

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 26, 2017

The Honorable John Kelly
Chief of Staff
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear General Kelly:

We were disheartened by the recent news of the Department of the Interior's recommendations to the President regarding modifications to national monuments, including Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks in New Mexico. We were concerned that there are several factual errors included in the report's summaries of these two monuments which were used to justify recommended changes. These factual errors relate to several overarching topics:

Border Security and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

- The Department claims that Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument causes problems for border security enforcement because the monument shares a border with Mexico, but in fact the monument boundary was established five miles north of the border at the recommendation of the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. In addition, the sheriffs from Doña Ana and Luna Counties, where the monument is located, wrote in July 2017 that “the monument’s designation in 2014 has not created new challenges for us, nor have local trends changed due to the monument.”
- The Department states that the monument restricts motorized access on the border, but U.S. Customs and Border Patrol stated that legislation to create the monument would “significantly enhance the flexibility of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol to operate in this border area.”
- The Department states that the monument presents a drug smuggling risk, but in fact New Mexico State Road 9, located south of the monument and less than a mile north of the international border, sees the vast majority of border crossing traffic because the volcanic terrain and inhospitable conditions of the Potrillo Mountains make travel north through the monument extremely challenging.

Grazing and Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks National Monument

- The Department claims the monument could degrade the ability of ranchers to run cattle, but the Bureau of Land Management, who manages the area, has confirmed there has been no reduction in grazing allotments or access. In addition, the proclamation

establishing the monument specifically states that the same laws, regulations, and policies that govern grazing on all BLM lands continue to govern grazing within the monument.

National Security and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

- The report suggests the monument might interfere with nearby military installations, but in fact leaders of these installations supported the designation of the monument because it provides a buffer against encroachment by incompatible development. In addition, the proclamation specifically provides that “Nothing in this proclamation shall preclude low level overflights of military aircraft, the designation of new units of special use airspace, or the use or establishment of military flight training routes over the lands reserved by this proclamation.”

Water Resources and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

- The Department claims that development of groundwater resources in the Mesilla Bolson Aquifer could be hindered by the monument, but the portion of the Mesilla Bolson within the monument boundaries is limited to the volcanic fields of the Potrillo Mountains, where the aquifer is thin and poorly suited to water well drilling. Including this area in the monument will only help wells downstream by protecting a proven natural recharge zone that replenishes the main basin aquifer.

Motorized Access and Rio Grande del Norte National Monument

- The Department claims that roads have been closed as a result of the monument, but land managers in the area have confirmed that no roads have been closed in the monument.

Grazing and Rio Grande del Norte National Monument

- The Department claims that many grazing permittees have chosen not to renew permits because of monument-related restrictions, but the rate of non-renewal and transfers of grazing permits has remained consistent before and after the designation of the monument. No permittees have cited the establishment of the monument or its management as a factor in a decision not to renew a grazing permit.

Monument Management Plans

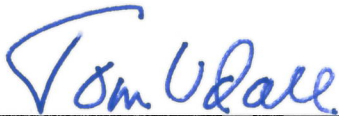
- The Department recommends that the monument management plans for both monuments should be revised; however, neither management plan exists yet and are actually delayed due to this process, so there are no plans to revise. The Bureau of Land Management, an agency of the Department, is currently working with the local communities to draft the first management plan for each monument.

New Mexicans know that a review based on facts would find that these two monuments have contributed to our state’s economy and protected the traditional way of life in these communities. These monuments were created via a decades-long public process with robust public input, which established the current boundaries and provided for clear management language in the proclamations to continue important cultural, economic and natural security

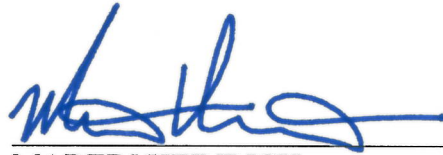
actions within these areas. We urge you to review the accuracy of these and other claims in the report. We hope that the White House will not move forward with any recommendations based on false information. The public deserves better than predetermined political conclusions based on hearsay and claims that are easily disproven if the Department had taken the time to listen to and work with local communities.

We have heard from our constituents in the past few months who fear the future of their monuments might be determined by people sitting in Washington who have never seen these places and who are unfamiliar with the local communities and their values. The value of these monuments to New Mexico and the nation has been well-documented. To make changes to them now with such muddled justification is an insult to the Americans who have dedicated their time, energy, and expertise to see that these resources are protected for future generations.

Sincerely,



TOM UDALL
United States Senator



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator



BEN RAY LUJAN
Member of Congress



MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
Member of Congress