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November 19, 2013

The Honorable Tom Udall
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Udall and Heinrich:

On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts, I write to thank you for your sponsorship of S. 776, the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Act. We understand that the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources will hold a hearing on your bill on Wednesday, November 20, 2013, and we wish to express our full support for this important conservation legislation.

Over the past several years, Pew has worked closely with a broad and diverse group of local stakeholders in New Mexico who deeply value the ecological and cultural importance of the Columbine Hondo area of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. This grass-roots coalition—including hunters and anglers, ranchers, Land Grant associations, the mountain-biking community, local governments, businesses, and other concerned citizens—has worked collaboratively to ensure these special wild lands receive permanent protection as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Wilderness designation will not only ensure that the scenic beauty and historic importance of this area of the Carson National Forest remain unaffected by development, but also serve to protect this vital watershed that feeds into the Rio Hondo and Red Rivers—major tributaries to the Rio Grande River. Wilderness protection for the Columbine Hondo will also serve to draw-in new visitors to the area who will bolster the local economy. Whether you visit this area to hike, horseback ride, bird-watch, hunt or fish, or simply to escape from our hectic daily lives, there are few places that are so accessible yet offer such a unique wilderness experience.

We commend you for your leadership in pursuing wilderness designation for the Columbine Hondo, which will ensure this special place will remain forever wild. We look forward to continuing to work with you to protect this important and beautiful landscape for our children and grandchildren.

Sincerely,

Mike Matz
Director, U.S. Public Lands