

Letter to the Editor or article.

In the past week or two, the NM Democrat Senators have conducted secret meetings. Only people, who they considered stakeholders in the M. H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act Amendment were invited. However, we are all stakeholders (entities who will be affected by this issue), so a number of us invited ourselves to the Wednesday, February 26 meeting at WNMU Miller Library. The amendment focuses on the Gila and San Francisco rivers, but also includes the Mimbres River and Las Animas Creek. The Mimbres River and Las Animas Creek are on the other side of the Continental Divide from the Gila and San Francisco rivers. Portions of them are included on maps showing designated sections. Las Animas Creek flows east towards TorC in Sierra County. Strictly speaking, none of these rivers are navigable. Also, those river segments which occur in Wilderness areas **are already protected** from degradation. The Middle Box of the Gila in the Burro Mountains is also included as a designated segment. This is where the Freeport MacMoran Gila diversion is located.

I believe that this *W&SR Act* amendment will be one step of many in kicking ranchers, farmers, and miners off river 'corridors' despite the senators' promises to the contrary. The Act Amendment states that private land will not be condemned; but that is no help to ranchers, farmers, and miners who cannot keep their operations and companies open for business, because the use of their property is restricted. Remember, the corridors can easily be much wider than 1/2 mile, because the measuring starts at the high-water mark, not at mid-river. Sections are a mile square, so the corridors can take up to half the land in each section and private land is no barrier to enforcing this *Act*. Also, river reaches and tributaries '**above and below**' designated segments will be affected, if federal agents and managers deem that private landowners or something on their private property is affecting or may affect the W&S segments.

Knowing environmentalist tactics through past experience, you may rest assured that the resulting required *River Management Plan* and *River Management Plan Manager*; in addition to application of the *Endangered Species Act* will have the authority to restrict all commerce activities, (farming, ranching, logging and the mines) the entire length of the Gila, San Francisco and Mimbres rivers and Las Animas Creek and any tributaries connected to them above or below their designated segments. Recently, environmentalists went after the mines and they will continue to pursue this goal. One New Mexico Wild attendee at Wednesday's meeting brought up the mines as being a negative blight on the county that should be stopped.

The senators' staff assured me that comments sent to GILACOMMENTS@tomudall.senate.gov would be seen by both senators. **The comment deadline is March 1.** It was a relief to learn that the additions to the *W&S River System* will not be subject to approval by only the *Secretary of Interior*; the *Act* will be voted on by Congress. Therefore, we can ask congressmen and senators nationwide to oppose the bill and ask President Trump to veto it, if it is approved.

About 40 people attended the meeting. The front two rows seemed to be *New Mexico Wild* volunteers, who performed surveys identifying which segments met the criteria (in their opinions) for designation as W&SR. What expertise do these volunteers possess, more than experts in the geological and watershed fields? I estimate that the crowd was split 50/50 liberal-conservative. There were others dressed in 'worn' cowboy attire, who I think must have been conservative. There was one man against the wall who was fraudulently dressed as a cowboy.

The Udall/Heinrich staffers were self-assured to begin with, but their composure slipped as the evening went on. They were looking distinctly uncomfortable by 6 p.m. It could have been the need for a break, but I think they did not expect opposition to their program.

The first time I spoke, I repeated Haydn Forward's statement from the February 22 meeting at the Roundup Lodge in San Lorenzo that the FS only identified 18 miles of river, which *might* qualify for designation as W&SR. Commissioner Harry Brown refuted this, stating that the Gila National Forest is now declaring 124 miles of W&S in the proposed forest plan. Haydn Forward, Catron County Commissioner, later advised me that there are 124 miles of W&S river identified **as needing evaluation, but they have not been approved**. The W&SR Act identifies **more than 200 miles of W&SR in Catron, Grant, Hidalgo, Luna and possibly Sierra** counties. In my experience working with the Forest Service between 1977 and 2014, the Forest Service often disregards established criteria and regulations, when identifying roadless areas, wild and scenic rivers, or wilderness areas. The Gila National Forest should be pressured on these issues. I hope that people will comment on the proposed W&SR designations and on the new Forest Plan and point out their deficiencies.

The second time I spoke, I focused on the excessive cost of overlaying yet more regulations on public land. Forest Service personnel will be required to prepare plans and enforce these regulations, which will increase their paperwork load. I believe this will cost millions of dollars and will continue to keep FS personnel out of the woods and in their offices at their computers, so they do not have time to accomplish the necessary work of thinning, fence and trail and tank and bank maintenance, and noxious weed/tree treatment.

Thirty-five and more years ago, FS employees spent most of their work week in the woods. Now they have volunteers who do some work for them, but most of the necessary work is not accomplished. Dozens, if not hundreds, of miles of trails have been abandoned, the forest is overgrown and prime wildlife habitat has been lost.

Our 'forest' is factually a geographical savanna. As such it should only have 40 trees (stems) per acre. Instead, it has an extremely unhealthy, insect infestation and fire-prone 400 to 800 stems per acre. This was explained to me by more than one Fire Incident Commander, when I worked as fire information officer in 2004-2006 on the Gila NF and on other forests since 1977. Fire suppression and reduced logging (due to the *Environmental Species Act*) on forests nationwide have increased stems per acre to excessive levels. Forests need to be thinned to be healthy. Allowing private companies to purchase timber contracts and individuals to purchase Christmas tree tags can safely perform thinning without negatively impacting forest budgets.

Environmentalists believe that they can 'preserve' the forest and keep living things and geology in a constant, static condition. This is not possible, because all of God's creation begins life, grows, ages, and dies. Even rocks change through wind and water action. When trees are over-mature, they attract insects and fire. Either way, trees will be harvested. How much better is it for man to harvest lumber and firewood, and provide fuel and lumber for American homes? Then there would be room for new growth. There would not be catastrophic fires, which decimate even great fire-resistant Douglas firs, sterilize soils and kill microbes that enable new plants to germinate and grow. Once ground cover is removed, soils erode and become gravel and rock. Areas affected by catastrophic fires (like a large area of the Black Range) take decades to recover. Due to steep terrain and low rainfall, these areas may never recover.

So, preservation is not the answer. Conservation is the answer. U.S. Forest Service policy used to be based on Conservation. With the influx of liberal environmentalists in employee ranks, it seems to be changing to a preservationist ideology, especially in U.S. Forest Service Regions 3 and 6. The FS has pushed the *Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River* acts to back this false ideology and enforce their efforts to keep traditional users off the land and authorize more restrictions on multiple uses. Currently, it is obvious that National Forests, especially the Gila NF, have chosen one preferred use – recreation.

The *Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960* states "It is the policy of the Congress that the national forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes." "The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized and directed to develop and administer the **renewable surface resources** of the national forests for **multiple use and sustained yield** of the several products and services obtained therefrom."

The Forest Service definitions of the terms "multiple use" and "sustained yield" as follows:

- *Multiple use* - the "management of all the various renewable surface resources of the national forests so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people"^[3]
- *Sustained yield* - "the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of a high-level annual or regular periodic output of the various renewable resources of the national forests without impairment of the productivity of the land."^[4]

Now we buy timber from Canada to build our homes and export little lumber. Timber harvested on National Forest Land is a fraction of what it was in 1965 as seen at the following link to the most recent data online (2016). <https://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/products/cut-sold/index.shtml>

[Forest Products Cut and Sold from the National Forests and Grasslands](https://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/products/cut-sold/index.shtml)

Forest Products Cut and Sold from the National Forests and Grasslands. FY 1905-2017 National Summary Cut and Sold Data and Graph (PDF, 123KB). Cut and Sold reports show total volumes and values of all convertible forest products sold and harvested from the National Forest System lands and National Grasslands agency-wide, and by organizational unit.

www.fs.fed.us

I was able to locate authorized cattle grazing numbers reported on Forest land (as calculated by head month (HM) from 2007 through 2016. This article did not show a large change at that point, but before 2007 and after 2016 may be a different story.

<https://www.fs.fed.us/rangeland-management/documents/grazing-stats/2010s/GrazingStatisticalSummaryFY2016.pdf>

[Grazing Statistical Summary 2016 - U.S. Forest Service](https://www.fs.fed.us/rangeland-management/documents/grazing-stats/2010s/GrazingStatisticalSummaryFY2016.pdf)

Grazing Statistical Summary: FY 2016 . 1. Introduction . An important part of the Forest Service's Range Management Program is providing information

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We all need to attend meetings and speak up. Body count at county, state, and federal meetings is important. A woman lectured us at the beginning of Wednesday's meeting that conservatives were not nice at meetings and that we should not 'intimidate' the progressive extremists. Except for me, the other conservatives who spoke were very mild-mannered and quiet - no intimidation there, very respectful. In my experience, that situation is reversed at public meetings. Conservatives do not call people names or raise their voices, liberals do.

Since I am a woman over 60 and I do not have a job that can be threatened, I will not be quiet. Being nice has not worked thus far. Open discussion is good, but I will express my opinions and back them up with facts, not feelings. In my opinion and as evidence shows, our Democrat senators and the Gila National Forest cannot be trusted. It is obvious that our senators and the Gila NF do not represent or respect their conservative constituents or those who traditionally work the land.

Respectfully,

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