

Back Country Horsemen of America



PO Box 1367

Graham WA 98338-1367

360-832-2461 FAX 360-832-1564 Toll Free 1-888-893-5161

www.backcountryhorse.com

September 5, 2013

The Honorable Tom Udall
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Udall and Heinrich:

We write to express our strong and unwavering endorsement of S. 776, the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Act. Your legislation will provide permanent “gold standard” protection for these unique, ecologically important, and culturally and historically significant wild lands in northern New Mexico—ensuring that they will be forever available for the use and enjoyment of future generations. We commend you for pursuing wilderness designation for this special area.

As you know, the original proposal to protect the Columbine Hondo as a designated wilderness was developed over several years by a diverse, broad-based coalition, including indigenous Hispanos and Native Americans, ranchers, hunters and anglers, outfitters and guides, equestrian trail riders, conservation organizations, Land Grant associations, and other concerned citizens—all working together as part of the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Coalition (CHWC). This locally-based, collaborative process has benefited from the active involvement of businesses, municipalities, and the mountain-biking community—all of whom support the permanent protection as designated wilderness of these special lands within the Carson National Forest.

Located in New Mexico’s Sangre de Cristo Mountains—the southern chain of the Rockies, the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Study Area (WSA) includes 13 miles of high alpine ridges and peaks and serves as the headwaters of the vital Rio Hondo and Red Rivers. Not only do

these important sources of clean water serve the local communities and farmlands, but they also represent the second and third largest tributaries to the Rio Grande River.

All New Mexicans understand the importance of water to our survival. It is the life's blood of our communities and farmlands. The extensive droughts experienced in recent years underscore the importance of protecting the largest renewable water source in the state—these Sangre de Cristo Mountains. By protecting the Columbine Hondo, we ensure the continued sustainability of the vitally important clean water provided by the Rio Hondo and Red Rivers.

In addition, while the Columbine Hondo is visually striking and serves as an important recreational resource, it also supports a wide range of animal and plant species. The abundance of elk, deer, mountain lion, black bear, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, pine marten, the Rio Grande and cutthroat trout, make this area a top destination for hunters and anglers, birders, hikers, and other outdoor enthusiasts.

The Columbine Hondo is an anchor for the viability and sustenance of local communities throughout the region. Thousands of tourists visit Taos County each year, drawn by opportunities for outdoor recreation, and play an important role in the local economy.

Uses of the Columbine Hondo are as varied as its landscape. The Taos Pueblo and local Hispanic villages rely on these special mountains as a source of wild game for food, and herbs for age-old medicines, and they are considered sacred ground by many.

The mountains and forests of northern New Mexico offer a respite from the hurly-burly of everyday modern life. Many of our nation's military Veterans come to these deep woods and high mountains seeking refuge and peace of mind that they cannot find anywhere else.

It is important that these many benefits of the Columbine Hondo will be available for future generations, that our children and grandchildren will have this pristine area to enjoy and experience. Thank you for the introduction of S. 776. We look forward to continuing to work with you to make sure the Columbine Hondo is permanently protected.

Sincerely,

Jim McGarvey

Jim McGarvey
Chairman
Back Country Horsemen of America
www.backcountryhorse.com
1-888-893-5161
C: 706-669-1015