

New Mexico Land Grant Council

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May 11, 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*

Honorable Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources:

The New Mexico Land Grant Council submits this letter in support of House Resolution (H.R.) 2785, the ***New Mexico Land Grant-Mercedes Historical or Traditional Use Cooperation and Coordination Act***. The Land Grant Council is a state agency tasked with providing a program of support land grants-mercedes in New Mexico. Part of the Land Grant Council's statutory mission includes development and promotion of federal legislation for an appropriate congressional response to longstanding community land grant claims in New Mexico. In fulfilling this purpose, the Council over the past decade has been working with the entire New Mexico Congressional Delegation to develop federal legislation relating to land grants-mercedes. Spanish and Mexican land grants-mercedes are centuries-old communities in New Mexico that were recognized and established through a grant of land made by the Spanish Crown or the government of the Republic of Mexico between 1690 and 1850. These grants were to communities whose populations were comprised of both Hispanic and Native American inhabitants. They included thousands of acres of surrounding common lands that were to be utilized by local residents for sustaining themselves. Therefore, the natural resources found on the common lands, such as pasture for livestock, wood for fuel and construction material, and vegetation for medicinal purposes and nourishment have played an integral role the development of land grant-merced communities since their inception. Utilization of the common lands for traditional uses are cultural practices that still continue to this day and are part of very fabric of *nuevomexicano* identity.

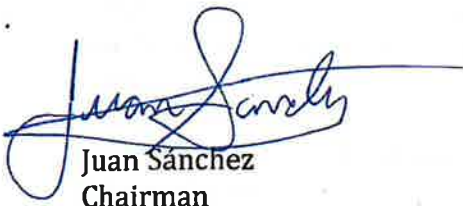
For many land grant-mercedes, the common lands were lost to unethical attorneys that they hired to win recognition of their rights protected by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Other land grant-mercedes lost portions of their grant through court decisions that misinterpreted

the Treaty and the Spanish and Mexican law under which these lands were granted. Lands lost by these court decisions became part of the public domain and portions were included in 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 heirs access to their birthright. Though many of these purchases were made during the New Deal to ensure land grant-merced communities had access to these lands, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management continued limiting access when New Deal federal programs ended.

Even those land grant-mercedes that retained their common lands through the adjudication process and are bordered by federally managed public lands are affected by the management decisions of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. This is especially true when it comes to catastrophic wildfires and bug infestations, which do not respect fenced boundaries and wreak havoc on land grant-merced resources. This important legislation addresses an injustice that was perpetrated on New Mexico's historic land grant-merced communities, some of which are over three centuries old.

The New Mexico Land Grant Council and land grant-merced leaders have worked with the New Mexico Congressional delegation for more than a decade on the development of this piece of legislation. This Act represents a concerted effort to finally begin to address the longstanding and historic injustices that have plagued land grant-merced communities for nearly 175 years. 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. The Act would also 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 that are located within their patented and/or historical-traditional use boundaries. This will provide for the management of those areas in a manner that is consistent with the protection of traditional uses and their related natural resources. We offer our agency's expertise and assistance toward the passage of this important legislation.

Respectfully,



Juan Sánchez
Chairman