Iconic Lands with Deep Roots
The Pecos Wilderness is 223,637 acres that span both the Carson and Santa Fe National Forests in northeastern New Mexico. From a Native American word meaning “place where there is water,” the Pecos Wilderness is the source of the headwaters for both the Pecos and Mora Rivers. Its 150 miles of streams and more than 15 lakes are part of a watershed that is essential to surrounding communities and the acequia systems that irrigate the lands. A landmark of New Mexico culture and tradition, the Pecos is of tremendous value to surrounding towns, neighboring tribal groups, acequia organizations, land grant communities, sportsmen, ranchers, and outdoor enthusiasts.

The Wilderness straddles the Sangre de Cristo mountain range and is critical habitat for elk, deer, bear, turkey, and one of America’s most robust herds of Rocky Mountain Big Horn sheep. Its waters are home to both the rainbow and brown trout, as well as New Mexico’s state fish – the Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

Protecting the Pecos
While part of the Pecos is protected, there are surrounding forest lands without roads (known as Roadless Areas) that are threatened by unchecked development. Incorporating these Roadless Areas into the Pecos Wilderness or designating some areas as Special Management Areas will protect 120,000 acres of lands and waters that five counties (Santa Fe, San Miguel, Taos, Mora and Rio Arriba) depend upon for clean air, fresh water, and a way to experience the great outdoors. A diverse local coalition – including sportsmen, elected officials, Pueblo leaders, business owners, hikers, and conservationists – has come together to protect these areas for future generations.

Conservation Opportunities Around the Pecos Wilderness

- **Prime Watersheds**: Headwaters for Pecos, Gallinas, and Mora Rivers, dozens of tributaries, and a key water source for farmers and the cities of Santa Fe and Las Vegas.
- **Diverse Plants and Wildlife**: Coniferous forests, aspen glades, ponderosa pine; trout, Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep, black bear, pika, spotted owl and rich bird populations.
- **Popular Outdoor Destination**: Hiking, fishing, hunting and its proximity to Santa Fe, Las Vegas, Española, Taos and Albuquerque have made it a gem among outdoor enthusiasts.
Keeping the Pecos Wild

A Legacy of Conservation in the Pecos

The history of protection for the Pecos dates as far back as 1892, when President Harrison proclaimed the upper Pecos a Timberland Reserve for watershed protection. Then in 1933, the Chief of the Forest Service established the Pecos Primitive Area; and on September 3, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act, creating the Pecos Wilderness. In 1980, the New Mexico Wilderness Act added 55,000 acres to the Wilderness.

Protection of the prime watersheds of the Pecos has long been a priority for many rural and urban communities, including land grant and acequia organizations and the cities of Santa Fe and Las Vegas. The wilderness contributes to both the Pecos and Rio Grande Watersheds, with many streams, tributaries and headwaters originating in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

What is Wilderness?

Wilderness is the highest level of protection for our public lands and is designed to protect lands and wildlife in their natural state. Thus, mining, logging, oil and gas drilling and off-road vehicle use are not permitted. Wilderness Areas are designated by an act of Congress and must be signed by the President.

Wilderness and Wildfire

There is nothing about wilderness designation that prevents fire managers from taking necessary action to achieve fire management objectives. The Wilderness Act states that, “…such measures may be taken as may be necessary in the control of fire, insects, and diseases…” Furthermore, federal fire policy states, “firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.”

Grazing and Wilderness

The Wilderness Act states that “the grazing of livestock, where established prior to the effective date of this Act, shall be permitted to continue subject to such reasonable regulations as are deemed necessary by the Secretary of Agriculture.”

Recreation and Wilderness

A wide range of recreational activities are permitted in Wilderness, including: hiking, backpacking, climbing, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, mountaineering, photography, wildlife viewing and bird watching. While mountain biking is not allowed in Wilderness, designated Special Management Areas would afford stronger land protections while recognizing popular mountain bike trails near Santa Fe and Taos. Hunting and fishing are time-tested, sacred traditions in New Mexico and are permitted in Wilderness areas. Because these lands are often remote and roadless, game populations generally prosper and wildlife habitat is maintained naturally.

“This land is precious to the people of Picuris Pueblo. By adding this area to the Pecos Wilderness, it will protect the Pueblo’s resources, preserve our watershed, our clean water, our unique landscape and will enhance our economy.”

Gary Pyne
Governor of Picuris Pueblo

“The Wilderness and the roadless areas maintain pristine lands cherished by many New Mexicans because they provide a beautiful backdrop to our quality of life and protect our valuable watersheds and wildlife habitat.”

State Senator Peter Wirth
D–Santa Fe–25

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