

April 10, 1972

Forest Supervisor
Santa Fe National Forest
P. O. Box 1689
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Sir:

It is becoming increasingly evident that wilderness classification hearings under the Wilderness Act of 1964 of National Forest land in New Mexico by the Forest Service are being conducted in a manner heavily favorable to the exploitive timber interests, and to the disadvantage of the public interest in the preservation of wild areas for recreational use. The loggers' interests are decidedly short term in outlook, especially when the current willingness of the Forest Service to permit the destructive practice of clear cutting of vast areas, which, if it does not indefinitely destroy the regenerative potential of the forest, will certainly extend the regenerative cycle beyond the generally accepted period of 120 years. On the other hand the public's interest in wilderness areas is immediately fulfilled without limit and for generations to come.

Although the Wilderness Act specifies that primitive areas must be reviewed for inclusion in the Wilderness System by 1974 the Forest Service has decreed a deadline for review in New Mexico of June 30th of this year. This short lead period plays directly into the hands of the timber interests which are opposed to all wilderness classification, and having only to support the negative side based on their alleged economic interest are under no obligation to prove their case, whereas the conservationists have the burden of establishing positive evidence for preservation founded on detailed evaluations of the wilderness potential of the areas under consideration, which requires much more time.

As a further administrative decision in favor of the timber interests the Forest Service is conducting public hearings on wilderness classification in small towns in New Mexico where the logging companies have an established presence by virtue of their on-going activities. The advocates of wilderness in the public interest on the contrary are scattered throughout the state and must journey far on their own time. To be equitable to all concerned the hearings should be conducted in the major population centers of the state.

Eliot Porter — Route 4, Box 33 — Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501 — Tel. 505-982-6010

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In addition to these pejorative administrative decisions in favor of special economic interest, the Forest Service is also pre-empting the prerogatives of Congress by pre-deciding what parts of the originally designated roadless areas of the Santa Fe National Forest it will even review for wilderness classification. It is arbitrarily eliminating from consideration all areas that ever contained unimproved roads regardless of their present state of reversion to wilderness. This is a matter for Congress to decide. The argument of the opponents of wilderness that valuable resources will be "locked up" in perpetuity by wilderness classification is an intentionally false, self-serving allegation since all these areas will be subject to review by Congress in the future. Congress as the representative of the people is sovereign in all matters in which it is not limited by the Constitution.

The Forest Service has a responsibility to serve the interest of all the people in the broadest sense of the term, to consider all aspects of the future welfare of the Republic in its custodianship of public lands which include more than immediate economic gain of dedicated exploiters, but such long term considerations as watershed and stream protection, insurance of the continued availability of replacable resources, perpetuation of recreational use, preservation of wild life, protection of aesthetic values, and the maintenance of reservoirs of the greatest diversity of life forms that is compatible with the most generous concept of human welfare.

For all these reasons it is imperative that you reappraise your program for public hearings on wilderness classification in New Mexico.

Respectfully,

Eliot Porter

EP/tcg