

**STATEMENT OF ARTURO SANDOVAL
PRESIDENT, CENTER OF SOUTHWEST CULTURE
ON THE
SABINOSO WILDERNESS ACT OF 2007
H.R. 2632**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS**

November 13, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to tell you why I support the proposed Sabinoso Wilderness Area in San Miguel County, New Mexico.

My name is Arturo Sandoval, and I am a native of New Mexico. I am president of the Center of Southwest Culture, an organization that promotes the peoples and cultures of the Southwest through economic, cultural and educational initiatives. I have been engaged in supporting the well-being of New Mexico's Indo-Hispano people for more than 40 years.

In New Mexico, we have had people living on the land for at least the past 10,000 years. Native Americans have lived continuously in what is now New Mexico for all that time, and Hispanos have shared the land with them for the past 400 years. We boast the longest continuously occupied village in the US: Taos Pueblo in northern New Mexico has been continuously occupied for the past 1,000 years.

What this deep imprint of people upon the land in New Mexico means is that we have developed an intimate and abiding relationship to place. Place has helped shape our worldview. It has helped us define who we are. It literally grounds us in core values of respect and love for all living things and for conservation of wild and open spaces.

As a result, Hispanos in New Mexico know that the health of our cultural landscape is forever tied to the health of our physical landscape. Healthy cultures in New Mexico depend on healthy landscapes.

I am especially honored to be here today with you because the Sabinoso area is part of my ancestral homelands. My great-grandparents, Pablo and Pablita Madrid, were born and raised near the proposed Sabinoso Wilderness, in a small ranching community called Trementina. Today, Trementina is mostly abandoned, with just a few scattered homes and a part time post office marking what was once a vibrant rural village.

On an even more personal note, I own a small parcel of forest land near Sabinoso in my homelands of Mora County. There, I am privileged to spend time riding horses, watching as deer, elk, wild turkey, bear and a host of birds share the landscape with me.

In that regard, I am typical of many northern New Mexico Hispanos, who have grown up on the land and who love it as much as I do.

That is why so many of us Hispano residents of San Miguel County are strongly in support of the proposed Sabinoso Wilderness. We know the area well. Our grandparents and parents took us there to hunt, to run cattle during summer months, to camp and share stories around the campfire.

We know that protecting Sabinoso as a wilderness area means we are also protecting our traditional culture.

Just as important, we are currently engaged in a process to re-think our traditional land-based economy. We are rolling out new economic initiatives that seek to keep our people on the land, while understanding the need to keep the land intact.

These new sustainable economic initiatives seek to encourage eco-tourism as a viable economic option for northern New Mexico's rural Hispano communities. Wilderness areas, we are rapidly learning, are one way to ensure that we can develop sustainable eco-tourism activities and help re-energize and rebuild our traditional land-based communities.

That is why the Las Vegas/San Miguel County Economic Development Corporation, along with the San Miguel County Commission and the town councils of Springer and Wagon Mound, NM, all have passed resolutions in support of Sabinoso.

Through the Center of Southwest Culture, I am actively working to create eco-tourism opportunities in northern New Mexico. Part of my efforts to achieve economic health in small rural communities includes talking to local ranchers whose lands abut the proposed Sabinoso Wilderness.

They strongly support creation of Sabinoso as a wilderness because they see the economic opportunities that wilderness will create: outfitting and guiding hunters, birdwatchers and all of those millions of Americans who gain personal satisfaction from being someplace that has been untouched and unspoiled by humans.

These local ranchers and villagers are excited because these federal lands support traditional practices like hunting and grazing. I am happy to report that New Mexico's Game and Fish Department is currently talking to several local ranchers about purchasing public access to this pristine area and the ranchers are happy to collaborate in this process.

On behalf of our ancestors, on behalf of rural villagers in San Miguel County, I respectfully ask that you pass the Sabinoso Wilderness bill and that you help us revive and sustain our culture and our life ways.

Thank you.