

## My Turn

# Columbine-Hondo: Land with a wealth of traditions

**Erminio Martinez**

*The Taos News, 2/12/2015*

**My** family has lived in the Taos area for eight generations.

We have a long history of raising cattle in the Columbine-Hondo. So I would like nothing better than to see my grandchildren and their children be able to live and work in this region, like our previous generations have.

I am grateful that Congress has answered the request from ranchers like me to preserve Columbine-Hondo. Just a few weeks ago, Congress voted to protect roughly 45,000 acres of public land in the Columbine- Hondo as wilderness. The president signed that bill into law on Dec. 19.

What this means is our traditional way of life can continue without the risk of seeing these lands carved up for mining, timber harvesting, or other unnecessary development.

U.S. Sens. Tom Udall, Martin Heinrich, and former Sen. Jeff Bingaman, and Reps. Ben Ray Lujan and Michelle Lujan Grisham deserve praise for being champions of this cause. They have worked with our community for many years to safeguard the Columbine-Hondo. Their leadership has been essential to the success of this effort.

It's telling that in a time where Congress can hardly agree on anything, they came together in a bipartisan way and voted to ensure that this land in our Sangre de Cristo Mountains should be preserved as wilderness. That means these lands will remain available for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations of Americans. It is also telling that Columbine- Hondo was protected during the same year the nation came together to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act – a law that was dreamed up right here in New Mexico and still holds special meaning for those of us who call the Land of Enchantment home.

The Sangre de Cristo Mountains offer more than agricultural benefits. The lands include the headwaters of the Red River and the R'o Hondo, so protecting this essential watershed protects our water quality and gives us a sustainable supply of clean drinking water locally and downstream for the rest of the state. These rivers are key tributaries to the upper R'o Grande.

Columbine Hondo also offers important habitat for our native plants and for wildlife such as the Rio Grande cutthroat trout, bighorn sheep, pine marten, black bear, deer, and elk. That's one of the reasons why these lands attract visitors from across New Mexico and from across the U.S. who appreciate these mountains for hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing.

Of course, visitors to Columbine- Hondo provide our local economy with tourism dollars and tax revenue on top of everything else. The wilderness protection will give businesses in our community the ability to plan and invest in this region knowing that they can count on the permanent preservation of these lands.

Support for the Columbine- Hondo Wilderness Act runs deep. Our local business owners, acequia parciantes, Native American Tribes, mountain bikers, veterans, and conservationists support it. Designating the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Area represents many years of meeting and collaborating and working to find common ground in our community to protect lands that we all treasure.

While many things about New Mexico have changed, here is an example of a land with a wealth of traditions that can be preserved the way they are. The community support and collaboration for Columbine Hondo mirrors the efforts surrounding the designation of the R'o Grande del Norte National Monument. And as our state faces more seasons of drought, we recognize that we must look for new opportunities to safeguard our precious land and waters in Northern New Mexico, like the roadless areas surrounding the Pecos Wilderness.

Our community's culture and way of life are bound to the land and water in these mountains.

We want our children to grow up with a shared appreciation for the land with clean air to breath and clean water to drink.

Congratulations to the community for ensuring that we can preserve this tradition.

*Erminio Martinez is an eighth-generation livestock permittee in Columbine Hondo.*