



Aubrey Dunn, State Land Commissioner
State of New Mexico

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***Trump Executive Order Could Stall Plans to Improve Public Access to
Río Grande del Norte National Monument and Sabinoso Wilderness Area***

SANTA FE, NM – An executive order signed today by President Trump instructing the Department of the Interior to review designations of national monuments could hinder a proposed land exchange between the New Mexico State Land Office (SLO) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that would consolidate state and federal holdings within the Río Grande del Norte National Monument, creating one of the most preeminent recreational spots in the United States.

Trump's order instructs Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to examine designations dating back to 1996 to determine whether they were within the scope of a century-old law that allows presidents to set aside federal lands without congressional approval.

State Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn today said his agency and the BLM have been negotiating an agreement to initiate a land exchange which would transfer about 41,000 acres of state-owned surface and mineral estate within the monument to the BLM.

In turn, the SLO had selected approximately 78,000 acres of federal surface and mineral estate in Chaves, Colfax, Guadalupe, Lincoln, McKinley, Mora, Otero, Rio Arriba, San Juan, Sandoval, Santa Fe, Socorro, and Torrance Counties which are more favorable for economic development.

Commissioner Dunn expressed concern that a delay of 60 days or more from the current time table will push the closing date past the end of his first term and possibly put the exchange in the hands of another land commissioner who may not support the trade.

“This exchange is an example of officials on both sides of the aisle, at all levels of government, coming together to do a good thing for New Mexico,” said Commissioner Dunn. “I hope we will be able to move forward sooner than later but I fear that if we don’t finalize the exchange within the next couple of months, it won’t get done.”

The Río Grande del Norte National Monument is an approximately 242,455-acre area of public lands in Taos County, proclaimed as a national monument in 2013 by President Barack Obama under the provisions of the Antiquities Act. The unique setting of the monument provides a wealth of recreational opportunities, such as whitewater rafting, hunting, fishing, hiking, biking and camping.

“If and when the exchange is completed, the public’s access to the monument will be greatly enhanced,” said Commissioner Dunn. “This could be the Yellowstone National Park of the Southwest.”

A second component of the exchange involves the Sabinoso Wilderness Area in San Miguel County. The BLM owns and manages the 16,030-acre area that offers exceptional opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, backcountry camping, and photography. The BLM would acquire about 2,000 acres of State Trust Lands within the wilderness area and the SLO would pick up federal lands elsewhere.

“State Trust Lands and federal lands are often intermingled which prevents us from effectively managing our respective resources,” said Commissioner Dunn. “This exchange is significant because the BLM could fully implemented its objective as a public land manager and the SLO could fulfill our mandate which is to generate much-needed revenue for public education.”

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Oil, gas, and mineral production, ranching and farming, and commercial development on State Trust Lands support public schools, seven universities, New Mexico Military Institute, New Mexico School for the Deaf, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three hospitals, correctional facilities, water conservation projects, and public building construction and repair.