

BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF NEW MEXICO

PUBLIC LANDS/LEGISLATIVE CHAIR

AUGUST, 2017 REPORT

Threats to public lands and the trails they contain seem to get worse every month. Here is an update on important issues and activities as they stand in early August.

National Monuments

The battle for the Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monuments continues. A special thanks to everyone who submitted comments to the Department of Interior (DOI). Over 100,000 comments were received during the 60-day comment period in support of these New Mexico monuments. Secretary Zinke visited both monuments during the last week of July, but generally avoided meeting with groups who assembled in Las Cruces and elsewhere to protest proposed reductions in their size. The New Mexico congressional delegation supports the monuments as they are, with the exception of Congressman Pearce in whose district the Organ Mountains are located. It is uncertain when DOI will make a decision on the NM monuments or the legal effect of any decision to change them. Legal scholars have opined that only Congress can change a monument's designation. Litigation may be inevitable.

Proposed Legislation

The House Natural Resources Committee passed H.R. 2936, the "Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017," out of committee on June 27th and the bill is now waiting in the House for debate. The bill would expedite National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) review for U.S. Forest Service projects related to forest management on federal and tribal lands. It would limit the NEPA process by

- (1) expanding the categories of Forest Service activities that are excluded from the NEPA analysis,
- (2) requiring expedited environmental assessments for other Forest Service activities which would limit the depth of the agency's NEPA analysis,
- (3) limiting the consideration of alternatives for some Forest Service activities to only the proposed action and taking no action at all, and
- (4) designating forest management plans as a categorical exclusion, therefore not requiring NEPA analysis.

It may also exempt a wide range of logging activities on the National Forests from the Endangered Species Act. This bill, although ostensibly proposed to promote forest management to reduce fire risk, may emphasize logging to the exclusion of

the rest of the forest environment including resource protection and recreation. It bears close scrutiny.

Forest Plan Review

The Santa Fe National Forest Forest Plan Revision process continues. The Forest Service will hold the last of its informal open houses on the plan on August 16th at the Cuba District Office at 04b, County Road 11, Cuba, NM 87013, starting at 1:00 pm. Future opportunities to comment on the proposed plan revisions are detailed on the FS Plan Revision website page, which also includes the plan documents under consideration:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/santafe/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprd3791442>

The draft Plan and Environmental Impact Statement are scheduled to be released this summer, and their release will be followed by a public comment period. BCH members should pay particular attention to the recreation and wilderness sections of the Plan.

Resources

The Wilderness Society is a valuable partner and supporter of BCH as is the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. For more information about these important organizations please visit their websites: wilderness.org and nmwild.org. They are good sources of information about public lands issues, as well as strong advocates for wilderness protection.

Your Lands Chair

Please contact me any time you have questions about public lands or legislative issues or if you have a particular issue you would like me to address in my report. I welcome your input. I work for you.

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