

Oral Testimony of Stephen Capra

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Submitted to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

**Regarding H.R. 5388, to expand the boundaries of the Cibola National Forest in the State of
New Mexico**

Hearing Held on June 24, 2010

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed expansion of the Cibola National Forest. I would also like to request the opportunity to submit additional comments in writing.

Let me begin by thanking Congressman Heinrich and his staff for a tremendous job of community outreach in working to expand the forest, including the addition of important acreage to the existing Manzano Mountain Wilderness. This outreach involved a very diverse group of constituents—tribes, Land Grant and Acequia communities, sportsmen and conservationists. The final product reflects the willingness of all participants to reach a workable compromise that will benefit all concerned and ensure greater protection for these important federal lands.

The transfer of these areas from the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management to the U.S. Forest Service as additions to the Cibola National Forest simply makes good common sense. This action will ensure these lands are better managed—improving their recreational and wildlife habitat values.

The Sandia Mountains are known by Native Americans as the Watermelon Mountains, because of the beautiful colors that reflect off these peaks at sunset. They are the dramatic backdrop of our community in Albuquerque and a source of recreational opportunity and solitude for urban dwellers. In 1978, Senator Pete V. Domenici of New Mexico, working with conservationists and a diverse group of stakeholders, championed legislation creating the 38,000-acre Sandia Wilderness. This measure forever gave the City of Albuquerque a stunning backdrop, free of development, which has become a staple for families, athletes and friends looking for quiet recreation and to enjoy the beauty and solitude our great state has to offer.

The addition of the Crest of Montezuma is an important addition to the Cibola National Forest. Bringing this area under the management of the U.S. Forest Service is also widely supported by the neighboring community of Placitas, where people have long asked for an expansion of the

wilderness boundaries. Residents here greatly value the interface of their homes to the unspoiled beauty of the northern part of the Sandias. They also recognize the importance of the Crest of Montezuma as a wildlife migration route leading out of the Sandias, and as a connection to mountain ranges to the north. Here, one can find deer, elk, black bear and coyote ranging across vast landscapes in search of food, water and cover.

To the south lies the rugged and remote Manzano Mountains. The Manzanos are also an important wildlife corridor—a mountain range that sees far less visitation than the Sandias. For more than a quarter century, a small piece of the mountain has been left out of the wilderness boundary, leaving management of this area confusing and disconnected. Here, too, Congressman Heinrich has engendered solid collaboration and outreach to the Land Grant community and local sportsmen to ensure that all-important voices have been heard as he developed this legislation.

The addition of the new wilderness will only enhance this remarkable landscape —where one can drop into a narrow canyon in the Fall and enjoy the beauty of the native oak forests, or stand on the mountaintop and gaze literally hundreds of miles and see distant mountain ranges, the green cut of the Rio Grande, and watch hawks and Golden eagles flying across this great expanse of American wilderness.

H.R. 5388 is an important step in protecting and expanding the Cibola Forest. The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance strongly backs this measure and once again commends the Congressman for his efforts and for building strong community support.