

**Testimony about H.R. 2640, the Buffalo Tract Protection Act  
before the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources**

**Rep. Deb Haaland**

**September 19, 2019**

Chairman Lowenthal, Ranking Member Gosar, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing and for allowing me to speak in support of my bill, the Buffalo Tract Protection Act.

I introduced the bill, which draws its name from the shape of one of the parcels of land involved, at the request of my constituents who do not want more sand and gravel mining in their community. H.R. 2640 would withdraw four small parcels of Bureau of Land Management Land near Placitas, New Mexico in my district from mineral development.

These parcels serve as critical connections for wildlife moving between the Sandia Mountains and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. They also provide invaluable recreational open space in this growing area and are home to cultural resources important to neighboring Pueblos.

Yet the draft resource management plan for the area BLM released in 2012 proposed to open them to additional mineral development, including gravel mining. During the public comment period on that draft, fifty thousand comments were submitted in opposition to mining. BLM has still not released the final RMP, so the area continues to be governed by an outdated plan that allows mining. Meanwhile, the community continues to wait and wonders whether the new RMP will or won't allow mining.

This area already has six gravel mines, with four of them being among New Mexico's 13 largest gravel mines. In past legal settlements, area mine operators promised not to apply for more permits on BLM land until the resource management plan can be amended to reflect changes in Placitas, and they promised to make payments to benefit the management of the nearby Placitas Open Space. Those payments were discontinued, however, and now we see efforts to expand the BLM mining lease.

Local residents and leaders have deep concerns about the impacts of additional mining on public health, cultural heritage, and wildlife. The character of Placitas has changed dramatically since BLM first allowed mining. It is now home to some 6000 residents and is a retirement community, with seniors who moved to New Mexico for its beauty and clean air making up a disproportionately large share of the population. Particulate matter released by sand and gravel mining poses a special risk to seniors who already have heart and lung disease, meaning that additional mining would have a devastating impact on public health in the area.

Sandoval County, the Town of Bernalillo, the Merced De Comunidad De San Antonio De Las Huertas, the Pueblo of San Felipe, the Pueblo of Santa Ana, and Placitas residents are all opposed to additional mining in the areas covered by this bill. I would like to enter into the record several statements and resolutions supporting my legislation and opposing new sand and gravel mining in the Buffalo Tract area.

Mr. Chairman, sand and gravel mining in the area has already degraded air and water quality, and area officials and residents agree that this is not the right place for yet another gravel mine. In fact, BLM itself acknowledges alternative locations for the mining industry in the general area that are not wildlife corridors and are a safe distance away from population centers. A legislative withdrawal of the lands covered by this bill is needed to permanently preserve the habitat and recreation resources for the community and protect public health.

I thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and on behalf of the constituents of New Mexico's 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District I urge you to support H.R. 2640.

## **Statements of Support for the Buffalo Tract Protection Act**

The Buffalo Tract Protection Act has been endorsed by the Town of Bernalillo, Santa Ana Pueblo, San Felipe Pueblo, Las Placitas Association, Eastern Sandoval Ranchos de Placitas Property Owners Association, and La Mesa Homeowners Association.

“The Pueblo of San Felipe has worked for many years to reclaim, preserve and protect the Buffalo Strip, which is an important part of San Felipe’s ancestral land base. The Buffalo Strip, which is directly adjacent to the Pueblo of San Felipe, contains cultural resources including NAGPRA sites, and is a crucial wildlife migration path between the Sandia and Jemez Mountains. We are thankful for the work of Congresswoman Haaland, and the NM Delegation who are working to withdraw the Buffalo Strip from mining. The Buffalo Strip must be protected to preserve cultural and wildlife resources for this, and future generations.” – **Pueblo of San Felipe**

“The Pueblo of Santa Ana vehemently supports Representative Deb Haaland’s Buffalo Tract Protection Act, a bill that would protect the BLM’s ‘Buffalo Tract’ from future mining. Representative Haaland’s bill is a companion to the bill introduced by U.S. Senators Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall in February of this year. The Pueblo is concerned with the impacts that mining would have not only on the Pueblo but on the region as a whole. Additional mining in the area would only further degrade air quality in the area that has already been negatively impacted by existing mines, highways, and the railroad. Protecting the ‘Buffalo Tract’ from future mining is an important step in ensuring that the Pueblo’s natural resources would not be negatively impacted by mining in this area adjacent to the Pueblo.” – **Pueblo of Santa Ana**

"Las Placitas Association and the Eastern Sandoval County Citizens Association greatly appreciate Rep. Haaland's support with introduction of the Buffalo Tract Act, vital legislation that can play a crucial role in safeguarding not only the public health but also the environmental quality and economic well-being of the Placitas and Sandoval County community." – **Las Placitas Association (LPA) & Eastern Sandoval County Citizens Association (ES-CA)**

“Placitas is finally bouncing back from the impact of past and current mines to regain its stature as the place to live in proximity to the population centers of NM. This bill would stop future mining in this wonderful tract that should be recognized as an Urban Interface area and preserved for its history, beauty and quality of life. We do not need it turned by miners into a moonscape, using enormous amounts of water, and adding pollutants to the air we breathe. Trails for quiet recreational use by the public that can coexist with existing wildlife corridors and the widely popular local wild horse population are appropriate uses.” – **Dick Ulmerchair of ES-CA’s Land Protection Trust.**