

**Written Testimony of Lawrence Montoya,
Governor of the Pueblo of Santa Ana, New Mexico
Before the
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs**

**Hearing on the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2019, S. 2891
March 04, 2020**

Introduction. Good afternoon Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Udall, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record regarding the "Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2019" (Act) My name is Lawrence Montoya and I serve as the Governor of the Pueblo of Santa Ana (Pueblo or Tamaya), a community of approximately 900 enrolled tribal members, which is located about 10 miles north of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

On behalf of the Pueblo, I would like to share our strong support for S. 2891. This bill would provide critically needed authorities to establish and support wildlife corridors on tribal lands and enhance coordination with Federal land use plans. Wildlife habitat connectivity is essential to the conservation of wildlife species such as deer, elk, wild turkey, and pronghorn antelope. Yet, ever increasingly, we are seeing the fragmentation of New Mexican land due to unsustainable development practices, including roadways. For example, Interstate 25 and US 550 are two major roadways that bisect the southern half of our lands. These roads receive heavy daily vehicular traffic loads, create a barrier for pronghorn emigration, and pose dangerous, and often fatal, wildlife crossings for animals that do navigate them, as well as putting human lives at risk. Wildlife corridors are a way to address the fragmentation caused by roads and related development which further fragments the landscape and degrades the quality of wildlife habitat.

As I describe below, the Santa Ana Pueblo has invested much time and effort already in the protection of wildlife and the maintenance of a wildlife corridor between the Jemez and Sandia mountains which passes through our lands. Although, S. 2891 only applies to tribal lands, we do hope to connect our corridor in a continuous fashion to corridors on federal lands, such as the BLM land adjacent to our reservation, commonly referred to as the "Buffalo Tract." We would like to note for the record that S. 2891 does not restrict private activity or limit private landholders outside our reservation boundaries.

Tamaya's Existence is Intrinsicly Connected to Our Land, Wildlife, and Natural Resources. Since time immemorial, the Tamayame, or the people of the Pueblo of Santa Ana, have lived along the banks of the Rio Grande and Rio Jemez. We have endured through the centuries by maintaining our traditional, cultural, and spiritual ways that are strongly influenced by our connection to the natural world and the wildlife resources it provides. The

importance of these resources to the Tamayame cannot be understated; the potential elimination of traditionally-important wildlife on our land would directly threaten our ability to engage in important religious ceremonies that ensure the persistence of our cultural identity, now, and deep into the future.

Historically, we maintained our culture by gathering important plant and wildlife resources from a large ancestral homeland that extended across approximately 1.8 million acres. However, since European establishment in New Mexico in the sixteenth century, the Tamayame homeland has been drastically reduced.

Today, we persist on a relatively small land base, but we maintain approximately 98% of our lands as undeveloped to try and help provide enough open space for wildlife and plants to thrive. However, for traditionally- important species such as mule deer, pronghorn, elk, black bear, and mountain lion—which require large home ranges to meet their annual requirements—our land base remains too small.

Santa Ana’s Investment in a Wildlife Corridor. Santa Ana has already moved forward with substantial investments with regard to the wildlife corridor that passes through our lands. Specifically, we have restored habitat, constructed water drinkers to assure adequate water for wildlife, tagged certain animals with radio collars to track their movements and installed and used cameras at key locations. We now enjoy an abundance of elk and mule deer and have seen the return of natural predators, such as mountain lions. In addition, we have reintroduced a population of wild turkeys, as well as antelope. Finally, we have acquired additional lands to extend the wildlife corridor and have put in place a wildlife code, which among other things, establishes hunting seasons for our people.

As an attachment to this testimony, I have provided a short description of Santa Ana’s wildlife corridor efforts, especially with regard to our desire to see the Buffalo Tract, currently managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), also protected as a wildlife corridor. Currently, the BLM parcel is threatened by potential development that would ultimately destroy the corridor itself and negatively impact wildlife movement throughout this part of New Mexico. Protecting these two parcels together in an integrated manner – as could be facilitated under S. 2891 – would assure the preserved vitality of this corridor and protect the vital link between the mountain ranges.

Conclusion – The Pueblo of Santa Ana Strongly Supports S. 2891 and Its Furtherance of Wildlife and Seascape Connectivity on Tribal Lands. In order for the Pueblo of Santa Ana to ensure the preservation of our cultural identity for current and future generations, we must find ways today to maintain wildlife connectivity to our land by both protecting critical wildlife corridors inside and outside our boundaries and by finding ways to ensure safe passage for wildlife through existing and future urban encroachment along our boundaries. S. 2891 would represent a significant step in furthering this goal.

Therefore, on behalf of the Pueblo of Santa Ana, I am here to say that we are encouraged by the benefits the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2019 could have on our culture, and I would like to share the Pueblo's strong support of the bill. Thank you.