

Heinrich moves conservation bills forward

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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WASHINGTON, D.C.—In a key hearing to consider pending legislation Sept. 16, Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., talked about how his legislation to designate portions of the Gila River as Wild and Scenic would permanently protect the river’s free-flowing segments, attract more visitors to southwestern, New Mexico and grow the outdoor recreation industry.

Heinrich championed efforts with local outdoor businesses, advocacy groups and Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., to draft and introduce the M. H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act.

Hearing witness Jamie Crockett, co-owner of Gila Backcountry Services, highlighted in her

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testimony how the legislation would bolster the local economy, create careers in the outdoor industry, and support small businesses.

During her testimony, Crockett stated that in “the American West, we measure our wealth in water, so while Southwest New Mexico isn’t dominated by wealth in a traditional sense, we are the heirs of an incredible fortune by way of this free-flowing gem — the Gila River watershed is our inheritance and our legacy.

“We carry the honor and the burden of protecting the river and its traditional uses indefinitely through this important legislation,” she added. “So while the economic importance of drawing tourists and visitors from across the United States is a significant benefit of this bill, protecting our public lands and the intrinsic value of our way of life underscores why Grant County and surrounding communities are a destination for retirees and those seeking a better quality of life.”

Heinrich noted how his legislation to establish Cerro de la Olla Wilderness within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument in northern New Mexico, would preserve traditional uses and provide sanctuary to a wide range of wildlife species, while maintaining current access routes.

“Cerro de la Olla, with a peak of nearly 10,000 feet, is the home of some of the best elk habitat in northern New Mexico,” Heinrich said. “This legislation is supported by a wide range of community members, as well as the Taos County Commission and Taos Pueblo. Protecting this peak and its spectacular views has long been a priority for the Taos community and I’m glad this bill is moving forward today.”