



# THE TAOS NEWS

Best U.S. Weekly Paper- NNA 2007, 2008, 2010  
Inland Press Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

## Feds release monument report, suggest proclamation rewrite

By Cody Hooks, [chooks@taosnews.com](mailto:chooks@taosnews.com)

*The Taos News*, 12/7/2017

While most of the country had its eyes trained on Utah this week as President Donald Trump announced sweeping reductions to two national monuments there, a final report to the president also suggests both Congressional and executive actions, to change the management of and rewrite the proclamation for the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.

The long-awaited recommendations from U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke regarding more than two dozen national monuments were finally released Tuesday (Dec. 5).

Local and longtime monument advocates, as well as New Mexico's two federal senators, say the recommendations — and potential actions the president could take to modify the Rio Grande del Norte — are still based on bad information that's been rebutted by land managers and outfitters alike.

For months, the Interior Department was tight-lipped about the review. Zinke released a two-page summary of his review Aug. 24, but it wasn't until Sept. 18, when several news outlets released a leaked copy of Zinke's 19-page draft letter to Trump, that the public had a hint about what might be coming down the hatch.

The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument was established in 2013 by a presidential proclamation, the monument's foundational document. It covers nearly a quarter of a million acres, though it is the eighth-smallest monument under review.

The recommendations in Tuesday's final report are largely the same as those in the draft leaked in September.

Zinke suggested the president "request Congressional authority to enable tribal co-management of designated cultural areas."

Taos Pueblo has lands adjacent to the monument, though the tribe's ancestral lands are spread throughout the monument. The tribe has been a partner in the coalition that 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.

"For generations, the Taos Pueblo has lived off of, and given back to, the land that encompasses [the monument]," said Taos Pueblo War Chief Curtis Sandoval, Monday (Nov. 4) via a press release. "The petroglyphs, sacred sites and wildlife define our people and our heritage. Our nations just celebrated Native American Heritage Month, and now more than ever we stand with Bears Ears and all the national moments under attack." Sandoval was responding to news that the president took unilateral action to shrink the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante monuments by more than two million acres.

Zinke also recommended the local proclamation be rewritten and the management plan — which is still in progress — be developed to promote “public access,” namely grazing. “I heard from local stakeholders that a lack of access to roads due to monument resisting has left many grazing permittees choosing not to renew permits.”

U.S. Sen. Tom Udall called the report a “sham” based on “hearsay and bad data.”

The Bureau of Land Management is the agency that oversees the monument. Former BLM Taos Field Office manager Sarah Schlanger told *The Taos News* in September that no roads were closed since the creation of the monument.

Schlanger also countered the claim in the review that grazing permittees haven’t been renewing their allotments. There are 30 permittees within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, with a total of 218 in the Taos Field Office. Aside from routine transfer of permits between ranchers, no grazers within the monument have relinquished their permits because of the monument designation, she said. Local supporters blasted other aspects of the review, notably the discrepancies around public input.

While Zinke’s final report says his department’s process “was to gather the facts which included the examination of existing proclamation” and also meet with local and tribal

officials, nonprofit groups and other stakeholders, no meeting was held in Northern New Mexico during the review to discuss the Rio Grande del Norte.

Coalition leaders, including local outfitter Stuart Wilde, counter that in the years and decades leading up to the 2013 proclamation, an energized base of people from Taos County was the driving force that handed the president a neatly wrapped and ready-to-go proposal for the federal designation.

Furthermore, of all the public comments submitted online in regards to the Rio Grande del Norte, 98 percent asked the government to not alter the monument, according to an analysis by The Wilderness Society.

Zinke’s recommendations are not official actions and it is expected the president could sign an executive order re-writing the proclamation for the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.

Congress could also take steps to “examine more appropriate public land-use designations” for the Rio Grande del Norte, according to the recommendations.

A coalition of Native American tribes and environmental organizations have filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration because of the actions in Utah, while many environmental nonprofits in New Mexico have vowed to do the same should any alterations be made to the state’s two monuments that were under review.

New Mexico’s attorney general, Hector Balderas, also said Monday he’s prepared to “fight [the president] every step of the way” if he makes changes to either the Rio Grande del Norte or the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monuments in southern New Mexico.



**A herd of bighorn sheep graze on the west side of the Rio Grande Gorge on Tuesday (Nov. 22). The area is among the most popular — for humans and sheep — in the national monument. Ruben Teran/ New Mexico Department of Game and Fish**

---

Copyright (c)2017 The Taos News 12/7/2017