



## **Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Act reintroduced for Taos County**

**By Matthew van Buren**

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**New Mexico's Congressional Delegation has reintroduced legislation to designate the 45,000-acre Columbine-Hondo area as a wilderness.**

**The area, located north of Taos, has been managed by Carson National Forest as a "wilderness study area" since 1980. Retired U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman introduced legislation to give the Columbine-Hondo full wilderness status about a year ago, but Congress failed to pass it.**

**U.S. Sens. Tom Udall, D-NM, and Martin Heinrich, D-NM, reintroduced a bill in the Senate Monday (April 22) in honor of Earth Day. U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Luján, D-NM, is expected to introduce a companion bill in the House Tuesday (April 23). The effort enjoys wide support in Taos County from local groups and governmental bodies, including Taos Pueblo, acequia associations, the Taos County Commission and municipal councils.**

**"For more than 30 years we have considered the Columbine Hondo's economic, recreational and scenic values for protection," Udall is quoted as saying in a delegation release. "And Taos County locals resoundingly agree that this area is deserving of permanent wilderness status. Designating the Columbine Hondo as wilderness will only increase profitable tourism opportunities and provide for continued traditional land uses, such as hunting and grazing."**