

July 1, 2017

Secretary Ryan Zinke  
Monument Review MS-1530  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Docket No. DOI-2017-0002

Dear Secretary Zinke,

The purpose of this letter is to provide public comment as part of the review of national monuments related to Executive Order 13792, specifically in regard to the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument (RGDN) in Taos and Rio Arriba counties, New Mexico, which was designated as a national monument in 2013.

RGDN protects a dramatic landscape used for centuries by Hispanic Americans and their ancestors and recognizes their traditional land uses such as hunting, grazing, and collection of firewood and piñon nuts. The names of the geography are indicative of the cultural ties of Hispanic people to these lands: Cerro de la Olla, Cerro San Antonio, Cerro del Yuta, and, of course, Rio Grande del Norte itself.

The public lands that comprise these monuments contain a rich array of archaeological resources that span thousands of years and represent our state's and nation's diverse cultural traditions. These lands are also rich in geography, encompassing the iconic Rio Grande Gorge, sweeping mesas, and numerous mountain-sized volcanic cones that leave indelible impressions on visitors and residents. The area is of critical importance to many plants and wildlife, including bighorn sheep, river otter, pronghorn antelope, and birds of prey.

There was a long and open public process that led to RGDN's designation as a national monument. Public discussions about protecting the area's public lands actually go back decades. But Congressional outreach to diverse stakeholder groups in northern New Mexico by then-Senator Jeff Bingaman's staff ramped up in earnest in 2007, including meetings with local elected officials; mine workers; Taos Pueblo leaders; diverse land users including Hispanic land grant heirs, all grazing permit holders, *acequia* associations, hunters and anglers; the business community; and more.

These leaders expressed their desire to maintain their rural lifestyle and traditions while also promoting economic development opportunities. The business community, in particular, was keen on keeping these public lands available for rafting, fishing, hunting, hiking, biking, climbing, and other recreational opportunity.

After six years, with widely-supported legislation introduced but failing to move in the 111<sup>th</sup>, 112<sup>th</sup>, and 113<sup>th</sup> Congresses, community will galvanized around protecting RGDN as a National Monument through the authorities of the Antiquities Act. When President Obama designated RGDN in March 2013, the response in New Mexico, both locally and statewide, was overwhelming positive. People from diverse cultures and backgrounds came together to celebrate and, in the four years since, that support has strengthened as traditional and recreational uses of these lands have continued and flourished.

Recent visitation data from the BLM's Taos Field Office indicates that visitation in the most recent fiscal years, 2015-2016, has risen by 45 percent over 2011-2012, the two fiscal years prior to RGDN's designation. The Town of Taos has seen a growth in its Lodgers Tax revenue during this same time period, according to Town of Taos Marketing and Tourism Director Ana Karina Armijo.

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the nation's oldest and largest Latino civic membership organization, took an official position of support for designation the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument in 2012 through both its New Mexico chapter followed by our national organization in 2013. The Hispano Round Table of New Mexico, a coalition of local, state and national Hispanic organizations with a representation of over 50 Hispanic organizations and over 50,000 members, took the same official position in 2013. This letter serves to convey our continued support as well as that of the other leading New Mexico organizations signed on to this letter.

We specifically and emphatically request that you take no actions to alter the RGDN national monument. Instead, we urge you to (1) support BLM staff in New Mexico who are working with stakeholders in development of RGDN's management plan, and (2) ensure that there is adequate funding for management of our public lands in New Mexico, including our monuments, parks, refuges, and other conservation lands.

Sincerely,

Roger Rocha  
National LULAC President  
Washington DC

Ralph Arellanes  
Chairman, Hispano Round Table of New Mexico  
Executive Director, NM LULAC  
National LULAC Civil Rights Commission  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Dennis Montoya  
New Mexico LULAC State Director  
Rio Rancho, New Mexico

Paul Martinez  
LULAC Council 120  
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Lawrence Vargas  
LULAC Council 78  
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Mr. Juan Jose Pena  
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Marcella Arellanes  
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Pablo Martinez  
Member  
Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico

Cc: James Cason, Special Assistant, Delegated the Functions, Duties, and Responsibilities of the Deputy Secretary