

**Statement of
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**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
S. 180, Buffalo Tract Protection Act**

October 19, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 180, the Buffalo Tract Protection Act. The bill would withdraw about 4,200 acres contained in four parcels of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) near Placitas, New Mexico, from location, entry, and patent under the mining laws; and disposition under all laws pertaining to mineral and geothermal leasing or mineral materials. S. 180 aligns with the Administration's conservation goals, and the BLM supports the bill.

Background

The lands proposed for withdrawal are located in close proximity to Placitas, New Mexico, which is an unincorporated area of Sandoval County, just north of Albuquerque. The population of the region has grown significantly in recent years, raising community concerns about the potential impacts of additional gravel mining in the area. The area is used for a variety of recreation activities.

S. 180 identifies the four parcels for withdrawal as tracts A (3,127 acres), B (903 acres), C (201 acres), and D (57 acres). Tract A is referred to as the "Buffalo Tract" and is used for hiking, off-highway vehicles (OHVs), and recreational shooting. The Buffalo Tract contains sand and gravel ridges and arroyos with juniper trees, shrubs, and grasses. Approximately 25 percent of tract A has been mined and reclaimed to date. Tract B is known as the "Crest of Montezuma" and is characterized by moderately steep slopes with pinyon and juniper trees intermixed with shrubs and sparse grasses. Tract C, which does not have a specific name, is similar in topography to the Buffalo Tract and is a common hiking area for local community members. Tract D, referred to as "San Francisco," is named after the arroyo that runs through it, and has terrain similar to that of the Buffalo Tract.

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S. 180, the Buffalo Tract Protection Act, would, subject to valid existing rights, withdraw four tracts totaling approximately 4,200 acres of Federal mineral estate near Placitas, New Mexico, from all forms of mineral development under all laws pertaining to locatable minerals, mineral leasing, or mineral materials. The bill specifies that nothing in the act would prevent future conveyance of the surface of the withdrawn lands, although the mineral estate would be retained by the Federal government.

The BLM recognizes the importance of locally crafted recreation and conservation areas on public lands and waters and believes they can yield immense economic benefits. The BLM believes the most effective and enduring conservation strategies are those reflecting the priorities, needs, and perspectives of the families and communities that know, live, work, and care for the lands and waters. The BLM is aware that local communities, including a Pueblo and residents from Placitas and unincorporated Sandoval County, support protection of these tracts from future mineral development. The BLM is in the process of updating the Rio Puerco Proposed Resource Management Plan that has jurisdiction over these covered lands, and is committed to ensuring Native American and Hispanic community voices are represented in the process.

Conclusion

The BLM appreciates the efforts of the sponsor and the Subcommittee in advancing this important conservation initiative. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of S. 180.