



El Consejo de las Mercedes  
P.O. Box 35091  
Albuquerque, NM 87176

Mercedes May 8, 2026

Abiquiú United States House of Representatives

Anton Chico Committee on Natural Resources

Arroyo Hondo Arriba 1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Atrisco

Cañón de Carnué Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, and Rep. Jared Huffman, Ranking Member  
Cebolleta House Committee on Natural Resources

Chih'ene Nde Nation

Rep. Tom Tiffany, Chairman, and Rep. Joe Neguse, Ranking Member  
House Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Chilili

Cristobal de La Serna

Cubero

El Consejo de las Mercedes offers this letter in support of H.R. 2785, the **New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act**. El Consejo de las Mercedes is a statewide, grassroots land grant organization with a membership of more than two dozen Spanish and Mexican community land grants-mercedes. Since its founding in 2006, the Consejo has promoted land grant-merced interests at both the state and federal level, advocating for legislative and administrative policies that address the past injustices that land grants-mercedes has experienced. Land grants-mercedes were granted by the Spanish Crown and Mexican Republic and represent the oldest non-Native American permanent settlements in North America, and many land grants were settled by *genízaro* (detribalized Native American) and *mestizo* (mixed race) populations. As community land grants-mercedes, they were granted the thousands of acres that included common lands with vast natural resources used to sustain these communities and their residents. These lands were used for fuelwood and timber to heat and build their homes, to pasture livestock, included water resources they developed to irrigate their crops, as well as flora and fauna for medicinal purposes and nourishment.

Don Fernando de Taos

Juan Bautista Baldez

Las Vegas

Plaza de Guadalupe

Nuestra Señora del Rosario

San Fernando y Santiago

(Truchas)

San Antonio de

Las Huertas

San Antonio del

Río Colorado

San Joaquín del

Río de Chama

San Miguel del Bado

Sangre de Cristo Land

Rights Council

Santa Bárbara

Santa Cruz de

la Cañada

Santo Tomás Apóstol

del Río de Trampas

La Joya de Sevilleta

Tajique

Tecolote

Tierra Amarilla

Torreón

Town of Tomé

Many land grants lost their common lands to the United States through a corrupt adjudication process that aimed to clear title to Spanish and Mexican grant lands. This necessary process was required by the Articles 8 and 10 of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, but did not protect the title and property rights of these communities as it was supposed to do. The process was ripe for speculation, failing to protect from the designs of land speculators, unethical attorneys and corrupt federal and territorial officials when these claims were heard by the Office of the Surveyor General for New Mexico and the Court of Private Land Claims. The Surveyor General and the Court failed to properly consider Spanish and Mexican law in their decisions and common lands of community land grants became part of the public domain, including portions that were included in newly established federal forest reserves. The U.S. Forest Service expanded these reserves by purchasing stolen land grant common land from land speculators and corporations and continued restricting local community access.

Many of these lands were purchased in the 1930s through New Deal Programs like the Farm Security Administration and the Soil Conservation Service, which aimed to restore access to these land dependent communities. When projects were discontinued, the lands were transferred to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management and they again limited access, leading to continued poverty and even the depopulation of many of these land grant-merced communities.

This legislation is also important to land grants-mercedes that retained their common lands through the adjudication process but are bordered by federal lands. Catastrophic wildfires, bug infestations and land management practices of the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service continue to affect these grants as devastation does not respect boundaries marked by a fenceline. For our communities, H.R. 2785 will finally begin to address the injustices that have plagued land grant-merced communities for more than one and a half centuries.

H.R. 2785 is intended to provide for the recognition of traditional uses on federally managed lands by land grant-merced communities and to provide for greater cooperation and coordination between federal land management agencies and land grant-merced governing bodies. Because the Act would require federal land management agencies to issue guidance on how land grant-merced communities can access and use natural resources for traditional use purposes on lands now managed as federal lands, which are located within their patented and/or historical-traditional use boundaries, it will provide for the management of those areas in a manner that is consistent with the protection of natural resources that are traditionally used by our communities.

The Consejo supports House Resolution 2785. Our organization feels that this is an important piece of legislation ensures access to public lands for our land grant-merced communities. Additionally, many land grant-mercedes are organized and recognized as political sub-divisions of the State of New Mexico. Land grant-mercedes represent the oldest democratically elected institutions in the United States. Access supports local economies that rely on this access to these resources and ensures that the cultural practices that maintain our unique, *nuevomexicano* cultural identity continue.

We ask that the House Natural Resources Committee support H.R. 2785.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Quintana". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "J".

Jason Quintana  
President