Steve Hattenbach

Forest Supervisor

Cibola National Forest

2113 Osuna Rd NE

Albuquerque, NM 87113

**Re:** **Support for Recommended Wilderness, Conservation Management Areas, and the San Mateo Mountains**

I am writing to express my dismay with the Forest Service’s draft land management plan for the Cibola National Forest, and to emphasize the need to include additional protections in the final management plan for wilderness, particularly in the San Mateo Mountains, and to designate conservation management areas.

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 D. Specifically, the Forest Service should recommend the following areas in the Cibola National Forest’s land management plan: the additions to the Apache Kid Wilderness (75,990 acres), Withington Wilderness (10,267 acres), Manzano Wilderness (7,054 acres), and the Sandia Wilderness (281 acres); the Hogback Wilderness Area (5,564 acres); the Guadalupe Wilderness Area (14,988 acres); the Mount Taylor Wilderness Area (475 acres); the Little Water Canyon Wilderness Area (27,348 acres); the Bear Mountains Wilderness Areas (7,174 acres); the Datil Mountains Wilderness Areas (32,402 acres); the Magdalena Mountains Wilderness Areas (6,394 acres); the Spruce Park Wilderness Area (6,198 acres); the Gallinas Wilderness Area (2,410 acres); Panther Canyon Wilderness Area (27,598 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 San Mateo Mountains are a New Mexico treasure and home to some of the wildest places remaining in New Mexico. I am pleased that the Forest Service is proposing to recommend an expansion of the Apache Kid Wilderness, but with so much wild land remaining untouched in the San Mateos the Cibola National Forest should include recommendations for all expansions and designations currently in Alternative D. Recommending the expansion of the Withington and Apache Kid Wilderness Areas will ensure a connected corridor of wild lands for recreational enjoyment and wildlife protection, as will recommending the designation of the Panther Canyon and Spruce Park Wilderness Areas. The San Mateo Mountains are home to a pack of Mexican gray wolves, and are an important corridor along the migration path of many species. Recommending as much wilderness as possible in this area will ensure the protection of the ecological diversity of the San Mateos.

Finally, the Cibola National Forest should establish conservation management areas for the areas mentioned above not being recommended for wilderness designation. This will ensure the preservation of uninterrupted wildlife habitat, opportunities for solitude, and scenic integrity.

In the face of ever-increasing threats of resource extraction and over-development, I implore 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 Cibola National Forest by recommending more wilderness, particularly additions to the Withington and Apache Kid Wilderness Areas, as well as recommending the designation of the Panther Canyon and Spruce Park Wilderness Areas.

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