

Wilderness added to national monument

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The Río San Antonio Wilderness northwest of Taos is one of several new wilderness areas protected under a bill signed into law by President Donald Trump on March 12.

Two remote corners of Taos County are officially protected wilderness after the president signed into law a sweeping public lands bill.

The John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act is a suite of more than 100 conservation and water-related bills. President Donald Trump signed it Tuesday (March 12).

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The Cerro del Yuta Wilderness will comprise most of Ute Mountain, the volcanic dome lying west of State Road 522 near the New Mexico-Colorado border. Along with the Río San Antonio Wilderness, the two areas create about 21,500 acres of new wilderness within the quarter-million acre Río Grande del Norte National Monument.

“Taos Pueblo is grateful to hear that our local community has gained more wilderness in Taos County with the Cerros del Norte Conservation Act passage in Congress,” said Taos Pueblo WarChief Bernard Lujan in a press release. “Many wildlife species migrate back and forth between our big moun-

tain ranges that provide sustainability for future generations.”

The bill passed the U.S. Senate on Feb. 12 in a 92 to 8 vote, and passed the House of Representatives on Feb. 26. All of New Mexico’s senators and congresspeople voted in favor of the package.

The package also created 10 new wilderness areas in the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in southern New Mexico.

“The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks and the Río Grande del Norte National Monument are two of New Mexico’s most special places – and these undisturbed areas within them deserve the special protections that wilderness designation confers,” said U.S. Senator Tom Udall, D-New Mexico.

The new law also permanently reauthorizes the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Congress created the fund in 1964 and money comes into it via revenue from offshore oil drilling.