



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## My Turn

### Working to preserve Columbine Hondo

**Roberta Salazar**

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On June 26, six members of the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Coalition went to Washington, D.C., to attend the Great Outdoor America Week and to visit with our congressional delegation to discuss permanent protection for the Columbine Hondo wilderness.

This trip to D.C. felt like a reunion as different coalition members came together, and Sen. Tom Udall, Sen. Martin Heinrich and Congressman Ben Ray Luján welcomed us into their respective offices and reiterated their determination to get a Columbine Hondo Wilderness Bill passed.

Our senators and congressman express admiration for the unity and cooperation demonstrated in Taos County for local land conservation. They see the local Columbine Hondo and R'o Grande Del Norte Coalitions as a community conservation model worth emulating elsewhere.

Sens. Udall, Heinrich and Congressman Luján also understand that the Columbine Hondo Wilderness is a precious water source and a landscape that shapes our livelihoods here in Taos County. We are fortunate to have a strong congressional delegation, passionate about land and water conservation in New Mexico.

In Taos County, the beauty of this watershed landscape blesses us each day. This is obvious from the way we unite as a community to protect our land and water.

According to the National Weather Service, the past 12 months have been the driest year on record for New Mexico. The past 24 months are the second driest consecutive 24 months on record. Most of New Mexico's large water reservoirs are now below 10 percent capacity.

We breathe a sigh of relief for the recent rains. But scientists predict increases in temperatures and decreases in annual precipitation for the Southwest over the next several decades.

With these extended droughts, the importance of taking steps to conserve our water is underscored.

Columbine Hondo is a precious watershed area for New Mexico. It supplies water to the second and third largest stream tributaries to the R'o Grande in New Mexico — the Red River and the R'o Hondo.

The people of Taos Pueblo exemplify what it means to be a sustainable community. When severe long-term droughts came to New Mexico, many, many Puebloan villages were abandoned — most likely due to scarcity of water and food.

The village of Taos Pueblo, however, has thrived in this place for thousands of years, thanks to their proximity to the largest renewable source of water in New Mexico — the Sangre De Cristo Mountains.

Wilderness designation ensures that these mountains will never be developed for industrial uses such as mining or logging. It ensures that New Mexico's most water rich mountains will remain protected for the benefit of all who live along the R'o Grande Corridor.

Let us all continue to work together to see that 45,000 acres of the Columbine Hondo receives permanent Wilderness designation soon. We owe this to future generations. Thanks to all who have supported this effort.

*Roberta Salazar, executive director of Rivers and Birds, is a member Columbine Hondo Wilderness Coalition.*