



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## My Turn

### **'This is a civil rights and human rights struggle'**

**A.M. Martinez**

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I write in support of transferring some "public lands" from federal to state control and to correct the many lies and fear tactics that have been used by extremist environmentalists, "sportsmen" and some in the media--including the Taos News--who used their fear tactics to deny the people of New Mexico the opportunity to simply study the idea of transferring some "public lands".

In the current New Mexico legislative session, a bill was introduced (and has since been tabled) to create an 18-member commission to study the pros and cons of transferring some "public lands" from federal to state control. The bill was only to study the idea, not to actually transfer any lands, since that would require further action beyond a study.

But the environmentalists and "sportsmen" showed how selfish their political agendas are because these two special interest groups did not even want a discussion or a study to be held. In a democracy, at the very least, we should be able to discuss and study ideas. But the environmentalists and "sportsmen" behaved themselves like wannabe dictators, not wanting to allow an intelligent discussion and study of this important issue.

The reality is, the supporters of transferring "public lands" to the state of New Mexico and to other western states, are ordinary citizens--many of us are farmers, ranchers and here in northern New Mexico, members of the Spanish Land Grant communities. We don't want to transfer "public lands" from the federal to the state government so that mining or oil drilling can take place on these lands, but rather we want and need more access to these lands so we can survive and sustain our families.

The environmentalists and "sportsmen"--and the government itself--like to pretend these lands, which are controlled by the Forest Service and BLM, are "public lands" but they are not really "public lands" because if they were "public lands" the public would be allowed to use these lands.

The lands controlled by the Forest Service and BLM do not belong to the public, instead these lands belong to the bloated and corrupt U.S. government bureaucracy. Today, the U.S. government controls a massive 600 million acre federal estate across America and this fact alone is killing the American economy and destroying the lives of millions of American families from "sea to shining sea."

Here in the American west, where so much of our heritage is tied to the land and where many of our families and communities are still small, family-owned, independent farmers and ranchers, the greediness of the federal government in wanting to control so much lands is destroying any chance of social and economic prosperity.

Here in northern New Mexico, where the U.S. government stole 93% of our Spanish Land Grant lands from our Hispano Spanish Land Grant communities, the U.S. government controlling so much of our ancestral Spanish Land Grant lands is the main cause of the poverty and economic stagnation that is keeping New Mexico one of America's poorest states.

In northern New Mexico, there is enough land for our U.S. government to return at least 3 million acres to our Spanish Land Grant communities so that our Hispano Spanish Land Grant families and communities can survive and thrive once again in our traditional Spanish Land Grant way of life, which is a landbased life of small agricultural communities. If our U.S. government returned at least 3 million acres of our ancestral Spanish Land Grant lands to our Spanish Land Grant communities, there would still be more than 16 million acres of lands left over for the rest of the public. The farmers and ranchers who are not part of our Spanish Land Grant communities (and who are mostly Anglos) also need more access to "public lands" so they too, can survive.

Today and for the past many years, the Forest Service and BLM have kicked the American people off these "public lands" and they misuse their "powers" as government employees to harass the American people and to violate the civil rights of the public if the public dares to cut wood or do anything else on these "public lands."

It's time for common sense ideas such as transferring "public lands" from the federal to the state governments so the public can finally have real access to these lands. And it's time for our U.S. government to return 3 million acres of our Spanish Land Grant lands to our Hispano Spanish Land Grant communities in northern New Mexico.