



# United States Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources

Chairman Jeff Bingaman

Democrat - New Mexico

**January 9th, 2009 Contact:** Bill Wicker

**Phone:** 202-224-5243 **BINGAMAN SPEECH: S. 22, OMNIBUS PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT ACT**

*The cloture vote on the motion to proceed to the public lands package, [S. 22](#), is set for 2:00 p.m. this Sunday.*

*This big, bipartisan bill contains roughly an equal mix of Democratic bills, Republican bills and bills with bipartisan sponsorship. It represents years of work by Senators from many states, and both parties, in cooperation with local communities, to enhance places which make America so special. Chairman Bingaman went to the Senate floor today to underscore that fact:*

## *S. 22 -- Omnibus Public Lands Management Act*

"Mr. President, I'd like to speak for a few minutes in support of the motion to proceed to S. 22, the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act. S. 22, which I introduced earlier this week, is a collection of over 160 bills primarily from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

"Although S. 22 itself is a new bill, the bills it incorporates are not. This package includes 159 bills which were considered by our committee during the previous Congress. Several of the bills in the package have even been considered in one or more earlier Congresses.

"The bills in this package have been developed on a bipartisan basis, last year with Senator Domenici, who was then the Ranking Member of the Energy Committee, and this year with Senator Murkowski. Almost all of the bills that were reported from our committee were on a unanimous vote. And we have made further modifications to some of the bills that were not reported unanimously in an effort to address remaining concerns.

"Collectively, the bill is one of the most sweeping conservation laws considered by the Senate in recent years. It will designate over 2 million acres of wilderness in nine different States.

"It would establish three new units of the National Park System, a new National Monument and three new National Conservation Areas, and codify the Save America's Treasures and Preserve America historic preservation programs.

"In addition, it will designate over 1,000 miles of new additions to the National Wild and Scenic River system, including several hundred miles in Wyoming dedicated to our late friend and colleague Craig Thomas, and would help protect 1.2 million acres of the Wyoming Range.

"The bill designates four new national scenic or national historic trails, enlarges the boundaries of several existing units of the national park system and establishes 10 new National Heritage Areas. And it establishes in law the Bureau of Land Management's National Landscape Conservation System, the collection of national monuments and conservation areas administered by the BLM.

"But this package is not just about new designations. The bill authorizes numerous land exchanges and conveyances to help local communities throughout the West. It includes several provisions to improve land management, such as the Forest Landscape Restoration Act, which will facilitate collaborative landscape-scale restoration to help reduce fire risk and fire costs and provide new forest product jobs. Another example, which is in my home State of New Mexico, will reauthorize the Río Puerco Management Committee. This committee has become one of the most effective collaborative land management efforts in the Southwest, which for more than ten years, has helped facilitate the restoration of the highly degraded Río Puerco Watershed, a major tributary to the Río Grande.

"This package incorporates 30 separate bills, that taken in their entirety, will have an unprecedented positive impact in helping address critical water resource needs on both the local and national level. It authorizes a range of studies to assist several communities conduct in-depth reviews of local water supplies and evaluate the best ways to meet future water challenges. There are also approximately 18 specific authorizations for local and regional projects that enhance water-use efficiencies; address infrastructure in disrepair; provide a sustainable supply to rural communities; and conserve water to promote environmental health and alleviate conflicts arising due to the Endangered Species Act. The overall understanding of our critical water resources, including the impact of climate change on water, is also promoted by the provisions in this legislation.

"Finally, I should note that the bill will reduce the workload of water lawyers in the West by ratifying three extremely important water settlements in California, Nevada and New Mexico. These settlements -- involving Indian tribes, agricultural and municipal water users, environmental interests and the applicable states -- will resolve decades-old litigation in a manner consistent with Federal responsibilities and with the broad support of diverse interests in each of those situations. As most familiar with the history of western water can attest, it is a near-impossible task to bring competing interests together to agree on long-term solutions. That has been achieved in this bill, and this bill ensures that the Federal government will be a full partner to help implement reasonable solutions to complex water issues.

"Mr. President, I think it's important to note the lengthy public process associated with many of the individual bills in this package. Many of these land and water bills began as an effort by local citizens to resolve important resource issues within their State. In many cases, local working groups were formed and discussion took place over a period of years, before a local consensus developed. Following all of that, many of these proposals then spent additional years under consideration in Congress, often with further negotiations and modifications. In my opinion, this is exactly the way the legislative process should work, and this process reflects why there is such strong local support for these provisions.

"Based on the action in our committee last Congress, there is strong bipartisan support for the bills in this package. I would like to commend the Majority Leader for his commitment to pass this bill in such a timely manner and urge my colleagues to support the motion to proceed and the passage of this bill."

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