

Public Law No: 101-578

11/15/1990

AN ACT

To conduct certain studies in the State of New Mexico.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

TITLE I--ENCHANTED NATIONAL FOREST INFORMATION AND EDUCATION STUDY

TITLE II--CAVE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

TITLE III--PREHISTORIC TRACKWAYS STUDY

SEC. 301. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.

(a) FINDINGS- The Congress finds that--

- (1) fossils are important for scientific studies of prehistoric life on earth;
- (2) lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the Robledo Mountains in New Mexico contain one of the most important fossil discoveries of the 20th century;
- (3) discoveries have included prehistoric tracks of amphibians, reptiles, arthropods and insects, extensive plant fossils, and clues to the weather and climate of the period;
- (4) fossil footprints that form trackways help scientists recreate the environment and habitat that supported prehistoric life;
- (5) nearly one hundred trackways from the Permian Age have been uncovered in the Robledo Mountains;
- (6) the trackways are over 280 million years old and they document the emergence of life from water to land;
- (7) the trackways are unique in length and represent most taxonomic groups, including many prints of previously unknown animals;
- (8) the trackways and other fossils are being lost for scientific study through unsupervised collecting, and commercial quarrying; and
- (9) the trackways and fossils found in the Robledo Mountains and surrounding areas should be evaluated for their potential protection and value for scientific interpretation and education.

(b) PURPOSES- The purposes of this title are to--

- (1) require the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to consider appropriate means to protect the discoveries and identify the scientific, interpretive, and public education values associated with the trackways and fossils located in the Robledo Mountains in southeastern New Mexico; and
- (2) provide for interim protection of such trackways and fossils.

SEC. 302. INTERIM WITHDRAWAL.

(a) IN GENERAL- The area consisting of approximately 736 acres, as generally depicted on the map entitled 'Prehistoric Trackways Study Area', numbered NM 030-01 and dated September, 1990 (hereafter referred to as the 'study area'), is hereby withdrawn, subject to valid existing rights, from all forms of entry, appropriation, or disposal under the public land laws, from location, entry, or patent under the mining laws, but not from operation under the mineral leasing laws. Such withdrawal shall terminate on the date 2 years after the date the study referred to in section 303 is transmitted to Congress.

(b) MAP- The map referred to in subsection (a) shall be on file and available for public inspection in the appropriate offices of the Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior.

SEC. 303. STUDY.

(a) STUDY- (1) The Secretary of the Interior, in cooperation with State and local governments, and institutions of higher education, shall conduct a study of the alternatives for the protection and interpretation of the fossil resources within the study area.

(2) The study shall include an analysis of the importance of the discoveries at the site and an evaluation of the feasibility of developing a facility in New Mexico to evaluate, curate, display, and interpret the fossil resources located within the study area.

(3) The study shall recommend the preferred administrative designation for the area, including but not limited to potential designation as a unit of the National Park System, and the appropriate management agency.

(b) TRANSMITTAL TO CONGRESS- Not later than 1 year after the date that funds are made available for the study required in subsection (a), the Secretary shall transmit such study to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the United States Senate and the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States House of Representatives.

SEC. 304. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this title.