishermen.

All of us know how magical the mesa and canyon are through the many intimate times and experiences in and along it that we have been blessed with. Many of us come away humbled in that interconnection of all things. Just as ecosystems and habitats factor into the presence of all the wild residents of the canyon so do the connections of our communities and our landscape.

We should all be fulfilled as a generation that we acted to protect a resource both eternal and fragile. It is yet another story of how the magic of the Rio Grande has touched us and drew us together in action that went to the ultimate forum of our country, Congress and the White House. It connects us over all time to the people who have lived and loved along this river to the wild heritage of the country.

This is a legacy that we all will share. Collectively we have felt deeply enough about our land and water to recognize the landscape and river that define our communities and fulfill our daily quality of life. We are fortunate to live in a place that many Americans will want to visit and witness for moments in their lives. The designation as a national monument is not the end all to conserving the canyon and its wild nature but it is certainly a profound acknowledgment of respect that we as a community have for a river canyon and plateau that draws us together.

There is work for future generations of Taos County's communities to conserve this unique diversity of life in the Upper Rio Grande Gorge and Taos Plateau. This new monument is truly a rare symphony of life and land where we live in a land that still has wild character. As with many conservation initiatives in western America few are successful without the understanding and support of the community. But as the President makes this special acknowledgment Congress will also have a responsibility to keep this landscape and ecosystem whole so that future generations may have those special times and experiences that we enjoy today.

Like the Tiwa struggle to recover the Blue Lake Watershed this will be a Taos County success for the ages. A very special thank you to Jorge Banuelos Silva, John Olivas and Esther Garcia for bringing together those community voices that made this week's signature possible.

*Ron Gardiner is a resident of Questa.*