

My Turn

RGDN Monument good for New Mexico; leave it alone

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On March 25, New Mexicans celebrated the fifth anniversary of Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. Designated by President Obama in 2013, the national monument came after years of community collaboration.

The Taos community is celebrating by discussing how local businesses can be a force for good for the environment and our communities. Additionally, the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument Coalition, in conjunction with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, conducted volunteer service project work in the monument at the Orilla Verde Recreation Area. The Partnership for Responsible Business and Taos County released an infographic recently explaining the benefits of Rio Grande del Norte to the economy and way of life of Northern New Mexico.

But now, five years later, the national monument is under threat from the Trump administration's national monument "review."

Department of the Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has recommended amending the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument proclamation to prioritize "public access; infrastructure upgrades, repair, and maintenance; traditional use; tribal cultural use; and hunting and fishing rights." But the proclamation already ensures access, ranching, hunting, fishing, and Native American traditional uses can continue. Amending the proclamation could open this spectacular area to energy development and delivery, ranching in areas where it has not previously existed and allow other uses that could change the nature and character of the national monument.

In fact, Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich sent a letter to White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, outlining the inaccuracies in the recommendations, including road and grazing access.

Please urge President Donald Trump to ignore Secretary Zinke's misguided recommendations and leave protections for Rio Grande del Norte National Monument intact.

Rio Grande del Norte National Monument has proven to be an economic success story for Northern New Mexico. For example, the average annual visitation to the national monument since its designation has been more than 180,000 people, an increase of 45 percent. Furthermore, New Mexico broke record tourism numbers again in 2016, with the state's public lands as one of the largest draws.

Since the designation in 2013, Rio Grande del Norte National Monument has proven to be a popular asset for the Land of Enchantment. This support was on full display when President Trump first ordered Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to conduct the "review" of certain national monuments.

Of the more than 2.8 million comments submitted to the department, 99 percent expressed support for maintaining and expanding national monuments. Of those that specifically mentioned Rio Grande del Norte, 98 percent of them requested that the monument not be altered.

Thank you for editorializing against the Trump administration's national monument "review" in the past. We ask that you urge President Trump to celebrate, not diminish, Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.

John Olivas is a member of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument Coalition

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