

La Merced De Cristóbal De La Serna

May 13, 2026

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: H.R. 2785, New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act

Dear Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, and Rep. Jared Huffman, Ranking Member, House Committee on Natural Resources; Rep. Tom Tiffany, Chairman, and Rep. Joe Neguse, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Federal Lands:

The Cristóbal de la Serna Land Grant is writing this letter in support of the passage of **H.R. 2785, New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act** introduced by Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández of New Mexico. We feel that this is an important piece of legislation that will protect our communities' access to the forest service lands that surround us. The Cristóbal de La Serna Land Grant was established in what is now Taos County, New Mexico in 1710. Although originally granted to an individual grant to Cristóbal de La Serna, under Spanish Law in effect at the time, even land grants to individuals required the establishment of community settlements. Like all land grants, the grant contained not only small private parcels of land for individual families to build homes and plan small gardens but also vast surrounding common lands accessible to all of the community for grazing livestock and gathering of essential natural resources such as timber and fuelwood.

By the time of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the communities of Ranchos de Taos, Talpa and Llano Quemado were all well-established on the Grant. When our ancestors petitioned the Surveyor General of New Mexico in 1876, the Grant's population was more than 1,500 residents representing 300 families. Though two Surveyors General recommended to Congress that the grant be confirmed, Congress failed to act on the recommendation, and our community filed suit with the Court of Private Land Claims (CLPC) seeking recognition of our land grant. The CLPC determined the grant to be valid and confirmed the land grant in 1892 but as a private & not a community grant. The survey and patent for the land grant was not issued until 1903 for 22,232.57 acres of land.

After the patent was issued the State of New Mexico moved to institute taxation of the common lands of the grant. A taxation scheme was created to spread the tax burden among all the individual families within the land grant. Taos County devised a plan to assign individual parcels of land to the 302 descendants and assigns of the 302 individuals listed on the U.S. patent. The result was a map that depicted long narrow linear tracts that stretched for miles from the river on the north end of the grant to the crest of Picuris Peak on the south. Land speculators not part of the community used these tax assessment parcels to file quiet title suits to gain control of thousands of acres of our common lands. The community did its best to fight off these attacks on

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the common lands but after decades in the courts they could no longer afford the legal expenses associated with the defense of the land.

Despite the devious practices of private interests, the community never stopped utilizing the common lands for grazing its livestock and harvesting needed natural resources. In recent years the descendants of one of these unscrupulous land thieves attempted to create a high-end housing development on the former common lands of the land grant, forcing the community to come out in protest. Public dissent against the development eventually led to Congressional intervention, whereby the U.S. Forest Service in 2016, through Land and Water Conservation Fund funding, came to acquire approximately 5,000 acres of our common lands known as the Miranda Canyon Purchase.

The Cristóbal de La Serna Land Grant has since engaged the Carson National Forest and implored them to allow for the continued traditional use of the land by the community, which in practice has never ceased to exist since the land was originally granted in 1710. While the Carson National Forest has committed to including our land grant in the dialogue for plan management, they have not committed to ensure our continued, unabated use of the land.

As National Forest System Lands, we fear that, as many other land grants have experienced, national interests will once again prevail over local community needs. **H.R. 2785** offers the federal recognition of our historic and traditional uses on these lost common lands now under federal control. If passed this bill will ensure that our continued access and use of the land is part of the management of these lands by the Carson National Forest. It will further ensure that the Carson National Forest will in perpetuity, regardless of changes in administration, coordinate with our land grant on the management of our former common lands.

The Cristóbal de La Serna Land Grant requests your support and the support of the House Committee on Natural Resources for H.R. 2785.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Ledoux

President of the Board of Trustees
Cristóbal de la Serna Land Grant

CC:

Representative Tereasa Leger Fernández, New Mexico, 3rd District
Representative Melanie Stansbury, New Mexico, 1st District
Senator Ben R. Luján, New Mexico