

My Turn

O'Donnell opposes expansion of Pecos Wilderness

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The Land Grant Committee, an interim legislative body of New Mexico legislators, voted on July 5 to oppose expansion of the Pecos Wilderness in both the Carson and Santa Fe National Forests.

State Rep. Debbie A. Rodella (D-Rio Arriba, Santa Fe and Taos - Dist. 41), made two motions to oppose expansion.

One opposes expansion efforts by the wilderness coalition (New Mexico Wildlife Federation, New Mexico Wilderness Society and New Mexico Wilderness Alliance) and the second notifies officials that the committee opposes any new wilderness in the revision plan of the Carson National Forest.

Committee Chairman, Sen.

Jacob R. Candelaria, (D-Bernalillo - Dist. 26), cast the lone dissenting vote on both motions, citing the stakeholders favoring wilderness expansion — Picuris Pueblo and the wilderness coalition, who were not present.

The committee will send letters to the congressional delegation and county commissions whose districts are in the boundaries of the controversial expansion informing them of the votes.

Ultimately, Congress has the deciding vote. Legislation has not been introduced.

I represent District 5 of the Taos County Commission.

Much of the controversial expansion would take place in District 5 within the boundaries of the two mercedes in southern Taos County.

During the meeting, committee member, State Rep.

Miguel P. Garcia (D-Bernalillo - Dist. 14) told land grant heirs, "The committee will be at your side come hell and high water." The committee heard from Merced de Santa Barbara and Merced de Santo Tomás Apòstol del Rio de Las Trampas board presidents Bonifacio Vasquez and Alex Lopez, respectively.

In a prepared statement Vasquez said, "Get the boot of this progressive giant off our back and let us restart the timber industry. Allow free market principles and put people back to work on the treatment of our forests. This would improve our economy and improve the health of the forest and secure our watershed."

Vasquez presented a Santa Barbara Land Grant resolution dated June 26 opposing any wilderness expansion. It urges "the Taos County commission, the congressional delegation

and the wilderness advocates to consider the historical significance of the land grants and the necessary and historical use of the common lands by the communities.”

Vasquez also read the Taos County comprehensive plan vision statement into the record.

Other agenda items included a presentation by Paula Garcia, executive director of the New Mexico Acequia Association, and updates by Tammy Malone, district ranger, Camino Real District, and Kevin Naranjo, a forest planner.

Lawmakers questioned the two about green and dead fuel wood permits, closing roads, grazing permits and the forest revision plan.

The Carson National Forest is accepting public comment on their additional wilderness inventory recommendations.

The comment period has been extended from July 15 until July 29 in the first round of public input on wilderness addition.

The lands grants hosted the meeting at the Pe-asco Community Center. Both grants have recently registered with the New Mexico Land Grant Council. The registration recognizes the two land grants as political subdivisions of the state.

O'Donnell is the Taos County commissioner for District 5.



Pictured is the July 5 Land Grant Committee meeting regarding expansion of the Pecos Wilderness.

Courtesy Candyce O'Donnell

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