

April 12, 2024 AD

Mr. Mark Sando
District Ranger; Coyote Ranger District (SFNF)
HC 78 Box 1
Coyote, NM 87012

Dear Mr. Sando,

Last night, as I returned to the monastery from the community meeting in which we discussed the Encino Vista Landscape Project, I reflected on what was said and how things were said. It became apparent to me that the two parties, the Forest Service and the local community, were talking past each other, and a connection was not being made on a deep level. Please let me explain.

I have lived in Cañones for only fourteen years, and do not have deep-seated roots here. I am a gringo, and know how gringos think, and what the USDA Forest Service was a gringo mode of thinking. It runs like this: the forest is an object, we possess this object, and we are free to manipulate and control this object as we please. This was evident in the presentations made last night from members of the USFS. This is contrasted with how the locals think: the land is a gift given to us, our ancestors were good stewards of the land and we received this inheritance, our livelihood is from the land, and we do not separate it from ourselves. This first way of thinking looks at the forest as a problem to be solved. The second way of thinking cultivates reverence for the land, and an intuitive sense that we must work with the land rather than manipulate it.

So communication will always be failing, since the Forest Service thinks about the forest with their heads—sitting behind desks and crunching numbers about how to solve a problem. The local community thinks of the land with their heart, with their hands in the soil, possessing a religious attitude toward the forest, knowing that it has provided for their forbearers for centuries before a time that this land was not part of the United States of America. The land speaks a timeless wisdom, and the heart intuitively knows that the proposed plan is shortsighted.

In New Mexico, there is a strong feeling of ‘tierra sagrada’; that we live on holy land. It is deep in the blood of Norteños, and for outsiders to come in and show irreverence toward what is sacred to the local community is a sad story which has long been told in the Americas. ‘White man’ thought he could buy land from the ‘Red man’, and the Native Americans failed to understand how white man could put a price on the land. The lack of reverence that has been shown to the earth for the past couple centuries has resulted in an ecological catastrophe of which we have dug a hole too deep to climb out. Let us stop this destructive trend now, and listen to the earth.

I fear that if the Forest Service acts contrary to the locals, they may be acting contrary to God. May we refocus our vision, and look at the land as sacred, and act with appropriate reverence, goodwill, and prudence. If we all think with our hearts, a wise solution will follow. Let us be patient in making our decisions. This is the way we will follow the Mind of God.

Sincerely,

Abbot Silouan; resident of Cañones and superior of the Monastery of the Holy Archangel Michael