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# Wilderness Outdoor Connection Leadership Program

by John Olivas

The Wilderness Outdoor Connection Leadership Program (WOCLP) is made possible by a private grant from Sally Strong, the wife of the late Bob Langsenkamp of Santa Fe, New Mexico. John Olivas, Northern Director of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance has organized a group of students from the Mora Independent School District to participate in the WOCLP. John is looking to expand the program to the Questa Independent School District beginning in April 2009. It is essential that our students in rural America connect with the outdoors. The outdoors makes up a large part of rural youths' surroundings throughout New Mexico. Programs like the WOCLP can help bridge some of those gaps and help to create responsible and

productive youth within their communities and give them the exposure to the outdoors that they might not get otherwise.

On February 15, 2009, the WOCLP put together a snowshoeing expedition in Carson National Forest (FR161) at the top of Holman Hill in Mora County. Six students and three parents participated in the event. Cody Vasquez, a Mora High School student who participated in this event, commented, "What a beautiful place to be on a winter day in Mora! It was a perfect day to participate in this snowshoeing activity. I look forward to future trips with the group this spring and summer." None of the students or their parents had ever participated in a snowshoeing activity before. John Olivas was grateful to get some students and parents from Mora out into our public lands to participate in the event. The group

looks forward to participating in future activities WOCLP will organize within our public lands system and in Wilderness areas.

On April 5, the group plans to visit the 303,000-acre proposed El Rio Grande del Norte National Conservation Area in Taos County. This area encompasses the Wild and Scenic River Byway of the Rio Grande. We plan to visit the Wild Rivers Visitor Center on the trip. Sheeps Crossing is one area that is used by traditional community members during their biannual cattle drives. Sheeps Crossing allows for cattle to cross the Rio Grande Gorge during the spring and fall months. Without this traditional crossing,



ranchers would have to transport their animals across the gorge via trucks and trailers. This means of transportation would take up to three hours for the ranching communities that utilize the crossing. It is essential that this area remain protected.