

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD -- *EXTENSIONS*

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TITLE: OMNIBUS PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT ACT OF 1996

SPEAKER: speech of HON. BILL RICHARDSON of new mexico in the house of representatives;
Saturday, September 28, 1996

TEXT: [*E1901]

Mr. RICHARDSON. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the Presidio bill which includes the Taos Bottleneck bill. The nearly 765-acre bottleneck tract is one of the most sacred sites for the Taos Pueblo people: It has had religious significance for these people for thousands of years. In fact, the area we call the bottleneck is known as the "Path of Life Lands" to the Pueblo people because it contains their most sacred religious lands. Additionally, the Taos Pueblo was recognized by the United Nations as a World Heritage Site in 1992 in recognition of its status as one of the last remaining pre-Columbian civilizations in North America.

Legislation signed by President Richard Nixon in 1970 returned to the Taos Pueblo all lands that had been seized by the Federal Government with the exception of the bottleneck tract. Inclusion of the bottleneck lands would have decreased the acreage of the adjacent Wheeler Peak **Wilderness** below the legal limit required for **wilderness** designation so the land was not returned to the Pueblo.

The Wheeler Peak **Wilderness** has subsequently been expanded several times and the transfer of the 764.33 acres of the bottleneck tract would not affect the **wilderness** designation of the Wheeler Peak **Wilderness**. My legislation would end this saga and bring to an end the responsibilities of the Federal Government to return land to the Taos Pueblo.

The land transfer to the Pueblo affected by this bill will enable the Pueblo to guard against the public intrusions that are presently occurring on surrounding Indian lands and sacred sites. These intrusions have occurred during sacred religious activities and are wholly inappropriate for such an area. Unfortunately, the Pueblo is powerless to prevent such intrusions without the return of the land to their management and jurisdiction.

Under the terms of the bill, the bottleneck lands would be used for traditional purposes only, such as religious ceremonies, hunting, fishing, and as a source of water, forage for domestic livestock, wood, timber, and other natural resources.

Enactment of this legislation will not result in the transfer of the land out of **wilderness** status. The Pueblo will manage the land as **wilderness** under strict requirements allowing only tribal access to the area for the specific activities, consistent with the **Wilderness** Act, which I have just described.

In the past, this legislation has been supported by the entire, bipartisan New Mexico congressional delegation and by a broad coalition of environmental organizations including The **Wilderness** Society, the Audubon Society, and the Sierra Club at the local, State, and national levels.

This legislation has been passed by the full House in previous Congresses, yet never enacted into law. Throughout this period, the Taos Pueblo has continued to suffer the indignity of public intrusions on their sacred land. It is time to put this long, sad story behind us by enacting this legislation. It is time to return the bottleneck to the Taos Pueblo people.

I am pleased to support the omnibus parks bill and I hope the Senate will support the bill
[*E1902]
so that the Taos Pueblo will receive the land that they deserve.