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Honorable Members of the House Natural Resources Committee;

I am writing to express my support for the Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act. As New Mexico's Commissioner of Public Lands, I am mandated by the New Mexico Constitution to be a steward of state trust lands to assure their protection for future generations. I am also charged with using those lands to raise revenue to fund our state's needs through agricultural leases, oil and gas development, renewable energy projects, business and commercial development, and outdoor recreation.

Now, some may say prioritizing wildlife corridors could be detrimental to new potential revenue sources. The way I see it, wildlife protection is an integral part of any sustainable land management plan. I envision a future where all land management decisions are made while considering the entire picture and the generations that will come long after those decisions are made.

New Mexico became the first state ever to make a Wildlife Corridors Act the law of the land this year. The act calls for the study of wildlife patterns as they embark on journeys and migrate through the Upper Rio Grande and the rest of New Mexico in search of better weather, food, water, mates, and hospitable habitat for their young.

If you look at a land ownership map, you will see that New Mexico is a checkerboard of federal, state, private, and tribal land. The act brings land owners and managers to the table — a necessity, because wildlife don't recognize boundaries — to assess the need for over and under passes for wildlife crossings, to encourage new development to consider wildlife migration routes, and to then prevent new development in identified corridors. Highways, fences, and other industrial development are the most common threats to wildlife corridors. And sometimes those threats affect our safety as well: over 1,500 animals were hit and killed in collisions with vehicles on New Mexico highways and freeways in 2018.

Amid these threats, climate change is also creating new challenges for wildlife. Climate change is shifting the habitat of numerous species, and creating new demand for migration corridors and habitats in entirely new places. A recent UN study shows that 1 million animals are in danger of extinction, and the reason is human caused climate change. Our actions and subsequent inaction have put us here, but we can, and we must take steps to get us out of this predicament. We must do our part to curb the potential for extinction.

Senator Udall's Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act of 2019 is critical legislation that directs federal agencies to collaborate with each other, states, tribes, local governments, and private landowners to manage national wildlife corridors according to the habitat connectivity needs of native species. The legislation will create a

database of information about wildlife connectivity that will help inform decision makers at all levels of government to make sound land management choices. This is coordinated data that is desperately needed. The act incentivizes private land owners to protect wildlife corridors using funds from Department of Agriculture conservation programs. Importantly, this legislation promotes public safety and critical landscape-level planning, which protects people and the natural resources that are a fundamental part of our national heritage and the legacy we will pass onto our children and grandchildren and those that will come after them.

The landmark Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act is integral to guaranteeing that future generations inherit a healthy ecosystem. I ask that you support it. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephanie", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephanie Garcia Richard
Commissioner of Public Lands