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New Mexico's Own Summit on Creating Jobs This Weekend

LAS CRUCES, N. M. - President Obama called for new ideas for job creation at a special summit in Washington, D.C., on Thursday. This weekend, one place to look for those new ideas will be Las Cruces, at an event on Saturday, December 5. The topic of the "Wilderness Economics" symposium is how to create jobs and economic progress, for New Mexico and other Western states, by conserving wilderness and encouraging others to appreciate it.

Gary Gomes, president of the High Tech Consortium of Southern New Mexico, says his group is working to make the region a recognized center for excellence in technology. While they're well on the way, he says, they must be able to attract the right minds and employees. He's convinced one way to do that, is by keeping the Land of Enchantment "enchanting" - so people will want to stay.

"The first thing they do is look up at the Organ Mountains and across the broad panoramas. It's something that not too many areas have, and of course, recreational activities are important."

Tim O'Donoghue, director of the Chamber of Commerce in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, will share his town's story at the meeting. Part of their success has come from supporting tourism and other industries that are likely to put their profits back into the local economy.

"Extractive industries for instance - a lot of the companies are not local companies, they're national or even international companies, where a lot of the revenue that's derived from extractive industries will leave the community and won't come back."

John Munoz, a board member of the Hispano Chamber de Las Cruces, lists just a few opportunities for jobs and small businesses based on public lands access and wilderness-driven tourism:

"Things like gas stations, hotels, outdoor recreation, sporting goods stores."

The Wilderness Economics symposium is free and open to the public, at the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum in Las Cruces, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Other speakers include wilderness author Doug Scott and representatives from the State Tourism Department; Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Tom Udall (D-NM) will address the group by video.

More information is online at w.donaanawild.org.

High Tech Consortium to host jobs in wilderness talks

By Brook Stockberger / Sun-News Business Editor

Posted: 12/09/2009 02:17:43 PM MST

LAS CRUCES — Why would the High Tech Consortium of Southern New Mexico be interested in the economic benefits of the New Mexico wilderness?

"From our side, the obvious answer is that protected lands are an important quality-of-life issue," said Gary Gomes, president of the HTC. "Attracting technology resources is a competitive undertaking, (so) it really helps for attracting that talent."

The HTC is a sponsor of an event titled "Wilderness Economics: Creating Jobs From our Protected Lands." The gathering is free and open to the public. It will take place from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday at the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, 4100 Dripping Springs Road. Breakfast and lunch will be provided.

The Hispano Chamber of Commerce de Las Cruces and the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance are also sponsors of the event. A variety of speakers will be on hand to discuss topics such as tourism, job recruitment, marketing of natural areas and businesses directly tied to public lands.

"It's a great networking opportunity but also an opportunity to educate people," said John Muñoz with the Hispano Chamber.

He said that concentrating on the wilderness areas can be, "not only good for the environment, but also good for how we identify ourselves as a community. At the same time, there is also the potential to really help emerging businesses and existing businesses." In addition to messages from Sens. Tom Udall and Jeff Bingaman (both D-N.M.), some speakers will be on

hand from the New Mexico Department of Tourism, Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, Sierra Business Council, New Mexico Wildlife Federation and others.

Some of the topics of discussion include: Dollars and Cents of Protected Lands in Doña Ana County; Tourism, the Untapped Market; Quality Public Lands Bring Big Bucks; The Billion Dollar Birding Economy.

"Ecotourism is an important way of both preserving and promoting our scenic beauty and cultural heritage," said Jennifer Hobson, deputy secretary of tourism for the state. "The top two reasons people come to New Mexico in first place is the scenic beauty and cultural heritage."

She said the event on Saturday is "a chance to educate those interested in these opportunities."

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A hidden gem in the Organs

December 11, 2009

BY GABRIEL VASQUEZ

The Las Cruces Bulletin

Land and resource management goes hand in hand with economic development, according to a group of panelists who visited from across the West to speak at the "Wilderness Economics" forum Saturday, Dec. 5, at the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum.

More than 150 business persons, members of the community and area legislators came out to learn about capitalizing on the economic opportunity of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks-Wilderness Act, legislation introduced to Congress in September by U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Jeff Bingaman aimed at protecting more than 350,000 acres of wilderness from development in Doña Ana and Luna counties.

The forum, sponsored by the Hispano Chamber of Commerce de Las Cruces, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and the High Tech Consortium of Southern New Mexico, featured a variety of speakers, including representatives from the Headwaters Economic Institute, Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, Sierra Business Council and the New Mexico Department of Tourism, among others.

"The Organ Mountains identify us as a community in southern New Mexico," said John Muñoz, Hispano Chamber board member. "When entrepreneurs and environmentalists can get together to collaborate on creating jobs, that's a wonderful thing."

An evolving role

Ben Alexander, associate director of the Headwaters Economic Institute, a nonprofit research group based in Bozeman, Mont., said historically public lands have been tied to economy prosperity.

"When we think about the economic history of public lands we think of food, shelter, forage and clothing for our pioneers and settlers," he said. "And subsequently, those lands have generated a tremendous amount of wealth for our communities today." He said commodity-based uses directly tied to public lands have been diminishing in importance for years, and dramatically so in the last several decades, accounting for less than 10 percent of total personal income in the rural West. One of the best ways to make the lands profitable, he said, is to protect them so that they can provide the scenery, weather, amenities and recreation to make Las Cruces an "attractive" place to do business.

It's hard to imagine a plume of black smoke wrapped around the peaks of the Organs or toxic sludge dripping from the canyons in the Robledos, but protection is not just about keeping developers at bay, he said, but about keeping wilderness areas pristine to attract newcomers.

"The money is in people bringing businesses with them or starting businesses in the place they choose to live," he said. "Having amenities is important to economic development in the West."

Alexander continued by saying that according to a survey of population growth and total income in the rural West using economic data from the past 30 years, communities that are adjacent to public lands significantly outperform those without.

"It's not prohibiting uses on public lands that cuts out economic opportunity," he said. "We now find that eroding national character erodes our competitive position."

Enchantment now comes in green

Jennifer Hobson, deputy cabinet secretary of the New Mexico Department of Tourism, told attendees that Doña Ana and Luna counties could soon benefit from a state developed program to bring more "eco-tourists" to the state, those looking to spend "big bucks."

"This (project) has garnered support from a great number of industry leaders as well as legislators and the governor," she said. "We are the only new initiative in the 2009 legislative session that received funding. It will put us on the map as one of the top eco-tourism destinations in the world."

The initiative is based on eco-tourism, a nature-based form of specialty travel defined as responsible tourism to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local communities, she said. Specifically, Hobson said as part of the project, the state will set up a series of tented camps across New Mexico in key wilderness areas for visitors to follow and explore.

"Think of it as a domestic safari experience," she said. "We have a great opportunity to capitalize on this trend and travel in the tourism industry."

She said southern New Mexico's cultural heritage, history and scenic beauty is a prime place to set up a series of camps, hopefully attracting thousands to the area each year.

"People don't want the sand and sun experience anymore," she said. "When they travel, they want to have an authentic experience."

The state's tourism department, in partnership with the Santa Fe-based company Eco-New Mexico, will work throughout 2010 to make the camps a reality and market them across the country and world, she said.

It's OK to brag

Kim O'Donohue, executive director of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce in Wyoming, offered the public a variety of ways to market Las Cruces to outdoor buffs.

"First, it's important that you decide your community character. Really think about what kind of character you want to protect in terms of your community, people, economy and your environment," he said.

Jackson Hole, which sits in a 6,000-foot altitude valley encompassed by the Teton Mountains and boasts 97 percent of public land within its county, relies heavily on the outdoor recreation industry and has built a very strong economy by banking on its natural assets, O'Donohue said.

"Without these lands our community would not have the economy it does now," he said.

Much of the tourist attention comes from self-promotion and marketing, he added.

"Brag, be out there with your message," he said. "Anything that elicits a feeling, there is power to that place. What is the power of your place? It's not just the natural environment, but your community. That has been central in organizing a brand for us."

Tying it all together

Steve Firsch, president of the Sierra Business Council, who represents more than 800 businesses in an economically troubled inner-mountain region of the Sierra Nevada in California, said stepping away from commodity-based wilderness economics and turning to sustainable business practices has helped his community weather the latest recession.

"The bottom line is, where are the jobs? If the employment in the region is based solely on low-wage jobs, then we're not going to be able to make the case that land and resource restoration should be an economic priority," he said. "Focus on cultivating innovation, spurring entrepreneurship, supporting the social fabric of the community and preserving a sense of place."

He said success cannot be attained unless economic, social and community capital work to support each other.

"You need to be inclusive, respectful, you need to look beyond your own point of view," he said. "These things are critical to success."

Entrepreneurship and innovation related to public land use will attract new business, he said.

Some forms of generating new revenue or creating new industry in the area, he said, are to focus on existing land use such as crop production and livestock management.

"Crops are a big piece of the value of your land, you want to keep that going," he said. "Another opportunity might be biomass utilization, using waste products from crop production like we use timber in our region for biomass energy. Or it might be livestock production, and tying that to creating a market of local food production."

He said creating a local food network could build a job market to support it.

"Then there's renewable energy production, crop subsidies and recreational uses," he said. "It's about looking at land management and tying economic opportunity and benefit at every level of the planning stage."

Among the legislators in attendance Saturday were state Rep. Jeff Steinborn, state Sen. Steve Fischmann and City Councillors Nathan Small and Gill Sorg. Udall and Bingaman, who were scheduled to speak at the forum, were unable to attend and instead sent a televised message voicing their support for the forum's sponsors and for the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act.



Sierra Business Council President Steve Firsch tells attendees about the economic benefits of public lands.

A panel of business leaders from rural areas of the West told hundreds of “Wilderness Economics” forum attendees that the Organ Mountains were “jaw-dropping,” “awe-inspiring” and should be protected to attract tourists and new industry to the area. Above, the Organs rise from the Chihuahan Desert coated with a blanket of December snow.

JIM HILLEY | The Las Cruces Bulletin



Sportsmen ask Teague to safeguard wilderness

By Ashley Meeks Sun-News reporter
Posted: 12/20/2009 12:00:00 AM MST

Click photo to enlarge



U.S. Rep. Harry Teague gestures to the Sierra County... (Photo for the Sun News by Krista Avila)



View the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act introduced in the U.S. Senate , [click here.](#)

LAKE VALLEY, N.M. -- On a map of New Mexico, about 7 inches by 7 inches, there are just a few splashes of color, just big enough to put your fingertip on.

"You see all those red things here?" asked wildlife biologist Randy Gray, gesturing to the colored specks peppering the map. "Those are the only places where they've measured (that) are two miles or more from a road. We don't need more roads."

After a Saturday morning quail hunt on John Cornell's land in the Mimbres Mountain foothills, Gray and seven other area sportsmen sat down at Gray's home with U.S. Rep. Harry Teague, D-N.M., to ask him to support legislation to add 259,000 more acres to those protected areas. Earlier this year, U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., introduced that chamber's version of the wilderness protection bill -- the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act.

"This has been well vetted throughout the country," said Gray, who retired as the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Wildlife Biologist in Washington, D.C., and currently advises the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. "Wilderness was born in this state with

(20th century conservationist) Aldo Leopold and the Gila Wilderness. Now, we have the opportunity to protect these low-desert landscapes."

Gray added, "I look back in my life and I thought we were going to save the world. And I look around now -- there's less world to save ... The people who say, 'I need to drive my ATV to just one more mountain top,' well, can we have just a few of these places?"

Cornell agreed -- even in the face of arguments about accessibility in New Mexico's backcountry.

"There are 30 million acres to hunt on and only 1.6 million protected," he said. With \$165 million spent on hunting and fishing per year in the state, he added, keeping that land protected makes economic sense.

Those against the bill have refused to compromise, said John Moen, chairman of the Southwestern New Mexico chapter of Quail Unlimited and the owner of Trophy Country in Las Cruces.

"The people who are throwing the rocks at the wilderness bill ... the biggest issue is trust: They don't trust the federal government to do what they say," he said. "Most people in Las Cruces and Do-a Ana County support it in our backyard and if we do, why won't everybody else?"

With the area's population explosion, Steve Henry of Las Cruces, president of the Do-a Ana County Associated Sportsmen and retired New Mexico Department of Game and Fish fisheries chief, said the legislation was vital before it was too late.

"Sooner or later, we're going to be a Tucson or a Phoenix," Henry said. "In 20 years, we're going to be wishing, when we've got a metropolis like Albuquerque, we're going to be glad we have a few places left like this in Do-a Ana County."

For his part, Teague mostly listened, though he said his concerns were chiefly flood control, the ability for residents of Anthony, N.M., to welcome industry to their area, and the protection of law enforcement's right to pursue criminals -- say, crossing the Mexican border -- through wilderness areas.

The congressman was also encouraged to support royalty- and reclamation-adding reforms in the 1872 mining act, legislation Bingaman also introduced in the Senate earlier this year.

"We need to bring back a balance in our multi-use activities," said Cornell, campaign coordinator for the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. "We're going to be able to put some of these out-of-work miners back to work, so I think (mining reclamation requirements) will create a whole new group of jobs for the industry."

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Into the wild

Do-a Ana County lands currently administered by the Bureau of Land Management that would be protected in the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act:

- Potrillo Mountains -- 143,450 acres (partially in Luna County)
- Aden Lava Flow -- 27,600 acres
- Organ Mountains -- 19,400
- Robledo Mountains -- 17,000
- Cinder Cone -- 16,950 acres
- Broad Canyon -- 13,900 acres
- Sierra de las Uvas -- 11,100
- Whitethorn -- 9,600 acres (also in Luna County)

Source: Senate.gov

Wednesday, December 23, 2009

http://www.abqjournal.com/opinion/guest_columns/232126352391opinionguestcolumns12-23-09.htm

Organs an Economic Opportunity
Albuquerque Journal

By Gilbert Apodaca

President, Hispano Chamber of Commerce de Las Cruces

Early this month our organizations were proud to have sponsored the seminar “Wilderness Economics, Creating Jobs from Protected Lands.” We, along with 150 other attendees, listened to an impressive lineup of speakers discuss many ways Doña Ana County could help create jobs and economic development through the protection and promotion of our important wilderness areas.

While we sometimes take for granted unique local treasures like the Organ Mountains, the reality is that we should capitalize on the appeal these public lands offer to families, businesses and recreationists. By protecting and promoting these resources, our wilderness will be good for our economy and quality of life. Wilderness Economics was a great education on how to create these economic opportunities, and given our tough economic times, this is one more reason to protect our wilderness now.

The Hispano Chamber of Commerce de Las Cruces and the High Tech Consortium of Southern New Mexico are proud to stand in strong support of the Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks Wilderness Act to protect our wilderness areas in Doña Ana County and create national conservation areas around the Organ Mountains and Broad Canyon. We thank Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall for their vision and leadership in introducing this important legislation and helping to secure the quality of life and a bright economic future for our region.

Protecting our spectacular natural areas — like the Organ Mountains — is critically important to protecting the quality of life we all currently enjoy and that is so important to a thriving business climate. Our incredible open space and mountains are the reasons many people and businesses move to Las Cruces or choose to stay here. Enacting a meaningful conservation vision for our community will provide a long-term boost for business, tourism and our overall economy.

Like many communities, Las Cruces and Doña Ana County are seeking opportunities to attract and provide higher paying jobs that will allow our citizens to earn more and give families and kids the chance to have better lives. In order to attract new businesses and keep the best jobs in our community, it is essential that we protect our strongest asset, which is our quality of life.

A recent study by the nonprofit Sonoran Institute examined how our mountains and open space have been vital to the economic success we've already experienced — and that are likely to play a bigger role in our economy if we enact permanent high-level protection of them. The Sonoran study, along with related research done throughout the western United States, shows the advantages to a community of having protected natural lands nearby to help recruit high-wage jobs and quality employers.

Proof of this appeal is how our beautiful mountains and open space are often mentioned in national publications as a key reason for us being recognized as one of the top places in the country to live, run a business and retire.

In addition to the economic value and quality of life that our mountains bring to us, it should also be pointed out that they have been integral to our culture for hundreds of years. From the time of the horse-drawn wagon caravans, people have come to the fertile Mesilla Valley to farm and settle family roots. Along the historic Camino Real trade route, our region is rich with this history, culture and countless stories from past generations, which are still alive today throughout Doña Ana County.

Today we have a critical opportunity to advance our economy and honor our culture by protecting our Organ Mountains and other important natural crown jewels like Broad Canyon the East Potrillo Mountains. We support passage of Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks Act to secure this future; now and forever.