

MY TURN

'Preserve the remnants of wild earth that remain in Taos County'

JOHN NICHOLS

I have lived in Taos 41 years.

I am a hunter, a fisherman, an avid hiker. I have wandered all over our county, up and down the Rio Grande Gorge from Bear Crossing to Pilar, and across the three watersheds of Pot Creek, the Rio Chiquito, and the Rio Grande del Rancho. I have climbed Tres Orejas mountain hundreds of times, and spent days roaming the Petaca Arroyo.

I've been interested in the life at tiny stock ponds on our western mesa and written books about them. The old sheep camps of friends like Pacomio Mondragòn and Manuel Martinez were wonderful. It's been fun scouting elk for other pals before the autumn season.

Several evenings a week for the last four decades I have slogged up Devisadero Trail.

In my younger days I often went from Cabresto Lake up to the Latirs, which were chock full of lunker cutthroats. Later, I trekked repeatedly above timberline to Lake Fork Peak, Spoon Mountain, Gold Hill. I snowshoe in wintertime and carry a spotting scope to watch deer, elk, bighorn sheep.

During my first 25 years here I gathered firewood from nearly every locale in the county except the Plaza and Kit Carson Park. In my travels I never thought about wilderness or non-wilderness designations. Most of the land was accessible and relatively unharmed.

Indigenous Taosenos taught me the land and I embraced it.

The land holds me here. I am now 71 years old. Obviously, things have changed since I arrived. More people, more houses, more pressure on resources. I cannot take our mesas, rivers, or forests for granted any more. Nowadays I don't go to many once-wild areas because they've been filled in by growth. My sheep-herder friends are gone.

Ironically, as our population has expanded the economy has changed, becoming more dependent on the attractions of our unspoiled terrains even as we diminish them.

So today it has become important, for both spiritual and economic reasons, to preserve the remnants of wild earth that remain in Taos County. Hence, I fully support the wilderness designation now under consideration for the Columbine-Hondo area.

In the future we will all come to understand, if we do not already, that such areas contain the healthy biology that truly sustains us.

John Nichols first visited Taos in 1957 when he was 16. He came to stay in 1969.

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