

The Buffalo Protection Act, introduced by U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), has been passed by a voice vote in a key legislative business meeting in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. The legislation has long been monitored and encouraged by the Eastern Sandoval Citizens Association.

Sen. Heinrich's legislation, co-sponsored by U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.), would withdraw four parcels of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in southern Sandoval County, including the Buffalo Tract and the Crest of Montezuma, from any mineral development, including gravel mining.

"The Crest of Montezuma and the Buffalo Tract are home to important ecosystems and have been used by communities along the Rio Grande Valley for centuries," said Heinrich "Numerous local residents have shared their concerns with me about the future of these lands and the potential damage that would result from gravel mining. Mineral development would negatively impact public health, quality of life, and water supplies. Today, we moved forward on legislation that strikes an appropriate balance and reflects carefully gathered input from local communities and stakeholders."

In order to protect these communities from the negative impacts of a gravel mine on these public land, the Buffalo Tract Protection Act would permanently withdraw for BLM parcels, including The Buffalo Tract and the Crest of Montezuma from any mineral development, including gravel mining. Additionally, it ensures that the mineral rights will remain under federal management and not be developed.

Despite progress, ESCA urges continued caution in regards to Buffalo Tract Development. In testimony, BLM officials have indicated that they still want to develop the parcel further and there have been tests to see what type of gravel lies beneath the tract.

As we noted in December, with regard to the BLM's seeming intent to open up the Buffalo Tract (also see the MAP of this area in the ES-CA.org LIBRARY) for what could be an even larger mine, we urge continued vigilance. Locally we need to continue our watch for signs of the BLM taking action to publish the Resource Management Plan or that it is otherwise to open negotiations to lease or sell this area for mining purposes.

At the national level, Congress seems totally consumed at this time with the impeachment hearings. We are encouraged by Rep. Deb Halaand's successes thus far in the House - and thank all of New Mexico's delegations and their staffs for their continued hard work in 2020. *Editor's noted: Some information for this article was obtained from Sen. Heinrich's office. Thanks for the updates.*

Next ES-CA Board Meeting: (open to the public) Monday, Jan. 13, 2020– 4:00 p.m.– 5:30 p.m. – Note new meeting time! Placitas Community Library, NM Hwy 165, Placitas, NM 87043.