

GRANT COUNTY
SHERIFF'S
DEPARTMENT

Frank Gomez

Jesse L. Watkins

Sheriff

Under Sheriff

Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski,
DSOB 304, Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator,

As the Sheriff in Grant County, New Mexico, I am writing to express my opposition to S. 3670, the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act. There is no doubt that the Gila watershed is a special place and is the home to America's first Wilderness Area. New Mexicans have lived and worked on these lands for over a century, preserving these great lands and rivers. However, S. 3670 threatens our heritage, ignores the US Forest Service public planning process, and destroys our ability to continue to work on these lands and care for them as we have for decades.

The designations included in S. 3670 far exceed any recommendations of the professionals of the US Forest Service in the past and currently. The Forest Service is currently undertaking a Forest Plan revision and the Draft Plan calls for a significant increase in the rivers eligible for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act compared to the already established 2002 Forest Plan. The current planning effort is an open public process conducted pursuant to NEPA with input from interdisciplinary experts. This planning process must be respected so that all New Mexicans and Americans can provide input into what rivers in the Gila watershed should be protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Many of the rivers included in S. 3670 are working rivers and have been for over a century. These rivers host water diversions, livestock infrastructure, irrigated facilities and heavy employment mining concerns. S. 3670 fails to protect the ability to repair or replace these facilities in the future and fails to protect water right holders' ability to secure their water. Several of these rivers naturally dry up annually and do not reflect the natural free flowing nature described by the Wild and Scenic River Act. All of the rivers within the long established Wilderness areas are already protected at our nation's highest level from development pursuant to the Wilderness Act and an additional Wild and Scenic designation provides no additional protection but only places additional burdens on the US Forest Service to provide additional planning documents and administration under the Act.

I urge you to oppose S. 3670 as it threatens the heritage of New Mexicans who live and work on the lands and rivers of the Gila National Forest. The US Forest Service in cooperation with New Mexicans have conserved these lands and waters for decades and we ask that the Forest Service public planning process be allowed to continue before Congress acts without input from all New Mexicans and citizens from across the nation.

Sincerely,


Frank Gomez
Grant County Sheriff



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