

Testimony of Rep Steve Pearce

July 10, 2014

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, Members of the Committee: thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the very real national security threats that can arise from restrictive land management policies. I'd also like to extend my appreciation for your invitation to Dona Ana County Sheriff Todd Garrison. He's a fourth generation resident of the Las Cruces, NM area, and a great sheriff. I am honored to call him a friend.

This issue is often overlooked by people in Washington, who are far removed from the reality of the security situation on our southern border. It goes without saying that both our northern and southern borders are not secure, and this is even truer on federal lands near the border, especially in areas that deserve protective status. I believe that history will give us some insight as to the potential for security threats within these lands and surrounding communities.

For years, the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Southern Arizona has been a human and drug smuggling corridor. In 2002, Park Ranger Kris Eggle was killed in the Monument by drug smugglers. While a vehicle barrier was constructed around the monument after Ranger Eggle's murder, the border south of the monument is nowhere near secure. **(Slide 1)** Signs warn American citizens not to go beyond certain points, and large portions of the monument are either not accessible to the public, or are only accessible when traveling with armed Park Rangers. On the Organ Pipe Cactus Monument website, the Park Service states that "illegal border crossings and activities, including drug smuggling, occur daily." **(Slide 2)** In some areas you find backpacks, abandoned clothes, and trash left behind from people crossing the border illegally. Is this what President Franklin Roosevelt envisioned when he designated the monument in 1937?

(Slide 3) In the Eastern half of Arizona sits the Chiricahua National Monument. While it lies north of Douglas, AZ, a decent stretch north of the US-Mexico border, it's also a haven for drug traffickers. Last year, a Park Service employee was the victim of a brutal assault by a drug smuggler in broad daylight. The victim was

bludgeoned with a rock until she passed out, and nearly died. The suspect stole her vehicle, and luckily was arrested the next day for drug smuggling. The Chiricahua Monument is known to have cartel lookout points to signal the optimum time for a smuggler to make his or her way through the Monument. Is this what President Coolidge had in mind for visitors and Park Service personnel when he designated this monument?

Keep in mind that many of these nightmare scenarios have occurred despite a 2006 memorandum of understanding between the Department of the Interior and Department of Homeland Security designed to facilitate better Border Patrol access.

These stories are all too common on federal lands near the border, and I am afraid that history will repeat itself in the newly designated Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. **(Slide 4)** As the following map shows, **ALL** 180 miles of New Mexico's southern border are designated as High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas by the Department of Justice. The Southwest border is of course where the vast majority of people coming across the border illegally are apprehended, and narcotics shipments are seized.

(Slide 5) The Potrillo Mountains, the part of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument closest to the border on the map, currently has restrictions on motorized vehicle use. Local and state officials expressed strong objections to the President's unilateral monument designation because of the federal government's questionable law enforcement record in protected areas. This is why I offered legislation that would have created a smaller monument footprint far away from the border with guaranteed, unfettered access for all law enforcement personnel. I fear that what we've seen on the border in Arizona will happen in New Mexico. There must be guaranteed access for all law enforcement personnel, including the ability to chase a suspect with an off-road vehicle.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I again thank you for looking into this issue. Many places on our borders are in a precarious and volatile situation for tourists and residents. This isn't a matter of partisanship—it's simply reality. The safety of the people visiting our treasured landscapes is a paramount issue

for the federal government to manage, and take seriously. We all want this pristine area protected for generations to come, but those who have the privilege of visiting the Organ Mountains and other protected areas have a right to be protected. I hope that today's hearing will shed some light on how those who would do harm to our communities take advantage of restricted access for the public and law enforcement.