



New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

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Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument to be Protected

NM Wild Applauds Pending Designation of New Mexico's Newest National Monument

LAS CRUCES, NM (May 19, 2014) – President Obama today announced plans to designate the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in southern New Mexico on Wednesday. This move will protect 496,000 acres in Doña Ana County, including the Organ Mountains, Sierra de las Uvas Mountains, and Greater Potrillo Mountains volcanic field. The new monument protects some of Doña Ana County's most iconic mountains on the local skyline including the Organ, Doña Ana and Robledo mountains, and Picacho Peak. NM Wild Southern New Mexico Director Jeff Steinborn and Conservation Coordinator Nathan Small have been invited to attend the signing ceremony this Wednesday with President Obama in Washington D.C.

The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NM Wild) cheered the designation, and applauded President Barack Obama and Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell for their preservation of this unique Chihuahuan Desert landscape. NM Wild also lauded U.S. Sens. Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall for their work to develop the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act, and for their leadership protecting this landscape for generations to come.

NM Wild has been working for 10 years to permanently protect this southern New Mexico landscape.

Steinborn, who is also a state representative in addition to his role with NM Wild, applauded the president's action. "With the historic establishment of the Organ Mountain-Desert Peaks National Monument, our nation achieves a truly significant conservation milestone. This new monument will enable countless generations of citizens to enjoy and learn from our diverse Chihuahuan Desert wildlands, and the rich history and archaeological sites that exist in them. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to President Obama and Sens. Udall and Heinrich for their visionary leadership."

On January 25, 2014, Secretary Jewell visited Las Cruces and held a town hall event to seek input from a standing-room-only group of supporters that overwhelmingly supported the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument proposal.

The national monument proposal was broadly backed by the local community—in a recent survey, more than 70 percent of people said they supported an Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument.

Doña Ana County landscape conservation efforts began in the early 1980s when the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) began granting temporary protections for eight local Wilderness Study Areas across the county within the Organ, Potrillo, and Robledo mountains. NM Wild opened and staffed its field office in Las Cruces in 2004, and in 2005 organized a community coalition to work toward the permanent protection of these lands along with other areas identified that possessed outstanding ecological and historical importance.

In the last 10 years, diverse members of the community including elected officials, business owners, historians, tribal governments, sportsmen, conservationists, and thousands of citizens have urged New Mexico's federal delegation to move forward to protect this landscape. This Wednesday, under the authority of President Obama, these efforts will come to fruition with the designation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument.

"We are proud to have helped organize the dynamic coalition of community members to permanently protect many of our most important natural and historic resources in Doña Ana County," said Small, who is also a Las Cruces city councilor in addition to his role with NM Wild. "NM Wild is made up of local leaders and thousands of members in every corner of our state and beyond, who are actively involved in protecting the best of the Land of Enchantment."

The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument possesses a vast array of unique plants and animals, some only found in this region.

It also contains important archaeological, geological, and historical sites including the Butterfield Stagecoach Trail, Apollo Space Mission training site at Kilbourne Hole, World War II bombardier training targets, and thousands of Native American petroglyphs and pictographs.

The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument designation caps a historic year and a half period in New Mexico that also saw the designation of the 242,455 acre Rio Grande del Norte National Monument outside Taos in 2013.

NM Wild Executive Director Mark Allison noted the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks as an important step in protecting New Mexico's natural heritage. "New Mexico is blessed with rich public lands, and iconic landscapes that make us 'the Land of Enchantment.' Given the importance of our diverse public lands ecologically, and in many cases culturally, we must continue to work towards their protection. This designation is a result of a decade-long effort

and is ultimately a testament to New Mexicans' love of their land and its people, past, present and future.”

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The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NM Wild) is a non-profit 501(C)(3), grassroots, environmental organization dedicated to the protection, restoration, and continued enjoyment of New Mexico's wildlands and Wilderness areas. The primary goal of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is to ensure the protection and restoration of all remaining wild lands in New Mexico through administrative designations, federal Wilderness designation, and ongoing stewardship.