

- The Potrillo Mountains **Wilderness**, the Aden Lava Flow **Wilderness**, the Cinder Cone **Wilderness** and the Whitehorn **Wilderness**, all located in southwestern Do a Ana County.
- The Sierra de las Uvas **Wilderness**, the Broad Canyon **Wilderness**, the Robledo Mountains **Wilderness** and the Desert Peaks National Conservation Area, all located south of Hatch and northwest of Las Cruces.

The proposal for federal **wilderness** in Do a Ana County was initially put forward in late 2005 by former U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., but he dropped the proposal after conservationists opposed certain components, including a measure that would have released U.S. Bureau of Land Management acreage for development. The proposal later on was opposed by former U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M., who had introduced a bill aligned with the ranchers' plan.

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[Photo:](#)

[Senators Tom Udall and Jeff Bingaman outlines a plan to set aside hundreds of acres of wilderness as well as protect the Organ Mountains.](#)

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# Southern NM Wilderness on the Table in DC

September 21, 2009

LAS CRUCES, N.M. - More New Mexico wilderness is officially on the table in Washington, D.C. Late last week, Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall introduced a bill with protections for nearly 400,000 acres of wild lands near Las Cruces.

John Moen, the New Mexico chairman for Quail Unlimited, says sportsmen, conservationists, landowners, businesses, and others with an interest in the area all worked together to compromise and come up with a plan that can be acceptable to everyone.

"I think in the long run we ended up with something that we all can live with, and which still provides a tremendous amount of habitat that's going to be secured forever."

Moen says one of the compromises in the bill was to split the wilderness areas, allowing for limited road access, but he says it shouldn't be expected that that will change much about the region.

"Very pretty, but it's real rough; 25 feet off the road, you're in about as big a wilderness area as you want to be, and you have as much solitude as you want."

John Munoz, board member for the Hispano Chamber of Commerce in Las Cruces, says he's excited by the entrepreneurial opportunities that could come with more protected areas in southern New Mexico.

"Those would be places where we'd want to increase our tourism, where we'd want to provide services for families who might want to go camping or hiking. I'm really very excited about the potential that this has."

The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act would create 259,000 acres of wilderness and 100,000 acres of National Conservation Area. The plan had been opposed by a coalition of ranchers and others, and some provisions in the bill, including dropping portions of a current 'wilderness study area' along the border, were meant to address their concerns. There has been little opposition to last week's introduction of the new bill.

Eric Mack, Public News Service - NM

September 21, 2009

**Section:** News

**Article ID:** 13383966

## County to consider resolution in support of **wilderness** bill

*Sun-News report*

To see a copy of the county commission agenda, [click here](#). LAS CRUCES — Doña Ana County commissioners on Tuesday will consider a resolution in support of a federal bill that would create thousands of acres of **wilderness** in the county.

The resolution, proposed by County Commissioner Oscar Vásquez-Butler, expresses support for the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks **Wilderness** Act.

The act would "help ensure the long-term quality of life for community residents" and "enhance our economy as a tourist destination and desirable location to live and operate a business," the proposed resolution states.

U.S. Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, both D-N.M., on Thursday introduced the bill, which would designate 259,000 acres of land as **wilderness**, the highest level of protection. Also, the bill would place another 100,000 acres into a national conservation area, a type of protection that varies depending on the conditions set by Congress.

The proposed resolution is on the commission's consent agenda, meaning it's set to be considered along with other routine business.

Proponents of the bill, including conservationists and sportsmen's groups, have said it's needed to guard against development. Ranchers and off-road vehicle users have opposed the legislation, saying it would restrict access to the land.

Also, the commission will consider:

- setting a policy for selecting members of the committee that awards thousands of dollars in grants each year to community organizations.
- reappointing members to the Doña Ana County Airport Advisory Board, a panel that was disbanded by the commission last year.
- approving the three members of the Doña Ana County Labor Management Relations board. Candidates are the incumbents: Donald Jonker, representing management; Charles Apodaca, representing labor; and Richard Purcella, a member selected by both sides.
- accepting a grant of \$527,696.65 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to buy 13 police cruisers for the sheriff's department.
- approving the purchase of another 25 police cruisers and two SUVs using various grants.
- hear a presentation about a vehicle fleet operations study conducted by a consulting firm.

If you go

What: Doña Ana County commission meeting

When: 9 a.m. Tuesday

Where: Doña Ana County Government Center, 845 N. Motel Blvd.

Info: [donaanacounty.org](http://donaanacounty.org); (575) 647-7200

# Las Cruces Sun-News (NM){PUBLICATION2}

September 23, 2009

**Section:** Opinion

**Article ID:** 13403993

## Their View: **Wilderness** legislation historic opportunity

*Ken Miyagishima, Leticia Benavidez and Michael Cadena / For the Sun-News*

There are few times in a person's life where one is able to be a part of something truly historic. Today we have such a moment for our communities in Do?a Ana County. On Sept. 17, Sens. Bingaman and Udall introduced legislation called the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks **Wilderness** Act in Congress to forever protect some of the most important natural areas in our county - including our iconic Organ Mountains - as new **wilderness** areas. The time has come to take the next step in securing this natural legacy for our region's future generations. For years, Las Cruces and residents of Do?a Ana County have sought balance between rapid growth and protecting some of the beautiful open space and mountains that give us our identity. Citizens have wondered if the quality of life that brought them here or kept them here was going to stay that way or if instead, we would go the way of some other high-growth communities and lose these important natural resources to sprawl and development.

Thanks to the visionary leadership of Sens. Bingaman and Udall, we are closer to an answer. The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks **Wilderness** Act will protect many of the county's most beloved natural treasures, including much of the Organ Mountains, the Robledos, the Sierra Las Uvas Mountains, the West and East Potrillos, Broad Canyon, and Mount Riley as new federal **wilderness** areas. Some of these lands were given interim protection almost 30 years ago, but lacking **wilderness** designation, remain at risk until Congress gives them this "gold standard" of protection.

This important conservation legislation also will protect nearly 100,000 acres buffering the front of the Organ Mountains as a national conservation area, and would include part of the Do?a Ana Mountains. The legislation will allow a full range of recreational and traditional activities to continue, including hunting, hiking and ranching, while preventing further development in this area.

Protecting these vital natural areas will boost our economies, as visitors come to enjoy the beauty of the landscapes and employers can attract workers looking for the high quality of life to which our open spaces contribute. A 2006 study of the economies of many western United States cities by the nonprofit Sonoran Institute found that communities with nearby protected lands had faster than average personal income growth. When good employers and high-tech entrepreneurs can locate anywhere they want, areas with high quality protected public lands are an added incentive. **Wilderness** designation of our area's natural gems will help our communities enjoy this competitive advantage and long-lasting economic benefits.

**Wilderness** and national conservation areas are considered the crown jewels of America's protected public lands and designation here could help attract federal dollars to showcase them. Simply put, **wilderness** will provide a huge long-term economic benefit to Do?a Ana County and its communities.

Today we have the chance to choose a direction that will have significant impact for our region and our way of life. At a time when we continue to lose 6,000 acres of open space each day in America, or 2 million acres a year, we believe Sens. Bingaman and Udall have taken a laudable step toward ensuring that more of what makes New Mexico the Land of Enchantment will be here for us and our grandchildren.

We encourage Congress to take up the legislation and pass it quickly. It will continue to give back for generations to come.

Ken Miyagishima is mayor of the city of Las Cruces. Leticia Benavidez is chairwoman of the Do?a Ana County Commission. Michael Cadena is mayor of the town of Mesilla.

## Las Cruces Sun-News (NM){PUBLICATION2}

September 23, 2009

**Section:** News

**Article ID:** 13399341

### County commission backs **wilderness** measure

*Diana M. Alba Sun-News reporter*

LAS CRUCES -- Doña Ana County commissioners on Tuesday decided to back a federal measure that would create 259,000 acres of **wilderness** in the county. Commissioners heard from several opponent and supporters of the **wilderness** area before voting 5-0 in favor of a resolution in support of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks **Wilderness** Act, introduced into Congress last week by New Mexico's senators.

In addition to **wilderness** -- the most-restrictive land-use protection granted by the federal government -- the bill would create another 100,850 acres of national conservation area, a less-restrictive designation.

"I see this resolution as our way of showing support for this bill, and I support this bill," said County Commissioner Scott Krahling.

County Commissioner Oscar Vásquez-Butler said the resolution wasn't subtracting anything from previous measures, but was only "reaffirming" them.

Dara Parker, a field representative for U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-New Mexico, said the legislation includes several changes from a proposal that has been debated in recent years, including that 16,000 acres now classified as temporary **wilderness** along the international border would be released to keep from hindering Border Patrol activities in that area. Plus, she said, land that might be needed for future flood control structures and a number of roads was excluded from proposed **wilderness** as part of compromise measures.

"Sen. Bingaman really does feel this bill strikes the right balance," said told commissioners.

Rancher Tom Cooper, a member of People for Preserving Our Western Heritage, a group that has opposed **wilderness** in Doña Ana County, expressed concerns about creating new **wilderness** so close to the border, something that has been problematic for border law enforcement in the Organ Pipe Cactus **Wilderness**, in southern Arizona.

Nathan Small, a city council member who also works for the New Mexico **Wilderness** Alliance, said the problems noted by Cooper stem from the **wilderness** directly abutting the international border. But the **wilderness** proposed in Doña Ana County will be between one and two miles from the border.

Cooper said the resolution didn't take into account the support for less-restrictive types of land protection. He asked the commission to delay voting on the measure until his group had a chance to give its own presentation.

Attendee Jim Graham, a member of the Las Cruces Home Builders Association, said he's promoted the idea of protecting the Organ Mountains since the 1980s.

"I think our open spaces attract a lot of desirable people to the area that contribute a lot to the economy," he said. "We can develop like Phoenix does, where they sprawl all over the place, or we can look at a development model like Boulder (Colo.), where people have higher property values and a lot of it is because they've protected their open spaces."

Angel Montoya, a local wildlife biologist, said some 75 percent of the land being proposed in the bill for **wilderness** already exists in temporary **wilderness** designations that "for all intents and purposes is already being managed as a **wilderness** area."

"We need to move on; either we designate them as **wilderness** or we undesignate them," he said, adding he favors the proposed legislation.

Resident Jodi Denning, also a member of People for Preserving Our Western Heritage, said she agreed that much of the land in temporary **wilderness** should be protected, but she's concerned about the type of protection they'll be given and how much that will restrict access.

"I want to be able to drive out there and park my trailer and ride my horses," she said.

The commission initially passed one version of a resolution on Tuesday morning with a vote of 4-1, with County Commissioner Karen Perez dissenting, but reconsidered later in the day at the request of Krahling.

Krahling said he asked for the resolution to be reconsidered because he'd thought of a language change to address Perez's concerns.

The revised measure added a line indicating the commission's support for retaining the rights of ranchers to continue grazing the federal lands that would be newly designated as **wilderness**. The federal law allowing for the creation of **wilderness** indicates that grazing is permitted; however, ranchers contend the designation would interfere with their operations.

Perez said the senators' newest bill showed the "most progress" of any proposal since she's been tracking the issue.

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#### Proposed land protection for Do-a Ana County under the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks **Wilderness** Act Designation

- Organ Mountains **Wilderness**: 19,400 acres
- Aden Lava Flow **Wilderness**: 27,650 acres
- Potrillo Mountains **Wilderness**: 143,450 acres
- Cinder Cone **Wilderness**: 16,950 acres
- Whitehorn **Wilderness**: 9,600 acres
- Robledo Mountains **Wilderness**: 17,000 acres
- Broad Canyon **Wilderness**: 13,900 acres
- Sierra de las Uvas **Wilderness**: 11,100 acres
- Organ Mountains National Conservation Area: 67,250 acres
- Desert Peaks National Conservation Area: 33,600 acres
- **Wilderness** study land released from temporary **wilderness**: 16,350 acres

Source: U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M.

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# Our view: Our wilderness around Las Cruces deserves protection

Posted: 09/26/2009 09:11:55 PM MDT

For some three decades now, the most pristine areas of the Organ Mountains and other natural treasures just outside Las Cruces have been regulated under a federal designation that was intended to be temporary -- a wilderness study area.

It seems to us there has been plenty of time for study, now it's time for action. Last week, New Mexico's two senators, Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, introduced a bill that would designate 259,000 acres as wilderness and place another 100,000 acres as a national conservation area. And on Tuesday, the Doña Ana County Commission threw its support behind the measure.

The land to be protected includes the Organ Mountains Wilderness and the Organ Mountains National Conservation Area west of Las Cruces; the Potrillo Mountains Wilderness, the Aden Lava Flow Wilderness, the Cinder Cone Wilderness and the Whitehorn Wilderness, all in southwestern Doña Ana County; and the Sierra de las Uvas Wilderness, the Broad Canyon Wilderness, the Robledo Mountains Wilderness and the Desert Peaks National Conservation Area, all south of Hatch and northwest of Las Cruces.

Introduction of the bill elicited the same arguments from the same adversaries that we've been hearing for years. Ranchers who work leased land in the designated areas are concerned that a wilderness designation could hamper their operations. They worry that they would restrict water projects, limit access to their herds and stock tanks and prevent them from making needed improvements to their operations.

We fully appreciate the importance of ranching to a diversified county economy and have no desire to see those operation diminished. If we believed a wilderness designation would have the dire consequences that have been predicted, we'd have second thoughts about offering our endorsement.

In fact, we see no reason why wilderness and ranching can't co-exist. The federal designation has specific provisions designed to carve out the exemptions ranchers need to run their operations. We believe local ranchers would be better-served working with Bingaman and Udall to ensure that their needs are protected under the bill now being considered, rather than fighting to defeat the bill.

Without protection, these precious lands will be lost to the urban sprawl that will surely come to our area in the years ahead. With wilderness protection, they will be preserved to be enjoyed by future generations.

We commend Bingaman and Udall for introducing this important legislation, and urge all those who treasure these special areas to make your voices heard.