A RIVER RUNS THROUGH…
OUR GOVERNMENTS
More than any year in memory, state and federal governments will impact the rivers and streams of New Mexico for good or ill. In this Member Advisory, we highlight four of those issues and how New Mexico Wild is working on each. Now is the time to make our voices heard at the Roundhouse and on Capitol Hill.

Mark Allison
Executive Director

NEW EPA RULE WILL HARM NEW MEXICO’S WATERS AND WETLANDS MORE THAN ANY OTHER STATE
Last month, the EPA finalized a rule that drastically reduces the number of streams and rivers protected under the Federal Clean Water Act. While this has made news nationally, its impact hits particularly hard in New Mexico where we do not have a state program in place to control surface water discharge into state waters. Called "The Dirty Water Rule," EPA protections would be removed for dumping, filling, and discharges in 90% of New Mexico’s smaller rivers and streams. This will put wildlife at risk, not to mention drinking water for 280,000 New Mexicans.

What New Mexico Wild is doing: We’re advocating for the state to replace protections lost from the repeal of the federal laws and to press federal land agencies to maintain protections under other existing statutes.

AN EFFORT TO ROLL BACK RULES LIMITING PUBLIC USE OF STATE WATERS
New Mexico adopted the Non-Navigable Water Rule in 2017 which allows private landowners the ability to stop access to public waters passing through their property. This rule runs contrary to historical use in our state and New Mexico’s constitution. Rafting, kayaking, and fishing are all impacted by the rule.

What New Mexico Wild is doing: We’re working with the New Mexico State Game Commission and Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s administration to reverse the rule.

Grave threats and great opportunities for the rivers and streams of New Mexico

Winter 2020 Newsletter Advisory

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WORKING TO GIVE THE UPPER PECOS WATERSHED GREATER PROTECTION

The Upper Pecos watershed is the lifeblood of nearby communities, and ecosystems, and offers some of the state’s best scenic and recreational opportunities. Above the community of Tererro, the Pecos River is protected for 20 miles to its Wilderness headwaters by a federal Wild and Scenic River designation. However, the six-mile stretch below Tererro and the surrounding watershed are under threat from proposed mining exploration.

What New Mexico Wild is doing: Our staff is working on a nomination for the Upper Pecos Watershed as an “Outstanding National Resource Waters” to provide a higher level of protection than exists today. This designation provides that a state’s highest quality, most valued surface waters are protected from degradation in perpetuity. Working with partners, we are advocating for this designation from our state agencies and lawmakers.

PROGRESS ON DESIGNATING THE GILA AS A “WILD AND SCENIC RIVER”

The “Gold Standard” in federal river protections is Wild and Scenic River designation. Only Congress can establish that status. For the past decade, New Mexico Wild has championed this cause to protect the last free-flowing river in the state.

We have fought proposed dams, diversions, and pipelines that would tame the Gila as we work toward permanent protection. Our staff and volunteers have spent more than 15,000 hours conducting inventories of the rivers and wilderness of the Gila in support of this status. We’ve surveyed hundreds of river miles of the Gila, San Francisco, and other tributaries for inclusion in the designation. The good news – we are as close as we’ve ever been and are pushing for a bill to be introduced this spring to designate the Gila River as Wild and Scenic.

What New Mexico Wild is doing: We continue to work with the U.S. Forest Service on their planning process for this important area and in a separate process with our Congressional delegation on the legislation. Recently, the Grant County Commission joined the towns of Bayard, Hurley, and Silver City in approving a resolution of support – an historic win that we have been working toward for years. We also organized a trip to Washington, DC for a group of 14 Grant and Catron County residents to meet with our U.S. Senators to encourage introduction of the bill and to express the urgency of its passage. Our staff continues to work with the offices to resolve any outstanding issues. We will continue our work until the bill becomes law.