January 18, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama  Senator Jeff Bingaman  Senator Tom Udall
President of the United States  703 Hart Senate Office  110 Hart Senate Office
The White House  Washington, DC  20510  Washington DC  20510
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  Washington, DC 2005

As Hispano leaders in New Mexico, a state that leads the nation with a 46.3% Hispanic population, we are writing to convey our strong support for the protection of the environmentally, culturally, and historically rich landscapes of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region in Doña Ana County, New Mexico. Hispano culture and presence in New Mexico is and has always been closely connected to our state’s rich public lands. These areas provide our families and communities with recreation, hunting, traditions and so much more. Throughout time, they have also brought travelers and tourists, and with them economic development. As such, protecting these natural treasures is an important priority to us, and to our future.

No place in New Mexico has the abundance of rich and nationally unique Chihuahuan Desert lands than Doña Ana County. Whether it’s the famous Organ Mountains that outline the town of Las Cruces and the historic Camino Real Trail or the Sierra de las Uvas Mountains that house thousands of Native American petroglyphs and pictographs that lie on canyon walls from earlier civilizations, these lands call for national protection. In turn, our country would be so much richer preserving both the unique southwestern landscape and its incredible western history.

Since the first settlers started north on the Camino Real, lands like the Sierra de Las Uvas, Doña Ana, Robledo, and Organ Mountains have played large roles in Hispano life and culture. Hunting and traditional gathering activities continue to this day, and bind generations of Hispano families together. Surging interests amongst Hispanic sportsmen also means more families are taking to our wilderness in pursuit of desert mule deer, quail, and javelina in Doña Ana County.

Fortunately, President Obama and Congress have the power to protect lands cherished by the Hispanic and American community. Well beyond their importance to the Hispanic community, the Mountains of Doña Ana County include important nationally unique historical resources including the Camino Real and the Butterfield Stagecoach trail, Geronimo’s Cave and Robledo Peak, Billy the Kid’s “Outlaw Rock,” and countless archeological sites. Some of these lands have been given interim protection as Wilderness Study Areas, while others remain vulnerable to a variety of threats.

Recent polls demonstrate New Mexicans strongly support protecting these lands, with the highest support amongst the Hispanic population and the community of Las Cruces. I believe now is the time
for action to protect the unique Organ Mountain – Desert Peaks region and secure our rich cultural heritage, natural resources, and economic potential of Southern New Mexico forever.

Sincerely, (see p. 2)

Governor Jerry Apodaca (1975-1979)
Attorney General Patricia Madrid (1999-2007)
House Majority Leader Ken Martinez, Grants
State Auditor Hector Balderas, Wagon Mound
Mayor of Mesilla Nora Barraza, Doña Ana County
Mesilla Trustee Jesus Caro
Mayor of Las Cruces Ken Miyagishima
State Senator Mary Jane Garcia, Doña Ana County
Las Cruces City Councilor Olga Pedroza
Las Cruces City Councilor Miguel Silva
Las Cruces Public Schools, Board Member Maria Flores
Albuquerque City Council Vice-President Ray Garduño
State Representative Antonio Lujan, Doña Ana County
State Representative Joni Gutierrez, Doña Ana County
State Representative J Paul Taylor, Doña Ana County (1987-2005)
Doña Ana County Commissioner Oscar Vasquez Butler (2002-2010)
Doña Ana County Commissioner Dolores Saldaña – Caviness
Doña Ana County Commissioner Leticia Benavidez
State Senator Eric Griego, Albuquerque
State Representative Miguel P. Garcia (House Labor Committee Chair), Albuquerque
State Representative Rick Miera (House Education Committee Chair), Albuquerque
State Representative Antonio “Moe” Maestas, Albuquerque
San Miguel County Commissioner John Olivas
State Representative Rudy Martinez, Grant County
New Mexico Wildlife Federation President Ray Trejo, Deming
Hispano Chamber of Commerce de Las Cruces President John Muñoz
Paul Martinez, Past President of LULAC, New Mexico
Jessica Martinez, Past National President of LULAC Youth
Kent Salazar, National Wildlife Federation Board Member
LULAC, New Mexico
LULAC, Las Cruces
Hispano Chamber of Commerce de Las Cruces
Anthony Women’s Intercultural Center
CAFE (Communities of Action and Faith)
Latino Sustainability Institute
Mesquite Community Action Committee