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Otero Mesa should be a national monument

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For hundreds of years the Mescalero Apache people roamed freely across the Southwest. They left little evidence of their presence, being likened by some to "mist on the land."

Otero Mesa is the exception.

This 1.2 million acres of Chihuahuan desert grassland was so rich in abundance for the Apaches that they altered their ages-old nomadic lifestyle, settled in, hunted, raised their families, even constructed towns, and left messages on rocks for those who would come after. There they remained until 1873 when the government moved them to the reservation.

To the contemporary Mescalero people, Otero Mesa is sacred, one of only a handful of holy sites that silently speaks of roots, history and culture, a place to be honored, revered and connect them to their ancient heritage.

Now, oil and gas speculators, excited about the miniscule amount of resources under the ground, are eager to haul in huge, noisy machines that destroy the tribe's heritage and smash the bones of their ancestors, all for a glass of oil and a cup of gas.

Drilling into Otero Mesa runs the risk of contaminating New Mexico's largest freshwater aquifer, estimated to be more than 18 trillion

gallons an amount sufficient to sustain populations for hundreds of years.

One solution to the collision of interests is to have Otero Mesa declared a national monument, an effort our former governor began a few years ago.

I strongly urge Gov. Susanna Martinez to continue the process. Otero Mesa and the Mescalero Apaches deserve no less.

H. Henrietta Stockel, Tularosa

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