

## Editorial

# Create a Rio Grande Trail? We'd make that trek

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New Mexico can't help but play to its strengths when it comes to attracting visitors: namely its gorgeous landscape, plus the recreational activities it offers. So we are encouraged state legislators from both parties propose creating a 500-mile trail along the Rio Grande — from Colorado in the north to Texas in the south. House Bill 563 calls for a commission to study that possibility, representing one of the few interesting and imaginative initiatives to come out of this so-far soporific legislative session.

Legislators gave their support Thursday (Feb. 19) for the bill introduced by state Rep. Jeff Steinborn, a Democrat from Las Cruces. Such lengthy trails already exist in our nation. The Appalachian Trail is in the East, the Pacific Crest Trail is to the west and the Continental Divide Trail is more centrally located.

Many hardy folk take on the challenge to make the entire trek on one of those trails; others do it in segments.

But a Rio Grande Trail? We encourage its serious consideration.

Of course, selfishly, we believe Northern New Mexico would benefit tremendously from a state-long trail. Nearly 20 miles of trail already exists on public land along the Rio Grande — preserved nicely by the recently established National Monument.

The trail would be for hikers, backpackers and horseback riders. We envision birders and wildlife observers taking a walk as well.

Importantly, we see benefit to Taos County's economy without a major investment from local governments. Those hikers, backpackers, horseback riders and others will spend money on food, lodging and equipment. They might hire outfitters to guide them.

Rural communities like Questa would no doubt benefit from being a way-point on an especially picturesque section of the river. Establishing a trail of that length would not be without challenges, however. A big issue certainly is whether landowners, in particular those who are private individuals, would permit a trail. Other concerns would be access to the trail, parking and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas. Another is that a riverbank trail would go through sacred tribal lands, which might not be allowed, so some sections would have to deviate from the river.

Creation of a Rio Grande Trail is not a new idea. One was proposed years ago but nothing came to pass.

But we believe the time is right for weighing creative ways to boost one of the state's sources of income — recreational tourism.

And frankly, giving New Mexicans the opportunity to walk at whatever length they want along our large and storied river would be an enriching experience.

The Rio Grande Trail is a project worth pursuing.