



MY TURN

The truth about the 'Protect the Pecos' campaign

On behalf of the "Protect the Pecos" coalition, we want to take time to provide facts about the ongoing Pecos conservation proposal and why it is important to Taos County, which has a long history of supporting and protecting wilderness areas like the Blue Lake, Columbine-Hondo and Latir wildernesses. The proposal seeks to preserve certain lands in Taos County adjacent to the Pecos Wilderness from extractive industry and commercial development – threats like oil, gas, fracking, mining, energy development and transmission lines, as well as illegal off-road travel which damages the watershed.

The proposal seeks permanent conservation protection as wilderness for 20,406 acres of pristine, high elevation, steep-sloped roadless areas on the fringes of the existing wilderness near Peñasco.

Last week's "My Turn" [July 21-27, 2016] by Taos County Commissioner Candyce O'Donnell quoted Bonifacio Vasquez urging "the Taos county commission, the congressional delegation and the wilderness advocates to consider the historical significance of the land grants and the necessary and historical use of the common lands by the communities." It is important for citizens to know that the proposed area has been roadless, historically, and was never logged by the local traditional communities.

The proposal would also create a "cultural heritage special management area" (SMA) of 14,612 acres to the south of Highway 518. The purpose

JOHN OLIVAS,
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of this cultural heritage management area is to create a legislative management mandate for the Forest Service to protect traditional cultural uses of this area from mining, fracking, drilling and other harmful development. This will honor traditional cultural uses like dedicated firewood production areas and science-driven forest restoration/thinning that greatly benefit acequias, livestock permittees and improved hunting/fishing habitat.

There is an unfortunate impression by some that conservationists have been unwilling to engage community stakeholders and are not being sensitive to their concerns. The truth is that there has been outreach to the Peñasco area since 2011. Based on these community conversations, we have listened and made significant changes to the proposal to honor the needs of the local communities.

Beyond these meetings, we've had many other conversations, lunches and coffees with residents, grazing permittees and acequia *parciantes*. These have focused on listening and constructive and respectful dialogue. While we have not resolved all of our differences, we have identified a number of areas of agreement. Virtually everyone has said that these areas deserve permanent protection through some type of federal legislation. We agree that preserving traditional uses must be hon-



Courtesy photo

The Pecos Wilderness is an area within the Santa Fe National Forest and Carson National Forest.

ored in any legislation.

We are on record agreeing to the following: No acequia headgates or infrastructure will be included in the proposed boundaries; existing legal motorized routes will remain open; existing legal fuel wood collection sites will remain accessible – long term firewood management should be implemented; stipulating that the proposal is not intended to affect the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; That the SMA include science-based

forest restoration including thinning; and welcoming the idea of having the SMA be named as a cultural heritage area.

While there are some who do not recognize the Carson National Forest as public land, and even those who have expressed a desire to open these roadless areas to commercial logging, we do not agree with these positions. We also believe that doing nothing is not an option.

We are honored to have a

large and growing list of pueblo, business, organizational and individual supporters. San Miguel and Santa Fe counties and the city of Santa Fe have endorsed this proposal already. Taos, Picuris, Nambe, Pojoaque and Ohkay Owingeh pueblos are also supportive. While it may not be possible to achieve unanimous support for conserving this land, we have pledged to continue our efforts to build as much public support and understanding as possible.

A wilderness designation is the highest level of land protection in our nation and it ensures protection of our high mountain headwaters for our desert state. *Como se dice*, "Agua es vida" in New Mexico. These pristine wilderness landscapes of Taos County also attract tourists from around the world which stimulates our economy.

As *parciantes*, fire wood cutters, a farmer and descendants of multiple generations of Hispanic ranchers from Northern New Mexico, it is our legacy to protect our cultural and natural heritage and preserving it for future generations. Make it your legacy, too.

To join our efforts or to learn more, visit protectthepecos.org. We are eager to meet with you, whether it is around a kitchen table, in a school classroom, or an acequia meeting. Let's keep talking.

Olivas is the traditional community organizer for New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and the current chairman of the Mora County Commission. Salazar is the executive director of Rivers & Birds. Trujillo is the sportsman organizer for New Mexico Wildlife Federation.

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Taos Democrats — a family united

We just finished another fiestas in which we welcomed friends, family members and visitors back to our community. We now turn our attention to another fiesta, the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. Although the convention will be almost over by the time of this letter's publication, a commentary is needed. And just as the Taos fiestas are, to me, a celebration of our culture, heritage, and values, so do I view the diversity of the Democratic Party. Multiple generations of people with different viewpoints and backgrounds come together.

What unites us as Taosños and Democrats ultimately is culture, heritage and values. Our culture is one of cooperation, as evidenced by our centuries-old acequia system which serves as one of the oldest political organizations in the region and to this day is a model for water conservation and sharing in the high desert. Our heritage is about unity around our core values of compassion and mutual respect. In Taos, we care about our *vecinos* and we respect each other.

We don't always agree, but we've always found a way to learn to live next to each other and welcome the differences that make us human. It is for this reason that Taos is so close-knit with such a rich history and the reason we still exist as community.

I see the same in our Democratic Party. Much has been written about the divisions between the Hillary and Bernie camps, the old guard and the new wave, etc. In Taos and New Mexico we saw those divisions played out. Taos County went for Bernie and over a thousand new voters were registered. The state ultimately went for Hillary, but by a close margin. That, to me, indicates unity.

I was proud to campaign for Bernie, who has undoubtedly encouraged a new generation of voters to involve themselves in the democratic process, while bringing

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fresh hope to so many who have worked for decades to improve the lives of all Americans.

Moreover, I am proud to be a Democrat, because the torch of progressive values carried by Bernie has been carried by so many before him, and will be carried by others now and in the future. And out of an exciting primary we have a presidential candidate with the skill set to lead and unite and who understands and will represent the concerns of all Americans. Continued involvement by all will help Hillary and our nation address the income gap, student loan debt, health care and, most importantly, stop Donald Trump, who is now leading in several polls. Let that sink in for a moment.

At a time when Republicans want to make it difficult to vote and the former Republican secretary of state was jailed, Democratic candidate Maggie Toulouse Oliver, upon becoming our new SOS, will create a culture of voting rights and will assist all county clerks throughout New Mexico to continue doing what they all want to do — make voting easier and available to all New Mexicans. That's why the progressive organization, Democracy for America, which endorsed Bernie, has also endorsed her.

While Trump wants to build a wall, our Democrats want to build bridges and unite people. Our New Mexico Democrats in Washington have been instrumental in opposing efforts to divide a North American continent. I lived in the deep south of Texas for several years. I saw portions of that wall go up. It has not worked, and only alienates families and trading partners.

Our Democrats have lifted this nation out of economic distress, have lifted families and children out of poverty, marched for equal rights and opportunities for all — even



Courtesy photo

when it has been politically unpopular. Franklin D. Roosevelt was called a traitor to his class, but his New Deal worked and we experienced the greatest expansion of the middle class until the advent of Reaganomics. Social Security. The Civil Rights Act. The Voter Rights Act. Marriage equality. The list goes on. Today I saw another example of political courage as Bernie spoke to his delegates at the convention and expressed his support of Hillary and the most progressive platform in

party history.

Is our party perfect? Of course not. No party is. No person is. No family is. What makes it work is a tolerance for different viewpoints and the continued involvement of our citizens. While the Republicans work to purify and shrink their party, we have expanded ours by welcoming people with all backgrounds and ideas. What results isn't always what everyone wants, but it reflects the diversity of these United States.

Witness unity in action on

Aug. 3. Taos Democrats will meet at Taos Plaza from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Come meet Sen. Tom Udall, Rep. Ben Ray Lujan, Attorney General Hector Balderas, Secretary of State candidate Oliver, Democratic Party Chairwoman Debra Haaland, local convention delegates and more. We are bringing our party together and will be successful up and down the ballot because we are *familia* and our differences only make us stronger!

Fernandez is a Taos town councilor.