

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Religious Leaders Applaud Monument Proposal**

Urge Obama to Designate Monument in Light of Congressional Gridlock

Washington, DC – Seven senior religious leaders representing 137 congregations throughout southern New Mexico presented New Mexico Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich with a thank you letter today applauding their proposed legislation to protect the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks region. This letter included signatures by the heads of communion from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Rocky Mountain Synod, the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces, the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande, the New Mexico Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Rio Grande Mission of the Community of Christ, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of the Southwest.

Senators Udall and Heinrich’s bill would protect an area of southern New Mexico prized by many. The faith community joins Hispanic and Native American groups, sportsmen, businesses, and conservationists in supporting protection for this unique landscape.

The Organ Mountains Desert Peaks region is a piece of God’s Creation that requires stewardship and care. “We feel that Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks is deserving of protection because it is full of natural gifts from God that have been entrusted to us,” said Sarah Nolan, Executive Director of CAFé.

Rev. Dr. Donna McNeil, Executive Director of the New Mexico Conference of Churches highlighted why the faith community is connected to conservation, “The New Mexico Conference of Churches is pleased with this step toward stewardship of God’s creation. Places such as the Organ Mountains are essential to human life. They give us a profound sense of rootedness in God’s world. And in our increasingly chaotic lives, wild spaces provide much needed space for reflection, prayer, and recreation. Protecting the Organ Mountains ensures that people will be able to enjoy this blessing for generations to come.”

The New Mexico Conference of Churches, CAFé, and Creation Justice Ministries joined the religious leaders on the letter highlighting the broad support within the religious community for the legislation. “Faith communities around the country are engaged in efforts to care for God’s Earth. Senators Heinrich and Udall have heard the call from their constituents to protect this beautiful place and we look forward to securing broader protections for Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks” noted Tyler Edgar, Transitional Executive Director for Creation Justice Ministries, a faith based organization made of 37 national Christian denominations. The breadth of supporters showcases that the faith community sees creation care as a moral obligation. Whether by legislation or declaration of the President, the faith community is urging more formal protection for the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks.

The full letter can be read below and is also attached:

*December 16, 2013  
Senator Tom Udall and Senator Martin Heinrich  
Senate of the United States  
110 & 702 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510*

*Dear Senator Udall and Senator Heinrich:*

*As senior religious leaders serving New Mexico and religious organizations working with communities in the Land of Enchantment, we would like to thank you for your proposed legislation to protect the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region of New Mexico. As people of faith, we believe that God has granted us use of Creation, but along with this gift comes the responsibility to tend and care for the land. We must recognize that we are merely tenants on this planet, and we have been called to care for Creation so that future generations can live, thrive, and enjoy it just as we do. By protecting this area, we are ensuring this piece of God's gift will exist for many years to come.*

*Outdoor spaces have been central to religion and spiritual practices for generations, and the Organ Mountains region is no different. Few landscapes evoke a comparable sense of awe and wonder like mountains. Divine presence is often felt in these settings by countless pilgrims. Not only are these mountain ranges mammoth embodiments of God's power and love, but they provide a retreat from day to day distractions. Protection is necessary to promise peace-seekers from near and far a wonderful piece of terrain in which to pray, reflect, meditate, and rejoice.*

*This enchanting region exemplifies the best of what New Mexico has to offer: raw natural beauty, historical and cultural significance, and recreation opportunities for all. This land is rugged, unspoiled, and wondrous, all qualities that make New Mexicans proud and draw visitors to witness. The uniqueness of this area should be reason enough for protection.*

*We want to commend you for your dedication to New Mexico, Creation, and future generations as you continue to support the protection of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region. We sincerely appreciate the support you have shown and promise to continue the work to preserve this piece of God's gift right in New Mexico's backyard.*

*Thank you again and we look forward to working with you!*

*Sincerely,*

*Most Rev. Oscar Cantú, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces  
Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, United Church of Christ Southwest Conference Minister  
Rev. Jim Gonia, Bishop Rocky Mountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
The Right Rev'd Michael L. Vono, D.D., Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande  
Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe, Bishop of The New Mexico Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church*

*Rev. Charlotte J. Hoppe, Area Minister for Transition Tres Rios Area and Central Area of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest*  
*Bruce Darrington, President of the Rio Grande Mission, Community of Christ*  
*Creation Justice Ministries*  
*New Mexico Conference of Churches*  
*Comunidades en Acción y de Fé (CAFé)*