

AFTER RECESS

(The subcommittee reconvened at 2 p.m., Senator Lee Metcalf presiding.)

Senator METCALF. The committee will be in order.

The first witness this afternoon is Mr. Elmer A. LaCome, vice chairman of the Taos County Commissioners. Mr. LaCome, we are certainly glad to hear from the administrative agency that is the governmental body over this area, and look forward to your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF ELMER A. LACOME, VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE
TAOS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, TAOS, N. MEX.**

Mr. LACOME. Thank you, Senator Metcalf.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Metcalf, my name is Elmer LaCome, from Taos County. Mr. Luis C. Martinez, chairman of the Taos County Commissioners, has appointed me to read a statement before this subcommittee. Mr. Luis Martinez regrets that he cannot be here because of illness in his family.

This statement is presented in opposition to House bill 3306, which will give 48,000 acres of national forest land to the Taos Pueblo Indians.

We are also interested in the affairs of the Taos Pueblo Indians. We have long lived as neighbors with them. We very much want their unique culture maintained. We also desire that their religious freedom be maintained. We agree that their sacred religious lands should be protected—but to give them 48,000 acres of land that belong to the people of the United States would be a serious mistake. This land is important to all the people in Taos County and to all the people who live in the Rio Grande Valley of the Southwest.

Senator METCALF. May I interrupt a moment? When you say that this land is important to all the people in Taos County, you also mean that it is important to the Taos Pueblo and all Indian people concerned, too, because there has been a good deal of testimony about the watershed value of this land?

Mr. LACOME. That is correct.

Senator METCALF. So you are not just talking about the non-Indian population in Taos County?

Mr. LACOME. We are talking about all the people in general.

Senator METCALF. Thank you.

Mr. LACOME. We just cannot agree that the Indians need 48,000 acres for a church; 48,000 acres is 75 square miles of land.

Rio Pueblo de Taos watershed is one of the best water-producing drainages of the Rio Grande River Basin. There is no provision in the bill to protect the existing water rights of the downstream water users from complete appropriation for the use of Pueblo de Taos. There is no assurance that water yield will be protected. I feel very strongly that our water supplies and watersheds will be jeopardized if this land is given to the Taos Indians.

For over 60 years the Forest Service has worked with the Indians in conserving and protecting these lands and their religious areas. We think that these lands should remain part of the national forest system. The Secretary of Agriculture in a recent statement to the con-