

Wilderness in Río Grande del Norte National Monument

Senators Udall and Heinrich introduce bill to protect special areas as wilderness within the northern New Mexico national monument

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TAOS, NM (May 7, 2015) – The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance joined a broad coalition today to applaud the reintroduction of the **Cerros del Norte Conservation Act** introduced by Sens. Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall. The legislation would provide extra protection for special areas contained within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument. It would designate two new Wilderness areas – Ute Mountain (Cerro del Yuta) and Rio San Antonio Wilderness Study Area – within the national monument.

Designated in 2013, Río Grande del Norte National Monument enjoyed overwhelming community support from a diverse coalition of business owners, sportsmen, tribal leaders, local and federal elected officials, and grazing permittees. John Olivas, the Traditional Outreach Organizer for the Wilderness Alliance and an outfitter noted, “Many generations have enjoyed and lived off this landscape and this legislation will ensure that they remain open and available for our traditions like hunting.”

“These areas have a special place in the heart of New Mexicans and this legislation recognizes the desire to keep them wild and free for this and all future generations” said Mark Allison, Executive Director of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. “New Mexicans are rightly proud of the importance of these areas to our natural and cultural heritage.”

The proposed wilderness areas within the national monument serve as one of the world’s great avian migratory routes. It is also home to important species like pronghorn and elk. The legislation would also safeguard world-class recreation opportunities already enjoyed within the national monument, such as hiking, hunting, and fishing. Wilderness designation would forever protect these areas from motorized and mechanized incursions, allowing them to remain self-willed and free.

“Our thousands of members throughout New Mexico and beyond are proud and appreciative of our Senators’ leadership introducing this bill to finish the job of conserving these lands within the new national monument” noted Allison.

In March, 2013, President Obama designated Rio Grande del Norte as a national monument. The two proposed wilderness areas in the **Cerros del Norte Conservation Act** will comprise 21,420 acres of the 242,500-acre national monument northwest of Taos, New Mexico.

A map of the two proposed wilderness areas is available [here](#).

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