

Timothy M. Keller
State Auditor



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State of New Mexico
OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

June 30, 2017

Secretary Ryan Zinke
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Protecting New Mexico's National
Monuments

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We write in strong opposition to the downsizing and privatization of national monuments. New Mexico's national monuments contribute tremendously to our economy and natural heritage.

The New Mexico Office of the State Auditor is charged with the constitutional and statutory duty to examine the financial affairs of governmental agencies that receive public money. From this perspective, our Office sees the huge positive impact that national monuments have on communities across our State.

The President's Executive Order of April 26, 2017, signals the possible removal of "National Monument" designation from at least 27 locations, including two in New Mexico: the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument (designated May 21, 2014) and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument (designated March 13, 2013). These possible actions have evoked strong opposition from the public, most recently in the Dona Ana County Commission's resolution opposing any downsizing of the Organ Mountains National Monument.

New Mexicans and visitors to the Land of Enchantment enjoy our national monuments in record numbers. The Department of Interior does not publish the economic impact of national monuments, which results in a lack of transparency into this critical issue. However, according to the National Park Service's Annual Report, 1.9 million visitors visited National Park Service lands in New Mexico in 2016. They spent an estimated \$108.4 million in local gateway regions. This was up from \$97.5 million in 2015. Their expenditures supported 1,700 jobs. According to the most recent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) annual Public Land Statistics Report, 2.985 million visitors visited BLM land in New Mexico for recreational use in Fiscal Year 2015. The BLM does not track economic impact, but the volume of visitors suggests an impact of at least the same as National Parks visitor impact, and possibly 150% of that impact.

The positive effects of national monuments are even more dramatic in contrast to the stagnation of the rest of the State's economy. New Mexico recently ranked last in economic

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health, with a nation-high unemployment rate of 6.6 percent as of May 2017. Downsizing or privatizing our national monuments would be an attack on one of the few bright spots in this dismal economic picture.

The Executive Order is particularly critical of “monument designations that result from a lack of public outreach.” In New Mexico, our national monuments are precisely the opposite, resulting from the public’s desire to protect these lands. They are valued part of their local communities, not a burden or hindrance.

We urge you to listen to all of the communities that the Department of Interior’s review of national monuments would affect, and to be guided by the facts about the importance of these spaces to our economy and environment rather than ideology or corporate interests. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy M. Keller". The signature is written in black ink and includes a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Timothy M. Keller
State Auditor