

Statement for the Record
Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior

House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

H.R. 5388, Cibola National Forest Boundary Expansion

June 24, 2010

The Department of the Interior appreciates the opportunity to present its views on H.R. 5388, a bill that would expand the boundaries of the Cibola National Forest in New Mexico by transferring administrative jurisdiction to the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) of two parcels of land currently managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)—the Crest of Montezuma in the north, and the Manzano Wilderness Study Area (WSA) to the south. The legislation also designates the Manzano WSA as wilderness. The Department of the Interior supports the legislation's transfer of administrative jurisdiction of both parcels and the designation of the WSA as wilderness but has concerns with the first right of refusal provisions contained in the legislation.

Background

At an elevation of approximately 7,000 feet above sea level, the 917-acre parcel known as the Crest of Montezuma is adjacent to the northern boundary of the Cibola National Forest. The area has high scenic qualities and offers recreational opportunities for the growing population of north-central New Mexico. The BLM's Rio Puerco Field Office currently manages this parcel for light recreational uses such as hiking and bird watching.

The 896-acre Manzano WSA is adjacent to the existing Manzano Mountain Wilderness on the southern end of the Cibola National Forest. The landscape, on the west face of the Manzano Mountains, includes pinon-juniper with extensive wildlife populations, such as mule deer, bear, coyotes, numerous raptors, and mountain lions.

The New Mexico offices of the BLM and the Forest Service periodically discuss opportunities to adjust boundaries to improve the management of federal land in order to manage parcels more effectively and efficiently on the ground. Through these discussions, the Crest of Montezuma and the Manzano WSA were identified as parcels that could be managed more efficiently by the Forest Service than by the BLM. We look forward to continuing our work with the Forest Service and with the sponsor of H.R. 5388 to pursue these opportunities.

H.R. 5388

Section 1(d) directs the Secretary of the Interior to transfer to the Forest Service administrative jurisdiction of the Crest of Montezuma and the Manzano Wilderness Study Area. Both the Crest of Montezuma and the Manzano WSA are adjacent to Forest Service-managed National Forest System lands (the Cibola National Forest) but isolated from other BLM-managed lands. The BLM supports this transfer.

The remaining provisions of H.R. 5388 pertain exclusively to the U.S. Forest Service's management of these lands after the transfer of administrative jurisdiction. We defer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture on issues affecting management of National Forest System lands. However, the Department of the Interior has concerns with the potential precedent that may be established by enactment and implementation of the provisions in Section 1(f) that extend a "First Right of Refusal for Any Disposal of Land," to tribes and to land grant entities. The Department of the Interior recommends that Section 1(f) be deleted from the bill. Finally, we request an opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of the transfers of administrative jurisdiction and wilderness designation under H.R. 5388.