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March 22, 2013

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President Obama Designates Rio Grande del Norte National Monument; Bestows Centennial Birthday Gift to New Mexico

(Taos, New Mexico) - Today's announcement by President Obama to declare the Rio Grande del Norte as a National Monument was welcome news across New Mexico. Citizens of the Land of Enchantment have worked since the mid-1990s with their Congressional delegation to try to secure permanent protection of this region.

"The legacy of President Obama's action will carry on beyond our lifetimes and live as a gift to future generations of Americans," said Mariel Nanasi, Executive Director of New Energy Economy.

President Obama declared the 240,000 acres of public lands that comprise Rio Grande del Norte as a National Monument using his authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906.

Other icons of the New Mexican landscape protected through Presidential use of the Antiquities Act are El Morro, Chaco Canyon, Gila Cliff Dwellings, Gran Quivira (now called Salina Pueblo Missions), Bandelier, Capulin, Aztec Ruins, Carlsbad Cave, White Sands, and Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks. The Antiquities Act has been used over a hundred times since its passage by both Democrat and Republican presidents.

Rio Grande del Norte is rich in wildlife habitat and offers a paradise for backcountry hiking, hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation, an outstanding place for observing nature in all of its splendor, and a refuge offering solitude and spiritual rejuvenation.

"The unprecedented outpouring of local support for protecting Rio Grande del Norte is because of its multiple uses. One hears stories of Native Americans polishing pots with river stones, rock climbers scaling the cliff walls, kayakers paddling through the white water, and lovers losing themselves under the stars. This unspoiled landscape attracts people of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds," said Nanasi who helped create *The Rio Grande del Norte - One Hundred New Mexicans Speak for a Legacy*, a book of photographs

that features the diversity of northern New Mexicans and visitors who love Rio Grande del Norte.

The National Monument designation will preserve Rio Grande del Norte from new oil and gas drilling, mining, and other detrimental development and protect an important part of the Rio Grande's watershed. It will also respect existing water rights and traditional land uses such as hunting, grazing, and gathering of piñon pine nuts, firewood, and medicinal plants and herbs.

This designation is a fitting way to celebrate New Mexico's centennial anniversary and protects the public lands of Rio Grande del Norte as a legacy for our children and grandchildren.

Fast Facts:

- Rio Grande del Norte is bounded on the north by the New Mexico/Colorado border, on the east by the Rio Grande Gorge and Ute Mountain, on the south by a jutting line running several miles north of Highway 64, and on the west by Highway 285. Its northwest portion crosses over Highway 285, encompassing the Rio San Antonio Gorge Wilderness Study Area. It also includes the Rio Grande Gorge south to the Taos Junction Bridge.
- Senators Jeff Bingaman(Ret.), Tom Udall, and Martin Heinrich and Congressmen Ben Ray Luján introduced legislation beginning in 2009 to protect Rio Grande del Norte as a National Conservation Area.
- According to a 2012 economic study commissioned by a coalition of sportsmen's and conservation groups, the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument will permanently protect important historic and cultural resources and fuel an estimated \$15 million in new economic spending in Northern New Mexico.
- Already, outdoor recreation contributes \$6.1 billion to New Mexico's economy annually and supports more than 68,000 jobs for New Mexicans (according to the Outdoor Industry Association).
- The national monument will safeguard the Rio Grande, ensuring that people and wildlife can use the river for years to come and will protect a key source of irrigation for farmers and acequias in New Mexico.

For more information about Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, please visit www.riograndedelnorte.org/media