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HOUSE JOINT MEMORIAL 5

57TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2025

INTRODUCED BY

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A JOINT MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE NEW MEXICO STATE LEGISLATURE TO SUPPORT FEDERAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION AND PERMANENT PROTECTIONS FOR THE UPPER PECOS WATERSHED TO SAFEGUARD CRITICAL WATER RESOURCES, THE LOCAL ECONOMY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE.

WHEREAS, the Pecos river provides clean water, which is critical to the health and well-being of local communities; and

WHEREAS, the Pecos river is one of New Mexico's most vital waterways, sustaining acequias, traditional agriculture, land grants-mercedes and local communities in the Pecos valley and beyond; and

WHEREAS, the local economy is dependent on the Pecos river to support farming, ranching and fisheries; and

WHEREAS, the upper Pecos watershed is renowned for its outdoor recreational opportunities, including hiking, hunting,

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1 fishing and camping, and serves as the gateway to the Pecos
2 wilderness, New Mexico's most-visited wilderness area, drawing
3 visitors from across the state and country and contributing
4 significantly to the local economy; and

5 WHEREAS, the Pecos watershed has a long and significant
6 history as the ancestral home of Pecos Pueblo, whose
7 descendants at the Pueblo of Jemez maintain cultural and
8 spiritual ties to the area, along with the Pueblo of Tesuque,
9 which also holds sacred connections to the land; and

10 WHEREAS, the upper Pecos watershed provides fresh water
11 downstream for hundreds of miles, contributing to high-quality
12 aquatic habitat for native fish, including New Mexico's state
13 fish, the Rio Grande cutthroat trout, and supports both a
14 cold-water fishery and the Lisboa Springs fish hatchery; and

15 WHEREAS, the upper Pecos watershed is an ecologically
16 sensitive area that provides critical habitat for wildlife and
17 supports biodiversity, making it essential to protect this land
18 from further mining activities that could cause irreversible
19 harm to its headwaters and ecosystems; and

20 WHEREAS, the Pecos river tributaries and nearby wetlands
21 have been recognized as crucial outstanding natural resource
22 waters by the state of New Mexico; and

23 WHEREAS, in March 1991, spring snowmelt carried
24 contaminants into the Pecos river, killing more than ninety
25 thousand fish, harming wildlife and contaminating community

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1 drinking water; and

2 WHEREAS, the rehabilitation of the watershed required
3 significant reclamation efforts by the state and others, and
4 the toxic metal cleanup cost New Mexico taxpayers twenty-eight
5 million dollars (\$28,000,000); and

6 WHEREAS, on April 9, 2019, New World resources, limited,
7 through its Colorado subsidiary, New Mexico LLC, announced it
8 had acquired the Tererro copper-gold-zinc volcanogenic massive
9 sulfide project in New Mexico, raising concerns about the
10 potential for renewed mining activity in the sensitive upper
11 Pecos watershed; and

12 WHEREAS, in 2023, United States senators Martin Heinrich
13 and Ben Ray Luján and United States representatives Teresa
14 Leger Fernandez and Melanie Stansbury introduced the Pecos
15 Watershed Protection Act in congress, legislation to
16 permanently protect portions of the upper Pecos watershed in
17 northern New Mexico from mineral entry; and

18 WHEREAS, the proposed Pecos Watershed Protection Act
19 received national recognition and strong support, including the
20 endorsement of the congressional Hispanic caucus in October
21 2024, underscoring the cultural, spiritual and ecological
22 importance of this area; and

23 WHEREAS, the United States secretary of the interior, the
24 United States bureau of land management and the United States
25 forest service have proposed withdrawing one hundred sixty-

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1 three thousand four hundred eighty-three acres of national
2 forest system lands and one thousand three hundred twenty-seven
3 acres of bureau-of-land-management-managed lands in the upper
4 Pecos watershed from new mining claims and the issuance of new
5 federal mineral leases. If approved, an administrative
6 withdrawal would provide protection for up to twenty years; and

7 WHEREAS, this proposal has received overwhelming support
8 from acequia organizations, land grants-mercedes, local
9 governments, tribal leaders, conservation groups and
10 communities across New Mexico that are united in protecting the
11 watershed for future generations; and

12 WHEREAS, protecting the Pecos watershed is not an anti-
13 mining initiative, but rather a recognition of the unique
14 sensitivity of this region, which is still recovering from the
15 impacts of past mining activities and where further
16 disturbances could result in devastating and permanent
17 consequences on the headwaters of New Mexico's largest river
18 originating within the state;

19 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE
20 STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the legislature express its strong
21 support for the proposed federal administrative action to
22 withdraw specified lands within the upper Pecos watershed from
23 federal mining and mineral leasing laws to protect this
24 sensitive area and its resources; and

25 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the legislature call on

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1 congress to pass the Pecos Watershed Protection Act and
2 establish permanent protections for the upper Pecos watershed
3 to safeguard its ecological, cultural and economic value for
4 current and future generations; and

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the legislature recognize the
6 Pecos river's role in sustaining acequias, traditional
7 agriculture, land grants and local communities, as well as its
8 significance to outdoor recreation, biodiversity and cultural
9 heritage; and

10 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the legislature acknowledge
11 and honor the historical and spiritual ties of the descendants
12 of Pecos Pueblo and the Pueblo of Tesuque to the Pecos region
13 and affirm the importance of protecting these sacred sites; and

14 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the legislature urge all
15 relevant agencies, community leaders and stakeholders to work
16 collaboratively to ensure the long-term health and
17 sustainability of the upper Pecos watershed, balancing
18 conservation, cultural preservation and economic prosperity;
19 and

20 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
21 transmitted to the United States secretary of the interior, the
22 United States bureau of land management, the United States
23 forest service, the New Mexico congressional delegation, the
24 congressional Hispanic caucus and the governor.