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My Turn

Two percent is a small amount of land to ask for — unless it's yours

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When I returned to the village of Penasco in 2000, I met a man who gave me very good advice. He said “Stay out of bars, stay out of politics, stay out of other people’s bedrooms and always wave.”

I have tried to live by that ever since. Those notions apply to the proposed Pecos Wilderness expansion as well.

I have lived here as a learner and a servant, and had the opportunity to watch and participate in a community that has survived and thrived through various waves of cultural change. I have learned some very important lessons in these few years. One: Technology will change culture and sometimes values, but love of land and family will never change. Two: Agencies will pass rules for unknown reasons that can and will be largely ignored. Three: Outside actors or special interests rarely have the best interest of the local community at their core.

Four: Never get between a Norte-o or Norte-a and access to their land.

When I asked some students, “Who owns the forest?”

They said things like, “BLM, the Forest Service, or the feds.” When I told them that they owned it and that those agencies managed it for them, they responded, “Then why did they chase us off on our four-wheelers when we were scouting for hunting season?”

I am mobility impaired and will never get to the top of Jicarita unless I fall out of a helicopter. Some of my younger friends, who have been riding since they were three, have taken me as close as legally possible and shown me sights that are incredible and impossible for me otherwise. They know these forests because it was, and is, their school and playground. They respect these lands because they are theirs.

My access may be even more limited because the designation of “what is a road” will be subject to bureaucratic speak.

The agencies that manage these lands have accomplished the following.

One: Created barriers to traditional family homesteads by nonexistent road maintenance, and dragged out for years permitting repairs willingly done by the owners and then are unable to process fee payments, etc. Two: Progressively limited access to various parts of the forest for firewood and granted permits so late in the season that firewood is green.

Three: Warned land owners who have stopped wood thieves from stealing cedars that are hundreds of years old that they are in violation of various regulations and not to play law enforcement.

These are only a few of the many issues that local “humans” have with well-intentioned agencies that receive orders from a distance. Our local Forest Service people have to follow these one-size-fits-all rules and do so with honor and integrity, but also, I am told, with frustration. The fact that this community is being asked to support another layer of outside “protection” that will limit access to their forest in the name of wilderness begs belief! The rules that already exist are being progressively used to shut them out.

This leads me to the following observations and questions.

One: Who really benefits from this new designation?

Two: Who paid for the postage and production of the glossy four-color letter and map that told us the wonders of wilderness? Three: Do our local, state and federal representatives support this, and if so, why?

Please tell us your position before the elections so we can have democratic input into the process. Four: The people who make the rules can change them, and often do, in ways that have little local benefit for those who have to obey them!

Five: Two percent is a small amount of land to ask for, unless it’s yours!

I know people on this side of the mountain would never tell people on the other side how tall to build their hotels, and I hope and believe that people there would never tell anyone on this side how to use their forests.

Sipp lives in Penasco.



The Pecos Wilderness is an area within the Santa Fe National Forest and Carson National Forest.

Courtesy photo