Among the many threats to air, water, wildlife and public lands in the last six months, perhaps the most critical one we are fighting is an unprecedented executive order from President Trump calling for the review of 27 national monuments, including New Mexico’s Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks. This is a deeply cynical move to undermine the clear wishes of an overwhelming majority of New Mexicans to protect these iconic landscapes after more than a decade of discussion. And while I’m skeptical of the integrity of the process, it has been wonderful to see the response from New Mexicans.

Thanks to you, nearly 100,000 comments in support of our New Mexico monuments were submitted to the Department of Interior during the 60-day comment period. Secretary Zinke is planning a visit very soon and we are ready to fill the streets wherever he may go to tell him to keep his hands off. One of the bright spots, I suppose, is they have unwittingly prodded a sleeping bear. It has been inspiring to see old coalitions spring back into action and new supporters rise. We should know whether our voices were heard by August 24, which is when Secretary Zinke will make a recommendation to the president.

This issue of Wildology brings you some much-needed upbeat news:

A stunning court ruling in favor of Mexican gray wolves may change the face of Endangered Species protection nationwide.

You’ll read about a new partnership we’ve struck with the US Forest Service to hire six seasonal wilderness rangers.

Staff member Nathan Newcomer writes a tribute to volunteer Richard Mahler, who tragically left us far too soon, but who died doing what he most loved in his favorite place.

We highlight an uplifting partnership with Catholic Charities to take school-age refugees into the wilderness. There they learn about the natural world and our unique public lands at the same time they are learning about citizenship and English.

We include two pieces that review our need for and obligation to wild places for our very survival and the physical and therapeutic benefits of wilderness. Doctor’s prescription for “forest bathing,” anyone?

I hope to see you on the trail and on the river. In solidarity for the wild,

Sincerely,

Mark Allison, Executive Director

Whether in the faces of delighted children, or an inspiring vista, or a walk with friends, wilderness lifts us up and supports our spirits.
This May through September, six new Wilderness Rangers are afoot across wilderness areas in northwestern New Mexico through a partnership between the Forest Service and New Mexico Wild. Ranger pairs will be working in the Sandia Mountain, Manzano Mountain, Apache Kid and Withington wilderness areas on the Cibola National Forest; the Chama River Canyon and San Pedro Parks wilderness areas on the Santa Fe National Forest; and the Wheeler Peak, Columbine-Hondo and Latir Peak wilderness areas on the Carson National Forest.

The rangers will be conducting wilderness character monitoring, trails assessment, trail clearing, campsite rehabilitation, public outreach and wilderness education. Their work provides valuable information on current wilderness conditions while enhancing public safety and contributing to positive wilderness experiences for visitors.

Volunteer engagement is an integral aspect of this partnership. Most volunteer projects will focus on monitoring visitor use, but could also include campsite and trail rehabilitation, signage, trash clean-up and other types of monitoring efforts. Public involvement helps leverage scarce federal dollars, helps address the backlog of maintenance and improvement needs and instills a sense of pride and stewardship for these public lands.

If you would like to volunteer in one of the wilderness areas listed above, please contact joelle@nmwild.org or call 505-843-8696 ext. 110 for more information. And, if you see these rangers on the trail, please take a moment to say hello!
We were recently astonished to learn that a federal judge threw out the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) flawed ‘McKittrick Policy’ under which the government only prosecuted killers of animals on the Endangered Species Act’s list when it could prove the killer knew the exact biological identity of the species s/he was harming. The decision came as the result of a challenge brought by New Mexico Wild and WildEarth Guardians in 2013. This internal DOJ policy to arbitrarily limit its own prosecutorial discretion was an abdication of its enforcement responsibilities, resulting in dozens of Mexican gray wolves being illegally shot without penalty. This victory was essential to the Mexican gray wolf recovery effort, and has far-reaching implications nationwide for endangered species. We took on the federal government – and won!

“The Court’s ruling is a victory for endangered species across the country, but especially for those like the Mexican gray wolf, whose highest cause of mortality is illegal killing,” said Judy Calman, staff attorney for the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. “This decision is an affirmation of Congress’s intent that endangered species recovery should be the highest priority for federal agencies, and that people who harm listed species should be held accountable under the law.”

Human Health & Wildlands

Human beings developed for millennia in partnership with specific places. Our genetic code carries the information of our total interdependence on the local breezes and winds, animals, plants, watersheds, weather patterns, seasons, solar and lunar cycles. Our survival depended on a deep sense of embeddedness, of beings in direct relationship with all aspects of the places we inhabited.

The Industrial Age brought a different sensibility. It has led to a techno-rational post-modern world that dismisses our embodiment as it celebrates a cerebral, digital realm of dis-memberment. We fail to re-member our sacred relationships with each other and with the places we live. This domination of the mental over the physical, spiritual and emotional denies and denigrates our interdependence on other forms of life. The techno-rational world, which dominates contemporary life, serves the illusion that human beings are divorced from natural systems, are somehow superior to them, and therefore have the right to dominate or use them for short-term economic gain. This does not address our soulful humanity. The result is that we do not make connections between our own health and the health of the water, soil and air around us. The consequences—to us and to all life—are grave.

Emotional and behavioral healthcare specialists have made a connection between time in nature away from the glow of the screen (phones, computers, video games, etc.) and increased brain function. Time in the wilderness or outdoors has also shown to decrease feelings of loneliness, disconnection, anxiety and to increase a sense of well-being and connectedness. “Nature deficit disorder” has been used as a term to describe this.

Here in the fragile ecosystems of northern New Mexico we can easily witness the damage, yet we can also participate in the repair. We can participate in reciprocal relationships and become stewards, protectors, advocates and activists for the natural world, which is a way of standing up for our own humanity. We can care for the local water systems. We can protect local wildlife and wildlands, for without wilderness we forfeit our heritage as human beings.

We are nature—not only domesticated nature, but wild nature. It lives in our psyches and our souls. We cannot survive as human beings without it. This is not just our human history, our past, but it is also our future. We are fortunate to be surrounded by the natural beauty of New Mexico. However, it requires human effort to protect and sustain this beauty. Let us connect the dots even more clearly and understand the interdependence and interrelationships between human health and wilderness.

Ann Filemyr, Ph.D.
Vice President of Academic Affairs & Dean of Southwestern College and Director of the Transformational Ecopsychology Certificate.

A Win for Wolves
“See the ocean!” “We see all the America!” and “I love this mountain!” shouted the children as they viewed the desert horizon and sprawl of the city from the Sandia Crest. In June, a unique partnership between New Mexico Wild and the Catholic Charities Refugee Youth Mentoring Program (RYMP) brought refugee youth to local wilderness areas. Through the Refugee Wilderness Explorers camp, a series of guided day hikes took place in the Sandia Mountain and Manzano Mountain Wildernesses. The children, ages seven to sixteen, have relocated to Albuquerque with their families after being forced to leave their home countries.

To encourage engagement during their time hiking, the kids were equipped with custom field activity guides designed to connect them with each outdoor setting and to teach them about wilderness, while helping them develop their English language skills. After completing the activities, the children earned custom patches featuring New Mexico species, including the red-tailed hawk, painted lady butterfly, Gila monster and the critically-endangered Mexican gray wolf.

Danielle Hernandez, Catholic Charities RYMP Coordinator, speaks to the importance of having these families feel connected to New Mexico as their home: “You can be resettled anywhere, but as far as making a place your home, it can be very difficult. For most people that arrive in the U.S. they envision a place that looks like New York City, and anything less is a letdown at first. A lot of their first encounters with their new homes, especially socially—with a lot of people not accepting refugees or immigrants—can make their new home seem ugly or unwelcoming. Connecting them to places like wilderness can help them find the beauty in places that look drastically different than their home countries or other idyllic visions of refugee resettlement.”

Due to the ongoing conflicts in their home countries, many refugee individuals suffer from some form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In research done with veterans, contact with nature improved mental health and helped curb the damaging effects of PTSD. For patients suffering from PTSD, health practitioners will prescribe wilderness therapy, adventure therapy, or what some call vitamin “N” (for Nature) to help them cope with their symptoms. For the Refugee Wilderness Explorers, camp provides a healthy dose of vitamin “N” while getting them out to the special wild places near their new home.

As the camp progressed, the ability of nature to subtly and gently facilitate relaxation, rejuvenation, and play became obvious. At the beginning of the camp, the kids were quiet and very shy to explore and interact with their surroundings. Week by week they became more comfortable with the outdoors and each other, eager to run off the trail, touch things and shout observations in their native languages and in English. The forest quickly became a playground. What better way to get used to a new place?

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Bringing these kids out to wilderness not only helps them assimilate, it also strengthens our communities by building a next generation with an appreciation for natural places. The future of our wild lands depends upon engagement by younger generations. There are a lot of kids out there and it’s going to take all of them to keep these places protected.

The camp has received a positive response from the refugee families, the Albuquerque community and beyond, even grabbing a bit of local and national media attention. A reposted article on Senator Martin Heinrich’s Facebook page included the caption, “What an amazing program to welcome refugees to New Mexico. Our national parks and public lands are open to all and offer endless opportunities for kids to explore, learn, and play.”

As a new school year quickly approaches, we are sad to see the camp end, but hope to find continued support for hikes to our local wild places during the school year, in order to keep the kids engaged in the outdoors until the next summer season. The kids are addicted, as well. During the end-of-camp celebration at the Albuquerque Center for Peace & Justice, Ghadir (age 11) watched a slideshow of pictures taken by the children while in the mountains. She turned to me and asked with wide eyes, “Miss Endion, when are we going out to the mountain next?”

Endion Schichtel
Wildology and the Healing Powers of Nature

Surely it is a love of nature, along with an affinity for wildness, that attracts supporters to New Mexico Wild. But what drives that love? And why do we feel so good when we’re in the mountains or near water? Turns out scientists at the Greater Good Science Center at the University of Southern California (USC) offer some insight here. They and others have documented how spending time in nature can increase feelings of awe, wonder, belonging, community and even empathy and creativity. No wonder we humans enjoy it so much!

The list of physical benefits being researched is even longer and it’s noteworthy that in Japan you can now get a doctor’s prescription for “forest bathing.” Yes, the idea is to consciously immerse one’s senses in nature and thereby benefit body, mind, spirit and soul. And taking it further, USC is conducting research on the actual healing power of nature, not just its ability to make us feel good. Specifically, they are exploring how time in nature can alleviate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in veterans.

We authors have certainly experienced nature as healer. Larry escaped from an abusive childhood into the wilds of nature and credits that with the literal saving of his life. For Cheryl, the healing power of nature became evident during her first wilderness solo. Her initial fears of being alone transformed into a deeper understanding of nature – that it can hold each of us and help us let go of old stories that no longer serve us.

The gratitude we feel for these gifts led us to help others experience healing and wholeness through their love of nature.

Member Profile: A Tribute to Richard Mahler

For the past 15 years, I often reflect and think about my time spent working to protect New Mexico’s wildest public lands. For me, it is extraordinarily humbling to have the privilege to wake up every day, knowing that I get to spend my time on this earth as someone who earns a living dedicated to protecting our beloved Gila National Forest, and all of New Mexico’s wildest public lands.

My job affords me the opportunity to not only meet, but also to develop meaningful relationships with so many wonderful people along the way. These individuals are just as passionate about working to protect our public lands as I am. They believe that future generations should have the same opportunity that we have to experience and appreciate wild lands.

There has been no one more dedicated to this ideal and mission than my dear friend, Richard Mahler, who suddenly passed away this past March, while hiking near the San Francisco River. When I first moved to Silver City, New Mexico in the summer of 2013, Richard was one of the first people I met. A well-esteemed author, editor, journalist, activist, dancer, and connoisseur of all things kind, Richard was astonishingly gracious in everything that he touched and did. In particular, Richard was very enthusiastic to learn that he could play a vital role in our collective effort to help protect more of the Gila National Forest as Wilderness, and to preserve our rivers as Wild & Scenic.

We are privileged to hear, after a hike or a multiday camping trip, stories of people coming to see themselves and the world differently after intentional time in nature. They speak of listening to the water sing in a creek and now see how a spirit of letting go can help them live with more ease. Or they describe sitting with a tree and feeling cradled by roots below, and are now inspired to bring that feeling of being embraced and held and supported into their everyday life.

With this background, let’s take another look at how we might characterize who you and we—as supporters of New Mexico Wild—truly are. In addition to being lovers of nature, we are in fact lovers and guardians of awe, wonder and creativity. May we all go passionately forth in loving and protecting the wild, and in exploring the wilderness within and without. As many indigenous cultures posit, remember that you are helping preserve access to this healing for the next seven generations.

Larry Glover and Cheryl Slover-Linett

Larry Glover is the founder of Wild Resiliency Awakening. Cheryl Slover-Linett is the Executive Director of Lead Feather. Together they offer day-long and multiday wilderness programs that help people connect to themselves, each other and nature more deeply. For more information please see wildresiliencyblog.com and leadfeather.org

Story continued on page 6.
In our first get-together, he had the ingenious idea to install motion-sensor-infrared wildlife cameras to document wildlife species in areas that we were surveying for potential new protections. Of course, this idea appealed to me immensely, as both Richard and I joked that retrieving the cameras in the field was akin to a child opening presents on Christmas day.

The camera captured hulking mountain lions, innumerable and various shades of golden, brown, cinnamon, and black bears, foraging mule deer, bugling elk, clutches of coatimundi, turkey, owls, raptors, and all the small critters in-between. Over the course of four years, Richard and I installed these cameras in very remote locations off the beaten path, and we logged some of the most spectacular images that I have ever seen. There were so many stories and stunning scenes in the Gila that Richard and I shared together. He was a dear friend and, whenever I walk in the Gila National Forest I know that his spirit will be there by my side every step of the way, encouraging me to keep working to protect this beautiful and wild landscape. I miss you, compadre, and will always love you.

Nathan Newcomer

EVENTS: You are invited! Go to nmwild/events for more details

August 20 • Author Phil Connors in Santa Fe
Join us at Collected Works Books in Santa Fe, where author and conservationist Phil Connors will talk about his time as a fire lookout in the Gila Wilderness, as well as important conservation issues in the Gila. He will also do a reading from his book, Fire Season. The program begins at 11:00 AM and ends at 12:00 PM.

September 10 • Rio Grande Paddle
Join New Mexico Wild and Quiet Waters Paddling to explore the primitive aspects of the lifeline of New Mexico from Algodones to Corrales. Our experienced guides will provide history and discuss important issues about this gorgeous stretch of the Rio Grande River. Enjoy the fall colors along the bosque! We meet at the Quiet Waters office in Bernalillo at 9:30 AM, and will be off the river by 2 PM.

September 23 • ASPENS! Living Wisdom for Navigating Turbulent Times
This retreat day presented by Lead Feather includes light hiking intermixed with structured exercises and personal time spent in the aspens. We’ll integrate ecology, poetry, and mythology with insights from neurobiology and Eco-psychology. It will take place on Santa Fe National Forest near Cowles, north of the Village of Pecos. 9:30 AM to 4:00 PM, $85 per person, maximum of 16. A free one-year membership to the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is included (or we will contribute $35 on your behalf).

September 27-28 • Grand Canyon Slide Show (Albuquerque & Santa Fe)
Elyssa Shalla and Matt Jenkins are backcountry rangers for Grand Canyon National Park, specializing in resource education and resource protection, respectively. In the winter of 2015-16 the couple completed a 700-mile journey hiking the length of the Grand Canyon. The program will be offered twice, once in Albuquerque at the Guild Cinema at 6:00 PM on the 27th, and then in Santa Fe at the Jean Cocteau Cinema at 6:00 PM on the 28th.

October 13 • Wilderness: Land Untrammeled Art Exhibit
Come to the opening night of a special benefit art exhibit sponsored by Collective Perception at Page Coleman Gallery in Albuquerque. This exhibit will offer the work of fifty New Mexico visual artists (each artist showing a single piece). Twenty original short poems by local writers will also be displayed. A portion of art sales proceeds will support the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. Join us from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM for snacks, refreshments, and great art!

October 6 • NM Wild Wilderness Costume Ball
Howl with us at this fun celebration! Come dressed as your favorite endangered species, or whatever inspires you. Music, food, a silent auction, and other fun at Hotel Andaluz, Albuquerque. Watch our website for more details!