

According to leak, feds call for tribal co-management of national monument

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U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke has recommended President Donald Trump keep the boundaries of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument intact, but change the management strategy to allow more public access and include cooperation with tribal offices.

His recommendation did not mention oil and gas drilling.

The recommendations came out Monday (Sept. 18), when

The Washington Post released a leaked copy of Zinke's 19-page letter with recommendations for various national monuments around the country.

Zinke calls for the management plan – which has been in development in the local Taos Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management for years – to be revised to promote infrastructure upgrades and maintenance and “prioritize public access,” which the memo said was limited due to road closures resulting from the monument designation.

The recommendations also asked the president to “request Congressional authority to enable tribal co-management of designated cultural areas.”

Taos Pueblo has lands adjacent to the monument that run through the tribe's ancestral lands. The tribe has been a partner in the longstanding coalition that's sought federal protections for the areas of the Rio Grande del Norte. The federal memo does not name Taos Pueblo or specific cultural resources for possible co-management.

The Bureau of Land Management operates at least one site in New Mexico with a tribal partner. Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument is run in coordination with the Pueblo of Cochiti.

His memo did suggest shrinking the size of four of the nation's biggest monuments, including Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante. The move could potentially open up those lands to logging, mining and energy development, some environmentalists and public lands advocates warn.

New Mexico-based environmental groups and some of the original supporters of the national monument, such as former Questa Mayor Esther Garcia, spoke out in support of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument in a rally Tuesday (Sept. 19).

“We must not let them take it from us,” said Garcia, who talked of “seeing the effects of mining in Questa.”

The supporters urged fighting for the “traditional uses” that are currently protected in the monument, such as grazing, pi-òn nut collecting and fuelwood gathering.

Tuesday's rally was an impromptu gathering similar to others called by supporters during the monument review.

Andrew Black, director of communications with the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, told *The Taos News* that Taosenos who support public lands must “persevere” over the political fatigue of fighting for a monument that has enjoyed broad support through its creation in 2013 and subsequent management.

“It’s obnoxious and a sham, but you have to be willing to walk the long walk,” Black said.

The four-month review of recently designated national monuments and those more than 100,000 acres in size was initiated by Trump in April with an executive order that was among a flurry of such actions in the early days of his administration. Zinke delivered a recommendation on 27 national monuments Aug. 24, though the details of that memo were not publicly known until now.

The review has held up a land exchange between the New Mexico State Land Office and the Bureau of Land Management that would add another 41,000 acres to the 242,455-acre Rio Grande del Norte. Zinke’s review made no specific mention of the land exchange.

A final management plan for the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument has not been completed yet.

It’s obnoxious and a sham, but you have to be willing to walk the long walk.’

– **Andrew Black**



Esther Garcia, left, holding the microphone, former mayor of Questa, was one of the biggest supporters of the creation of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. She spoke in support of the monument at a rally Tuesday (Sept. 19), which was quickly organized after a leaked copy of a federal monument review revealed proposed changes to the management of the Rio Grande del Norte.

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