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April 26, 2017

The Honorable Mr. James W Duffey
The Honorable Mr. T. Calder Ezzell Jr.
The Honorable Mr. Jeff Bilberry
The Honorable Mr. Robert Corn
The Honorable Mr. Will Cavin

Commissioners of Chaves County, New Mexico
1 St Mary's Place
Roswell, NM 88203

Dear Commissioners,

The New Mexico Wildlife Federation, which represents more than 80,000 sportsmen and women in New Mexico, strongly opposes the proposed closure of Felix Canyon Road on the Casabonne Ranch.

The closure of this road would restrict the primary access to recreation and hunting opportunities on public land, which belongs to the residents of New Mexico and Chaves County. According to the Chaves County guidelines for road vacations, no county road shall be closed that serves as primary access to recreational areas or public lands. Felix Canyon Road is the primary access point to Unit 32, which includes 1,600 public land deer licenses and 600 public land Barbary sheep tags issued every season. The closure of this road would severely restrict access unnecessarily for hundreds of New Mexico sportsmen who contribute to the economy and tax base of Chaves County and of the State of New Mexico.

We value and understand the rights of private land owners, however, Mr. Mike Casabonne, the property owner who has requested the road closure, has not provided sufficient or evidence-based reasons to merit the closing of his stretch of Felix Canyon Road. Mr. Casabonne's claims have been disputed by the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish, as there are no records to indicate a heightened amount of theft, trespassing, and vandalism from the users of this public road. According to the Game & Fish records, there have only been two documented incidents of trespassing in six years on this county-maintained road.

Mr. Casabonne's other stated concerns regarding lack of law enforcement and poaching on this stretch of road should raise attention to these issues and interagency plans and agreements should be developed to investigate and address such concerns, as is done on other public roads and right-of-ways throughout New Mexico when such concerns arise.

The Bureau of Land Management, the United States Department of the Interior, and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish all agree that the road should remain open and have agreed to work with Mr. Casabonne on his concerns. The New Mexico Wildlife Federation, along with the undersigned sportsmen's organizations, strongly oppose the closure of Felix Canyon Road.

We strongly ask that you vote against vacating Felix Canyon Road at your May 18 meeting and that you vote to help preserve and embrace New Mexico's outdoor heritage and access to public hunting and recreation opportunities, as it is the birthright of all Americans.

CC: Chaves County Land Council

Sincerely,

Garrett VeneKlasen

President
New Mexico Wildlife Federation

John Cornell

New Mexico Field Representative
Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Brandon Wynn

New Mexico Representative
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Tony Popp

President
Doña Ana County Associated Sportsmen

C.J. Goin

President
Wild Turkey Sportsmen's Association

Steve Brugman

Owner
Brugman Outfitting

Southwest Consolidated Sportsmen