

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Witness Statement

**Statement of Congressman Jim Kolbe
Arizona, Fifth Congressional District
For Presentation To
Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
U.S. House of Representatives**

March 16, 2000

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Resident Commissioner Romero-Barceló, and members of the Subcommittee. It is a pleasure for me to be before you to discuss HR2941, the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area Establishment Act.

This Subcommittee is well aware of the daily tug-of-war that is fought each and every day over land use matters - from all different sides and perspectives. Well, this bill -HR2941 - deals with a land use matter. And I am happy to say that it has support from ranchers, environmentalists (which also includes ranchers I might add), developers, as well as unanimous and bipartisan support from the two major counties that absorb the NCA.

This has not been an easy task, mind you. It has taken more than four years of hard work by the people who live and work in the area to come up with this plan. And I am honored to take their years of hard work through to the final stretch - Congressional enactment of the Las Cienegas NCA.

Land use issues impact virtually everyone, and there are diverse ideas in this room and in southeastern Arizona on how growth and conservation should be addressed. However, no one benefits from our current situation: a day-to-day struggle to resolve these issues in a piece-meal fashion with the courtrooms being the final battleground.

I think all of us believe there has to be a better way.

Everyone would agree that securing and stabilizing natural resources for our children's future is a necessary goal whether the interest is in ranching, sensible growth, the preservation of our desert ecosystem and wide open spaces, or recovery of listed species.

Southeastern Arizona has many competing forces that make these issues extremely difficult - arguably the most difficult place in the country. The region is home to several species listed under the Endangered Species Act. This factor alone complicates the debate over this area's future, but there are more.

Pima County is one of the fastest growing areas in the nation, and there is a broad spectrum of needs and values found in the County. On top of all this, only 13 percent of the County's land area is private. All of these factors exacerbate an already sensitive subject.

With that said, I believe that these enormous pressures have actually brought the community together. They have come to realize that fighting and bickering every day divides the community and makes the future

unknown and daunting. No one wants to live under these conditions.

People think: What will this area be like for my children, or even, what will this area be like for me in 10 years? Will it be the same place I have come to cherish?

Well, the Las Cienegas NCA sheds some positive light on this previously dark discussion.

It shows that people can work together to achieve a goal that embraces everyone's needs.

It shows that the community can have a brighter future.

And it shows that people can share a life with each other and with the desert - with neither being destroyed.

The Las Cienegas NCA proposal before you will protect private property rights, prevent the federal government from buying private lands, and strengthen the future for ranchers and recreationists. It is supported by people of all walks of life, such as -

Pima County Board of Supervisors

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

City of Tucson

Ranchers

Pima Trails Association

Audubon Society

Southern Arizona Mountain Bike Association

Department of the Army, and

Major developers in the area

Also, I would like to submit for the record a letter of support from Chairman Ron Morriss of the Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors and the County's unanimously passed resolution in support of the Las Cienegas NCA. He was unable to make it here today.

This NCA also has editorial support from a daily newspaper.

Working on this bill has been an honor for me. I am extremely appreciative that this committee has taken the time to review this bill. I think that you will find it a positive step forward for the West and the nation and look forward to it being favorably reported to the House floor.

Thank you very much.

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