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Letters

Valid arguments against Pecos designation

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I am writing in response to the "My Turn" of July 28-Aug. 3 "The Truth about the 'Protect the Pecos' campaign."

First, to correct a misrepresentation: John Olivas is not the chairman of the Mora County Commission. He lost his re-election bid in 2014, and in March of this year, the commission rescinded its support of the Pecos Wilderness expansion and issued a resolution that calls for the designation of a cultural heritage area that protects both the environmental and social integrity of these forest lands.

Second, valid arguments have been raised against the Pecos Wilderness expansion that should be thoughtfully considered by those who automatically think a wilderness designation must be good because it "ensures the highest protection of our high mountain headwaters." Many areas of the Pecos Wilderness are dangerously overgrown with small diameter trees that reduce the amount of snowmelt that sustains watersheds and are susceptible to wildfire conflagrations such as the Jaroso Fire in 2013 that threatened both the Pecos and Rio de Frijoles watersheds. Due to years of fire suppression, many of these fires are by default classified as "too dangerous to fight." Adding the proposed roadless areas to the extant wilderness just puts more acreage into the same situation.

The Forest Service has neither the resources nor the will to adequately address much needed forest restoration within or outside the wilderness areas. Scaring folks by claiming the "extractive industries and commercial development" are standing on the perimeters just waiting to exploit these already roadless areas, wilderness proponents detract from efforts being made by coalitions such as the Rio Grande Basin Water Fund to raise the money to underwrite forest restoration thinning and burning.

On a more philosophical level, folks need to remember that wilderness means different things to different people. To the descendants of the norteno land grants it signifies their common lands, where their ancestors built their acequias and harvested their timber and firewood, and will always be seen as a further "taking." For me, an Anglo who has hiked the entire Pecos Wilderness (I wrote a guidebook to it), it represents an inhabited wilderness where all of us go to hike, fish, hunt, graze cattle and respect the incredible tenacity and sacrifice of those who came before us, both Native and Hispano, to establish these land-based communities we call home.