



Merced De Comunidad De San Antonio De Las Huertas

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

Dear Chairman Bruce Westerman, Ranking Member Jared Huffman, Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Chairman Tom Tiffany, and Ranking Member Joe Neguse of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands:

The San Antonio de Las Huertas Land Grant writes in strong support of H.R. 2785, the New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act. This legislation is essential to protecting our centuries-old community and ensuring meaningful access to traditional use resources, as well as securing a seat at the table when decisions are made regarding the management of Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service lands surrounding our Land Grant community.

The San Antonio de Las Huertas Land Grant was established in 1767 under Spanish rule in what is now New Mexico. From its founding until the 1950's, our Land Grant families lived in direct and continuous relationship with the surrounding lands. These lands sustained generations through grazing, hunting, fuelwood gathering, medicinal plant use, and seasonal occupation of historic cabins for our families and their livestock in the Sandia Mountains. This was not only economic survival, but the foundation of our Land Grant community customs, culture, and identity.

Originally encompassing tens of thousands of acres, our Land Grant was significantly reduced following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and subsequent United States land adjudication processes to approximately 5,000 acres. Today, most of our former common lands are administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. The historic site of our original settlement lies within an area in the BLM-managed Buffalo Tract. Surrounding BLM lands, Forest Service and designated wilderness areas include lands that historically supported seasonal grazing, wood gathering areas, and long-standing Land Grant family use.

For nearly 200 years, this traditional way of life continued even after the establishment of the Cibola National Forest, until the 1950's when communal grazing access was terminated by the U.S. Forest Service. Although grazing permits had previously been recognized, they were later revoked. The impact on our Land Grant community was profound. Families who had depended on these lands for generations were forced to leave in search of economic survival elsewhere, resulting in deep cultural, social, and economic loss that continues to be felt today by our Land Grant community.

In the late 1980's, most of our former common lands under Forest Service management were designated as wilderness without consultation with our community. This further restricted access to traditional use resources. Fuelwood gathering became increasingly difficult due to mechanized equipment restrictions, placing significant burdens on working families attempting to continue long-standing practices. Because grazing had already been eliminated decades earlier, the wilderness designation effectively prevented any future restoration of our use, regardless of historical precedent.

These combined management, or lack thereof, decisions have also contributed to increasing fuel loads and limited forest management capacity. Dense forest conditions pose the increased threat of reduce snowpack absorption, potentially contributing to declining water availability in local wells and acequia systems, and

elevate the risk of catastrophic wildfire. As wilderness designation limits active management tools, our Land Grant community remains directly exposed to these growing risks with limited ability to address them.

Our Land Grant community's position is clear. We seek the opportunity to regain and maintain meaningful access to traditional use resources on lands that remain under federal management, and to ensure that these uses are recognized, preserved, responsibly continued and allowed to grow to meet the needs and evolution of our Land Grant community in these fast-changing times. We also seek formal inclusion in decision-making processes affecting these lands. When policies are introduced and developed that could or will impact our Land Grant community, traditional uses, culture, and resources, we ask to have a voice and seat at the table and be included in a meaningful and consistent way regarding these decisions.

H.R. 2785 represents an important step toward establishing a framework of cooperation and coordination that recognizes the historic and ongoing relationship between Land Grant communities and the surrounding federal lands. It acknowledges that past decisions were often made without our participation, and it creates an opportunity to correct that course through structured engagement and respect for traditional uses that need the opportunity to continue and be reestablished as needed to meet the needs of our community not only today but for future Land Grant generations to come.

We respectfully but firmly support the passage of H.R. 2785 and ask for the Committee's support in advancing this legislation through committee and to the House floor.

With Hope,



Kendra Lucero-Matteucci

President

San Antonio de las Huertas Land Grant

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CC:

Representative Teresa Leger Fernández, New Mexico, 3rd District

Representative Melanie Stansbury, New Mexico, 1st District

Senator Ben Ray Luján, New Mexico