

**Statement of  
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**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining  
S. 177, Cerro de la Olla Wilderness Establishment Act  
June 16, 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 177, the Cerro de la Olla Wilderness Establishment Act. The bill designates approximately 13,000 acres within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument in New Mexico as the Cerro de la Olla Wilderness.

On January 27, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, which launched a government-wide effort to confront climate change and restore balance on public lands and waters. The President's directive recognizes the opportunities America's lands and waters offer and outlines a historic and ambitious challenge to the nation to conserve at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030. The President's America the Beautiful initiative specifically emphasizes the value of conserving the nation's natural resources, recognizing multiple uses of our lands and waters, including its working lands, can be consistent with the long-term health and sustainability of natural systems. S. 177 aligns with the Administration's conservation goals and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) supports the bill.

**Background**

The Río Grande del Norte National Monument lies north of Taos on the border with Colorado, and straddles New Mexico's Taos and Rio Arriba Counties. The area is comprised of rugged, wide open plains at an average elevation of 7,000 feet, dotted by volcanic cones and cut by steep canyons with rivers tucked away in their depths. The Cerro de la Olla volcanic cone provides a visible reminder of the area's volatile past, while wildlife species – including deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope – bring both hunters and wildlife watchers to the area. These lands benefit the public by providing recreational opportunities, such as whitewater rafting, fishing, hiking, and camping. Further, the land supports grazing and traditional collection of firewood and piñon nuts.

**S. 177**

S. 177 would designate approximately 13,000 acres of land administered by the BLM as the Cerro de la Olla Wilderness within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. Wilderness designation would afford these lands the highest level of protection while continuing to provide recreational opportunities as well as allow for certain traditional uses. The BLM appreciates the efforts of the sponsor to support community access for firewood collection and grazing by excluding certain lands from the proposed wilderness designation. The BLM would like to continue working with the sponsor to ensure the local community can responsibly continue traditional uses of these public lands.

Additionally, the proposed designation overlaps a significant portion of the reserve common grazing allotment the BLM has set aside for the temporary use of permittees displaced due to wildfire, vegetation treatment, drought and other issues. Grazing can be a compatible use within wilderness and there is a history of legislation incorporating guidance for accommodating grazing within wilderness designations, such as the Congressional Grazing Guidelines (outlined in H. Rept. 96-1126 and H. Rept. 101-405). The BLM recommends the addition of language addressing the unique circumstances of the reserve common grazing allotment.

The Administration supports collaborative conservation in all land use planning efforts, including monuments, and BLM looks forward to working with the local community and stakeholders as the Committee considers the bill's boundary modifications to the Monument.

### **Conclusion**

Wilderness is a key component of conservation. The Biden Administration recognizes wilderness is a fundamentally important part of the American landscape, not only for practical and scientific values, but also for the beauty, majesty, and solitude it provides. For example, wilderness generates significant economic benefits to local communities by providing recreational opportunities while simultaneously supporting ecosystem health and biodiversity. The BLM supports S. 177 and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee on minor modifications.