

## My Turn

### In search of our home ground

**Meg Peterson**

*The Taos News*, 12/24/2014

*The Taos News* editorial (Dec. 18) was spot on when it highlighted the environmental costs of the latest deal by politicians and their allies that helped secure the Hondo/Columbine Wilderness. Horse-trading of our public lands is not confined to Washington, however. It goes on right under our noses here in Taos.

We learned that Red River got a chunk of public land, TSV got another chunk, and the International Mountain Biking Association got a chunk. The boundaries of the Wheeler Peak Wilderness will be re-drawn for — amazingly enough — a mountain biking loop trail. (The IMBA officially signed on in support of the coalition in 2013, though they targeted the Wheeler re-draw in 2012.) The Hondo/Columbine coalition basically horse-traded one section of forest for what they deemed more worthy acreage elsewhere. This scenario played out nationally as forests in Arizona and Alaska were horse-traded for protected portions — postage-size by comparison — here in New Mexico.

Recently, Taos BLM decided in favor of the mountain biking lobby, too. Before the plan for the new R'o Grande del Norte National Monument is even decided upon, Taos BLM is proposing to build infrastructure on monument land so that mountain biking races can take place. Taos BLM, outside any authentic authorization, went ahead last summer and built improved roads with access to camping with the help of Rocky Mountain Youth Corps (whose director heads up the IMBA's Taos chapter) at the overlook site at the end of CR 110.

The Hondo/Columbine Coalition and Taos BLM believe fervently they are doing the right thing. They believe compromises have to be made somewhere.

Perhaps we need to re-frame the discussion. In the end, it may be less important that we set aside chunks of wilderness (whose lines, as we see in the case of the Wheeler, can easily be re-drawn with a change in the political winds) than we come together as neighbors to focus on the worn-down ecosystems in our midst.

The overlook site at the end of CR 110 could be rehabilitated — not as potential vendor sites — but as renewed habitat for humans as well as for the whole complex of life, from butterflies to birds. The R'o Fernando, as it flows through town, is such a sad little stream, yet beckons with a promise of potential transformation. Curbsides and vacant lots that are a tangle of invasive plants could be lush with native grasses and flowers. From El Prado to Ranchos, even the strip of hard-packed dirt that edges the highway could be rejuvenated as soil.

Benjamin Vogt, a blogger from the prairie, says it better than me: "We have to fall in love with every place, every ecosystem, if we have any hope of helping it ... if we're to help ourselves and other species adapt to a world changing so fast adaptation may be impossible regardless, the least we can do is learn the species of our home ground."

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