**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT: Rhiannon Schroeder 505.980.3567**

August 24, 2015

**Mayor Urges U.S. Forest Service to Maintain Access to Elena Gallegos Open Space**

*Proposed plan would dismantle existing trials in the Sandia Mountains*

**Albuquerque-** Today, Mayor Richard J. Berry publically urged the U.S. Forest Service to withdraw consideration of a potential wilderness designation that would inhibit access to Elena Gallegos Open Space. In a letter sent to Elaine Kohrman, the Forest Supervisor of the Cibola National Forest and Nation Grasslands Mayor Berry stated, “Recreational use and public enjoyment of these areas contribute significantly to the quality of life for our city’s residents.” He went on to say publically, “As the U.S. Forest Service considers potential areas for wilderness designation, I respectfully urge you to remove lands from consideration that fall north of I-40 and east of Tramway in the Sandia foothills.”

Access to this area for all outdoor activities is threatened by the United States Forest Services’ recent forest revision plan. Although the plan is still within the public comment portion, the way it stands now would completely dismantle existing trials for all outdoor recreation enthusiasts. The plan would incorporate land surrounding the Elena Gallegos Open Space which is part of Sandia Mountain Wilderness. This designation would prohibit activities like mountain biking in that area, thus disrupting mountain biker’s ability to easily access to city-owned Elena Gallegos land.

Through a land purchase in 1983, the City of Albuquerque obtained one of the city’s most treasured recreational areas, the Elena Gallegos Open Space. This 640-acre park hosts a network of multi-use trails that offers enjoyable challenges for hikers, bikers, and equestrians.

The City of Albuquerque boasts more than 29,100 acres of Open Space land and 100 miles of natural trails for hikers and bikers alike can enjoy. The mountain biking and hiking trails provide and encourage residents and visitors with an outlet to pursue a hobby and passion, all the while leading a healthy lifestyle through the rigorous exercise. The mountains are one of the many qualities that set Albuquerque apart from other Southwestern cities. Limiting the activities that can take place on the mountain to such an extent would be taking away a natural attraction of our city.

Albuquerque’s extensive trail system and outdoor recreational opportunities has led to the city being nationally recognized in the following categories:

* Top 10 Mountain Bike Cities in North America by *SingleTracks.com*
* 50 Best US Cities for Biking by *USA Today*
* One of the Fittest Cities in America by *Groupon*
* Best Cities for an Active Lifestyle by *WalletHub.com*
* Top 9 Hiking Trails in the US by *Osyter.com*
* Top Park Systems in the USby *The Trust for Public Land*
* 15 Fantastic U.S. Bike Trails by *The Active Times*
* 10 Best Big Cities for Active Families by *Outside Magazine*

To view a complete list of all Albuquerque’s national rankings please visit: <http://www.visitalbuquerque.org/media/top-rankings/>

**###**