

July 1, 2017

Secretary Ryan Zinke  
Monument Review MS-1530  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Docket No. DOI-2017-0002

Dear Secretary Zinke,

The purpose of this letter is to provide public comment as part of the review of national monuments related to Executive Order 13792, specifically in regard to the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument (OMDP) in Dona Ana and Luna counties, New Mexico, which was designated as a national monument in 2014.

Encompassing the Organ, Dona Ana, Portrillo, and Robledo Mountains and the Sierra de Las Uvas, OMDP protects a wealth of historic, cultural, natural, and scientific features and objects that make up part of our nation's heritage as well as the birthright of our children and grandchildren. From diverse flora and fauna to archaeological artifacts spanning thousands of years to the preserving the more recent history of human occupation in this region, we value that OMDP helps to ensure that future generations can enjoy and learn from these public lands as we can today.

Hispanos, Latinos, Mexicanos, Native Americans, and Modern American Mestizo People have lived on lands now comprising New Mexico for thousands of years, have a rich cultural heritage here, and have made many important contributions to the culture and history of the United States. Thus, it is imperative that the history and contributions of Latino people be appropriately and adequately represented in our nation's network of national monuments, parks, conservation lands, historic landmarks, and other recognized sites to reflect and preserve the cultural heritage of Latino and Hispanic Americans as a valued part of our nation's heritage.

Latino community leaders, elected officials, business owners, veterans, sportsmen, youth, activists, and conservationists have collectively pursued the protection, conservation, and establishment of OMDP. The outcome of these efforts has resulted in a national monument that can rightly and appropriately honor our state's Latino, Mestizo, and Native culture and heritage, and can ensure the history that lives therein is protected for our children and grandchildren and the generations that come after them.

Amongst the many cultural and historic features protected by OMDP that are important to our organizations and members are the areas surrounding the historic Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, use of which dates back over 12,000 years; the Organ Mountains—also known as the *Cerros de los Manso*—whose majestic, rugged peaks served as the backdrop to hundreds of

years of Native and Mestizo history on the Camino Real; the northern boundary of the Gadsden Purchase, which absorbed many existing Mexican, Spanish, and Native families as citizens of the United States; Spanish naming for many of the region's prominent geographic features, such as the Sierra de las Uvas, Picacho Peak, and the Potrillo, Robledo, and Doña Ana Mountains; and historic sites visited by Pancho Villa.

While we greatly value the opportunities that OMDP provides to experience and learn about objects of historic or scientific interest on our public lands, we also enjoy pursuing diverse recreational opportunities including picnicking, hiking, hunting, bicycling, camping, viewing wildlife, and rock climbing. These all contribute to the health, well-being, and quality of life for county residents and visitors.

Between 2009 and 2013, widely-supported legislation was introduced three times by New Mexico's U.S. Senators but failed to move through Congress. Thus, diverse community partners came together in 2012 to promote a national monument proposal as an alternative to legislation, if needed. This alternative gained traction and widespread community support as Congress failed to act. On May 21, 2014, President Obama used his authorities under the Antiquities to designate OMDP as a National Monument.

OMDP's designation has also benefited our local economy. Recent data from the BLM's Las Cruces Field Office indicates that visitation to OMDP has already increased dramatically, including a 102 percent increase from 2015 to 2016. These visitors patronize local hotels, restaurants, shops, gas stations, and other services. New businesses have opened to join existing merchants in offering OMDP products, tours, and related services. In addition, OMDP has attracted conferences, retirees, and new businesses to Dona Ana County.

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the nation's oldest and largest Latino civic membership organization, took an official positions of support for designation of OMDP as a National Monument in 2013 through both its New Mexico chapter and the national organization, as did the Hispano Round Table of New Mexico, a coalition of local, state and national Hispanic organizations with a representation of over 50 Hispanic organizations and over 50,000 members. This letter serves to convey our continued support as well as that of the other leading New Mexico organizations signed on to this letter.

We specifically and emphatically request that you take no actions to alter the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. Instead, we urge you to (1) support BLM staff in New Mexico who are working with stakeholders in development of OMDP's management plan, and (2) ensure that there is adequate funding for management of our public lands in New Mexico, including our monuments, parks, refuges, and other conservation lands.

Sincerely,

Roger Rocha  
National LULAC President  
Washington DC

Ralph Arellanes  
Chairman, Hispano Round Table of New Mexico  
Executive Director, NM LULAC  
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Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico

Cc: James Cason, Special Assistant, Delegated the Functions, Duties, and Responsibilities of the  
Deputy Secretary