NEW MEXICO WILD!
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW MEXICO WILDERNESS ALLIANCE

WILDERNESS!
Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks
Wilderness Act

GIS
SPECIAL EDITION

VOLUME XI, NUMBER III— FALL 2009
It has been an amazing few months here at the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance! The change in political winds has brought good fortune to the Land of Enchantment. It began with the United States Senate introduction of the 302,000-acre proposal for El Rio Grande del Norte, near Questa, New Mexico. Then came the news we have worked toward for years: the introduction of the Organ Mountain Desert Peaks Wilderness in the United States Senate. That proposal, including the National Conservation section, would protect close to 400,000 acres of land surrounding the city of Las Cruces, which would become the second largest Wilderness complex in New Mexico since the enactment of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Our thanks go to the real heroes here—Senators Bingaman and Udall—for following through on their promises to help us move forward on Wilderness designation across the state. Being last among all the states in the amount of protected public lands we have means New Mexico has a long way to go. These two bills, along with efforts in various parts of the state, however, point toward a new and very serious attempt at preserving wilderness in New Mexico.

So our state is suddenly poised to add more than 700,000 acres of protected land in the coming year! This is tremendously encouraging, but we remain vigilant on many other fronts. Recently, for example, we learned of plans for opening an area on the northern boundary of Chaco Canyon National Historical Park to full-scale oil and gas development. This land is also adjacent to the areas that are at the center of our Split Lip Flats and Ah-Shi-Sle-Pah citizens Wilderness proposals. It is a surprising and perhaps little-known fact that in the United States today there are only twenty World Heritage Sites, out of 890 in the entire world. These are places of natural beauty or of significant cultural value. In the United States, they include sites like the Statue of Liberty, the Grand Canyon, and New Mexico's own Chaco Canyon. Yet important landscapes like Chaco Canyon and Carlsbad Caverns have no buffers from oil and gas development. In Carlsbad Caverns, one can see oil rigs from the parking lot, and leasing goes right up to the park boundaries in many areas. This is a disgrace. In communications with Interior Department officials, we have asked that Interior Secretary Salazar use an executive order to create buffers around important landscapes like national parks and Wilderness areas, not just in New Mexico, but nationally—to preserve the scenic qualities for which these parks and Wilderness areas were created and to allow them the dignity that they and their wildlife so richly deserve.

We have been studying these areas, using the most advanced GIS techniques to identify parcels that have not been leased for oil and gas, and meeting with various agencies to try to broker trades or exchanges that could create important buffers for our parks, Wilderness areas, and wildlife. These are complex arrangements often involving the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the State Land Office, and sometimes tribal entities. The results, however, can be dramatic, as our work in Chaco Canyon is beginning to indicate. So write a letter to Secretary Salazar, asking that buffer zones be created for our national parks and Wilderness areas. The time has come to make protecting our lands and heritage a priority, trumping the endless greed and destructiveness of the oil and gas industry.

Thankfully, we have good people in Washington who are making a real difference. Besides our senators, there are their staffers. Jorge Silva-Banuelos, for example, is Senator Bingaman's environmental aide. Many people will tell you there is not a more qualified person working on the environment in Washington than Jorge. He has worked his magic over the past few years, helping to craft our El Rio Grande del Norte Wilderness proposal and doing much of the groundwork in putting together the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks Wilderness proposal, spending countless hours meeting with agency officials, ranchers, off-roaders, conservationists, and sportsmen. But Jorge has also come to New Mexico to camp, hike, and see the lands firsthand, asking questions, exploring Otero Mesa, and thinking about the potentials for Wilderness designation that remain in our state. He has also worked with longtime Wilderness craftsman David Brooks, who is on Senator Bingaman's Energy and Natural Resources Committee. These two men are examples of the unsung heroes who have helped to make this new era of Wilderness a reality in New Mexico. We thank them, and we look forward to working with them on many more Wilderness proposals.

Which takes us to the long view, or the 11 percent solution. Currently only 2.1 percent of our state is protected as Wilderness. Our goal is to get that number to 11 percent—still far behind states like California, Washington, and others—but a number that is obtainable and that would dramatically change our poor standing as far as the amount of protected public lands in our state. It would also ensure that future generations will enjoy landscapes rich in wolves, bears, prairie dogs, and all the wildlife that is so important to maintaining a healthy and balanced environment. Finally, it would protect areas large enough to sustain precious water and wildlife resources. So remember that number—11 percent. It is a goal that we are working toward, and one that will be achieved with your continued support!
Wilderness Explorer

by Pat Buls

I’ve been an explorer all of my life. I always take the back roads, the scenic route, the road less traveled. Growing up in a military family, I had ample opportunity to explore many different areas in the United States and South America, mostly by horseback. I settled in southern New Mexico because of its climate and its vast, open spaces—room to explore.

I’ve also been a seeker of the Truth, the reason for our existence here on this awesome planet. My extensive exploration of the backcountry has led me to places where I entered into the very presence of the Creator of this wondrous earth and all its amazing creatures. The oldest and most reliable story of creation is that the Creator’s intent was to establish an everlasting paradise.

In the book of Revelation (11: 18) he reveals that “he will bring to ruin those ruining the earth!” No wonder then, that for those of us who cherish nature, our fondest wish—our driving force—is to preserve the earth as it was created. Throughout my amazing journey through life, I have had the rewarding experience of bringing other people into the wilderness—my children, my horseback-riding students, and now my grandchildren. What a delight it is to foster that spirit of adventure and watch it unfold into a desire to care for and nurture the earth! It is, after all, our natural habitat—and our only viable one!

Here in Doña Ana County, we have some of the most extreme contrasts in habitat for both human and animal inhabitants. We are one of the poorest in the nation in terms of average income, yet we are experiencing new growth that includes some of the wealthiest people around. We live in a desert, yet we have a lush river valley flowing through our midst. We have a fair-sized metropolis in the city of Las Cruces (second largest in the state), and we have vast areas uninhabited by humans but bearing evidence of previous inhabitants in the many petroglyphs and fossil remains.

Broad Canyon is one of the most interesting areas an explorer will encounter in southern New Mexico. It is filled with the artwork of the Ancients. Fossils and petroglyphs are abundant, rock formations and the native flora are breathtaking, yet there is currently no permanent protection for this area. The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and its support groups continue to work to establish such protection. We know that it’s now or never, for once public lands are “disposed of” (sold for private development), there’s no getting them back. Even holding on to public access roads becomes difficult when private ownership is granted. Fences are built, gates are locked.

For those of us with any sense of adventure, it is imperative that we become active, not only in exploring our habitat, but in protecting and preserving it intact, as it was created for our enjoyment, our sustenance, and our spiritual renewal. Get involved by joining a group of like-minded individuals, making your voice heard by your legislators on a local, state, and national level. And know that by doing so you will be heard as a “voice crying in the wilderness,” preparing the way for a return to Paradise.

Reflections

By Nathan Small

The rains arrived late this year. With them the country has sprung to life, green shoots filling in the yellowed clumps of last year’s grass and bright flowers popping up next to water pools in recently dry desert draws. In mid-September, one of the larger storms, replete with midnight lightning and sleep depriving rain, heralded an even more important event: Senator Jeff Bingaman and Senator Tom Udall’s introduction of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act.

There are many perspectives on this momentous event. Most are enthusiastically supportive. Three local governments, Dona Ana County, the Town of Mesilla, and the City of Las Cruces, unanimously passed resolutions supporting the legislation. The Las Cruces Sun News and Albuquerque Journal wrote editorials praising both the legislation but the pain-staking process that preceded it. Excited phone calls have come in from new, long-time, and even lapsed members asking what they can do to help.

The outpouring of support underscores an important point: conservation can bring communities together. Voices in this newsletter eloquently describe the hope, pride, and accomplishment that comes with protecting important wilderness areas. Increasingly, the economic and quality of life benefits of wilderness protection are being showcased and openly discussed, with conservation and economic opportunity going hand in hand.

On a recent weekend, in the midst of all this excitement, I stole away for a solitary morning trip to the Broad Canyon. A misty fog enveloped the land, courtesy of an all day and all night rain. I began hiking in a familiar place—the beginning of several common hiking routes, including the Top of the World Ridge tour, Valles Canyon, and more. Climbing high above the canyon, I saw mist clouds Boating below, above, and also at eye level.

We’ve been fortunate to take scores of trips over the past several years to the Broad Canyon Country. It had never appeared this way—veiled in swiftly flowing rivers of fog and cloud. During these trips, the oldest participant was over 80, and the youngest had yet to see 10 years of age. Promoting the exploration and enjoyment of these wild lands is a wonderful blessing. We will continue to help introduce people to these extraordinary places. Through the leadership of countless community members, businesses, and organizations, combined with the strong leadership of our two Senators, Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, look forward to the day when the Desert Peaks-Organ Mountains Wilderness Act is passed into law.

What is Wilderness?
The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the National Wilderness Preservation System to preserve the last remaining wildlands in America. The Wilderness Act, as federal policy, secures “an enduring resource of wilderness” for the people. Wilderness is defined as an area that has primarily been affected unnoticeable. It is an area that offers outstanding opportunity for solitude or a primitive or unconfined type of recreation, and an area that contains ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

Please visit us at nmWILD.org
TOM WOOTTON — WEST POTRILLO MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS AREA

by Steve West

The recent introduction of the Doña Ana County Wilderness Bill in the United States Senate is a great step forward in protecting large landscapes across that part of the Chihuahuan Desert. One of the main components of this bill is designation of the West Potrillos as a Wilderness area. This is a large area with forty-eight cinder cones and numerous other geologic, cultural, and biological features.

We are also working to honor one of our wilderness leaders by adding his name to the designation. Tom Wootten was a quiet, unassuming man who lived in Las Cruces and frequently wandered the Potrillos in his quest to learn more about desert plants. Tom passed away suddenly and far too soon a little over two years ago. During his time with us, he and his wife supported a wide variety of conservation measures. He was a founder and former board member of NMWA. He and Eleanor founded T & E, Inc. and supported hundreds of projects undertaken by students, professors, and agencies who were studying threatened and endangered species, ecosystems, and biological processes, primarily in the Chihuahuan Desert. This support, which still continues, has greatly increased our understanding and has helped to preserve species that might otherwise have passed on.

There are over 700 established Wilderness areas in the United States and almost fifty of them have been named after wilderness heroes. Some of these areas are named after people with national wilderness credentials such as Bob Marshall, Aldo Leopold, or Henry Jackson. Others are local wilderness heroes—people who often worked quietly to protect landscapes and species and to increase environmental awareness and protection. Tom was one of those.

Tom spent a great deal of time in the Potrillos; it was one of his favorite places. And the Potrillos, both West and East, are deserving of Wilderness designation. The proposal concerning the West Potrillos, located southwest of Las Cruces, would include over 140,000 acres and extend into the far reaches of eastern Luna County.

This area is a broad volcanic field that encompasses numerous cinder cones, large craters, and signs of extensive lava flows that occurred about 10,000 years ago.

So what is the Tom Wootten-West Potrillos proposed wilderness area and why should it be designated Wilderness?

The plant community found in the West Potrillo Mountains is typical of the Chihuahuan Desert. A wide variety of grasses occurs, and much of the landscape is covered with creosote, the result of years of overgrazing. Yucca, mesquite, acacia, and creosote currently make up the majority of the plant cover. Netleaf hackberry occurs in draws and arroyos where additional moisture may collect. Junipers are found at higher elevations in the wet Potrillos but can occasionally be found at lower elevations as well. Most of the moisture comes in August-September and can result in a profusion of flowers, including white and yellow desert zinnias, desert marigolds, blackfoot daisies, various species of globe mallow, mountain pepperweeds, Chihuahuan flax, summer poppies, and sunflowers. In one of the large basins in the center of the West Potrillos can be found a unique type of vegetation called the cholla savannah. In this area grow grasses and large cane cholla with heights up to ten feet (3.05 meters). Large barrel cactus are also found in this vegetation type and elsewhere.

This area is also important to a wide variety of wildlife. Numerous birds of prey use the area, with golden eagles, great horned owls, and Swainson’s hawks nesting here. Peregrine falcons have been reported during migration. Other species of animals that can be found here include mule deer, pronghorn, coyote, black-tailed jackrabbit, scaled quail, and even ducks, who appear on ephemeral ponds in the fall. The area also has a high diversity of bats. The Potrillos area is also known for its cultural importance. There is ample evidence of pre-Columbian Native American habitation in caves in the East Potrillo Mountains. Located in the region is a classic Mimbres Pueblo, which has the highest concentration of bird bones found at any known Mimbres site. There are also several undisturbed El Paso phase structures in the West Potrillo Mountains. The name “Potrillos” comes from Spanish, meaning a foal or a young horse, and reflects the Spanish influence. How that name became attached to this area may be a mystery lost to history.

This large area is important for a variety of reasons. Not the least is that its being close to Mexico means that it forms a biotic link between species that the U.S. and Mexico share. The area also provides large-scale protection for plant and animal communities in an area that has already been drastically changed. Some species, such as aplomado falcons and Mexican gray wolves are gone, and others will disappear without additional protection.

It is amazing to realize that a largely untouched gem of this size exists so close to the cities of El Paso, Texas; Las Cruces, New Mexico; and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. These cities contain in excess of 2.5 million residents, many of whom value open space and depend on it for weekend getaways.

Tom Wootten was a mentor to many who work in protecting the land today. T & E, Inc. supported many of those people who continue to study the land, work to preserve biodiversity, and promote education. Tom’s name should be associated with an area that he studied and loved. His name also serves as a reminder of what an individual can do to make things better, working quietly and showing the commitment that can bring about changes that last for generations. People who hike in the Tom Wootten-West Potrillos Wilderness Area a hundred years from now will be reminded of a wilderness hero from another generation.

NMWA is asking that people write letters to Senator Bingaman and Congressman Teague in support of this wilderness area. A copy should be sent to Steve West, Staff Scientist and Southeast Director for NMWA. His address is 1105 Ocotillo Canyon Drive, Carlsbad, NM 88220, or e-mail: stevewest@nmwild.or
Wilderness in Doña Ana Gets Its Chance

Looking for scenic landscapes? Southern New Mexico offers breathtaking sights such as lava flows, limestone cliffs, and winding canyons; these natural beauties can be found in the surrounding wild areas of our own Doña Ana County. Hiking, camping, fishing, bird-watching, and horseback riding are some of the recreational activities these places offer.

Doña Ana County is part of the northern Chihuahuan Desert, an area considered high desert, with elevations ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 feet. This diverse, high desert ecosystem supports nearly 4,000 species of plants and animals, including endangered species such as the Mexican wolf (Canis lupus baileyi), the black-tailed prairie dog (Cynomys ludovicianus), and the recovering Aplomado falcon (Falco femoralis). Current threats to these species, among others, include a growing human population and the increasing popularity of ATV recreation. Off-road vehicles present a serious risk to wildlife, causing direct mortality, habitat fragmentation, and damage to native vegetation.

Preservation of wild areas such as those in Doña Ana County is of utmost importance to protect the natural habitat that is critical for all species. For this reason, local citizens selected several areas in southern New Mexico to be designated as Wilderness. The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines the term “wilderness” as “An area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

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In addition to ecological soundness, there are many reasons to justify wilderness protection, not excluding personal ties to the land. Piedad Mayagoitia, a New Mexico State University member of the NMWA, sees her connection to wild lands as an opportunity to be part of a natural existence so seldom found these days. Along similar lines, chapter member James Mored describes his personal connection to wilderness: "I experience significant moments of clarity when I spend time in the wild; time seems to slow down in the tranquil atmosphere of wilderness." Chris Brit, another member of the university chapter of the NMWA, says that wilderness is, for him, “A place to escape anthropogenic pressures, gain a clear mind, and relish the solitude found in the mountains.”

Southern New Mexico wildlife issues have gained importance, and, thanks to local efforts such as those of the Wilderness Alliance, the citizen’s proposal has reached the ears of Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall. On September 17, 2009, both senators introduced a bill called the Organ Mountains—Desert Peaks Wilderness Act, which would protect the following wilderness areas: the Organ Mountains, Sierra de Las Uvas, Broad Canyon, Robledos, and the Greater Potrillo Mountain Area. This bill would create 259,000 acres of Wilderness and 100,000 acres of National Conservation Area. Watersheds, outstanding hunting and recreational opportunities, and cultural resources like petroglyphs and other historical features would all be protected under the provisions of this bill. This legislation seeks to promote local tourism and economic development, as well as maintaining healthy habitat for game and sensitive species, and represents a big step toward designating our wild lands as protected Wilderness areas. The next step, which we support and advocate, will be encouraging Congressman Harry Teague to introduce this bill in the House of Representatives.

The New Mexico State University chapter of the Wilderness Alliance will continue to pursue wilderness advocacy as our main goal. We also organize hiking excursions with the purpose of demonstrating the need for wild land protection, while also enjoying the fresh air, beautiful views, wildlife, and plants. If you are interested in participating in our organization or in the state chapter, send an e-mail to the student chapter at nmsuwild@gmail.com or to Nathan Small, at the state chapter, at nathanssmall@nmwild.org. You can also visit the Web site of the Doña Ana Wilderness Alliance.

Perceptions

by Jim Bates
Doña Ana County Sportsman

With the state of the nation—and the world in general—as they are, it is not difficult to understand why so many of us are skeptical about things. Sometimes, though, events occur that can give us hope. Such has been the case with the events leading up to the recent wilderness bill introduced in Congress by Senator Bingaman.

As an outdoorsman and hunter who has used the proposed Wilderness areas extensively for several decades, I was extremely concerned about the Wilderness designations, especially given some of the suggested boundaries and road closures in the original study areas. I vowed, along with many others like me, to oppose any legislation that would essentially eliminate our ability to utilize these areas for our traditional recreational purposes. We were skeptical, to say the least, of the Wilderness proponents’ underlying intentions; we perceived that they wanted to prevent us from using these areas.

Then came the public forums and meetings on the wilderness proposal. For me, they were a real eye-opener. Instead of being confronted by wilderness zealots with dastardly intentions of preventing me from participating in the activities I cherish, I found the individuals involved to be reasonable, amicable, and willing to listen to the concerns of others; they possessed an attitude of compromise that was unexpected and quite refreshing.

The discussions that took place between those willing to focus on the “big picture” of preserving these landscapes and the plant and animal communities that reside in them were civil and productive. Although every effort was made to bring them into the fold, those who could not get beyond their own selfish interests and shortsightedness were—reluctantly—left behind.

The final product that came out of the entire process is a good one. The compromises in it are substantial and reasonable. Assuming that the legislation that has been introduced passes, these treasured areas will finally be protected in a manner that allows the parties from all sides—even those who continued to balk throughout—to feel good about their interactions with one another and the resulting accomplishments.

From a consumptive-use outdoorsman’s perspective, my faith has been restored in the “process” and the ability of reasonable people with varied and differing outlooks on things to come together and make good decisions. The wilderness folks should take pride in the work they have done through individuals like Jeff Steinborn, Nathan Small, and many others. Kudos to you all!
Think for a brief moment about luck and chance, and imagine the meaning of destiny and fate.

A soaring pair of golden eagles; a herd of fifty pronghorn grazing in a valley, the clouds hanging low; countless songbirds scurrying up and down through several feet of undulating grass; and old, brittle carvings etched on volcanic rocks spark the imagination to dream of a time when land tamed men.

A pack of coyotes streaming along the horizon as a monsoon storm quickly rolls in behind them. A story of pronghorn bones found 800 feet up the side of Wind Mountain in a den that could only belong to a mountain lion. A ceaseless night sky, filled with stars and the Milky Way as thick and clear as a jar of marbles let loose on the heavens.

A deluge, then the rush of water cascading down cliff sides, overpowering arroyos and breathing new life into the desert; a yellow carpet of small flowers that blanket the entire terrain for miles on end, and a landscape that ostensibly swallows up everything else around it, including the thoughts and worries of the traveler that has just stepped foot into it.

This is New Mexico’s Otero Mesa – the largest and wildest grassland remaining on public lands in America.

For the past eight years, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance has been working to protect this grassland from oil and gas drilling. Surprising to some, but testimony to those that have worked on this campaign, we have been successful in curbing leasing and development – for now.

Along the way, we helped form a coalition of conservationists, sportsmen, ranchers, religious and business leaders, as well as elected officials at the state and national level. This was truly a campaign built by the people of the state of New Mexico – a real grassroots effort.

Senator Jeff Bingaman wrote many letters to the Department of Interior, expressing a lack of satisfaction with the agency’s management plan for the area. Specifically, the Senator sighted concerns over contamination of the Salt Basin Aquifer underneath Otero Mesa, and emphasized that the public voice needed to be heard more in the discussion.

As a congressman, Senator Tom Udall joined Senators Bingaman and Pete Domenici in calling on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to suspend all oil and gas leasing and drilling in Otero Mesa until a thorough study of the aquifer was completed.

Governor Bill Richardson has perhaps been the most outspoken champion for preserving Otero Mesa’s wilderness, water, and wildlife (SEE PAGE ……)

Numerous other municipalities, county commissions, state senators, and representatives have supported, adopted or passed resolutions calling for the protection of Otero Mesa. Newspapers throughout the state have editorialized in favor of preserving this ecological gem. And most recently, the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals issued a decision on a lawsuit brought by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and the State of New Mexico, declaring that the federal Bureau of Land Management’s plan for oil and gas drilling in the area was fatally flawed.

The court went on to say that the agency’s plan inadequately addressed measures to prevent habitat fragmentation, and water contamination, admonishing the agency that “[d]evelopment is a possible use, which BLM must weigh against other possible uses—including conservation to protect environmental values, which are best assessed through the NEPA process.” Furthermore, the court ruled that the BLM must write a new alternative that closes Otero Mesa to oil and gas leasing, and allow the public to comment on this new option.

This is a tremendous victory for the campaign to save Otero Mesa – and we would not be here in this moment without the support of our robust coalition and supporters throughout the state and country. It is because of the multitude of voices that cascaded from every corner of the state that we are able to say – “oil and gas development in Otero Mesa is suspended, indefinitely.”

So hats off to ALL of you!
El Rio Grande Del Norte
National Conservation Area (NCA) Proposal

by John Olivas
Northern New Mexico Director

Forty-five years ago, a bipartisan group of lawmakers agreed to legislation that would have a lasting impact on our nation’s public lands—not by changing them, but by making sure that some portion of these magnificent wild places would stay as they were for all time and for all generations to use and enjoy. The Wilderness Act, signed into law September 3, 1964, was an acknowledgment that our public lands are part of what shape us as a people and that there is value in protecting some of them in their pristine state as a natural legacy.

Over the last four and a half decades, this act, which created the National Wilderness Preservation System, has been used to protect forever some of New Mexico’s wild treasures, including the Gila, Aldo Leopold, and Blue Range Wilderness areas in southwestern New Mexico, and the Pecos and Wheeler and Latir peaks in the northern part of the state. Earlier this year, after years of work by sportsmen, conservationists, business leaders, and ranchers, the Sabinoso Wilderness, located in eastern San Miguel County, became one of the nation’s newest Wilderness areas. Sabinoso Wilderness was part of a major lands package that was signed into law by President Barack Obama in March, protecting 16,030 acres for future generations.

A similar group of diverse interests has been working with Senator Jeff Bingaman to add more special, wild places to the Wilderness treasury. Efforts are underway to designate the Cerro de Yuta Wilderness and the Rio San Antonio Wilderness as part of a measure introduced by the senator to create the 235,980-acre El Rio Grande Del Norte National Conservation Area. His bill, which has won the backing of the Taos County Commission and the support of the Mora Valley and Taos County Chambers of Commerce, would ensure that this area, rich in wildlife and plants, would stay as it is—for camping, hunting, fishing, and quiet solitude. The legislation would preserve an important part of our natural heritage—an area that boasts high mesa sagebrush grasslands, woodlands of piñon juniper, and extinct volcano cinder cones. Senator Bingaman has crafted his bill to allow for longstanding traditions, such as grazing and the collection of firewood and piñon nuts, to continue. It also protects the rights given land grant members under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

We applaud this conservation effort and hope to see it become the law of the land as soon as possible.

ROADLESS RULE UPDATE

by Kathy Holian
Santa Fe County Commissioner

Five National Forests are contained in the state of New Mexico: Carson, Cibola, Lincoln, Santa Fe, and Gila. These forest lands are among the most important of our state treasures. Most people are aware of the recreational opportunities that they afford — hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, among other activities. But it is also important to recognize that they help serve as our community lungs by cleaning our air, and as our community kidneys by cleaning our water. Fifteen communities in New Mexico — including Santa Fe — depend on the National Forest land for their watersheds. As such, they are an integral part of our life, and our health. About a third of the National Forests across the country are in a special category called “Roadless.” It is critical to have some areas that are unfragmented and pristine. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, or “Roadless Rule,” was created in 2001, not only to safeguard a significant fraction of America’s National Forests from logging and other commercial development, but also to protect unbroken areas from the ravages that roads can cause. Roads always cause fragmentation, but moreover, they can cause erosion and drying of vegetation that borders the roads, leading to increased fire danger. In developing the Roadless Rule, the federal government garnered an almost unprecedented amount of public involvement. It received more than 1.6 million comments from the public, and it held some 600 public hearings. Federal, state, tribal, and other pubic agencies were involved in drafting the rule. More than 95 percent of the comments were favorable toward establishing roadless areas in our National Forests. Unfortunately, in the eight years since the inception of the Roadless Rule, it has been challenged in court on a number of occasions, and the federal government has been deliberately recalcitrant to defend against those challenges — up until now.

President Obama and his administration have recently taken a step toward protection of these areas. On May 28, the Department of Agriculture issued an interim directive requiring secretarial-level review of any projects that might be inconsistent with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This, in essence, is a time-out for the legal challenges. Additionally, Sen. Jeff Bingaman and Reps. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján have all signed on as original co-sponsors of the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2009. This legislation would make the roadless rule the law and ensure permanent protection for wild areas of our National Forests and the vast wildlife, recreation, and economic benefits they provide. I urge our entire congressional delegation to support the act vigorously, and I urge everyone to take a moment to think about how National Forests contribute to our lives in so many ways, and how they are a priceless legacy to our future generations.

Kathy Holian is a Santa Fe County commissioner in District 4. She lives in Santa Fe.

‘Time out’ a chance to defend ‘Roadless-Rule’
“Thousands of New Mexico ranchers, hunters and conservationists, regardless of party affiliation, are opposed to oil and gas leasing at Otero Mesa.” - Governor Bill Richardson (January 2005)

It’s not often that you get to work on an exciting campaign like the one to protect America’s wildest grassland—Otero Mesa. It is even more uncommon to find a true champion for a place such as this, a champion like the one we’ve had in Governor Bill Richardson (D-NM).

In 2002, when he was running for his first term as governor, Bill Richardson wrote a letter to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) requesting that the agency conduct a new Wilderness inventory of Otero Mesa. The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance had done its own comprehensive fieldwork, finding that 500,000 acres of this grassland qualified for Wilderness designation. Yet the BLM had only formally recognized two small areas for Wilderness status within the broader 1.2 million-acre area.

Richardson’s request for a new Wilderness inventory by the BLM was a bold step, but it was only the beginning.

In February of 2003, the newly elected governor wrote a letter to then secretary of the interior Gale Norton, expressing his opposition to opening Otero Mesa to drilling and stating that “any future development would have to include the designation of a significant wilderness area.” The governor went on to add that he would “remain opposed to any drilling in this area unless the BLM conducts a new wilderness study.”

In late January 2004, Governor Richardson made a surprise appearance at the Otero Mesa public forum, which was held at the KiMo Theater in downtown Albuquerque. Halfway through the event, the governor got up on stage in front of 700 people and signed an executive order directing all state agencies to work to conserve and protect the resources of Otero Mesa.

“The federal government just got notice that, if they want to drill in Otero Mesa, this governor and this state are going to fight them,” said Mr. Richardson.

In March of 2004, the governor submitted a Consistency Review & Recommended Changes to the agency. In this comprehensive and lengthy document, the governor outlined the case for preserving Otero Mesa and highlighted key errors in the agency’s drilling plans. The governor also proposed a new alternative that would establish a National Conservation Area in Otero Mesa.

Despite the vast chorus that was calling for protecting Otero Mesa, in January of 2005 the BLM released its final plan for drilling, and the results were not pretty. Close to 90 percent of the region would be available for leasing and development, with a piecemeal 10 percent remaining closed. This was obviously neither balanced nor prudent, and, as the facts would later demonstrate, it was also arbitrary and capricious.

In response to the BLM’s lopsided drilling plan, the governor stated that “the state is going to fight this with everything we’ve got,” and in April of 2005, the state of New Mexico filed a lawsuit in conjunction with the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance against the federal government over Otero Mesa. This was the first time in history that the state of New Mexico sued the federal government over a public lands issue, and it was the catalyst that led to the landmark decision issued by the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit in April of 2009.

Without the strong leadership of Governor Bill Richardson, and the tireless efforts of other, unsung, champions within state government, Otero Mesa could very well be overrun with oil and gas development. It is also important to remember that the citizens of this great state are the ones who helped push our leaders to take an active role in safeguarding this wild grassland.

We wholeheartedly thank Governor Richardson for being a vigorous defender of Otero Mesa and working to leave a lasting legacy of wildness for future generations.

Otero, Etc.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

As reported in our last newsletter (New Mexico Wild! Summer 2009), the Coalition for Otero Mesa, submitted an ACEC nomination to the Bureau of Land Management, recommending that 600,000 acres of this 1.2 million acre area be designated as critical Chihuahuan desert grassland habitat.

This occurred in June of 2008 and to date, we have heard very little on what the agency intends to do with this nomination, although they have expressed some positive views about the concept.

Consequently, our ACEC nomination was submitted during the agency’s Tri-County Management Plan for Otero, Sierra, and Dona Ana Counties, before the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals issued its landmark decision in the Otero Mesa litigation.

A draft of the Tri-County Management Plan might be available to the public for comment in spring 2010.

10th Circuit Court of Appeals Decision – The Landmark Victory

On April 28, 2009, the 10th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals issued its decision invalidating the Bureau of Land Management’s drilling plan for Otero Mesa.

The court rejected the BLM’s position that there were no significant risks to the Salt Basin Aquifer, which contains millions of acre-feet of potable water, from oil and gas, noting that the agency had not reviewed “relevant data” and characterized the information included in the agency’s own documentation as “point[ing] uniformly in the opposite direction from the agency’s determination, we cannot defer to that determination.”

Further, the court required the BLM to thoroughly examine the potential destruction of fragile desert grasslands from its proposed management approach, which was not included in the original draft provided to the public. In dismissing the agency’s claim that wildlife habitat would not be affected by a complete change in approach, the court analogized the BLM’s approach as claiming “that analyzing the likely impacts of building a dirt road along the edge of an ecosystem excuses an agency from analyzing the impacts of building a four-lane highway straight down the middle, simply because the type of impact—habitat disturbance—is the same under either scenario.”

As of the publication of this article, we are still waiting to hear back from the BLM on how they intend to comply with the courts decision. STAY TUNED!!

[Image of Governor Bill Richardson]
by Claire Wilcox

Palms sweaty and chest tight, I introduced myself to the woman next to me, and she said, “I know, I’m your neighbor.” I apologized, told her I was tense, as many of us were. It was June 11, 2009, at a public hearing in the Town Hall of Rico, Colorado. Rico: population range 200-500, altitude approximately 8,825 feet, nestled in 12,000+ foot peaks among aspen and spruce, surrounded by miles of some of the most spectacular undeveloped alpine wilderness in the country. The hearing was an opportunity for the Dolores County commissioners to hear from Marc Levin, of Outlook Mining Resources, which had applied to explore for and mine molybdenum about one mile up Silver Creek from the town of Rico, about 4,000 feet below the ground surface. It was also an opportunity for the commissioners to hear from the Rico public about its views on the application. Our fates were in the hands of the Dolores County commissioners—three individuals, all of whom live in a different town, and whom many of us don’t know personally. The hours ahead would determine the course of history for us. I cared desperately about the outcome, as I felt this proposal was threatening my home.

Mr. Levin spoke first. During his half-hour presentation, he spoke of using “just a ventilation shaft in the Silver Creek drainage during the mining phase” and “minimal traffic during the exploration phase.” The symbol of his company is a columbine flower, representing the minimal environmental impact of his work. He stated that there would be little impact on the quality of the water, despite the fact that the initial mining operations would take place near the Silver Creek drainage, Rico’s source of drinking water. He also asserted that the ore would not be removed by open pit (which is the standard way that Molybdenum is mined in other places) and would take place up to ten miles away. He said that it would be so expensive to begin the process … to drill; that each patch, of which there would be at least fifteen, would be about fifty by fifty feet in size; that from each initial hole would stem other holes, like a root system; and that many would be on public land, where he imagined he would remove the ore if it was found, etc. They further exposed that Levin didn’t have a concrete plan; that the mill might go up along the Dolores River scenic Hwy 145; that his potential ore removal site couldn’t be specified, because he hadn’t “contacted the rancher yet.” I watched their faces closely as he talked, and especially as he spoke about the potential financial benefits to Dolores County (200-300 jobs; 15-20 million dollars annual payroll), since I knew this might be the hook that would ultimately reel them in. I couldn’t read their faces.

Thirty-three members of the public signed up to speak. The floors creaked as people moved forward to share their concerns. “I’m more afraid the floor is going to fall in than that he’s going to get rights to mine,” my neighbor whispered. But I felt different. I was scared. But I was also amazed by the eloquence, clarity, intelligence, and, above all, the unity of the town voice. Presentation after presentation cited practical concerns, mentioning wildlife, water purity, proposed access routes for the mining operations (through town), trails access, lack of detail in the proposal, violation of county codes, potential effect on downstream irrigation water for agriculture, lack of clarity about how the company would irrigate the project, its not having yet obtained state permits, lack of emergency services. Residents stated that they didn’t want Rico to change, citing firsthand experience of boom and bust mining economy, and asserting that they wanted Rico to develop not along the lines of its not-so-distant past (mining having left less than fifty years ago, the town still recovering and cleaning up from past mining damage), but as a residential, family-oriented community. The town manager was soft-spoken and relentless. The attorney was unshakable and legally firm, and 100 percent behind Rico, protecting the rights of its citizens against the potential damage from an application. The meeting went very late—past 1:00 AM—and one of the speakers offered a room at the hotel to the commissioners. Rico was friendly, open, intelligent, and firm in its stance: we love Rico the way it is, and we beg that you don’t approve the application as it stands.

I left the meeting a bit early (at 12:30 AM), feeling impressed, but still uncertain about the way the commissioners would vote. Would they choose the potential for minor, short-term economic reward over environmental and water protection? Did the fears and happiness of a town whose year-round population gets just above 200, in a county with a population of 1,986, really matter to them? The next day, by e-mail, I heard the great and surprising news: the commissioners had voted the application down. Within a month, however, Outlook Resources filed a lawsuit against the Dolores County commissioners because of their decision, and confidential discussions are underway between the two entities. The outcome of these discussions is still unknown.

Last week, I went backpacking along the Colorado Trail just northwest of Durango, which overlooks much of the land that would likely be accessed for mining. From
The Human Footprint: A Tool for Wilderness Protection

by Miranda Gray
GIS Coordinator

A lot of wilderness can still be found in New Mexico, and to recognize it requires a hard look at where wilderness is not. The human footprint refers to the extent of our disturbance of the land. A model of the human footprint serves to highlight places most untrammled, natural, and undeveloped. This GIS analysis is an estimate of the cumulative human footprint in New Mexico, attributable to modern human settlement, human access, human land use, and electrical power infrastructure.

The final human footprint map is a synthesis of ten datasets, weighted and combined in such a way as to reflect a relative contribution to land conversion and biodiversity loss. GIS becomes an especially important support tool for wilderness protection when its scientific results are readily understood—mainly in the form of simple, good-looking maps. With a robust database of defensible data, the possibilities for GIS analysis for wilderness support become equally robust, as do the possibilities for wilderness protection. While the human footprint can itself serve as a useful tool for conservation planning and public awareness, it can also be used for further analysis, such as:

• Prioritization of wilderness-quality lands for wilderness protection and restoration work
• Refinement of habitat suitability models to incorporate species-specific response to human land use
• Easy replication of the model with any new data

Mining
Mines have the potential to cause significant localized damage through direct habitat removal and the contamination of local water sources. New Mexico is a leading mining state with significant production of coal, copper, potash, and molybdenum. Mining activity is most pronounced in areas with large reserves of these commodities: the San Juan Basin coal district, Tyro and Chino copper mines in Grant County, the Carlsbad potash district in Eddy County, and the Questa molybdenum mine and mill in Taos County.

Oil & Gas
Oil and gas wells are scored to reflect mostly localized impacts on biodiversity as a result of habitat alteration and the associated risks of spillage, leaks, and emissions at the well site. The combined pressure of densely roaded areas can further fragment habitat and open up remote areas to increased human access, which is accounted for by a high score for producing oil and gas leases. Most of today’s oil production occurs in the New Mexico portion of the Permian Basin in southeast New Mexico. Natural gas extraction is concentrated in the San Juan Basin in northwest New Mexico.

Human Settlement & Access
Human settlement and access has caused significant biodiversity loss; sprawling neighborhoods permanently replace natural habitat, and roads and other transport corridors cause habitat fragmentation, increase wildlife mortality, and provide access to habitats that were formerly remote from human encroachment. Human settlement over the years has also altered predator-prey interactions and in general set natural ecological systems off balance. Settlement pressures were evaluated by population density, housing density, and the distinction of rural vs. urban in the 2000 census. Access was evaluated by a multi-level classification of road data to capture varying degrees of use, infrastructure, and edge-effects.

Large Dams
The Human Footprint accounted for 105 dams larger than 15 meters throughout New Mexico. Alterations of a river’s flow impacts aquatic and semi-aquatic species by changing water temperature, water levels, sediment and nutrient levels, while dams themselves act as a barrier to wildlife movement. Human Footprint scores accounted for large dam sites, as well as the further-reaching impacts both downstream and upstream of the site.

Livestock Grazing
Because New Mexico has a long history of livestock grazing and presumably only an extremely small percentage of land has not been grazed, it would be difficult to quantify the all-pervasive footprint of this practice. For the purposes of this map, we assigned a small footprint value to active grazing allotments on the basis that grazed lands may still qualify for wilderness.

Invasive Plants
The invasive plant species footprint is another of those subtle but serious threats to biodiversity and native habitat regimes. The invasive plants that are well-established in New Mexico out-compete native plants for water and space, and spread quickly on the trail of human disturbance. GIS data for invasive plant dispersal in New Mexico is far from complete, but this model incorporates what data does exist.

Crops Agriculture
In our arid environment, water used in large-scale irrigation largely evaporates, and the percentage that does find its way back to streams is increasingly laden with pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. Invasive plants find a good home in areas designed for plant growth, making agricultural lands sources of invasive plant dispersal. Industrial Agriculture in New Mexico is focused in Doña Ana County and east-central NM.

What is GIS?
Miranda Gray is GIS specialist for the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. She has been with the organization since 2007. She sits in the far back corner of the office, cooking up models and maps in NMWA’s state-of-the-art GIS laboratory. Kurt Menke helped coordinate NMWA’s first GIS activities in 1999 and has since started up his own conservation GIS nonprofit, BirdsEyeViewGIS. He continues to contribute his invaluable GIS expertise to the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.

Those are the people; now here’s a much-needed introduction to Graphic Information Systems

At its most basic level, GIS is the modern way we make maps, but it is much more than that. GIS is a rapidly growing technological field that is now incorporated into the daily work flow of a growing number of government agencies, organizations, businesses, and universities. Broken down into its essential components, it consists of a computer, software, spatial data, and someone who knows how to use it all. Spatial data is the backbone of the entire system. This information that identifies the geographic locality and associated attributes of features on the Earth’s surface. If our dataset consists of lake boundaries, the attributes might include lake names, depths of water, or whether a lake is perennial or ephemeral. The combination of spatial data and attributes allows us to query information by location and by attributes. For instance, we may wish to identify all lakes in New Mexico deeper than thirty feet. Or, we may wish to compare the attributes of lakes above 10,000 feet.

GIS is different from GPS (Global Positioning Systems). GPS communicates with satellites to tell us precisely where on Earth we are. For a GIS professional, GPS is a means to collect the coordinates of spatial data, which can then be used in GIS. For instance, GPS could collect the coordinates of a user-created route, and we can use GIS to determine whether that route is encroaching on a wilderness area. With GIS one can overlay these different mapped features as layers stacked on top of one another. This structure allows us to see associations and patterns between multiple data layers and allows us to begin to answer more interesting questions, such as, “What grazing allotments cover the Pecos Wilderness?” Working with multiple data layers also allows us to derive new GIS data layers. For instance, we can model potential habitat for jaguars by merging such factors as elevation, terrain ruggedness, road density, population density, and available prey in a logical scheme.

Another key component for collecting GIS data is conducting on-the-ground surveys and inventories. This is a critical element in fact-checking what is actually on the ground and provides us with the ability to “defend” our data if ever challenged. With modern GIS we can conduct very sophisticated analyses that would have been nearly impossible in the age of paper maps. It is a tool with which we can analyze and model what is happening spatially on the planet. It also then provides a means to easily produce custom maps that highlight the answers to geographic questions such as these:

Where are the best dispersal corridors for cougars in New Mexico?
What is the human footprint on the landscape?
Where are the best alternative energy sites, and which of those areas contain important habitat?

The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is in constant need of volunteers to help out with our GIS program. If you’re interested in helping us gather data from field work, or you have a knack for plugging these datasets into the GIS system, please contact Miranda Gray (miranda@nmwild.org) to learn about how you can GET INVOLVED! Continue reading to see how GIS is used to protect New Mexico’s natural heritage.
The Human Footprint on New Mexico
by Stephen Capra
Executive Director

Southern New Mexico is home to some of our state’s richest, wildest, and most remote lands—from Carlsbad Caverns in the east, past Otero Mesa, just west of Fort Bliss, into the Organ Mountains, then folding into the incomparable Big Hatchet Mountains, and finally sprawling into Arizona, the biologically rich Pellincillos.

Since 2005, we have been focused on protecting lands around the rapidly growing community of Las Cruces. However, if you speak to some of our Board members the fight has gone on for more than thirty years. During the past four years, we have looked at old, frayed maps, spent countless hours doing GIS and hundreds of hours of on-the-ground field checking.

The community of Las Cruces has exploded in growth in recent years. It has made headlines as a community worth retiring to. People have come from across the country, and new schools are being built; million-dollar homes are being punched in near the base of the Organ Mountains. To the south, plans for more than 30,000 homes are in the works, to the north, the Space Port. Therefore, the time for wilderness was now—now or never.

We will also push hard to see the strongest possible Wilderness proposal pass. We feel strongly that the wilderness proposal in Doña Ana Country has been completely vetted, with every conceivable party able to weigh in on the proposal. As a result, many changes to the proposal, including roads, cherry stems, and whole areas of wilderness were removed to ensure access is maintained for ranchers and to address other issues. However, as the proposal moves forward, a small subset of radical ranchers and off-road vehicle enthusiasts have attempted to fight all wilderness protections and encourage large-scale land sell offs of public land. We simply will not allow that to occur, and we will continue to ask for your help and support.

Heroes

If you have ever been involved in a campaign, you find people of all types that come together for a common goal. When it works right there is a sense of magic that comes from the intensity of the interaction. That magic has been on display for some time in Doña Ana County. The heroes in this case begin with Senators Bingaman and Udall for investing the time and energy to get this proposal introduced and to truly get it right. But frankly, this proposal would have never come to fruition without the endless hours and tireless effort of our two Las Cruces staffers, Jeff Steinborn and Nathan Small. Back in 2005, we had a goal: Wilderness in Doña Ana County. We began to plan, but it was these two staffers who met with elected officials, many in the business community, and countless meetings with ranchers, sportsmen, and community groups. The list is as endless as were the meetings.

In 2001, we held a focus group in Las Cruces, where one of the questions asked was, “What are public lands to you?” The answer most people responded with was restrooms on the side of the interstate. In our 2009 polling, 79 percent of the people
in the area supported our Wilderness proposal. That is an amazing accomplishment. In the time both Jeff and Nathan worked on this campaign, Jeff was also elected as a State Representative and Nathan became the youngest city councilor in Las Cruces history.

During these times, our incredible staff also led countless outings to Broad Canyon, opening many people in the community to the wonders of this desert canyon—from the petroglyphs that line the canyon walls to the spectacular vistas revealing the valley below. On countless Saturdays and Sundays, they have taken people, from Scout troops to Catholic school groups, and one time a Methodist youth group from Kansas, across these special lands on foot and horseback. Still, we are far from the finish line with this campaign,. Their work to this point in creating and maintaining such a strong and diverse alliance for the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks Wilderness, and their personal passion for these lands, is why we are enjoying such an ambitious proposal.

However, no campaign is taken to this level without the many unsung heroes that play such a pivotal role in its development. That begins with the sportsman community in Doña Ana County. People like Sandy Schemnitz, former Chair of the Wildlife Department y at NMSU, an avid quail hunter and world champion dog trainer who supports our Wilderness efforts. Sandy has met with congressional leaders, testified before city councils, and spoken to people in the community about the need to protect these lands. But there are other sportsmen, like John Moen, who at first were leery of Wilderness designation but became convinced that such protections were in the best interests of the community. John would go back to Washington and tell our congressional delegation how important this proposal was to the community. He wrote letters and went into the field to look closely at the lands covered by the proposal and would comment on changes and work to help ensure that the bill was introduced. Without the support of people like John, this bill would still be a fantasy. With their support and the countless hours they invested, we are now moving forward.

The Hispano Chamber of Commerce is another group whose support for our wilderness proposal has been vital to its success. Early on, it worked with our organization and came out in support of the proposal. That was an important milestone for our efforts and may have helped bring other business groups into the campaign, giving us an important voice in framing the debate. The Hispano Chamber continues to work with our coalition, and will be an important part of an exciting Wilderness Economics conference that will take place in Las Cruces on December 5th.

There are other unsung heroes, like Pat Buls and Don Patterson of the Back Country Horsemen. They have been to countless meetings with our congressional delegation and taken many groups on trips into the areas targeted by our proposals. Pat has written poetry and articles about wilderness and our proposal, and Don has traveled north for editorial board meetings at the Albuquerque Journal and has always maintained a smile and a sense of humor, no matter how serious the moment.

Then there are people like Joel Hoffman and Kay Shade. Every time we had a tough resolution to get passed or a need to bring members out to an important congressional meeting, these two super volunteers spent hours, calling and e-mailing and making sure that, in the end, we had the people to make the case for Wilderness. As Hillary Clinton was fond of saying, it takes a village. It takes a community of people to push forward to ensure a quality of life for themselves and for generations yet to come.

As the recent Ken Burns series on national parks made clear, no matter how spectacular the landscape, no matter how important the wildlife, there remain people focused solely on the present, on their own needs and special interests, not those of the greater community. Burns focused on our victories, not the lands that were lost to dams, stupidity, and greed. Nor the wildlife slaughtered by ignorance. The fight to protect wilderness remains just that—a fight. For some, the concept of protected federal lands smells of socialism. For most of us, it reflects thought, vision, and a respect for land, water, and wildlife.

The Land

If you live in Las Cruces, then you understand that the Organ Mountains are the soul of your community. They are the sentry that stands over the communities east side. They are the mountain range that the full moon climbs up to frame the city. It is a mountain range that is craggy and tall, filled with canyons, wildflowers, and wild cactus species such as claret cup, queen of the night, and horse crippler. It is a mountain that absorbs the heat of the Chihuahuan desert while providing shelter for mule deer, badger, mountain lions, and Montezuma quail, to name just a few.

The Potrillos are a landscape that astronauts once trained on for moon landing. It is a wild and rolling land, filled, in places, with rising cinder cones. I recall a camping trip several years ago where we camped on the east side of the East Potrillo mountains. As evening began to take hold, and the baking sun began to set, the sounds of life started to rise. Here the song of the common poorwill and the hoot of great horned owls began to fill the dry, quiet air. With evening descending, we sat quietly listening to the sound of nearby coyotes as the Milky Way took form above.

To the north are lands that few have walked - the Las Uvas and Broad Canyon. In a good rain year, the Uvas can be lush, with grassy meadows, some perennial water, and a coolness in the evening that lets you know you are at a slightly higher elevation, removed from the stark and heated desert floor. You can walk up dry canyons, filled with minerals and rocks that lend color and definition to the rugged land.

Nearby is Broad Canyon—a special place, and one that originally was not considered for Wilderness designation. Hiking into Broad Canyon, you start by following a large, dry riverbed. It is a must to be alert, however, as you may pass close to a black-tailed rattlesnake.

As you walk, you will see rock formations that are pink with rich mineral content, and the walls reveal stories of generations past. The rock art is impressive, but so are the nests of red-tailed hawks, the whistle of a western screech owl; the echo of your voice off the canyon walls; and the deer, javalina, and coyote prints that dot the sandy washes. The canyon, too, is cooler—a relief from the summer heat.

As you continue to walk, the greatness of this land becomes clear. Each wilderness unit reflects a personality and an ecological difference. But collectively they represent a spectrum of environments, all of them wild. They are “untrammeled,” as the Wilderness Act defines wilderness. They are awe-inspiring to those who take the time to travel through them and sense the silence of wild lands, those who...
Habitat fragmentation is now widely recognized as one of the leading causes of species extinction. The four million-mile network of roads we have constructed in America has allowed unprecedented mobility for human travel and commerce. These same roads, and the developments associated with them, however, have negatively affected the mobility and survival of wildlife by creating “fracture zones” between suitable habitats. Animals following their instinctual movement patterns often encounter development and roads as they seek food, water, mates, and territory. The environmental impact of roadways extends far beyond the edge of the pavement. This “road-effect zone” is estimated to be fifteen to twenty times as large as the actual paved right of way itself. One of the unintended adverse consequences of habitat fragmentation is that this process effectively creates smaller, more isolated habitat patches and wildlife populations. Isolated populations are more vulnerable, less resilient in the face of natural disturbances, and thus have a higher probability of local extinction. As growing human infrastructure fragments the landscape, it becomes less permeable to wildlife movement. Permeability is a measure of how easily an animal can cross the landscape.

To model a corridor, one must first identify the areas to connect. For this study, I used a combination of the results of the 2003 Critical Mass Workshop carnivore roadkill data and a cougar habitat suitability model to identify the patches of habitat to connect. The 2003 Critical Mass Workshop resulted in the identification of four Critical Risk Highway Segments, thirteen High Risk Segments and fourteen Moderate Risk Segments. These were based on the knowledge of the attendees and represented known animal-vehicle collision hot spots. It was decided that corridors should be modeled across each of the four Critical Highway Segments and many of the High and Moderate Highway Segments where they serve to generate a connected landscape for cougars in the state. Cougar and other carnivore roadkill records were also used to inform the decision on where to model corridors. In total, twenty-six corridors were modeled. Several corridors showed strong correlations to carnivore roadkill records.

It should be noted that these are considered potential corridors. While many show strong relationships to existing roadkill data, they should only be used as an indication of where on-the-ground studies should be undertaken and as an initial focus for such studies.

This study was funded by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Share with Wildlife Program. The full report can be downloaded at: http://www.birdseyeviewgis.com/downloads.html
By Kurt Menke

Historically, jaguars once roamed north to Santa Fe, west into California, and east as far as Mississippi and Louisiana. Today, the northern extent of their range has been greatly reduced. In recent years there have been increasingly regular sightings in southeast Arizona and occasional sightings in southwest New Mexico. The northernmost documented breeding population lives about one hundred miles south of the U.S.–Mexico border in Sonora. The first step in protecting vital habitat for these cats in the United States is identifying where it is.

This map shows the results of a model developed to identify potential jaguar habitat in New Mexico. This analysis was done in coordination with the Jaguar Conservation Team, an interagency team tasked with studying jaguar conservation in the United States. The study area was defined as areas within fifty miles of reliable jaguar sightings. We included only those sightings that were reported with sufficient precision that we were able to map their locations reliably. The model focused on five habitat variables documented to be important in defining jaguar habitat. These were population density, road density, distance to water, prey availability, terrain ruggedness, and Madrean evergreen forest. These were weighted, with the help of expert opinion, and combined.

The model predicted two areas as having the highest probability of being able to support jaguars in New Mexico. These areas were the Peloncillo and Animas Mountains in far southwestern New Mexico, and the river canyon and adjacent areas of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers. Very little is known about jaguars in the northern end of their range. Therefore, we did not define these two areas as “suitable” for breeding populations of jaguars, nor were slightly less suitable habitats classified as “unsuitable.” We merely labeled them as most suitable and less suitable. We hope that the results of this study will be combined with similar efforts in Arizona and Mexico to help further evaluate the connectivity of suitable habitats and their ability to support a jaguar population in the border region.

The full report can be downloaded at: http://www.azgfd.gov/pdfs/w_c/jaguar/JagRpt4%20doc.pdf

CHACO CANYON VICTORY!

For the past several years our organization has been hard at work on protecting Chaco Canyon National Historic Park. Our proposal includes getting more than 20,000 acres of wilderness designated in the park. Today, the park continues to be threatened by oil and gas development on its boundaries.

In late September we learned of plans to auction off eight leases right on the boundary of the park. Obviously, we were very concerned about drilling so close to such a national treasure.

After working closely with the Governor’s office, the congressional delegation, and the State Director of the BLM, we were able to get these eight leases pulled from the October oil and gas lease sale.

Chaco Canyon National Historic Park is one of the most spectacular areas in New Mexico. Its combination of natural beauty and cultural significance justifies its World Heritage Site status, making it beloved by visitors the world over.

Today we have the protection of Chaco Canyon intact and the ability to continue working towards our wilderness proposal, understanding that we’re not going to have oil and gas development on the perimeter of this park.
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance  
2009 Wilderness Outdoor Connection Leadership Program Activities

The Wilderness Outdoor Connection Leadership Program (WOCLP) youth group had an exciting summer with lots of projects and activities for the youth of northern New Mexico. One of the first activities was a trip to Carson National Forest, where the group took to the hills and did a snowshoeing expedition. This trip was a first snowshoeing experience for all of the kids.

In April the group went out to visit the proposed El Rio Grande Del Norte National Conservation Area in Taos County. The tour included a drive around the northern end of Ute Mountain to the Rio Grande Gorge. The group viewed a drop of 200 feet at the rim of the Gorge on the northern boundary of the NCA near the Colorado Border. The students then went to La Junta Point, where the Red River and the Rio Grande come together. The drop at this location from the rim of the Gorge to the rivers below is 800 feet. The students then went to La Junta Point, where the Red River and the Rio Grande come together. The drop at this location from the rim of the Gorge to the rivers below is 800 feet. The members of the group all saw firsthand the beauty of the area and the reason why this New Mexico jewel should be preserved. Each student wrote a letter of support to Congressman Ben Lujan and Senator Jeff Bingaman, advocating getting S874 through Congress.

In May the group visited the Valles Caldera. On this trip they joined with thirty other youths from northern New Mexico who toured the Caldera. They heard a presentation by the wildlife biologist from the Valles Caldera about the elk herds that exist in the area. The treat for the kids at the Caldera was the search for fallen antlers—the elk shed each spring. In June the youth participated in the north Pecos Wilderness Service Project. The students had the opportunity to work with the recreation coordinator from the Peñasco Ranger District on a trail maintenance project, which included the installation of bollards on a trail to prevent off-highway vehicle (OHV) access to an existing, closed trail. They were briefed on the effects of OHV use on forest land.

Our biggest project took place in July, when NMWA and the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation partnered to do a joint project around volunteer service work and youth education in the Valle Vidal McCrystal Campground Area. NMWA headed the youth activities for the weekend, which included groups from all over northern New Mexico. The groups that participated in the event were the NMWA Wilderness Outdoor Connection Leadership Group from Mora and Questa, the Rocky Mountain Youth Corp group out of Taos, the northern New Mexico Sembrando Semilla Youth Group, the New Mexico Acequia Association, and the Fit in Taos Youth Leadership Group. In total twenty-seven students participated in the event.

Events included an ecological presentation by the Fitness in Taos leadership; a hike led by Wild Earth Llama Adventures; a Llama to Lunch; team building and group activities for youth led by the Rocky Mountain Youth Corp; and storytelling around the campfire. On one of the evenings there were leave-no-trace ethics discussions around the campfire that engaged the students in talking about the environment and the importance of land and water conservation.

The highlight of the trip was the llama hike—a three-mile trek up McCrystal Creek to the archeological site of the McCrystal Place, where the McCrystal family once lived and ranched in the Valle Vidal. The history and importance of the watershed management in the area was shared with the students. There was discussion about why the Valle Vidal Coalition was put into place and the work that it did back in 2006 in preventing oil and gas development in the area.

The AWF and NMWA split up into groups, conducting several on-the-ground service projects in conjunction with the youth activities. We would like to thank NMWA, AWF, U.S. Forest Service Questa Ranger District, the New Mexico Acequia Association, the Sembrando Semilla Youth Group, the Taos Rocky Mountain Youth Corp, Wild Earth Llama Adventures, and Fit in Taos for participating in the event.

Organ Mountains Sites Deserve To Be Saved

Albuquerque Journal Oct. 4, 2009
EDITORIAL

The Organ Mountains provide a dramatic backdrop to the vibrant and growing community of Las Cruces, the state's second largest city, much as the Sandias do to Albuquerque. More than 30 years ago, at the behest of now retired U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, the Sandias were designated as a protected wilderness area.

Now, our U.S. senators, Tom Udall and Jeff Bingaman, have introduced the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act. It would designate 259,000 acres as wilderness and create a 100,850-acre conservation area around the Organ and Doña Ana Mountains and parts of Broad Canyon. The Bureau of Land Management would manage the land to protect it from development, but current uses, such as hunting and grazing, would continue.

The area has been under study since 2006, when Domenici proposed protecting more than 200,000 acres of federal land in Doña Ana County as wilderness, creating a 35,000-acre conservation area around the Organ Mountains and allowing the BLM to sell off about 65,000 acres. It didn't fly at the time, and years of negotiations ensued.

Now a fairly broad consensus has been reached by some interests — conservationists, hunters, business people, hikers, local governments and even some ranchers — that the areas should be protected, although other ranchers and off-road enthusiasts still have concerns over access.

The bill is expected to be heard this week in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which Bingaman chairs. This is a rare opportunity to set aside some natural resource gems for the enjoyment of generations to come.
West Texas Sojourn

by Steve West
Staff Scientist

Everyone (even those who have never been there) knows a lot about The Lone Star State. But not all of it is well known, especially that west wedge located between southern New Mexico and northern Mexico. The least populated part of the state has the only two national parks in Texas and also has a national historic site, a national memorial, a national trail, a wild and scenic river, as well as several state parks and other lands set aside for wildlife and/or recreation. While Texas has a higher percentage of privately owned land than any other state, there are multiple opportunities in west Texas for enjoying wilderness, hiking, camping, exploring, and virtually any other outdoor activity in which one could be interested.

The gems in west Texas are the two national parks, and the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is deeply involved in both those areas. NMWA met with Big Bend’s superintendent in March to discuss the potential for Wilderness there, where none currently exists, at least not legislatively. Big Bend has just over 800,000 acres (about 1,250 square miles) and is the best and largest preserved area in the Chihuahuan Desert north of Mexico. Big Bend has had a Wilderness plan gathering dust for over twenty years. The time wasn’t right, and sometimes it takes time to gather public support for Wilderness. Now is the time. With a wilderness-friendly Congress and president and with local support for Wilderness, it may be only months before Big Bend joins over 700 other areas in the country that have Wilderness designation. The proposal would mean that about two-thirds of Big Bend would be Wilderness—where now, none of it is!

Why is Wilderness right for Big Bend? Wilderness designation would protect those special places that bring people to visit the park today. Big Bend is as unique as any park in America. The uniqueness here that deserves the protection of a Wilderness designation includes more birds than any other national park; species found here and nowhere else in the country—some, nowhere else on Earth. Wilderness would preserve the flavor and sense of what the area was like when the first Europeans walked across the land. Wilderness in Big Bend would also draw needed attention to the conservation of desert areas. Establishing Wilderness in this park would provide an example of how land can be preserved and managed for the future and would, one hopes, bring about both greater cooperation across the border and additional protection for lands to the south. NMWA is actively involved in pushing for Wilderness and building Wilderness support in Big Bend National Park.

To the north is a park with which more New Mexicans are familiar, but that is entirely in Texas: Guadalupe Mountains National Park. Designated in 1972, the park was established to protect a large portion of the exposed, fossilized Capitan Reef, one of the best fossil reefs in the world. Geologists from around the world have visited the area for decades to learn about the area, and they continue to do so today, though most visitors come to the park for a wider variety of reasons.

The biggest attraction at the park is the October-November hikes into McKittrick Canyon to see the fall colors of the maples and other trees. Running along the canyon bottom and adding to the pleasant sounds of a fall day is McKittrick Creek, the largest water source in the Guadalupe. To the south is Guadalupe Peak, at 8,749 feet the highest point in Texas. While the peak is the lowest of any of the state high points in the West, the view from the top of Guadalupe Peak is hard to describe. To the west are the gypsum dunes, on the west boundary of the park, as well as the Cornudas Mountains, and Otero Mesa. To the east and south are the Delaware Mountains, the Sierra Diablo Mountains, and, to the far south, the Davis Mountains—another special area in Texas.

While one drives along the highway between Carlsbad and El Paso, the south end of the Guadalupe looks like a large, imposing, and even barren cliff of limestone. Inside the park, however, are numerous canyons and hiking trails, as well as spotted owls, black bears, and about 1,000 species of plants, including several orchids. And wilderness—lots of it. Park plans are to expand Wilderness areas and, once completed, Guadalupe Mountains will have one of the highest Wilderness percentages of any national park. NMWA is also working to support this expansion by coordinating with the park and building local support.

While Texas attracts many superlatives, many of the best are justified by these two national parks. They both preserve areas vital to protecting wildlife and unique plant communities, and it is in Wilderness areas that this is best done. Proposals to increase Wilderness in Guadalupe Mountains and establish it at Big Bend will not close any roads or deny any access currently available. Work by NMWA and other organizations will help to make conservation (and Wilderness) a main component of land management in one of the most special corners of the United States.

The Texas Initiative

When we talk about preserving wildlands and wildlife, it is foolish to stop at artificial boundaries such as state lines. For this reason, NMWA is expanding its efforts into west Texas and elsewhere. Trans-Pecos Texas (that area west of the Pecos River) is home to two national parks of great value—Guadalupe Mountains and Big Bend. Together, the two parks contain almost 1,250,000 acres. At just over 800,000 acres, however, Big Bend contains not a single square mile of designated Wilderness!

NMWA is actively supporting additions to the current Wilderness in Guadalupe Mountains and has been working for months to promote Wilderness in Big Bend. None of this will be easy or inexpensive to accomplish. We are asking for supporters of wilderness and wildlife in west Texas to donate to a special “Texas Fund” that will support our efforts to the south.

For those who donate $50 or more, we will send you a copy of The Guadalupe Mountains Symposium. NMWA was given about one hundred copies of this excellent work, which is the product of a symposium held in Carlsbad in 1998. The book contains over fifty chapters on various aspects of Guadalupe Mountains National Park and nearby areas. The articles were written by the presenters at the symposium, and there are chapters on resource management, biology, cultural resources, ecology, geology, history, interpretation, social science, and other fields. Some of the titles are: “Mountain Lion Ecology and Population Trends in the Trans-Pecos Region of Texas,” “Historic and Archaeological Investigations of Apache War Sites,” “Permian Extinctions: A Fusulinacean’s Way of Life and Death,” and “The Butterfield Overland Stagecoach through Guadalupe Pass.” No matter what your interests, there are articles in the symposium proceedings that will get your attention.

The money donated to the Texas Fund will assist NMWA in protecting and promoting wilderness in west Texas. When you donate, please specify that it is for the Texas Fund and state whether or not you would like a copy of the book. Supplies are limited, so please move quickly on this one before we run out of these books.
Connecting Exhibitions:  
**Grasslands and Separating Species**

by Mary Anne Redding

This fall, 516 ARTS is hosting the concurrent exhibitions Grasslands and Separating Species as part of the large collaboration called LAND/ART (www.landartnm.org). As the curator, I developed this two-part project starting with the work of photographer Michael P. Berman, who has an unbroken connection to the land and art making. He has a long involvement with the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance; longer is his involvement with the grasslands of the southwestern deserts that he calls home. It is appropriate that he is one of the speakers at this year’s NMWA conference focusing on the grasslands. His work in this exhibition focuses on the Chihuahuan grasslands of New Mexico, Texas and northern Mexico.

Rather than making site-specific sculpture to insert into the landscape like the original artists of the Land Art movement, Berman creates gallery installations that translate his intensive experiences in the land. It would be nearly impossible for most people to walk his walk. He makes time to look, to be in the violent desert lands on both sides of the border, self-sufficient and alone, walking for weeks, sometimes a month at a time. The land is what’s important to him — a metaphor for consciousness, what he feels art should also be.

In his essay in the exhibition catalog (published by Radius Books, radiusbooks.org), William deBuys describes how Berman’s process makes him a “poet of place.” He says, “On foot (Berman) lugs his view camera down washes and up ridges where no trails exist; sometimes he has a plan, sometimes he hasn’t. He hunts the angle and moment that shape the visual speech of the land into a clear declarative sentence… These wordless sentences are the poems he hauls back to his studio and commits to paper.”

Although vastly different in their approaches and the resulting imagery, Michael Berman and artists David Taylor, Dana Fritz, Krista Elrick and Jo Whaley in Separating Species, visually investigate what happens when species are separated, whether in the wilderness, in protected wildlife refuges, urban zoos or other artificially created environments, or even across political, economic and cultural borders. Grasslands and Separating Species are permeated with a passion for revealing wildness and increasing a global understanding of community to include grasslands, birds, butterflies and moths, animals, rocks and ridges, rivers and people. As Terry Tempest Williams, the honored speaker at last year’s NMWA conference says: “We need another way of being in the world. We can learn to live more deeply, more fully in place, our eyes wide open to the wild. We don’t have to develop every acre in sight or drill for oil simply because it’s there. Restraint is a virtue we have yet to cultivate.”

Mary Anne Redding is the Curator at the Palace of the Governors/New Mexico History Museum.

Grasslands / Separating Species is on view October 3 – December 12 at 516 ARTS in Downtown Albuquerque. For more information, please visit www.516arts.org or call 505-242-1445.

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**DJ Spooky explores vanishing environment in multimedia performance**

by Tom Guralnick

The LAND/ART project spans grasslands to Antarctica in one day on Saturday, October 24. Following the NMWA conference 11am-3pm, come Downtown to the KiMo Theater, Richard Levy Gallery and 516 ARTS for more arts events and exhibitions focused on the environment.

One of the highlights of the six-month LAND/ART series is the performance of DJ Spooky on October 24. While highly regarded as a writer and conceptual artist, Paul D. Miller is probably best known under the moniker of his constructed persona, “DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid.” In that role, Miller has remixed and recorded with a panoply of artists ranging from Metallica to Steve Reich to Killah Priest and has performed in a wide variety of situations throughout the world. His work crosses boundaries and merges media and ideas with an inventive braininess that merges musical, cultural and environmental concerns in a unique, mind-bending mix.

His large-scale, multimedia work, Terra Nova: Sinfonia Antarctica, is an acoustic portrait of a rapidly changing continent, translating his first-person encounter with the harsh, dynamic landscape of Antarctica into visual and sonic portraits. In Terra Nova, Miller captured the acoustic qualities of Antarctic ice forms in field recordings, reflecting a changing — even vanishing — environment under duress. In addition to video projections and DJ Spooky on turntables, the performance will also feature local chamber musicians, Linda Vik, violin; Katie Harlow, cello; and Debbie Briggs, piano.

Presenters of Terra Nova in Albuquerque are the Outpost Performance Space, an intimate, nonprofit, community-based Performing Arts Center presenting everything from jazz to experimental, to folk &

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Erika Blumenfeld: Early Findings: Artifacts from The Polar Project (www.levygallery.com), and an Open House next door at 516 ARTS (516 Central Ave. SW) which features the exhibitions Grasslands and Separating Species (www.516arts.org). For information on the performance, call 505-268-0044 or visit www.outpost-space.org.

Tom Guralnick is the Founder/Executive Director of the Outpost Performance Space in Albuquerque.
Support for the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act continues to grow, as the Obama administration has now offered its support to the legislation intended to protect the mountain range just east of Las Cruces and other scenic areas in Doña Ana County.

"Passage of this legislation will ensure that generations of New Mexicans and all Americans will be able to witness a golden eagle soar over the Sierra de las Uvas, hike the landmark Organ Mountains, or hunt in the volcanic outcroppings of the Potrillo Mountains," said Marcilynn A. Burke, deputy director for the Bureau of Land Management. "We welcome this opportunity to enhance protection for some of America's treasured landscapes."

We fully appreciate the importance of ranching to a diversified county economy and have no desire to see those operations diminished. If we believed a wilderness designation would have the dire consequences that have been predicted, we'd have second thoughts about offering our endorsement.

In fact, we see no reason why wilderness and ranching can't co-exist. The federal designation has specific provisions designed to carve out the exemptions ranchers need to run their operations. We believe local ranchers would be better served working with Bingaman and Udall to ensure that their needs are protected under the bill now being considered, rather than fighting to defeat the bill.

Without protection, these precious lands will be lost to the urban sprawl that will surely come to our area in the years ahead. With wilderness protection, they will be preserved to be enjoyed by future generations.

We commend Bingaman and Udall for introducing this important legislation, and urge all those who treasure these special areas to make your voices heard.

By Steve Ramirez Sun-News reporter 10/10/2009

Support for the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act continues to grow, as the Obama administration has now offered its support to the legislation intended to protect the mountain range just east of Las Cruces and other scenic areas in Doña Ana County.

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The Obama administration endorsed the legislation at a U.S. Senate hearing Thursday in Washington, D.C. Resolutions in support of the legislation written by Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, both D-N.M., to protect the Organs have already been adopted by the city of Las Cruces, town of Mesilla and Doña Ana County governments. Gov. Bill Richardson has also thrown in his support for the bill.

The legislation would protect 259,000 acres of wilderness and 100,000 acres of National Conservation Area. These areas would be managed in ways that protect the landscape from development while preserving current uses such as hunting and grazing.

The bill also releases 16,350 acres along the southern border that had previously been designated as so-called "Wilderness Study Area." This will provide increased flexibility for border law enforcement.
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Retired Senator Pete V. Domenici was what “thinking like a mountain” meant. In The Land of Enchantment, with Aldo Leopold understanding the simple grace of what “thinking like a mountain” meant. As a congressman, Senator Tom Udall worked to successfully pass legislation for the Ojito Wilderness, and most recently, the Sabinoso Wilderness just east of Las Vegas, NM.

Senator Jeff Bingaman, who also has a long-standing tradition of supporting wilderness designation, has recently introduced the Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks Wilderness Act, along with Senator Udall. Additionally, Senator Bingaman has submitted the El Rio Grande del Norte National Conservation Area Act of 2009. Combined, these two bills will protect over 700,000 acres of public land. These two initiatives represent the largest amount of proposed protected public land in New Mexico history.

Congressman Martin Heinrich, Congressman Ben Ray Lujan, and Congressman Harry Teague all voted for the Omnibus Lands Bill of 2009, which formally designated the Sabinoso Wilderness, as well as the Fort Union National Monument, Snowy – River Cave near Fort Stanton.

As New Mexicans, and those who care about the vast beauty of our state, we should be thankful for the leadership that we have been afforded throughout our history and present state of affairs.

Today, we have an opportunity to continue this natural legacy. Please take the time to write a letter or make a phone call to our congressional delegation, thanking them for upholding our conservation and wilderness ethics. More often than not, we tend to express our frustrations and dissatisfaction, but it’s time for us to give credit where credit is due and thank our congressional, state, county and city leaders for their vision and steadfast support of wilderness preservation.

Do something positive for our wild public lands, and thank our leaders for ensuring that we have a natural legacy to pass on to future generations.

Join New Mexico Wilderness Alliance Today! You’ll not only help preserve New Mexico’s Wild Places for your own enjoyment… but you’ll help ensure that future generations may enjoy them too.

YES! I want to be a member of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance!!! My contribution will go towards the continued protection and wilderness designation of New Mexico’s natural heritage.

Mail your Tax Deductible Donations to:

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LAND/ART
www.landartnm.org

EVENTS
10/3, 2pm: Panel Discussion with Guggenheim Fellows, 516 ARTS
10/21, 7pm: Lannan Readings & Conversations: Rebecca Solnit, The Lensic
10/24, 11am-3pm: NMWA Conference: Charles Bowden & Michael P. Berman Bosque School
10/24, 7:30pm: DJ Spooky: Terra Nova: Sinfonia Antarctica, KiMo Theatre
11/21, 7:30pm: Conversation with David Abram: Discourse of the Birds, 516 ARTS

GRASSLANDS / SEPARATING SPECIES
Michael P. Berman, Krista Eliott, Dana Fritz, David Taylor, Jo Whaley
curated by Mary Ann Redding, 516 ARTS
Exhibition catalog with essays by William deBuys and Rebecca Solnit
published by Radius Books, radiusbooks.org

“...my husband and I have decided to leave a bequest to New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.”

“I’d like my children to be able to enjoy the beautiful wild landscapes of New Mexico.”

“I’d like to know that as population increases and global warming changes their world, our special wilderness will remain and wildlife will flourish. I was thinking about this when my husband and I sat down to talk about what to do with our estate. Of course family is first. But, then I realized that there was more too. I care about the future of our special places in the world and want to make sure my children get to enjoy it too. Plus, I wanted to set an example for our family of what it might look like to care for our world. That is why my husband and I have decided to leave a bequest to New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.”

Madeline Aron (505) 265-7927 or madeline@swcp.com

“The wild’s call connects us all, when we dare to deeply feel.” from “The Wild Calls”, by Madeline Aron

To find out how, contact us: Tisha Broska, Development Director (505) 843-8696 or tisha@nmwild.org
For the city of Las Cruces, already on the radar for those looking for an affordable retirement community, the designation of more than 400,000 acres of public land will only add to its value as a place with real recreational opportunities. In addition, those in the business community will be able to point to these recreational opportunities as a magnet for attracting companies looking to relocate and offer their employees real quality of life amenities. In December, we will be sponsoring along with the Hispano Chamber of Commerce de Las Cruces a half-day Wilderness Economics conference. It will be a chance to bring together many facets of the business community along with groups like the Headwaters Economics Institute (groups that have studied the affects of conservation on communities across the West) to help the community best use conservation to their economic advantage. As Oscar Vasquez Butler, a Doña Ana County Commissioner made clear in his testimony before the Senate Committee. “This land preservation, protects so much for our community, but also acts as an economic engine of sorts because of the draw it will have on people and businesses.”

The Fight That Remains
After more than thirty years of struggle, we have a Wilderness bill for southern New Mexico. Getting the bill introduced is just the first step, however. Because of the anti-environment efforts of Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), any legislation that passes will have to be part of a large omnibus package of Wilderness bills that come from across the United States. His constant badgering of all Wilderness proposals means we can not move this bill on its merits alone. Instead, it will be tied to bills that often contain controversial funding for projects in other states. The handful of inflexible ranching and off-road vehicle activists will continue to fight all wilderness protections, as well as disseminate misleading and inaccurate information about its effects. Unfortunately, such has always been the case in the story of conservation in America, and one of the main reasons why groups such as the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance are so important, as is the support and participation of citizens fighting for their future and these wild and beautiful lands.

National Security
They continue to pound away on the idea that illegal immigrants will be flowing through the land covered by our proposal in the West Potrillos. This, despite the fact they we released close to two miles on the border so that the border patrol would have full access. And despite the fact that we have a Memorandum of Understanding with the border patrol that allows them access to any area where they perceive a threat—something that the senators’ offices hammered out in order to remove any concerns. Furthermore, the area is rugged, and there is no history of these areas being a hotbed of transborder activities.

Slow the Process Down
This has been a rallying cry. But it ignores the more than thirty years that people have worked to get these areas protected, and the numerous hours spent by the staffs of Senators Bingaman and Udall to find consensus and compromise. They have worked with the ranching community to make certain that ranchers had the access and boundaries they were comfortable with. Some ranchers understand that the proposed legislation will help their operations continue in perpetuity.

Conclusion
This is an important moment for New Mexico. We remain last in the amount of protected public lands among Western states—dead last. This proposal, combined with our efforts in the north with El Río Grande del Norte, have put us on track to protect more than 700,000 acres of public land in our state. We are following in the footsteps of so many who came before us. So many who understood the value of protecting land, not just for their quality of life, but as an act of preservation of the asset we treasure most, our environment. We are such a rich nation, yet we remain in a constant whirlwind of growth—overachieving and demanding more material gain.

Yet, as you walk up Broad Canyon, as the evening light begins to fade, you can hear the single note of the common nighthawk and sense its presence. Fall colors begin to adorn the cottonwoods. If anything can be called perfect, it is this. The cost of preservation is simply your engagement and support against the many forces that do not believe that these American lands, in their wild and perfect state, belong to us all. Like the many great public lands before them, it is our responsibility to protect this wilderness, and to finally call their bluff.
Do you need to renew? Check your membership expiration date located above your name and address.

Cover photo by Mike Groves
mikegrovesphotography.com