



NM sportsmen and businesses applaud designation of Rio Grande del Norte National Monument

For Immediate Release: March 22, 2013

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President Barack Obama's announced designation of the Rio Grande del Norte as a national monument fulfills a longtime goal of New Mexicans who treasure the area for its diverse wildlife, iconic Western landscapes and importance to the economy, hunters and anglers.

"This designation would provide permanent protection for this incredible area that is long overdue," said Max Trujillo of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. "It will ensure that the outdoor traditions of northern New Mexico can continue on into the future, and protect the lands and rivers that so many people rely on for food, recreation and livelihood."

The 236,000-acre area managed by the Bureau of Land Management in northern New Mexico includes the Rio Grande Gorge and 10,093-foot Ute Mountain. With broad local support, New Mexico's U.S. senators and representatives have spent years leading efforts to protect these traditions only to be thwarted by congressional gridlock and partisan posturing.

"The area's designation as a monument under the Antiquities Act is a refreshing sign that President Obama and Secretary Salazar recognize the importance of passing New Mexico's heritage on to future generations," said Kent Salazar, a National Wildlife Federation board member whose family has lived and ranched in New Mexico for generations. "We've been working on this for 15 years. Hunters and anglers support protecting Rio Grande del Norte. Environmentalists, ranchers and businesses support it. Native Americans have been hunting and fishing in this area forever. There's mountain biking, hiking and fishing in the area. Tourism is a major part of the northern New Mexico economy and Rio Grande del Norte is key to that."

A recent [report](#) by BBC Research & Consulting said the estimated \$17.2 million pumped into the area economy yearly from tourism and spending related to Rio Grande del Norte is expected to nearly double to \$32.2 million because of the new designation.

Protecting the Rio Grande del Norte is vital to sustaining the area's culture, heritage and economy, a standing-room-only crowd told Interior Secretary Ken Salazar at a listening session he conducted in December in Taos. Dozens of northern New Mexico residents told the secretary they appreciated the fact that existing uses of the land, including grazing, hunting and fishing, would be allowed to continue with the area's new status. The Rio Grande, classified as a Wild and Scenic River in 1968, will remain open to kayaking and other activities. More than 150 [area businesses and business organizations endorsed](#) making the site a national monument.

The [area contains thousands of archaeological sites](#), some dating back 11,000 years. It's home to bears, cougars, elk, pronghorn and bighorn sheep and is an important stop along the Rio Grande migratory flyway.

Taos Fly Shop owner Nick Streit praised the designation proposal. "Fishing is an essential pastime in northern New Mexico and Rio Grande del Norte has some of the best in the region. This permanent protection is a welcome decision by residents and businesses alike."

Cisco Guevara agreed. The owner of Los Rios River Runners, a rafting company in Taos, said thousands of visitors a year flock to the Rio Grande del Norte region, helping support a strong local economy. "Designating this area as a national monument can only help our long-term economic outlook," he said.

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For a look at Rio Grande del Norte and hear what it means to area residents, watch this video, <http://vimeo.com/57560484>.