

Grazing, roads unchanged in monument, despite claims in federal review

By **Cody Hooks**. chooks@taosnews.com

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Both of New Mexico's U.S. senators and both Democratic representatives called out the Trump administration's review of national monuments for multiple errors and urged the president to reject recommendations to alter the management strategy for the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke's recommendations came out Sept. 18, when

The Washington Post released a leaked copy of Zinke's 19-page draft letter to Trump.

Zinke's recommendations for Taos County's national monument, which covers nearly a quarter of a million acres, contained erroneous information concerning grazing and access, the lawmakers said Tuesday (Sept. 26) in a joint letter to John Kelly, White House chief of staff.

The letter was signed by U.S. Reps. Ben Ray Lujan and Michelle Lujan Grisham, a candidate for governor in 2018, as well as U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, all Democrats.

The federal review said roads have been closed because of the monument designation in 2013.

However, Sarah Schlanger, Taos Field Office manager for the Bureau of Land Management – the agency that oversees the monument – told *The Taos News* Sept. 26 no roads have been closed since the creation of the monument and that crews are maintaining the same quality of roads as they were before the designation.

Furthermore, Schlanger countered the claim in the review that “grazing permittees [chose] not to renew permits” because of the monument designation.

There are 30 permittees within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, with a total of 218 in the Taos Field Office, Schlanger said. Aside from routine transfer of permits between ranchers, no grazers within the monument have relinquished their permits because

of the monument designation, she said. Furthermore, the monument plan for the Rio Grande del Norte is still not complete, rendering moot Zinke's recommendation to “amend” it.

The lawmakers also noted factual errors in Zinke's recommendations around the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in Doña Ana County.

“The public deserves better than predetermined political conclusions based on hearsay and claims that are easily disproven if the [Department of the Interior] had taken the time to listen to and work with local communities,” their letter stated.

U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce, a Republican running for governor in 2018, criticized the federal review of national monuments Sept. 19, saying it ignored the local concerns of Southern New Mexico residents, ranchers and business owners. Still, Pearce recommended eliminating “hundreds of thousands of acres without legitimate purpose” from the boundaries of the monument.

Some environmental groups have maintained that the president does not have the authority under the Antiquities Act, the law that lets a president create national monuments, to resize or significantly alter established monuments.



Rio Grande del Norte National Monument encompasses nearly a quarter of a million acres in Northern New Mexico.
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