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HOUSE JOINT MEMORIAL 5

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

INTRODUCED BY

Anita Gonzales and Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics  
and Joseph L. Sanchez

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.