

My Turn

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Our national monuments are threatened by New Mexico officials, too

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As the Trump show continues to distract the country, and as social, moral and political battles are being waged across media outlets (wouldn't we still like each other without Facebook?), something even scarier is happening behind the scenes.

A Trump presidency is as good as a bucket of blood in the drink for politico sharks from the far right-sniffing the next four years as a perfect opportunity to implement their far-fetched schemes. In this day and age anything is possible, right?

Rob Bishop, a high ranking Republican Congressman from Utah, has urged Trump to revoke President Obama's decision to make the Rio Grande del Norte, Organ-Mountains Desert Peaks, and other prize pieces of America's public lands national monuments. As national monuments, these places are now off the table for oil and gas developers. Not to mention safe from folks that believe our Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands would be better off in the private sector.

While Bishop thinks he knows what's best for us Taosenos (Rio Grande del Norte has had tremendous local support), he is the least of our problems. In fact, it is the people already in office in New Mexico that we need to worry about. Our land commissioner Aubrey Dunn and our southern Congressman, Steve Pearce, can't wait to get their hands on my and your public lands. They will spin the conversation to say that if federal lands were in state control, they would help fund our schools. But it's important to note that land currently in the state trust (what's left of it, we've sold almost four million acres since statehood) is not for the public to use as they please like federal land or state parks. And while funding schools sounds great, what happens when New Mexico's tourist economy takes the hit as we are no longer able to take our visitors rafting, fishing or hiking without dodging logging trucks, oil rigs and no trespassing signs? Since the creation of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, our businesses have done nothing but flourish.

And what about us, the people who make a living and a life within the open gates of our national monuments, BLM and Forest Service lands? It boggles most minds here in the Land of Enchantment that anyone would want to manage public lands for anyone except the public. We all consider access to the mountains, rivers and lakes here in our home state to be a birthright. Why would anybody want to change that?

Can we really trust our (and our children's) heritage lands and livelihoods to whomever might be in office for a few years?

In the interest of trying to understand the opposition, it's worth noting that in our fly fishing guide businesses in Taos and Santa Fe, we take folks fishing who are visiting from states to

our east. And while states like Texas and Oklahoma have plenty of oil, they do not have much for public lands. In fact, a good part of the country has very limited public land to fish, hunt, hike, bike, boat, etc. on. So it is possible to see how many people could be convinced that the public land issue is not important to them.

It's hard to miss what you never had.

Whether you're liberal, conservative, independent or Klingon, my guess is that even if you're celebrating a Trump presidency you probably have had at least one enjoyable experience on a piece of public dirt somewhere. And if you're like most New Mexicans, you had a lifetime of them.

Tell your elected officials that though we may not have enough money to fly to Africa and shoot an elephant on some high-dollar game reserve a la Trump Jr., we are rich in our lives as we can work and play in the Rocky Mountains, "the marrow of the world" as Mr. Del Gue once put it.

Let's not be another Texas.

We love our suburban driving brothers from the east, especially when they spend money in our state. And there is a very big reason they all come here for vacation. Turns out that our public land is their public land too, and they need to drive west to experience it. Let's make sure it doesn't go anywhere.

Streit and Valdez' businesses are the Taos Fly Shop and The Reel Life of Santa Fe.



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