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## **INTERIOR RECOMMENDATION FALLS SHORT**

**Washington, DC (September 18, 2017)** Congressman Steve Pearce today released the following statement after the White House made public Secretary Ryan Zinke's national monument review, which included recommendations for both the Organ Mountains Desert Peak National Monument and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument in New Mexico.

"Secretary Zinke's recommendation fails to provide the solutions New Mexico needs. Since 2008, I have been working with the local community to establish a compromise that protects the Organ Mountains Desert Peak National Monument (OMDP) while preserving the multiple uses that public lands provide. By designating this monument under the Antiquities Act, the Obama Administration ignored this work and created an overly burdensome and harmful footprint – roughly 500,000 acres extending roughly 59 miles from corner to corner. The size and complexity of the Organ Mountains raises serious economic, security, and access concerns that cannot be appropriately addressed without resizing the monument's footprint.

This decision blatantly ignores local businesses, Border Patrol agents, and outdoorsmen to protect sites that should not be protected under the Antiquities Act. The Secretary even mentioned the WWII bombing craters in his summary as one of the more egregious examples of an over-expansive monuments – yet he left these ranges in the Monument. Even as a former Air Force pilot, I fail to see any value protecting this land over supporting historical ranching and economic growth. The Antiquities Act makes it clear that protected sites must be of historic or scientific interest, yet the OMDP is home to hundreds of thousands of acres without

legitimate purpose.

Additionally, the Monument does not respect or protect private property rights. The current footprint surrounds thousands of acres of state and private lands, creating a number of access concerns that will significantly devalue these parcels. This will most likely lead to landowners being forced to sell off their properties to the federal government, something the previous Administration likely intended.

Over the course of this debate, nearly 800 businesses and organizations in the community expressed serious concerns over regulations and limitations that come with a monument of this size. By simply unleashing nearly two-thirds of the land that are irresponsibly choked off, the same natural treasures would remain protected – thwarting any concerns raised by the tourism industry – while the economy and culture of ranching, recreation, and multiple use that enriches the western traditions of southern New Mexico would be restored. It's greatly disappointing that Secretary Zinke ignored a large cross-section of the community. I urge the Trump Administration to roll back the damage done by the previous Administration, and resize of the Organ Mountains Desert-Peaks to preserve the natural beauty of New Mexico's land, while supporting the rights of local ranchers, farmers, and outdoorsmen," stated Rep. Pearce.

**The following statements are from local New Mexicans who directly addressed their concerns to Secretary Zinke, but remain overlooked by this recommendation:**

Frank DuBois, former NM Secretary of Agriculture:

*“Changing the grazing language will help but does not answer all the concerns of the ranching community. For instance, the language in the Proclamation that prevents off-road travel, even by nonmotorized means, is a great hindrance to the day-to-day operations of a ranching family. How do they get fencing supplies to a fence line? How do they get a trailer to a sick cow or horse? How do they transport equipment needed for an existing range improvement? In addition, the language in the Proclamation limiting new right-of-ways will certainly put a stop to new range improvements like water pipelines, and in some instances prevent them from getting power to their property.”*

Jerry Schickedanz, Dean Emeritus, NMSU CAHE:

*“In order for the Antiquities Act to be accurately followed, the objects are to be named first and then land can be set aside to properly protect and preserve the named object. Because this was not done in the proclamation for the OMDP National Monument, I firmly believe that the designation was done illegally. This proclamation drew the boundaries from old legislative proposals and then looked for objects to protect. The monument designation fails the first two criteria to be reviewed by the E.O. signed by President Trump. I am disappointed that the Secretary of the Interior did not follow the review criteria in his recommendation for downsizing to President Trump.*

*I am disappointed that the monument was not reduced in size to the footprint of the Organ Mountains which would have maintained the iconic backdrop to Las Cruces that everyone cherishes. It would still bring tourists to see the monument and any economic revenue can be still be accrued to the designation.*

*Because the monument was not downsized, there will still be problems with rights of way to private and state trust land for development, access for border security, flood control, and watershed management. There will be problems of trespass of monument visitors looking for objects that were named in the proclamation and reside on private and state trust land. They were not part of the monument, but in the rush to get President Obama to sign the proclamation, they were illegally named as objects to be protected.”*

Stephen Wilmeth, Rancher

*“I have invested my livelihood in my ranch. While changing the grazing language may alleviate some of the burden, my future existence depends on the reduction of the monument. Without a reduction, the future operating plan will limit access and eventually eliminate my ranch and other ranches within the monument borders.”*

Carol Cooper, Rancher

*“The current boundary of the OMDP National Monument surrounds a number of ranches that have significant state or private lands. Without*

*changing the footprint, private land and State Trust Lands will, inevitably, be controlled by the Federal government. Reducing the footprint of the monument is the only way to protect individuals, businesses, and our community from the negative effects of the Monument designation.”*

Wesley Eaton, Rancher

*“Changing the grazing language will help stakeholders that have ties to these lands that span generations, but it will fail to protect the thousands of acres of private and state properties that are within the monument. Those who will be forced to operate on private and state land within the Monument will have significant difficulty in obtaining rights of way to do basic maintenance activities. The Antiquities Act specifically states that objects with historic or scientific interest should be protected. In no way was the OMDP National Monument created with that in mind. These overly expansive designations must be remedied, but unfortunately, the necessary changes have not recommended.”*

John Keck, Rancher

*“Our family currently has 3 parcels of private deeded land within the monument boundaries as well as many, many acres of State of New Mexico grazing leases which together with the Federal BLM land make up our 90 section ranch. Failing to reduce the monument's footprint will create a "taking" of our private deeded lands and our State of New Mexico grazing leases, which will destroy our operation and diminish the tax base and income not only for us but for the two counties in which we are located and the State of New Mexico.”*

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