James Duran

Forest Supervisor

Carson National Forest

208 Cruz Alta Rd.

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**Re:Support for Recommended Wilderness, Wetlands Jewels and Valle Vidal**

I am writing to express my dismay with the Forest Service’s draft land management plan for the Carson National Forest and the need to include additional protections in the final management plan for wilderness, wetlands, and the Valle Vidal.

Wilderness is the highest level of protection for our public lands and is designed to protect lands and wildlife in their natural state. While only Congress can designate wilderness, the Forest Service can recommend areas be designated for wilderness and protect the natural condition of the land in its land management plan. I urge the Forest Service to adopt the wilderness recommendations in Alternative 5. Specifically, I urge the Forest Service to recommend for wilderness the following areas in the Carson National Forest’s land management plan: the additions to the Pecos Wilderness in Alternative 5 (22,475 acres); Llano and Cisneroadditions(2,490 acres) to the Rio San Antonio Wilderness; the Toltec, Ruby, and Brazos Ridge additions(4,344 acres) to the Cruces Basin Wilderness, and the San Antonio area (11,703 acres). These places are among the wildest lands left in New Mexico, and they are ideal places to protect ecologically important, undeveloped lands. These areas merit this protection, and I urge the Forest Service to recognize their vital ecological, geologic, cultural, historic, and recreational value.

The Valle Vidal is a New Mexico treasure and has often been called the Yellowstone of the southwest. I am pleased that the Forest Service is proposing to establish the Valle Vidal Management Area in the Forest Plan, as this will ensure the area remains protected for the next 15-20 years. That said, there is an important piece missing from the Forest Service proposal for the Valle Vidal. Please include management direction that will ensure that off-road vehicle use does not impact the area’s natural, undeveloped setting. Additionally, please adopt direction that does not allow the construction of new dirtbike and off-road vehicle trails in the area to ensure people will continue to find peace and quiet and enjoy the area’s naturalness.

Water is life and the Wetland Jewels Management Area, if established in the Carson’s Forest Plan, would protect the headwaters of many important streams in northern New Mexico. Please establish the Wetland Gems Management Area in the final land management plan. Doing so will ensure the area is protected and restored for people, fish, and wildlife.

In the face of ever-increasing threats of resource extraction and over-development, I urge you to safeguard these high value conservation lands now to protect our economy, natural heritage,opportunities for outdoor recreation, and livelihood for future generations. Please protect these priority lands in the Carson National Forest by recommending more wilderness, particularly additions to the Pecos Wilderness Area, and establishing the Valle Vidal and Wetland Jewells Management Areas in the Forest Plan.

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