



President Obama to designate Rio Grande del Norte National Monument

The Wilderness Society applauds permanent protection of an American treasure

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ALBUQUERQUE, NM (March 22, 2013) – The Wilderness Society applauded President Obama for the [pending designation](#) of the [Rio Grande del Norte National Monument](#) in northern New Mexico. By using the [Antiquities Act](#), President Obama will protect roughly 240,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat, exceptional outdoor recreation areas and a vital source of water for New Mexico.

Hispano leaders and organizations, small business owners and the Taos and Mora Valley Chambers of Commerce, sportsmen and ranchers, Taos Pueblo and elected officials, and conservation organizations came together to ask President Obama to permanently protect the Rio Grande Gorge and Taos Plateau.

“The Wilderness Society applauds President Obama for protecting the Rio Grande del Norte as a national monument,” said [Michael Casaus, New Mexico Director at The Wilderness Society in Albuquerque](#). “The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument will boost New Mexico’s economy and protect our culture and way of life for generations to come.”

The national monument will safeguard the Rio Grande, ensuring that people and wildlife can use the river for years to come and protects a key source of irrigation for farmers and acequias in New Mexico. It also includes some of the most ecologically significant lands in northern New Mexico, including Ute Mountain, which towers over the region and provides excellent habitat for a wide array of species, including elk, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and great horned owl. It will also protect the vast recreational opportunities contained within the Rio Grande Gorge and Taos Plateau, such as hiking, biking, camping, rafting, hunting and fishing.

A [recent survey](#) found that 84 percent of New Mexico voters agree that public lands are an essential part of the state’s economy, and an [economic study](#) found that a national monument designation for Rio Grande del Norte is estimated to fuel \$15 million in new economic benefits, such as boosting tourism and supporting ongoing livestock grazing.

Legislation to protect the Rio Grande del Norte was [re-introduced during the 113th Congress](#) by Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich and Rep. Ben Ray Luján. The sponsors, in addition to former-Sen. Jeff Bingaman, have also called on President Obama to use the Antiquities Act to designate the Rio Grande del Norte as a national monument.

In southern New Mexico, community members have also come together to try to protect the [Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks as a national monument](#), citing the same dysfunction from Congress. Former-Sen. Jeff Bingaman and Sen. Tom Udall sent [a letter](#) asking that the president protect the two areas as national monuments. Additionally, newly elected Sen. Heinrich also supports the president protecting Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks.

The 112th Congress was the [first Congress since World War II](#) to not protect a single new acre of public land as a Park, National Monument or Wilderness Area.

Understanding that Congress is broken, The Wilderness Society is very pleased to see President Obama taking important steps toward putting conservation on equal ground with energy development.

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The Wilderness Society is the leading public lands conservation organization working to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places. Founded in 1935, and now with more than 500,000 members and supporters, TWS has led the effort to permanently protect 110 million acres of wilderness and to ensure sound management of our shared national lands. www.wilderness.org