

I would like to comment on a point that was made by a Congressman on the floor of the House recently during the discussion of this bill. This in effect is what he said: "The Taos Pueblo Indians need this land more than the Forest Service."

The Forest Service does not need the land that is involved here at all. This agency has only been charged with the responsibility for the management. It is really the people of Taos County, the people of the State of New Mexico, and the people of the United States who really need this land.

We would not be opposed to turning over a small tract of land such as suggested by the Secretary of Agriculture and by Senate bills 1624 and 1625. We do feel, however, that any bill should direct that management of the proposed area require that it be protected from grazing by domestic livestock and be closed to the cutting of green timber. We also think that the Forest Service should continue to protect the area from insect and disease and also to control fires which might occur there. With this type of management, watershed will continue to receive adequate protection.

There are many more people who will be adversely affected by the passing of this bill than would benefit. Many people in Taos Valley, outside Pueblo de Taos, make their livelihood by and are dependent upon the water produced within this watershed. We do not feel that H.R. 3306, as passed by the House of Representatives, is in the public interest.

I urge you to support legislation that will assure the Indians of reasonable protection of their religious activities as well as satisfy the needs and desires of all of us who live in Taos County and the valley of the Rio Grande.

Senator, that concludes my written statement presented by the Commission of Taos County.

Senator METCALF. Thank you very much, Mr. LaCome.

Senator Anderson?

Senator ANDERSON. I think it is a very interesting statement and a good statement. I appreciate very much having taxpaying organizations to testify about what this bill is all about. You have done a good job and I appreciate it very much.

Senator METCALF. Mr. LaCome, I agree that your statement is more than helpful. I am wondering if it is proposed—you are a county commissioner—that you could tax this land if it is kept in the present situation?

Mr. LACOME. I don't really see where we could because, as is, the county itself isn't benefiting from it that much.

Senator METCALF. So whether it is in a use situation or in actual Indian ownership, there is no proposal to invoke and impose a county property tax on this land?

Mr. LACOME. I think that the county could benefit from it if it were put into commercial use.

Senator METCALF. Well, there isn't any suggestion that it be open to commercial use, because this committee wants to abide by the 1933 law that says that the Indians' use is paramount, and it is only when the resources under the contract are not needed by the Indians that they are made available for commercial use. But some of the fear that I have heard invoked is that you people will go out and tax this 48,000 acres.