



**April 28, 2025**

**RE: Community Letter of Support for the Protection of the Upper Pecos Watershed**

To Members of Congress, Federal Agency Staff, and Public Land Managers:

We, the undersigned members of the Hispanic Conservation Leadership Council ([HCLC](#)), along with residents and community leaders from Northern New Mexico, write to express our strong concern about the impact of future mining in our watershed. As the people who would be most directly affected, and who depend on the Pecos River for clean water and our livelihoods, we support the withdrawal of the Upper Pecos Watershed from future mining activity whether it is through the passage of the Pecos Watershed Protection Act ([S. 1319](#) and [H.R. 2727](#)) or an administrative action.

The Pecos River is the only native river to New Mexico and is a lifeline for our communities. Fed by snowmelt from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the Pecos River nourishes our acequias and sustains our farms, families, and livelihoods. This river is [central to our cultural identity as Hispano people of the Southwest](#) and to the health of the ecosystems, wildlife, and outdoor recreation that define our home.

We know firsthand the cost of irresponsible mining. Our community is still recovering from the [Terrero Mine disaster of the 1990s](#), when a toxic spill decimated over 90,000 fish and caused irreparable damage to the watershed. Millions of taxpayer dollars were required for cleanup, and the memory of that contamination still lingers in the minds and hearts of those who depend on this river.

That's why so many of us have advocated for years to protect the Pecos from future mining threats. When the Secretary of Agriculture, Brook Rollins, [recently canceled the proposed mineral withdrawal](#) of 165,000 federal acres in the Upper Pecos via secretarial memo, it disregarded the overwhelming local and state support for protecting this watershed. In 2024, the New Mexico Legislature passed [House Joint Memorial 5 \(HJM 5\)](#), formally calling on Congress and federal agencies to protect this land. The New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission also designated the [Upper Pecos as an Outstanding National Resource Water](#), offering the highest level of water quality protection in the state. Furthermore, in [2025 the New Mexico State Public Lands Office banned mining](#) on state lands in the Upper Pecos Watershed through 2045. Even with all these successes, this watershed is still at real risk due to the federal land now open for mining in the watershed.

We invite policymakers, land managers, and congressional staff to visit the Pecos and stand by the river we rely on every day. Come see what's at stake. Come talk with the residents who live here, work here, and raise their families here. We want you to understand why this land and water are irreplaceable — not just to us, but to the American people.

The Pecos Watershed Protection Act also offers a path forward. The bill would provide permanent safeguards from new mining in these sensitive headwaters and ensure our acequias, wildlife, and water remain protected for future generations. We commend Senators Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján and Representatives Teresa Leger Fernández and Melanie Stansbury for their leadership in [reintroducing this vital legislation](#).

Now we call on Congress and federal agencies to honor the voices of our community and take action. The time to protect the Upper Pecos is now.

**Community Leader Signatories:**



**Harold Mark Garcia**

Las Vegas, NM  
San Miguel County Commissioner  
District 1

**Bernadette Baca**

Pecos, NM  
San Miguel County Commissioner  
District 2

**Max Trujillo**

Las Vegas, NM  
San Miguel County Commissioner  
District 3  
HCLC Member

**Martin Sena**

Ribera, NM  
San Miguel County Commissioner  
District 4

**Kenneth Medina**

Las Vegas, NM  
San Miguel County Commissioner  
District 5

**Janice Varela**

Pecos, NM  
Former San Miguel County  
Commissioner, District 2  
HCLC Member

**Marvin Martinez**

Las Vegas, NM  
Las Vegas City Councilman  
Ward 4

**Louie Trujillo**

Las Vegas, NM  
Former Mayor of Las Vegas, NM

**Ralph Vigil**

Pecos, NM  
Farmer, Acequia Advocate and  
Northern Organizer with NM Wild  
HCLC Member

**Telesfor A. Benavidez**

Pecos, NM  
Mayor of Pecos New Mexico

**Clara Lopez**

Pecos, NM  
Pecos Resident

**Kenneth V. Salazar**

Santa Cruz, NM  
Past Chair of Santa Cruz Irrigation  
District  
HCLC Member

**Darlene Vigil**

Taos, NM  
Taos County Commissioner  
District 3  
HCLC Member

**Corilia Ortega**

Taos, NM  
Taos City Councilwoman

**Matthew Gachupin Jr.**

Pueblo of Jemez, NM  
2nd Lt Governor aka Pecos Pueblo  
Governor Pueblo of Jemez  
(Descendant of Pecos Pueblo)

**Veronica Serna**

Mora, NM  
Mora County Commissioner  
District 1  
HCLC Member

**Camilla Bustamante**

Santa Fe, NM  
Santa Fe County Commissioner  
District 3  
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**Frank Adelo**

Pecos, NM  
President, Upper Pecos Watershed  
Association

**Stephanie Garcia Richard**

Velarde NM 87582  
Commissioner of Public Lands,  
New Mexico  
HCLC Member

**State Senator Liz Stefanics**

Cerrillos, NM  
New Mexico State Senator  
District 39

**State Senator Leo Jaramillo**

Espanola NM 87532  
New Mexico State Senator  
District 5  
HCLC Member

**State Senator Pete Campos**

Las Vegas, NM  
New Mexico State Senator  
District 8

**State Rep. Joseph Sanchez**

Alcalde, NM  
New Mexico State Representative  
District 40

**State Rep. Anita Gonzales**

Las Vegas, NM  
New Mexico State Representative  
District 70