DO YOU NEED TO RENEW? Check your membership expiration date located above your name and address.

New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
P.O. Box 25464
Albuquerque, NM 87125
Corporate Welfare: THE 1872 MINING LAW

SEE PAGES 12-22
My grandfather lived to be 96 years old. He was born in the mountainous Abruzzi region of Italy. By 1905, he had made his way via Ellis Island to the mountains of western Pennsylvania. He made this country, and in particular the mines of the region, his life's work. With my grandmother, he raised a family of eleven children in a three-bedroom, one-bathroom home.

My parents divorced when I was quite young, so I lived with my mother and spent the majority of my childhood with her family. They were a family born of the South, among whom debutantes and manners were not just considered, but were a way of life. On rare occasions I traveled with my father to visit his side of the family, and on the plane flights there I would often throw up, sick with fear and uncertainty. Yet my father's family always treated me warmly and forced wonderful quantities of pastas, salamis, and pastries down my throat. I remember speaking to my grandfather on those visits. In my mind's eye, I see him as a tall man, thin and wearing the gold-hued, wire-rimmed glasses of the time. He spoke often of Italians, why they were such great people— and smart— and my grandmother, who could not speak English, would often interrupt with: "Mangia—Eat! So thin..." glaring in my direction.

My grandfather chewed snuff and I found that to be very strange indeed. I assumed that he was simply spitting out coal, from his years in the mine. Their home was well worn, but always clean; it was a row house in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, typical of those in working communities across the state. The front of the house was a candy store that Grandpa ran in the afternoon when he returned from the mine. In my youth, it was largely a place of storage and memories. To this day, the streets outside remain cobblestone.

My grandfather was a coal miner for more than 50 years. His story is part of the larger history of the stark reality of mining in America, which is still ongoing. Their stories, and Grandpa's story, represent the American dream, but also tarnish somewhat the mining industry's purported "values" and self-image.
ers. Naturally, Grandpa quickly found work in the mines as a water boy. At the time, safety and unionization were concepts seldom practiced. Miners worked long hours for little pay, as did the water boy. Companies were the foundation of the communities, and helped sick families, but always enjoyed maximum profits.

My grandfather worked in several mines: the Kiski Mine, Pine Run, and finally the large mine at Renton. The conditions were harsh. Men were at the mines by 6 AM daily. There, they worked in veins of coal only three feet thick. As my grandfather began to mature, he was moved into the more profitable position of being a digger. He would often dig bent over or on his knees, as the shafts were narrow and often no higher than three feet. Ventilation was crude, too, but men were instructed to work hard or be replaced.

By 3:30, the men from his shift would come out of the mine and begin the long walk home. No one had a car, so the men would walk the three or so miles back to town in small groups. They also started their day with this walk to work, in summer, fall, winter, and spring. Once home, my grandfather, who like his fellow miners would be working on building rails for the mine, what he referred to as a subscription as a birthday gift. When the first issue arrived at his door, Grandpa called the paper immediately to cancel the subscription. His point was that he did not need a copy for himself, which he viewed as simply excess.

I think my grandfather would be appalled by the way the Mining Law of 1872 is being implemented today, and by the idea that companies like the ones that exploited him for many years would be given special treatment by the federal government. He was hard-working and pragmatic. That companies already making millions, even billions in profits are getting a sweetheart deal to mine and get tax breaks to make their profits even higher would represent to him, I think, the perfidy that permeates Washington.

Perhaps the Mining Law of 1872 made sense in 1872, but today it merely sustains the few people that still dare to justify corporate welfare. It is time to retire such outdated, unjust laws. I think that would make my coal-mining grandpa proud.
GET OUT THERE!

GET OUTDOORS WITH THE NEW MEXICO WILDERNESS ALLIANCE to learn about the beauty and benefits of wilderness. Wild Guide 2012’s purpose is to educate, connect and engage folks in the protection of New Mexico’s wild lands. We are fortunate to live in this beautiful state. Let us bring you along on our journey and show you why. Wild Guide 2012 has something for everyone. How about a guided hike into a remote location, looking for and finding solitude? Maybe you would enjoy a fence removal project, restoring freedom of movement to wildlife. Backpacking in the Gila Wilderness looking for wolves, might suit you? Or maybe it is a field seminar to identify invasive weeds for the U.S. Forest Service? If you are looking for substance for the soul, we have a yoga class in the middle of the wilderness. There are scenic drives, with places to eat and rest, plus suggested hikes, hot springs, or birding sites. Join the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance for some glorious fun and exciting adventures around our great state. There’s something for everyone!

To order your copy of Wild Guide 2012, contact Tisha Broska, tisha@nmwild.org. Or, order online at www.nmwild.org by clicking under the cover icon on our homepage. You can order on Amazon.com or buy a copy at REI, and other local bookstores listed on our website.

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**Fillmore Canyon Back-in-Time Tour**

**DATE OF HIKE:** February 25

**DESCRIPTION OF HIKE:** This is a moderately difficult hike into the Organ Mountains and up Fillmore Canyon, where a seasonal stream can usually be found bubbling underneath glades of ponderosa pine trees. Hikers will pass abandoned mines, archaeological sites, and be able to look out over the Mesilla Valley. A historical interpreter will be along to take hikers on a history tour, including the trips of Western legends like Billy the Kid, Geronimo, and other, lesser known, but important figures. Just twenty minutes east of Las Cruces, this superb hike is a unique opportunity for a comfortable February day.

**MAXIMUM PARTICIPANTS:** 15

**HIKE LEADER:** Nathan Small

**TO SIGN UP:** Go to nmwild.org and click on “Events.” Look for the calendar and locate the event you are interested in; then click on “Register for this event.” Administration fee due at sign-up: $10.00 for members, $20.00 for nonmembers.

**HIKING DISTANCE:** 4.5 miles

**HIKING TIME:** 4 hours

**CONTACT FOR HIKE:** nathansmall@nmwild.org

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**Nature Journaling**

**DATE:** Saturday, April 14, 10 am–2 pm

**THE WORKSHOP:** Nature journaling with Margy O’Brien. This interactive workshop will open your eyes to the nature all around you. The workshop is for beginners to advanced artists of all ages and will include some limited hiking and exploring. You will have plenty of time to draw or paint, so you will need to bring a blank book, and writing and art materials. Margy O’Brien has made a career as an artist by melding her dual love of art and nature. Teaching nature journaling refreshes her passion for the practice—not just the how-to, but the why.

Margy has kept sketchbooks and nature journals for thirty-five years; her sketches and notes build bridges between places and herself. The difference between journal entries and photographs has something to do with intentionality. Spending time sketching requires really seeing with understanding, building observation skills and dissolving visual complacency. The goal should be drawing to learn about something, rather than making a pretty picture, although sometimes you get both.

**THE PLACE:** Elena Gallegos Open Space Picnic Area, Albuquerque
**Yoga Outside for All Wilderness Enthusiasts**

**DATE:** May 12, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm  
**DESCRIPTION OF Hike:** Join Satkirin Khalsa, physician and yoga instructor, for a day in the outdoors. Satkirin will lead a hike in the Sandias, incorporating improvised yoga postures, by using hiking gear and nature as props. Focus will be on the aches and pains we all experience in the wild, including shoulder tension, low-back pain, knee discomfort, and sore muscles. Bring your gear and your questions, and learn how to relieve discomfort during your next wild expedition!  
**THE PLACE:** Sandia Mountains  
**MEALS:** Vegetarian sack lunch provided

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**Rio Chama Rafting**

**DATE:** June 1–3  
**PLACE:** Rio Chama in northern New Mexico  
**TRIP DESCRIPTION:** Experience three days and two nights floating down America’s Wild and Scenic Chama River with experts, scientists, and philosophers from the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. Rio Chama in northern New Mexico is a dam-controlled stream, impounded by El Vado Reservoir. The twenty-five-mile Rio Chama begins in alpine woodlands as a clear, rushing trout stream and ends at the head of Abiquiu Reservoir as a silky desert river, rolling among the rainbow cliffs so typical of the Four Corners region. Lovely, wooded campsites and lively but easy rapids make the Chama one of the best family river outings anywhere.  
**MEALS:** Gourmet food and beverages will be provided.

**TriP leADER:** Doug Chinn  
**MAXIMUM PARTICIPANTS:** 12  
**PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS:** First-time rafters are welcome, twelve years of age and older in normal good health. Guides will do the navigating in our oar-powered, self-bailing rafts. You can also choose to use an individual inflatable kayak on this Class II river.  
**DRIVING TIME:** 1 hour north of Albuquerque

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**Chacon Acequia**

**DATE:** June 1–3  
**THE PROJECT:** We will be working with the partantes (landowners) on the oldest acequia in the state, and also the highest, at 11,947 feet. The acequia (main irrigation canal) is unique in that it crosses the Continental Divide, diverting water from the Colorado watershed to the Canadian watershed. This year marks the fifth consecutive year that we have gathered experts, scientists, and philosophers from the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.  
**PROJECT LEADER:** Tisha Broska  
**TO SIGN UP:** Go to nmwild.org and click on “Events.” Look for the calendar and locate the event you are interested in; then click on “Register for this event.” Administration fee due at sign-up: $25.00 for members, $30.00 for nonmembers.  
**DRIVING TIME:** 1 hour north of Albuquerque, New Mexico

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**Gila Wilderness Wolf Backpack**

**DATE:** Friday, August 31–Monday, September 3  
**DESCRIPTION OF Hike:** A four-day/three-night backpack looking for wild Mexican lobos in the heart of the Gila Wilderness. We could not have a better guide; Dave Parsons led the wolf reintroduction project for U.S. Fish and Wildlife in the nineties. No one knows more about wild Mexican wolves or has done more for them than Dave. A truly unique opportunity to spend time with a wilderness hero, in the place he knows and loves like no other. We will be looking for wolves, but we will be there to enjoy the natural beauty as well. The aftermath of fires that burned in 2011 will be within day-hiking distance of our camp—a possible side trip that will allow us to observe how fires burn in mature Ponderosa pine forests.  
**THE PLACE:** Gila Wilderness, America’s first wilderness. The Gila has exceptionally diverse habitats, this can lead to rich wildlife viewing experiences.

**MEALS:** Saturday night dinner will be provided by NMWA. All other meals are your responsibility.

**MAXIMUM PARTICIPANTS:** 10  
**PROJECT BACKPACK LEADER:** Dave Parsons  
**TO SIGN UP:** Go to nmwild.org and click on “Events.” Look for the calendar and locate the event you are interested in; then click on “Register for this event.” Fee: $250.  
**DRIVING TIME:** Over 5 hours south of Albuquerque, New Mexico

**DISTANCE:** 7 miles to set up base camp and another 20 (optional) on day hikes exploring the wilderness

**NOTE:** For this exclusive trip, horses will transport your backpacking gear to base camp so you can enjoy hiking with only a daypack. You must be self-sufficient and provide your own food, water, and shelter. We will camp near water, so you will only need enough water for the hike in.
By Nathan Small, Wilderness Protection Organizer

In 1857, responding to complaints from New Mexico, Arizona, and California residents weary of the three-month delay in steamboat mail service, Congress authorized the establishment of a federally-subsidized overland mail service between Tipton, Missouri and San Francisco. The contract was won by John Butterfield and his partners in the Overland Mail Company. Butterfield was a successful, self-made New York entrepreneur and a friend of President Buchanan. During his formative years, Butterfield witnessed the construction of the Erie Canal, saw Robert Fulton’s newfangled steamboat miraculously chug upstream, watched as the first telegraph lines were strung, and experienced the rumble of the first steam locomotive. Anything seemed possible. Making his start as a dependable stagecoach driver along the Erie Canal at the age of 19, Butterfield matured into a man of vision and adept managerial skills. In 1849 he founded the Butterfield and Wasson Express Company. Shortly thereafter, he orchestrated a corporate merger with owners of two other express delivery companies: Henry Wells of Wells & Company and William G. Fargo of Livingston and Fargo. Together, they formed the American Express Company. Both American Express and Wells Fargo (founded independently in 1852) remain iconic U.S. corporations to this day.

In 1857, John Butterfield, William Fargo, and five other investors formed the Overland Mail Company to service the new so-called “Southern” mail delivery route. Within the span of a single year, their crews pieced together existing routes; surveyed new sections of road; appropriated or constructed corrals, bridges, and stations; dug wells or harnessed spring water; stocked the stations with hay and feed for the 1,500 horses and mules they acquired; purchased 250 coaches; and hired 800 employees. Known as the Butterfield Trail, their route covered a distance of 2,795 miles. They met their target start date of 16 September 1858, and on that day service began out of St. Louis, Memphis, and San Francisco simultaneously. “Remember, boys,” Butterfield famously admonished his employees, “nothing in God’s earth must stop the United States mail!”

One-way trips on the Butterfield Trail cost passengers between $150 and $200 (around $3,000 by today’s standards) and took just under three weeks traveling day and night. Postage for a letter was ten cents, and freight cost a dollar per one hundred pounds for every one hundred miles. Brief stops were made only to change horses, repair broken axles, or consume two daily meals (at an extra cost of fifty cents each). The meals often consisted of hard, flat biscuits, beef jerky, and raw onions served in tin cups and washed down with unsweetened black coffee. Inverted pails or stumps often served as chairs. Wrote New York Herald correspondent Waterman L. Ormsby upon his arrival in San Francisco: “Safe and sound from all the threatened dangers of Indians, tropic suns, rattlesnakes, grizzly bears, stubborn mules, mustang horses, jerked beef, terrific mountain passes, fording rivers… here I am in San Francisco… I almost feel fresh enough to undertake it again.”

In any case, way stations—small rough-hewn wood, rock, or adobe buildings with adjacent corrals and a well or a water tank—were spaced an average of twenty miles apart. (Distances were...
George Hackler's detailed fieldwork informs us that the Rough and Ready Station, established in December 1858, was located at the gap between the Sleep- ing Lady Hills to the south and the Rough and Ready Hills to the north. Archaeological excavations revealed that the station was built of adobe on rock foundations with rock and adobe fireplaces and chimneys. Although what remains of the station is currently buried, the Butterfield Trail itself remains evident. Stations next in line heading west were Good- sight, Cooke's Spring, Mimbres, Los Ojos de Vaca, Soldier's Farewell, Barneý's, Mexican Springs, and Stein's Peak. Stein's Peak in Doubt- ful Canyon is about one mile from the Arizona border and was the last station in New Mexico. Each station name tells a story.

Imagine for just a moment traveling with the original Camino Real caravans, at the slow pace of walking alongside creaking wagons and carts for a twelve-mile day. Contrast that with the confinement of between six and nine tightly-packed passengers in a coach built for speed (4-5 miles an hour). In some ways, the freedom of movement afforded with the slower Camino Real compares favorably with travel on the Butterfield stages, which were fast, rough, dangerous, prone to tipping, and harbored passengers plagued by boredom, sleep deprivation, fear of the unknown, and motion sickness.

In 1873, one intrepid family made such a stagecoach trip. Beginning in New York, they eventually made their way from Santa Fe to Mesilla along much of the Camino Real route, and then on to Silver City along the Butterfield Trail. Catherine McCarty Antrim, her two sons and her second husband William Antrim relocated west to find work. Catherine busied herself running a boarding house. Her husband worked mostly in the mines. William Henry Antrim and his half-brother Josie attended the one-room schoolhouse. A few years later, after his mother died, young William Henry took the name presumed to have been given to him by his biological father, William H. Bonney. His forced return to Mesilla in 1881 as a young adult, and the aftermath of that stay, created quite a stir.

Life in the station office and corrals were located in the present-day “El Patio Bar,” which is owned and operated by descendants of the original Fountain family to this day. Passengers disembarked at what is now the “La Posta” restaurant. It provided a place to rest and exchange mail after fording the river, which was on the east side of La Mesilla in the 1850s. Notably, one of the adjacent lots housed the offices of a local express delivery company, the Catlett Express, owned by Samuel and Roy Bean, the latter also known as “the law west of the Pecos.” The Butterfield Route then continued its way up the valley to the town of Picacho, and from there made an angle westward to the Rough and Ready Station, which was situated some twenty miles from the river.

The first official station arrived in La Mesilla from the west near dusk on Christmas Eve, 1858. For days, local riders had reporting on the progress of the stage, and its arrival was greeted by a jubilant crowd. One can only wonder if farolitos (luminaries) adorned the plaza to greet and welcome the travelers.

Butterfield received a cable from President Buchanan after the first eastbound mail delivery arrived in St. Louis on 9 October 1858, proclaiming that it was “a glorious triumph for civilization and the Union. Settlements will soon follow the course of the road, and the East and West will be bound together by a chain of living Americans which can never be broken.”

The arrival of John Butterfield's tri-weekly Over- land Mail service created a burst of growth in El Paso, which served as the half-way point. Street names in central El Paso today indicate the ar- rival and departure routes of the stages and their destinations (Santa Fe, San Francisco, and San Antonio Streets). Indeed each of the towns and villages along the overland route benefited from the service by bringing mail, news, visitors, and passengers in need of locally-supplied provisions.
In the ranching community of northern New Mexico, grazing has long been traditional livelihood for my people. I am a fifth generation rancher, farmer, and hunter, and reside in the beautiful Mora Valley. Ranching is not what it used to be; once, it was not an uncommon means to feed and support our way of life. As the years go by, it gets tougher and tougher to support and feed my family with the cattle I still maintain. Nowadays, raising cattle is more of a hobby than a way of life. Only if someone runs a large herd and owns large tracts of pasture are they able to sell their cattle for profit on a large scale, and remain in the cattle business. I currently run a small herd of cattle and each year it is tough for me to make enough revenue to break even and support the cattle that I run. The challenges of purchasing feed and hauling water are things so many ranchers face on a day-to-day basis. The droughts seem to get more severe and the pasture needed to sustain a profitable herd seems farther and farther out of reach.

Currently, there is an effort across New Mexico to expand some public lands to protect them from off-road motorized vehicles and to keep industry from extracting resources from our pristine landscapes and watersheds. As a rancher and grazer of the land, I believe it is essential that we protect the landscape and mountainous watersheds that exist here in New Mexico. Many people travel into our state to see the majestic landscapes that New Mexico has to offer, and it is our duty and responsibility as New Mexicans to protect these areas.

From the Valle Vidal in northern New Mexico to the Sacramento Mountains in southern New Mexico and everything in between, these landscapes in New Mexico define who we are as a people. Traditional values run deep in New Mexico, and protecting these public lands seems like the right thing to do.

Our New Mexico Congressional delegation has the authority to draft legislation to protect these vast landscapes of New Mexico. The Pecos Wilderness, Columbine Hondo and Rio Chama Wilderness Study Areas, and Rio Grande del Norte National Conservation Area are landscapes we must protect for my grandchildren and their grandchildren. In northern New Mexico, Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, as well as Congressman Ben Ray Lujan, have the opportunity to introduce legislation that can protect the land and keep it the way it has been for so many generations. I urge you to protect this land for all future generations.

By Donald LaRan, Rancher in Northern New Mexico
While I only moved to New Mexico in 2004, my love affair with the Southwest began many years ago. In 1970 I volunteered for the US Army and was assigned to Biggs Field outside Fort Bliss for a year of Vietnamese language training. For nearly a year, before leaving for Vietnam, some buddies and I spent weekends exploring the extraordinary desert, grasslands and mountains that spread east and north of the base. The pristine beauty of the amazing west Texas and southern New Mexico landscape stayed with me through the ensuing decades and after retirement led me back to the Southwest.

The heart of that extraordinary landscape is Otero Mesa, a nearly untouched expanse of grasslands bounded on the east by the majestic Guadalupe Mountains and on the north by the magnificent Lincoln National Forest. Known to many as the Serengeti of the Southwest, Otero Mesa is home to large herds of Pronghorn, mule deer and rare bird species. A century ago it was the domain of the Mescalero who trekked across it from their encampments in the Sacramento Mountains. They and their predecessors from centuries before left a stunning record of their lives in rock art that embellishes Alamo and Wind mountains at the southern edge of Otero Mesa.

Since returning to New Mexico I have worked with the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance in its effort to preserve this unique land against development that continues to threaten the area. Those who have encountered the raw beauty of Otero Mesa, experienced the massive monsoon thunder storms that sweep across it in summer or marveled at the unmatched beauty of the wildflowers that color the whole mesa in Spring are determined to protect this land against oil and gas development and the emerging threat of open pit rare earth mining that continues to menace this precious place. In an all too rare alliance, hunters, ranchers, and people who simply love nature and the history of this special place, have come together to defend Otero Mesa.

Also since coming to New Mexico I have worked with other veterans in the area on a personal basis. Many of the veterans I have met have shared their experiences, especially in service. Vietnam and Korea were for many hellish places with memories of combat and suffering that continue to be open wounds that limit their careers and work, their family life and of course their health. Sadly, the current generation of veterans now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are even more heavily burdened, after multiple extended tours, having endured the same hellish conditions of war Vietnam or Korea era veterans faced for only one or at most two tours of duty.

Many of these veterans have told me that they have been able to find in the Southwest, and particularly in New Mexico, the kind of inner peace and solace they could not find elsewhere in America. They have found in the incredible vistas of New Mexico’s mountain framed horizons and the silence of its deserts, grasslands and forests a kind of harmony and order that has given them the time and space to rebuild their lives. This is the very specialness about New Mexico that left so strong an impression on me four decades ago.

Too often when we consider New Mexico’s natural resources, our minds turn to the physical exploitation of that wealth. We value the land for that which lies beneath it, the oil, the gas the minerals. Or for some, it is the grassland itself whose value lies in the potential for cattle grazing or for hunting the pronghorn and mule deer herds. Even those of us fighting to preserve Otero Mesa have tended to think in such terms, arguing as we do that Otero Mesa must be preserved so as to protect the vast water aquifer that lies below it, or to attract tourist dollars to the State.

We tend to overlook the more intrinsic value of Otero Mesa and other places of wonder that comprise our state. There is real value too in the simple, pristine beauty of this land, unadorned by oil rigs, open pit mining operations, or for that matter, tourist-oriented billboards. People in need of and in search for harmony in lives fractured by war, or personal tragedy, and even those for whom the pace of life at times gets to be overwhelming, understand this intrinsic value better than most. The veterans, the physically and mentally wounded or those simply seeking to re-order their lives, have a deeper insight regarding the value of this land.

Their insight and understanding is along the lines of that offered by Henry D. Thoreau over 170 years ago. In his essay “Walking,” he wrote: “The West of which I speak is but another name for the wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in wildness is the preservation of the world.”

As a veteran and newly minted New Mexican, whose love for New Mexico was inspired by Otero Mesa and who drew on memories of it for solace and strength during a tour in Vietnam and through ensuing decades, I am determined that this priceless treasure be preserved for future generations.
We are blessed in New Mexico to live in a place that is recognized as the “Land of Enchantment,” a place where skies are open and sunsets are indescribable. New Mexico is not alone in this regard. The West, as a whole, is unique because of its bounty of public lands and natural resources. Our great state, as others in the West, was settled on the premise of extraction – the idea of bettering lives and creating wealth by accessing the abundant natural resources of the West: our land, trees, and minerals. Over time, Western states have gained recognition for their beauty and natural wonder, attracting vast numbers of visitors. Tourists and locals alike love to see the wild places of the region; they are drawn to the monuments, parks, and the rugged outdoors. The West’s transformation into a destination for recreation has created a conflict between protecting the lands that make it so attractive, and responsibly managing the natural resources important for industries around the country.

Some aspects of our extraction history have a dark past. During the Cold War era, extensive uranium mining was done throughout the West, and specifically in New Mexico. The Pueblo of Laguna was home to the nation’s largest open pit uranium mine. Additionally, many large and small mines and mill sites were opened within the Navajo Nation. In fact, much of northwestern New Mexico, from the Grants Mineral Belt through the Navajo Nation, is speckled with hundreds of abandoned uranium mines. Workers from across the state came to these mines and mills, especially from the economically struggling communities of rural New Mexico.

Many of these individuals, unaware of the dangers of radiation exposure, unwittingly gave their health and even their lives to national efforts to develop uranium for a Cold War nuclear arsenal during the mid-20th century. Some Americans were sickened through exposure to aboveground atomic weapons tests, and others were exposed to heavy doses of radiation from working in the uranium mining industry. Families of workers were exposed to yellowcake (a concentrated uranium powder) coming home on the clothing of their loved ones, and to the mine waste itself. Some families even built homes out of uranium tailings materials, not realizing their toxicity. Water sources were contaminated, and the once-pristine landscapes became spotted by abandoned mines and contaminated tailings piles. All the while, as our national understanding of the dangers of radiation exposure developed, the federal government continued to fail to ensure that uranium workers and their families were safe from the hazards of exposure to radioactive materials. As a result, a generation of Americans who worked in the mines and lived near testing sites became sick with serious diseases like lung cancer and kidney disease, and many areas were left in a serious state of environmental degradation.

In the late ’70s my father, Stewart Udall, took up the fight for these workers. In 1979, my father filed 32 claims against the Department of Energy on behalf of widows of deceased Navajo uranium miners. In many ways, this marked the beginning of the fight for compensation for all uranium workers. I remember working those years with my whole family to collect information and push for recognition. It was a family effort to fight injustice, and for me, it continues to be a family priority. Ten years after the initial claims were filed, the original Radiation Exposure Compensation Act legislation was passed in the United States Congress, giving a level of restitution to...
sick miners and millers, as well as individuals downwind of nuclear tests. With the leadership of Senator Jeff Bingaman and our colleagues in both the House and Senate, the RECA legislation was later expanded upon through an amendment adopted in 2000.

Today, I carry on my father’s legacy to see to it that those who have suffered health consequence due to uranium mining are justly compensated. For many years, I have fought for a package of amendments to RECA that would include post-1971 uranium workers as qualified claimants. While the federal government ceased purchase of domestic uranium in 1971, implementation of federal work safety standards was slow and regulation of mines was poor. As a result, thousands of miners and millers were never made aware of the dangers of the yellowcake they handled on a regular basis. In recently conducted surveys, the majority of uranium workers from this time period report that they did not have showers or washbasins in the mines where they worked. They often took contaminated clothing home for laundering, unaware of the hazards and with no other option for cleaning. Many also report that ventilation to prevent unnecessary exposure was not provided in their work areas.

My family’s legacy doesn’t just extend to RECA and helping those who have suffered the health consequences associated with uranium mining. There are other improvements that need to be made to our mining industry. This includes the cleanup of abandoned mines, which is yet another side effect of uranium mining. New Mexico has hundreds of abandoned mines, which are in need of closure and cleanup. The cleanup of these mines in New Mexico and across the West is vital, and I will continue to work with members of Congress and federal agencies to ensure that the abandoned mines are not forgotten again. In the Senate Subcommittee on Children’s Health and Environmental Responsibility which I chair, we are working to ensure the agencies fulfill their cleanup responsibilities, or are held accountable for failing to do so.

The legacy of the 1872 Mining Law, which allows mining companies to extract minerals while paying little or no royalties and employing limited environmental safeguards, is long overdue for reform. For 135 years, the citizens of the United States have been giving away pieces of their property for practically nothing, without even receiving the basic courtesy of having the land left in the same condition it was found. For many years both as a member of the House of Representatives and the Senate, I have been a cosponsor of a bill that would make much-needed improvements to the 1872 law. These bills would protect sensitive environmental areas, and help clean up sites that have already been harmed.

For years, New Mexico has given its resources to our country. Not only have we given our land to be mined and developed, but too many citizens have given their health and the health of their families to the development of minerals. It is time we do the right thing and find a balanced approach to cleanup, compensation and conservation. 

The West’s transformation into a destination for recreation has created a conflict between protecting the lands that make it so attractive, and responsibly managing the natural resources important for industries around the country.
Mining has been part of the American character since our inception as a nation. It is also been at times a ruthless business, that has allowed owners and investors great profits and placed the health and safety of its miners in great peril. Currently, mining threatens the very fiber of the lands we love. Otero Mesa, our beloved grassland, is threatened yet again by a company that operates in Cameroon, a country riddled with government corruption. Activists in that country are demanding investigations into the equally corrupt ownership structure of this so-called mining operation known as Geovic.

Those who support the so-called "green future" of nuclear power should consider the consequences of uranium mining, which poisoned the groundwater of the Navajo Nation and gave cancer to many of the people who mined this "yellowcake." It is a stark reminder that nuclear power is far from green, and its costs in human suffering and contamination remain great and dramatically underreported. Those who enjoy gold jewelry should consider that the use of cyanide leach mining is causing great harm to the land, water, and wildlife. A single gold ring is the product of tons of rock and soil.

Yet with the price of gold at all-time highs, companies are enjoying great profits, which fund lobbying and naturally translate into increased support from elected officials like Senate Majority leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada). With such friends, mining companies enjoy the influence needed to continue to wreak havoc on the public lands of the West, with little or no cost to their bottom line. Few laws on the books display such largesse to industry. For so long, the public lands of the American West have been a welfare paradise for miners, oil and gas developers, loggers, and ranchers, lands to be exploited for easy, government-backed profits. In the late 1800s, despoliation of the land was the price to pay for expansion and to help defray the national debt. Few at the time would have understood that these so-called rugged individualists would turn their short-term government support into a multi-generational license to exploit our public lands and become both iconic and politically stealth both statewide and nationally.

In 1872, President Ulysses Grant signed into law the General Mining Act of 1872, designed to give incentives to the then-budding mining industry to go west and create jobs and raw materials for a growing America. Prior to 1872, the miners themselves largely determined mining laws, often adopted from Mexican mining laws that had preexisted in California. Miners would form governments in each new mining camp, which led to a lack of mining standards, violence, and little state or federal control.

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Following the end of the Civil War, many eastern representatives concerned about the national war debt looked west at these mines and saw them as a means of paying off the federal treasury. They also viewed the miners as squatters who were robbing the countries lands and legitimate means of paying down such debt. With the passing of legislation, certain standards were put in place. It set the price of the land claim to range $2.50 to $5.00 per acre. This price set by law has remained the same since 1872. According to Wikipedia, the Chaffee law of 1866 and the placer law of 1870 were combined into the General Mining Act of 1872. The mining law of 1866 had given discoverers rights to mining claims for $2 per acre.
to stake mining claims to extract gold, silver, cinnabar (the principal ore of mercury) and copper. When Congress passed the General Mining Act of 1872, the wording was changed to “or other valuable deposits,” giving greater scope to the law. The 1872 act also granted extra lateral rights to lode claims, and fixed the maximum size of lode claims as 1500 feet (457m) long and 600 feet (183m) wide.

So how does all this pork work on the ground? In an important story on mining written by Seattle Post-Intelligence reporters Robert McClure and Andrew Schneider, they walk us through the reality of this arcane mining law.

Today the legacy of this legislation is the poisioning of more than 16,000 miles of Western streams, tens of thousands of abandoned mines scarcing the landscape and many still emitting an orange-red acid runoff called “yellow-boy.” When a mine goes bankrupt and they do, taxpayers often are stuck with the cost of cleanup. In the 1990s, just three mines in Montana, Colorado and South Dakota cost more than $275 million.

Perhaps more disturbing is the reality that while miners and more realistically mega mining corporations have been permitted to blast, strip mine and dig away tracts of public lands, thus privatizing an area larger than the state of Connecticut. Mining interests have also walked away with minerals in excess of more than $11 billion during the nineties, even more in recent years, while contributing nothing to the US Treasury, which equates to zero dollars. As if that was not enough, congress deemed it necessary to give these corporations more than $823 million in tax breaks.

Currently federal officials must administer a law they say promotes the best use of millions of acres of federal land, even in sensitive places such as Top of the World, Arizona — a wide spot in the road 70 miles from Phoenix. There, a Canadian company called Cambior wants to dig copper where wild boars roam and the hedgehog cactus blooms brilliant red in the spring. The sulfuric acid, trucks, noise and dust from a 24-hour a day mine would be pumped down a shaft, then doused with 400 tons of sulfuric acid per day. To do this the company would reroute more than two miles of streams, some through canyons constructed of concrete like material. The Canadian firm and its subsidiary, Carlota Copper Co., will pay no more than $1700 for the public portion of the land it will mine. The company expects to mine some 478,000 tons of copper worth about $728 million in 1990s prices.

Even a federal lawyer trying to defend the government’s approval of the mine admitted, “The circumstances here include a proposed project that is so invasive to the forest that it would never be considered, less approved, were it not for the mining law of 1872.”

According to research prepared in 1964 by University of Colorado Professor Charles Wilkinson, prominent natural resources attorney John Sterling Boyden, who claimed to be representing the Hopi Tribe, was actually on the payroll of the Peabody Energy Company, a publically traded energy company based in the mid-west. Mr. Boyden was able to first convince the Navajo and then two years later the Hopi to sign an agreement that was clearly advantageous for Peabody.

The agreement entitled Peabody to both the mineral rights and most importantly; the aquifer, despite widespread opposition from tribal members and conservationists.

Black Mesa would become a watershed moment of mining, activism and the fight of First Nations for control of their lands. By 1968, Peabody Coal began strip-mining operations on lands leased from the Hopi and Navajo on Black Mesa. They would employ approximately 850 Native Americans, primarily Navajos. The sacred lands of Black Mesa became the folly of Peabody few laws on the books display such largesse to industry. For so long, the public lands of the American West have been a welfare paradise for miners, oil and gas developers, loggers, and ranchers, lands to be exploited for easy profits.
THE IMPACTS IN NEW MEXICO

It is clear that mining is destroying beautiful lands across the West, but in New Mexico it is especially apparent that the lust for coal, uranium, copper and other minerals has left emotional as well as physical scars.

Across New Mexico, the push is on to find new sources of uranium. Mt. Taylor, long a sacred site for many tribes in our state has been the focus of companies such as Neutron Energy Inc. and Urex Energy Corp who want to drill on thousands of acres of land near the town of San Mateo. They are proposing 279 holes as a first step and the construction of new roads for steeply sloped sites.

Yet it is Otero Mesa, which once again sees threats to its grasslands and mountainous integrity. The latest push comes from Geovic Mining Corporation. Geovic has a shady history with the government of Cameroon, Africa. Their only goal is to lure unsuspecting investors hungry for a big strike, rather than a long-term, sound, strategic plan for growth and minimizing environmental impact. That sadly seems to be the general operating principles of many mining interests worldwide and many countries bear far bigger environmental scars as a result.

In 1918, around the close of WWI, the area known as Carrizo Mountain, about 30 miles west of Shiprock, New Mexico was mined for vanadium. The mines where vanadium was extracted were lined with a soft yellow ore. Few had interest in uranium at that time. In the early 1920s, the first uranium extraction began on the Navajo Nation. By 1923, operations ceased when large and rich sources were discovered in the Belgian Congo. With the advent of Atomic weapons and the Cold War, mining exploded across the Southwestern United States. More than 15,000 people mined uranium or worked in processing mills since the 1940s. More than 13 million tons of uranium was mined by such companies as Kerr-McGee. Navajos who worked in these mines were generally paid low wages (80 to 90 cents an hour, with minimum wage at $1.25) and were not informed of the hazardous affects that uranium was having on their welfare. With few jobs available to them, many chose to take work at the mines.

For the Navajo miners, the incident of cancer was staggeringly high. Though both government officials and mining companies were fully aware of the dangers, they never informed the miners. In part, it was an experiment designed to see what the true effects of uranium would be. By the time miners began to have problems and met with physicians, they were diagnosed with lung cancer and had few options.

Perhaps no one was as outraged over this painful chapter in American history than former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall; it would become one of the major fights that framed his personal sense of environmental justice. The fight to compensate miners would span many years and for some of the miners they would not live to see justice. The United States Radiation Exposure Compensation Act was passed by congress on October 5, 1990. It resulted in a payment by the government to “miners, millers, and ore transporters.”

On April 12, 2011, US Senator Tom Udall led a bipartisan group in supporting Amendments to the Act. It would extend compensation to employees of mines and mills after December 31, 1971. It included many more amendments, and was introduced in the House by Congressman Ben Ray Lujan.

During the Bush Administration, efforts were made to soften regulation and expedite coal mining. Examples include allowing operators wider allowance to bury streams and mountain headwaters with mining waste. This was enacted to encourage more mountain top removal, which has been a common practice in the Appalachian region of the east. These operations process coal on site and generate toxic slurry that is stored in dammed impoundments. These impoundments, which are filled with billions of gallons of sludge, are often situated near communities. Besides the major flood potential, they have been directly linked to contamination of drinking water and tributaries. More than 1,000 feet of ridgelines are generally removed for such crude mining operations. More than seven percent of the Appalachian forests have been clear-cut for such mining and sometimes little... continued on page 23

...prominent natural resources attorney, John Sterling Boyden... was able to first convince the Navajo and two years later the Hopi to sign an agreement that was clearly advantageous to Peabody.
Public Health Impacts of Mining

By Tina Deines
Communications Coordinator

If anyone in the United States had faith that the American government would do all it could for its citizens, you’re on Amtrak.

So says Linda Evers, who has witnessed the phenomenon firsthand. In four years, she has seen her committee’s membership drop from 40s and 50s, while 14 percent cannot afford medical treatment or have received treatment in the past, 14 percent are unable to participate because of severe health conditions. Other ailments include problems related to the immune, digestive, and reproductive systems. Other ailments include problems related to bones; muscles; joints; skin; kidneys; and heart problems (49%), followed by eye, ear, nose and throat maladies, lung problems and brain conditions. Other ailments include problems related to bones, muscles, joints, skin, kidneys, and the immune, digestive, and reproductive systems.

All in all, 72 percent of post-'71 workers have some kind of federally recognized uranium-related medical condition. Fifty-nine percent of workers are either currently receiving medical treatment or have received treatment in the past, while 14 percent cannot afford medical treatment. Six percent of the sample, 69 individuals, are already deceased.

The group has lobbied numerous times in Washington, and bills were introduced in 2010. However, Evers is worried about the group’s lack of financial resources and how that will affect legislation.

Evers is fighting for compensation under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). Those who worked in the mines before 1971 qualify for federal aid under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). Those who worked in the mines after 1971 do not qualify for this aid, though they are just as sick.

Evers is the vice president and legislative spokesperson for the committee based in Grants, NM. The group started as a town hall meeting. The committee was formed after a meeting focusing on post-'71 workers’ experiences and impact study. I think that people like to see the government do its own study so that they can discover the truth of what we’re telling them, namely, that post-'71 miners are just as sick.

The health difference between mine workers and the general population is steep. Only two percent of the general population is fighting for compensation under RECA. Those who worked in the mines before 1971 qualify for federal aid under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). Those who worked in the mines after 1971 do not qualify for this aid, though they are just as sick.

Eighty percent described their health as “Fair/Poor” compared to nineteen percent of the general population. The most common ailments are heart problems (49%), followed by eye, ear, nose and throat problems, lung problems and brain conditions. Other ailments include problems related to bones, muscles, joints, skin, kidneys, and the immune, digestive, and reproductive systems. Other ailments include problems related to bones, muscles, joints, skin, kidneys, and the immune, digestive, and reproductive systems.

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The town has a high occurrence of reproductive ailments—30 percent of all female workers and 40 percent of all female spouses reported a miscarriage, still birth, and/or child with birth defects. Evers has had first-hand experience in dealing with birth defects. Like many post-’71 workers, she started in the mines right out of high school in 1976. In 1979 she became pregnant—she says her employer assured her there was no risk to the baby. After her baby was born with birth defects, she returned to work in the mines. In 1980 Evers had her second child, who was also born with defects—she underwent five major hip surgeries before the age of five and at 29 years old had a hip replacement surgery. Evers, who is now 41, also has health problems, including degenerative bone disease and arthritis.

“It’s really a pretty harsh reality at 41 to realize you’re already at the tail-end of your life,” she says.

One of the most maddening memories for Evers was the lack of proper safety equipment and policies. When she was working in the 1970s, Evers recalls, the company would put new vent fans right before safety inspectors—the fans would go back into storage right after the safety inspectors left. Half the time, however, safety inspectors did not even get out of their trucks, she says.

Both Evers and Lucero noted the lack of safety information given to workers over the years. For instance, both brought their work clothing home to wash along with their family’s clothing. According to the survey, 96 percent of workers said they were never instructed against laundering their work clothing at home. As a result, 95 percent laundered their work clothing with their family’s clothing. Lucero often brought leftovers from his lunch home for his children, which exposed them to radiation. One of his children now suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, and even his grandchildren have respiratory issues.

After mining ceased in the area, Evers says the companies washed their hands clean of the situation. “This town was destitute when the mines shut down,” she says. The area is still a Superfund site, with extensions until 2015. “It’s families, it’s land it’s water—it’s the whole package out here,” Evers says.

Now, however, the mining companies are coming back again, and both Lucero and Evers fear that the young people in the community will be drawn by the good pay these companies offer—the same incentive that once lured them into the mines.

“If I had known it was going to be like this I wouldn’t have taken the risk,” Lucero says.

Evers says this gives her more incentive to keep fighting, despite her deteriorating health. “Somebody has got to stand up for the young people because they’re oblivious.”

While the post-’71 miners don’t know whether they will ever see equal treatment by RECA or whether the mining companies will be allowed to move back into their community, Evers is sure about one thing: “There is no safe way to do uranium mining.”

More information:
http://www.post71exposure.org

“The air quality wasn’t very good. Never sent me to a doctor when I was over-exposed. Said fresh air would clean me out. Sounds foolish now when all us miners are getting lung and other cancers.”

“I didn’t know that I was harming my family’s lives by coming home in dirty unsafe clothes and even washing our clothes together. The company’s mistakes (have and) will cause family tragedy.”

“In 1980 I lost a child. It was born and then it died. In 1984, the same thing (happened). I delivered the baby and that same day the baby passed away in my arms. With both, I was five months pregnant and worked underground.”

“We never had formal safety meetings describing all the potential dangers we were being exposed to: Inhalation dangers, daily exposure to hi-grade uranium, inadequate ventilation, contaminated water and dangerous fumes.”

- Only 2 percent of the sample described their health as “Excellent/Very Good” compared to 42 percent of the general population.

- 80 percent described their health as “Fair/Poor” compared to 19 percent of the general population.

- All in all, 72 percent of post-’71 workers have some kind of federally recognized uranium-related medical condition.
The landscape around Questa, Red River, and Taos, like many parts of the West, is marked by a cultural history of mining. When hiking, even in what are now protected wilderness areas, it is not uncommon to come across prospecting pits, mine shafts, or old mining equipment. Many of these mines were built in fruitless search of silver or gold, and were abandoned within the first few years of discovery. This is not the case with the “Moly Mine,” a molybdenum mine which has become the largest mine in the Río Grande watershed. The mine is located off Highway 38 in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, four miles east of the Village of Questa and adjacent to the Red River, a waterway once identified as a blue-ribbon fishery. In this article, the mine will be referred to by its colloquial title, “Moly Mine,” although its official title is now the Chevron Mining Inc. – Questa Mine.

The Moly Mine has become part of the cultural and economic heritage and environmental legacy of the Village of Questa and surrounding areas. The mine has nearly a hundred years of history that reflects the transformation of the village of Questa from a primarily agricultural community into a mining town. Its complex and ironic story has many layers: cultural, economic, environmental, political, corporate, and now federal, to name just a few. Recognizing this complexity is essential in addressing the environmental and economic challenges now facing the mine, the Village of Questa, and the other affected communities of Northern NM.

On one hand, the mine has provided significant economic opportunities for local residents and funded infrastructure in the village of Questa, such as a local park, streetlights, and a new solar array. On the other hand, the mine has polluted the Red River and local groundwater and posed potential health risks both to employees, through the dangers of daily mining operations, and to local residents, through exposure to mine-related pollution of the surrounding water, air and land.

What is molybdenum and how is it used?
The answer to this question illuminates another layer of complexity in this story. Molybdenum (Mo), or “moly,” is a “refractory metallic element used...as an alloying agent in steel, cast iron, and superalloys to enhance hardenability, strength, toughness, and wear and corrosion resistance...” Through the simple acts of owning a car, cooking with cast iron or digging in my garden with gardening tools, I am reaping the benefits of molybdenum's steel-hardening characteristics. My lifestyle inherently creates a demand for these resources. As I enjoy the strength of my shovel and the usefulness of my car, I can't help wondering– did the molybdenum in these products come from “our” Moly Mine, from one of the three other major sources in the US, or from somewhere overseas? In imagining its source, I wonder: how does that mine affect local people and their homeland?

Moly Mine Timeline
In the mountains above the Red River, molybdenum was discovered and claims were purchased in the early part of the 20th century. Small-scale mining operations began in 1919, and soon after were purchased by the Molybdenum Corporation...
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of America (MCA), thus beginning the corporate storyline of this tale. In 1964, what had been a small operation grew into a full-fledged open pit mine, which was in operation until 1983. The Molybdenum Corporation of America became Molycorp Inc. in 1974. In 1977, Molycorp Inc. became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Union Oil of California (UNOCAL), and was purchased by Chevron Corporation in 2005. The Moly Mine became the “Chevron Mining Inc. - Questa Mine” in 2007, when Pittsburg & Midway Mining Co. and Molycorp Inc. merged to form Chevron Mining Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Chevron.

Mine Facts
The Moly Mine is an important economic force in the region and is the largest private employer in Taos County. Once employing over 750 people, the mine now employs less than 200, approximately half from Questa and half from other Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado towns. These are significant numbers for Taos County and the village of Questa in particular, which had a population of 1,804 according to the 2000 Census. Throughout the mine’s history, there have been temporary shutdowns and periods of big layoffs, most notably in 1986, when 750 workers were left idle.

The Moly Mine and mill operations occupy approximately six square miles of mountain terrain, and include a series of waste rock dumps, an open pit, an underground mine subsidence area, a tailings facility, and other facilities, roads and features. Additional tailings-ponds and facilities are located west of the mine on approximately three square miles in the village of Questa, and are connected to the mine site by a tailing slurry pipeline approximately eleven miles long. “Block caving” is the primary technique currently used by miners and engineers at the Moly Mine, a method of extracting large, low-grade ore bodies that can lead to problems with subsidence or groundwater contamination.

Environmental Impacts and Superfund Cleanup
The federal part of this story began when the Moly Mine became a Superfund site at the request of then-New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson on May 11, 2000. Just recently, in September 2011, the mine was placed on the EPA’s “National Priorities List” of Superfund sites. During the intervening 11-year period, investigations of site contamination were conducted and the long list of documents relating to a Superfund site were written and negotiations begun. In preparation for the cleanup, the EPA tested for 26 metals in and around Questa and the Molycorp mine site. The contamination of water and air are the two main focuses at the Moly Mine Superfund site. The Moly Mine is required by New Mexico state agencies and by the EPA to operate and dispose of waste in accordance with the Clean Water Act of 1972, to prevent seepage into ground water, and to stop contaminated dust from blowing across the village. Regardless, contaminated dust blowing from evaporated tailings ponds has caused health problems for residents. Seepage from tailings ponds into the groundwater in the Questa area has contaminated wells, making them unsafe for domestic use and, in some cases, even for irrigation of crops and use for livestock. A statement from the Water Quality Control Commission reads, “For several miles at and below Molycorp, the sheer volume of steady-state metal-loaded drainage seeping out of mine waste dumps and old underground workings overwhelms the [Red] river and has rendered it dead for at least eight miles.” Acid generating materials, acid mine drainage (AMD) and waste rock dumps are also of concern. AMD is created through the disturbance or exposure of sulfide-bearing rocks through mining activities. According to the Mineral Policy Center, “Acid mine drainage (AMD) is the number one environmental problem facing the mining industry. AMD is virtually impossible to reverse with existing technology once it starts.” Another problematic hazard is the instability of the waste rock piles at the mine.

Red River Restoration Group (R3Group)
The Red River Restoration Group (originally named Rio Colorado Reclamation Committee) was founded in 2002 to participate in the Superfund process established for the Moly Mine. The R3Group is partially funded by a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) from the Environmental Protection Agency to hire independent experts to help interpret and disseminate technical data and help the affected communities better understand the Superfund process. The group maintains an informative website and publishes newsletters to update affected communities about news related to the mine, the Superfund process and proceedings with the cleanup. The R3Group is working with the Village of Questa and local environmental groups, and forming a strong coalition to develop and implement a plan of action for the restoration of the Red River.

The R3Group is also involved in a collaborative educational initiative with the Questa Schools and the Questa Village Council. This educational initiative, set to begin in the spring of 2012, is designed to shape the Moly Mine reclamation process into a positive economic force in the local community. The goal of the initiative is to develop an immersive, holistic curriculum reflecting the economics, physical sciences, history and math related to the Moly Mine. Given the choice, many parents would prefer that their kids avoid the dangers of mining, but they also want the next generation to be able to find gainful employment in their hometown. By offering junior and senior high school students information about education and career paths related to the mine clean-up project slated for the next 30-40 years, the R3Group’s initiative prepares Questa high school graduates for job options in their hometown. Despite the dangers and risks the mine poses to the environment and human health, it is a part of the cultural heritage and pride of the area. The new collaborative educational initiative will acknowledge and examine the heritage and history of the mine, while shaping the story for an ecologically brighter and economically more stable future.

To learn more about the Moly Mine Superfund process or to get involved with the Red River restoration efforts visit www.r3group.org.
Each morning when I step out of my home at the edge of the Otero Mesa, just a few miles south of the New Mexico state line in Hudspeth County, Texas, I take in the view: the Guadalupe Mountains to the east, Wind Mountain and the other peaks of the Cornudas Range to the north and, to the south, just visible on the horizon, Texas’ Sierra Blanca Range. Increasingly, my appreciation for this Chihuahuan Desert landscape is heightened by a sense of its vulnerability. Two of the landmark formations here – Wind Mountain in New Mexico and the Sierra Blanca Range in Texas – are currently sites of exploratory drilling that could pave the way for major mining operations. In both cases, mining companies seek metals known as rare earth elements. Rare earths are, as one mining executive told me, the “vitamins of modern technology,” essential for our iPods, laptops, electric-car batteries and military equipment. China presently produces almost all of the world’s rare earths, and North American companies, are scrambling to develop local sources of the metals. Enter Geovic Mining Corp and its pursuit of metals from Wind Mountain.

At 7,280 feet, Wind Mountain presides over the grassland sanctuary of Otero Mesa and is the highest point in the Cornudas Range, a cluster of volcanic forms that bear pictographic evidence of a locus of prehistoric Native American life. Geovic Mining Corp began exploratory drilling on the north slope of Wind Mountain in early August. In September, Geovic geologist Garrett Mitchell said the drilling was moving at a rate of about one hole every two weeks. Geovic paused in its work in late September and early October, but test drilling is expected to continue through the winter to create a total of 10 holes, each with a maximum depth of 200 feet. Initial tests, Mitchell said, confirm the presence of rare earths at the site.

The Texas project is moving forward with far greater speed and scope, and is focused now on Round Top Mountain, a 5,732-foot peak in the Sierra Blanca Range. As of November 8, Texas Rare Earth Resources, the company pursuing the project, said it had completed about 17,000 feet of test drilling in 48 holes.

Most significantly, in recent months the company has indicated that it envisions… operations that could ultimately involve removal or leveling much of the Sierra Blanca Range.
Rare Earth Mining

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Geovic says the rare earths it seeks appear to be concentrated in a band around the base of Wind Mountain...

...It could involve an open pit. Initially, the pit would be the size of a football field, but it could move around to circle the base of the mountain.
Community Collaborations Address the Impacts of LEGACY MINES

By Dan Hintz, AmeriCorps OSM/VISTA with Gila Resources Information Project

The town of Silver City was founded in 1870 when prospectors discovered silver ore at Chloride Flats in the hills north of town. Unlike many other mining communities founded in the late nineteenth century, Silver City was not destined to become a ghost town; mining activity in the area continues today. Grant County is home to three active copper mines: Freeport-McMoRan’s Chino, Cobre, and Tyrone mines. These are some of the largest open-pit copper mines in the United States and the world. One hundred and forty years of mining has provided significant economic development to the region, but has also impacted the area’s groundwater, surface water, ecosystems, and wildlife. Today, citizens are partnering with non-profits and government agencies to address the environmental impacts of historical mining through water quality monitoring, education and outreach, and cleanup of legacy mine sites.

In addition to active mines, at least 15 legacy mine sites (sites shut down before 1977) exist in the 19-square mile Silver City watershed. There have been EPA cleanups at the most contaminated sites, but many legacy mine sites have been ignored by government agencies and residents alike. However, that is not the case for the San Vicente Tailings. This site is what remains from decades of ore processing at a mill called the Silver City Reduction Works that operated from the late 1800s until around 1940. Containing arsenic, lead, copper, iron and manganese, the rust-colored tailings pile has leached heavy metals into adjacent San Vicente Creek, the main drainage in the Silver City watershed. San Vicente Creek is a source of recharge for the aquifer Silver City uses for drinking water. Although two emergency actions have been conducted by EPA at the site to control contamination, heavy monsoon rains in recent summers caused the tailings to wash into a ditch, through a culvert and into San Vicente Creek. In addition to contaminating surface and groundwater, the San Vicente Tailings also pose an obstacle to the community’s redevelopment of the San Vicente River Walk, a greenway that links downtown Silver City with the golf course and other key destinations for recreational use.

In response to the pollution impacts from legacy mine sites, such as the San Vicente Tailings and non-point sources, citizens and organizations have joined forces with local and state government to take an active role in improving the health of San Vicente Creek and the Silver City watershed through citizens’ water quality monitoring, trail building, trash removal, and cleanup of legacy mine sites. Gila Resources Information Project (GRIP), a non-profit environmental organization based in Silver City, launched a volunteer water monitoring group called the Silver City Watershed Keepers (SCWK) in summer of 2010. The SCWK, in collaboration with the New Mexico Environment Department, meet quarterly to monitor the health of San Vicente Creek. At the same time, the monitoring program teaches volunteers about environmental issues related to water and fosters scientific literacy. This project began in response to public concern over leaching of contaminants from the San Vicente Tailings. The SCWK have raised awareness about the tailings pile and are also collecting valuable water quality data, such as pH, conductivity, and dissolved oxygen, to help track the health of San Vicente Creek. The SCWK development is sustained by the work of thirty volunteers, and the group plans to apply their monitoring model to other waterways within the watershed potentially impacted by legacy mine sites.

Consisting of local organizations and community members, the Grant County Trails Group has been working to develop the Silver City River Walk. A major hindrance in this process has been the inability to acquire the land directly downstream of the tailings pile for public use, due to liability issues. The River Walk trail is important to the group and community since it provides opportunities for recreation, outdoor education, and economic development. Youth Conservation Corps members and interested citizens work on the trails and pick up trash. Many local schools participate in outdoor education days along the creek.

Clean up and reclamation of the San Vicente Tailings site may soon be realized as part of a groundwater restoration plan developed by the Office of the Natural Resources Trustee. This is likely a one-time opportunity for cleanup of the site, and community collaboration has ensured that this project is a priority in the draft restoration plan. Through citizen science, partnership, development, and outreach and education, the community has shown that it can work together to address the impacts of legacy mines and improve the health of the Silver City watershed.
An Attitude of ABANDONMENT

By Nathan Newcomer, Associate Director

It’s bad enough that our country continues to operate under archaic laws such as the General Mining Law of 1872, but it gets worse if you look a little closer and find that the management structure put in place for hardrock mining has an abysmal track record.

Historically, the mining of hardrock minerals such as gold, lead, copper, silver, and uranium created economic incentive for exploring and settling the American West. However, when the ore was depleted, miners often left behind a legacy of abandoned mines and structures, contaminated land and water, and other safety hazards. Even in more recent times, since cleanup became mandatory, many parties responsible for hardrock mining sites have been liquidated through bankruptcy or otherwise dissolved. Under such circumstances, mining companies have left the burden of cleanup to the taxpayer.

In 2004, the Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Inspector General placed 63 hardrock mining sites on their National Priorities List, which would cost up to $7.8 billion to clean up. $2.4 billion of this cost was expected to be borne by taxpayers, rather than the parties responsible for the contamination. Two years later, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified that without mandated financial assurances, there is increasing risk that the American taxpayer will eventually have to assume financial responsibility for the entire cleanup cost.

Given that agencies like the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service have a key responsibility to ensure mining companies provide adequate financial assurances for cleanup based on sound reclamation plans and cost estimates, it is disturbing that the American public is still faced with cleanup after mining companies pull up stake and leave town.

The GAO estimates at least 161,000 abandoned hardrock mine sites exist in the 12 western states and Alaska, and that at least 33,000 of these mines had degraded the environment by contaminating surface water and groundwater. It is shocking to find out that the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey either do not routinely collect or do not consistently maintain data on the amount of hardrock minerals being produced on federal land.

The Office of the Inspector General for EPA acknowledges that mining causes significant environmental problems, and highlighted the fact that the projected operation and maintenance period for cleanup remedies ranges from 40 years to “in perpetuity.”

When I think of “in perpetuity” I think of Wilderness — not endless cleanup remedies at a mining site. It is beyond time for Congress to reform the 1872 Mining Law, because this attitude of abandonment is not one that we can live with forever.
of the forest are removed before large-scale blasting of the mountains begins. Former Deputy Secretary at the Department of the Interior, Stephen Griles, played an important role in shifting the agency away from environmental study to his personal goal of “centralizing and streamlining coal-mining permitting.” Bush appointed Griles to this sensitive position, despite the fact he had previously been a lobbyist for the National Mining Association. A close associate of Jack Abramoff, Griles was sentenced in 2008 for obstruction of justice.

The legacy of mining can be found the world over, from the diamond miners of South Africa, to the stories of trapped miners in the Soviet Union, Chili, China and of course here in the United States. Their personal stories of mine explosions or collapse define claustrophobic nightmares. The stories remain the same, good paying jobs in depressed communities or countries. Yet the consequences from mountain top removal in Appalachia, the pouring of cyanide across the west, the suffocating of rivers and the consistent air of corruption, makes legislation like the 1872 Mining Law still viable in this the 21st century. While mining should be evanescent, it continues to see record prices and profit.

It remains criminal that congress treats the exploitation of our natural heritage with such an insouciance attitude. Yet, today we continue to demand that such an antiquated law be re-

The latest push comes from Geovic Mining Corporation. Geovic has a shady history with the government of Cameroon. Their goal is to lure unsuspecting investors...

Compensation for miners and the changing of laws like the Mining Act of 1872, often take generations. That is the power of mythology, and sadly the power of greed.

Our mission, as always is to demand justice. Justice for miners, for taxpayers and for the lands, rivers, aquifers and wildlife that are sacrificed to uphold an outdated image of America; one of lands waiting to be settled, rather than the present reality of lands in dire need of preservation.

New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is Proud to Participate in the Central & Northern New Mexico Combined Federal Campaign

NOW CELEBRATING THEIR 50th ANNIVERSARY, THE COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN (CFC) allows charitable organizations to solicit contributions from employees of the Federal Government of the United States.

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is the world’s largest and most successful annual workplace charity campaign. Pledges made by employees, through their paychecks support tax-exempt charities determined by the IRS code 501(c)3. Charities that apply to receive funds through the CFC are required to submit to extensive review of their financial and governance practices prior to acceptance. This eligibility review has helped set standards for participation in giving. Of the one million charities operating in the United States today, it is estimated that fewer than 50,000, or 5%, meet or exceed these standards, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is proud to be one of them.

If you are eligible and interested in supporting New Mexico Wilderness Alliance through the Central & Northern New Mexico Combined Federal Campaign, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance’s Charity ID Number is 90043.
In the last issue of NMWild, we highlighted Congressman Pearce’s dangerous and radical vendetta against public lands and environmental causes. For months now, Mr. Pearce has been rallying local communities with calls to “take back” public lands from the federal government. These have often contained thinly-veiled appeals to violate federal laws and regulations, including telling local law enforcement they should not enforce rules on Forest Service lands. At publicity events, the Congress- man has come close to violating the law himself. Pearce’s inflammatory rhetoric seems to have struck a chord with many of his district’s local politicians. Shortly after a Pearce rally in August at which Catron County commissioners were reportedly present, several commissioners made the decision to bulldoze through a Forest Service roadless area near Reserve. On August 11th, 2011, they drove a bulldozer over thirteen miles in a remote river valley, crossing the San Francisco River a whopping forty seven times by the Forest Service’s count. The bulldozer was driven through a designated critical habitat area for a threatened species listed under the Endangered Species Act (the loach minnow) with the explicit consent and in the presence of the Catron County Sheriff.

Catron County may have violated a variety of laws, including trespass (both on federal land and private land), the Endangered Species Act (by causing damage in a designated Critical Habitat area), and the Clean Water Act (by pushing dredged material into the San Francisco River). All of these come with steep penalties if Catron County is found liable.

Yes, Catron County trespassed on private land, though private property rights are supposedly sacred to the very people who committed these acts. There are no records of requests by the affected landowners for the bulldozing, and some landowners are upset that it occurred on their property. It appears the officials of Catron County violated private property rights in the same way they defaced federal land. Neither the Forest Service nor the private landowners were notified that the bulldozing was planned.

When questioned by various federal agencies and environmental groups about the trespass, Catron County officials claimed the area falls under an obsolete law called RS 2477, which allows a county to claim jurisdiction over a route on federal land if it can show that the route has been continually maintained by the County since before 1976, when the RS 2477 rule was replaced by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Catron County has no such evidence and has never attempted to legally establish this claim, which must be done in court. Since the Forest Service has given the county documents showing the right of way was ceded to the federal government seventy years ago, the County must realize they would never win a legal battle, and instead have resorted to force to take matters into their own hands.

Catron County Commissioner Hugh B. McKee stated that the track has not been maintained by the County for many years, though continued maintenance and a “clear historical record” of local jurisdiction is a specific
Chaos erupts when land seizure is attempted by groups who lack the experience and resources necessary to manage land in a sustainable and reasonable way, causing serious damage to the environment.

Mr. Pearce has distanced himself slightly from the Catron County issue, but still resolutely defends his radical viewpoint, which at the very least bolstered the County’s resolve. While federal agencies have stated their opposition to the County’s actions, and the Army Corps of Engineers have sent a cease-and-desist letter to the County, no damages have yet been assessed. So far, Catron County remains penalty-free. Mr. McKeen has asked how it is possible that government agencies can do illicit things and never be held accountable. We ask the same question. How is it that Catron County or the officials who committed this act have not been held accountable?

We fervently hope that the federal agencies responsible for managing and protecting these lands refuse to allow this sort of activity to continue. Chaos erupts when land seizure is attempted by groups who lack the experience and resources necessary to manage land in a sustainable and reasonable way, causing serious damage to the environment. The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance has sent letters outlining our concern to all federal agencies involved, as well as New Mexico’s Congressional delegation, and we will continue to follow this situation.

New Mexico Wilderness Alliance’s Board Elections Transition to Online System

It’s that time of year again when the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance holds our annual Board of Directors election. To save time, money and paper, we are transitioning to an online voting system. If you are a member in good standing with the organization then you will be able to vote in this year’s election and you will receive an email notification from us in early February 2012 announcing the nominees.

If you would still prefer to vote my mail-in ballot you must notify the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance in writing that you intend to still vote through the mail. If you do not notify the organization then you will be automatically opted in to the online voting system.

Voting will begin on February 3rd, 2012 and end on March 16th, 2012.
Congressman Steve Pearce has been busy since our last issue of NMWild, in which we published an article outlining his campaign against public lands (See “Public Enemy #1,” NMWild Summer 2011). While he has never been a friend of the environmental movement, Mr. Pearce has ramped up his opposition to earth-friendly causes since the rise of the Tea Party in southern New Mexico, and with his appointment of anti-environment lobbyist Todd Willens as his Chief of Staff.

There is some evidence that federal agencies have been bending to either direct or indirect pressure from Congressman Pearce, though these same agencies are targets of Pearce’s anti-federal rhetoric. In September, Mr. Pearce helped organize a “thinning” event in the Lincoln National Forest, which is under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. This event was planned as a demonstration of the Forest Service’s supposed inability to regulate and manage its lands for fire; the idea was to let the local community take over the job by entering federal land and chopping down trees. Without a permit from the Forest Service, this action would have violated several federal laws, including trespass and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Mr. Pearce initially stated that he was willing to proceed with the event without a permit, essentially expressing his intent to violate federal law. At one point, the Otero County Sheriff even threatened to arrest any Forest Service employee on federal land who tried to interfere with the tree cutting. Shockingly, despite these threats and the obvious disregard for federal authority displayed by both Mr. Pearce and Otero County, the Forest Service agreed to issue a permit for the event at the last minute, rolling the required analysis under NEPA into another, already-finished environmental assessment. One acre of National Forest land was logged at the event.

Mr. Pearce also organized rallies and town-hall meetings in opposition to the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s proposal to place the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard on the Endangered Species List. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence that the lizard is gravely imperiled, as well as proof that oil and gas activity would barely be impacted by its listing, industry representatives backed resolutely by the Congressman falsely stated that listing the lizard would have disastrous consequences for Southeastern New Mexico’s economy. Their hyperbole caused undue panic in local communities.

Sadly, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced on December 1 that it will delay a decision on placing the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard on the Endangered Species List for an additional six months past the original December 14th deadline. While the lizard undoubtedly deserves federal protection, it will unfortunately remain at risk for the foreseeable future.

The Congressman has been unwavering in his opposition to environmental protection. The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance does not often meet with Mr. Pearce, but at our last meeting in mid-2011 he emphatically stated that he would never vote for any legislation designed to protect New Mexico’s public lands. He may claim to be proud of New Mexico’s open spaces, but he has promised not to let the federal government protect them on his watch. There is no doubt that countless acres of land have been protected through federal environmental laws. If Mr. Pearce was really concerned about open spaces, he would be pledging to expand federal protection.

Federal agencies manage land in accordance with federal laws duly passed by both houses of Congress. It is not the place of a single politician to be involved in agency decisions in the way Pearce has attempted. It is completely inappropriate for Mr. Pearce to try to influence agency rulemaking through fear-mongering and spreading false information to undermine agencies charged with making decisions based on the best science available. Further, Mr. Pearce has appeared willing to disregard federal laws, which is potentially a breach of his Oath of Office and his duties as a Unites States Congressman. Other politicians have been formally censured by the Congress for smaller transgressions. We hope the Congressman realizes his mistakes in time to rectify some of the damage his behavior has caused.
Journey to Yellowstone
BUILDING A VISION FOR WILD NEW MEXICO

By Demis Foster, Community Partnership Director

It is 30 degrees below zero in the Lamar Valley of Yellowstone National Park. Crystals of delicate ice drift gently—golden and shimmering across a sea of snow. My eyes are watering from the bright rays of sunlight and my heart knocks loudly in my chest. I don’t want to speak because I might jinx it. Will today be the day I see a wolf in the wild for the first time?

It had been 21 years since I was an intern for the Wolf Recovery Foundation in Boise, Idaho. My assignment was to give presentations to groups about the idea of a wolf reintroduction program in central Idaho and Yellowstone. It was 1989, and there were no resident wolves in Yellowstone. In fact wolves had not lived in Yellowstone since 1926 when the last reported wolf was killed in the park. Government-sponsored predator control programs initiated in the 1880s resulted in the near extermination of wolves from the Lower 48, including Yellowstone National Park. Wolves were trapped, shot from planes and snowmobiles, and hunted with dogs. Animal carcasses salted with strychnine were left out for wolves to eat. This practice killed millions of wolves and also eagles, ravens, foxes, bears, and other animals. And there I was—the bright-eyed daughter of a compassionate rancher who welcomed any wild creature to take refuge on our land—catapulted into the war on wolves.

I was naïve and quickly experienced the full shock of emotions that arise out of conversations about wolves. At the time, I wondered when we could bring this gift to our members. Because it is not only an offer to view wolves, otter, bear, bighorn sheep and bison—it is an invitation to be a part of this big vision for New Mexico—the vision of a landscape brimming with biodiversity and complexity and healthy and thriving populations of Mexican wolves.

Back in the Lamar Valley, our guide Meredith Taylor, an expert guide and naturalist, approached us with the offer of leading a trip to Yellowstone, we knew that we should bring this gift to our members. Because this is 20 years since the last reported wolf was killed in the park. Government-sponsored predator control programs initiated in the 1880s resulted in the near extermination of wolves from the Lower 48, including Yellowstone National Park. Wolves were trapped, shot from planes and snowmobiles, and hunted with dogs. Animal carcasses salted with strychnine were left out for wolves to eat. This practice killed millions of wolves and also eagles, ravens, foxes, bears, and other animals. And there I was—the bright-eyed daughter of a compassionate rancher who welcomed any wild creature to take refuge on our land—catapulted into the war on wolves.

I was naïve and quickly experienced the full shock of emotions that arise out of conversations about wolves. At the time, I wondered when we could bring this gift to our members. Because it is not only an offer to view wolves, otter, bear, bighorn sheep and bison—it is an invitation to be a part of this big vision for New Mexico—the vision of a landscape brimming with biodiversity and complexity and healthy and thriving populations of Mexican wolves.

Back in the Lamar Valley, our guide Meredith spots a biologist she knows with a high-powered scope out viewing something on a ridge. Our group quietly assembles outside of our van. You can see our collective breathing—an assembly of log—as we connect with our excited eyes and quiet whispers. What is it? What’s happening on that ridge? We stand almost still as Meredith speaks to the biologist then high-tails it for her scope.

We stare with binoculars and our naked eyes up the ridge—and there she is—a graceful solitary figure moving forward, then stopping, and moving back again. I look into the scope and see her clearly for the first time—a yearling wolf raising her head to howl—but no sound. I try to process in my mind if she is real. I can’t hear howls, but I can see her pacing. She is calling for her pack who has moved across a road that she will never cross. The biologist comforts us. “They will come back for her. They always do.” She howls for her pack until she lost her voice. In this moment all my connections fired into place. Things I had learned about wolf dynamics were true. Wolves are social animals that live in families just like we do. They cry out when they are left behind. They mourn the loss of companionship and they worry.

So there she was, that young wolf—a vision of restored hope. And my personal journey with wolves that began 20 years ago had come...
Journey to Yellowstone

continued from page 28

full circle. My dream of seeing a wolf in the wild of Yellowstone had come true. And the most profound and intimate part of this moment was that it was shared with others also experiencing it for the first time.

After the initial excitement of that first wolf sighting, we also saw moose, coyotes, foxes, pine martens, river otters, bighorn sheep, birds, elk and bison. We also saw more wolves. This time they were closer and in full view. We watched the entire Blacktail pack lounging and playing together before heading closely towards a nervous herd of bison and then making their way down the backside of the ridge.

A few days into our trip to Yellowstone, I noticed a change in our group. We stopped worrying about the mechanics of our snowshoes or what time it was. We were more relaxed and focused on the moment. Every night at dinner we would excitedly add animals to our “species list” and talk about everything we encountered that day. We became more adventurous. Some of us even walked out across ice and slippery rocks for a soak in the Boiling River. We were living in the moment, and by doing so, became more connected to wildness and each other.

On the last day, we were told that the young female was re-united with her pack and with that happy news, we took the old road out of Yellowstone towards the river and up to Montana. A heavy snow was falling and we watched bison swinging their massive heads in an ancient ritual to find grass buried beneath deep drifts of snow. I felt perfectly content in that moment. This is the gift of spending time in wilderness. Time falls away.

Grass buried beneath deep drifts of snow. I felt perfectly content in that moment. This is the gift of spending time in wilderness. Time falls away.

Our intention in offering a trip to Yellowstone is to give people an experience of a lifetime while energizing and inspiring them to keep the dream of the wild New Mexico alive—the dream of one day knowing that places like the wild Gila could be like Yellowstone—a thriving and diverse landscape—protected and revered for all that is truly wild.
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New Mexico Educators Federal Credit Union maintains the safety and soundness principles and values that have been part of the international credit union movement for over two hundred years. BauerFinancial has ranked New Mexico Educators Federal Credit Union as five stars for financial strength and security. You can join New Mexico Educators Federal Credit Union by visiting any of their branch offices (location information at nmefcu.org) or by calling 888-7753 (800-347-2838 from outside the Albuquerque area) Monday through Saturday.
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