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NEW MEXICO
GREEN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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New Mexico Green Chamber: Rio Grande del Norte National Monument Means Preservation and Job Creation

(TAOS) -- Local businesses in Taos and Rio Arriba counties, as well as the New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce, are celebrating President Obama's announcement to designate Rio Grande del Norte as a National Monument.

The monument, which is expected to be designated on March 25, encompasses approximately 240,000 acres of historically and culturally significant and wild land west of Taos and north to the Colorado border, including the Rio Grande Gorge, Ute Mountain, and the Taos Plateau.

"The President's national monument designation of Rio Grande del Norte will not only protect a pristine land for all time, it will also create jobs and economic opportunities for the people living in Taos and Rio Arriba counties right now," said Jamie Tedesco, Executive Director of the Taos Green Chamber of Commerce. "Rio Grande del Norte is one of the most beautiful regions of our state, and I applaud President Obama for protecting it."

Tedesco said that the designation wouldn't have been possible without the hard work of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, retired U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, and U.S. Representative Ben Ray Lujan, in addition to local leaders and businesses who advocated for National Monument status for years.

"Not only is Rio Grande del Norte an important part of our collective cultural heritage, but it is a vital component to our local economy," Tedesco continued. "The protected public lands across New Mexico, including Rio Grande del Norte, support jobs and attract visitors and new businesses to our state. The President's designation will only improve the long-term economic prospects for this area."

The economic impact of Rio Grande del Norte has long been evident. It already supports approximately 312 jobs per year in the Taos and Rio Arriba counties, and is responsible for about \$17 million in revenue from out-of-state visitors. A recent study conducted by BBC Research & Consulting estimates that the President's designation will result in an increase of about \$15 million in additional revenue and 279 new jobs created in the tourism- and outdoor-related activities as the monument's status is promoted in guidebooks and travel blogs the world over.

"When a national monument is designated, it achieves a higher status in guidebooks and travel blogs, luring people who might otherwise be just passing through to stay a while longer," said

local Taos business owner Cisco Guevara of Los Rios Rivers Runners. “Those longer stays mean revenue for our northern New Mexico economy. In fact, the BBC study noted that some similar regions which received a national monument designation in 2001 experienced approximately 500 percent growth in visitation from 2003 to 2007. If Rio Grande del Norte experiences a visitation growth anywhere close to that number it will do wonders for our local economy.”

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