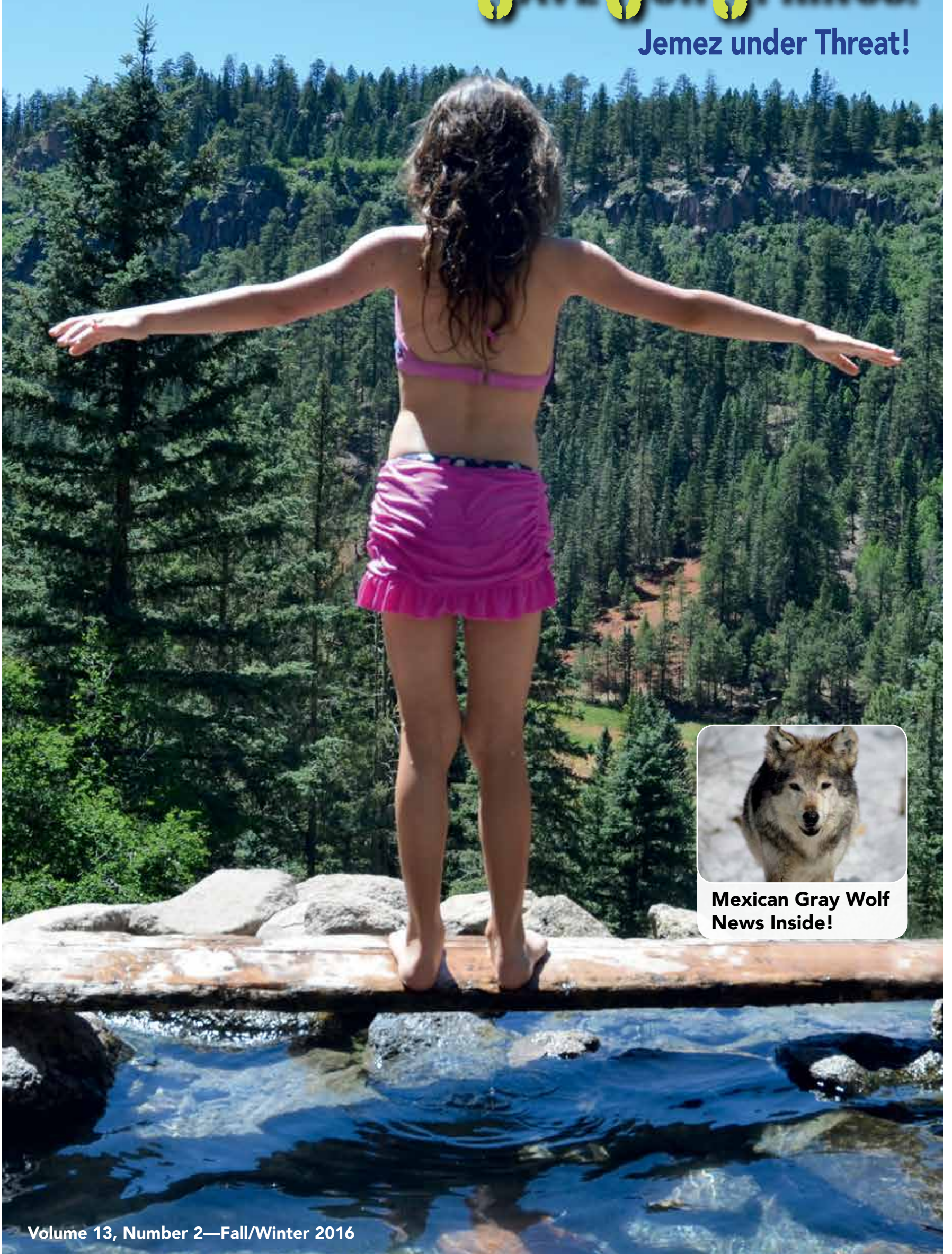


# New Mexico **WILD!**

The Bi-annual Publication of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

## **SAVE OUR SPRINGS:**

**Jemez under Threat!**



**Mexican Gray Wolf  
News Inside!**



New Mexico **WILD!**

The Bi-annual Publication of the  
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance  
**Fall/Winter 2016**

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ABOVE: Gambel oaks. Photo: James A. Morris  
COVER: The San Antonio hot springs and others like it in the Jemez Mountains could be threatened by geothermal energy production. Photo: Mark Allison; Inset Photo: Rebecca Bose, Wolf Conservation Center

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



By Mark Allison, Executive Director



A recent study published in *Current Biology* found that the world’s wild places are undergoing “catastrophic decline” and that development has resulted in the loss of approximately 10 percent of wilderness around the globe in the past 20 years. The authors warn that without serious efforts to protect what is left, Earth faces a future with only “tiny remnants” of wild places.

Another study, the “Disappearing West” project conducted by the Center for American Progress and the Conservation Science Partners, determined that between 2001 and 2011, about 4,300 square miles of natural areas in 11 states disappeared because of road construction, energy development and agricultural and urban sprawl. That’s an area slightly larger than Yellowstone National Park. New Mexico alone lost 319 square miles of natural areas during this period.

According to a third recent study by the U.S. Geological Survey, Northern Arizona University and the University of New Mexico, increasing temperatures and decreasing precipitation associated with climate change will result in massive disruptions to wildlife habitat. In the Southwest, some reptile species may lose between 25 percent and 72 percent of their range, and numerous bird species, including the pygmy nuthatch and Williamson’s sapsucker, could lose up to 85 percent of their range.

Yet another study, published in the journal *Science*, found that the number of different animal and plant species across the globe has fallen below a “safe” level identified by biologists due to development and habitat loss. The authors make a point to note that “safety” also refers to humans since “biodiversity supports a number of functions within ecosystems, things like pollination, nutrient cycling, soil erosion control, (and) maintenance of water quality” – things humans benefit from and need to survive. The study notes central North America now has less than 60 percent of its original biodiversity intact.

Enough, you say! Uncle!

I share these not to depress or discourage but to underscore the cumulative effect of human activity on the landscape and on the species with which we share this planet. I share these to underscore why we do what we do and why the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance was formed almost 20 years ago and why we keep at it.

The lessons of these studies are clear. We need to protect the rapidly disappearing wild places that are left before they are lost to us and posterity forever. Climate change means that having large, un-fragmented core areas of lands protected from development is more important than ever. Ensuring areas of conservation continuity and connectivity will be essential to the very survival of species as they attempt to adapt to rapid changes to habitat.

But don’t despair—do something about it!

If you love our public lands, consider our breathtaking landscapes inseparable from your quality of life or can’t live without Wilderness, we need your help. If you derive peace and joy from hiking, backpacking, bird watching, riding horses, snowshoeing, skiing, kayaking, hunting or fishing, you’re one of our kind. If you care about the health of our watersheds, wildlife habitat and leaving generations that come after us with a future that includes wild places, please lend us your voice. If you intuitively understand the connection between our natural and cultural landscapes, value traditional uses and relationships with the land and celebrate our state’s proud history of land conservation, we’d like you to join us.

We know that the vast majority of New Mexicans share these values. Caring is a good and necessary start—but it isn’t enough.

Those hostile to Wilderness, conservation, and even the very idea of public lands are loud and mobilized. I can tell you that they are showing up to Forest Service planning meetings, they are calling the offices of our elected officials, and they are making their voices heard.

If we are going to rise to the challenges outlined above, we need to grow, diversify and better engage our community of supporters. And we need to cultivate the next genera-

# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



tion of stewards by more effectively reaching out and involving our young people. At the same time—right now—it’s up to all of us to do our part to stand up for these places that we hold dear. Care, yes – and do something about it! I hope you enjoy the articles in the following pages, which highlight some of our efforts to protect New Mexico’s remaining wild places.

I hope you’ll visit our website or give us a call to see how you can make a difference.

See you on the trail ... and at the rally, and the hearing, and the planning meeting, and the ...

Enjoy!

Mark Allison, Executive Director

## New Mexico Wilderness Alliance Values Statement

More than two decades ago, our founders articulated a conservation ethic in the state of New Mexico aligned with our nation’s landmark Wilderness Act of 1964. Dedicated to the rights and the value of citizen involvement, this organization began listening to and amplifying that citizen voice to protect our increasingly rare wild places within our public lands.

To this day we remain exclusively dedicated to protecting Wilderness. We ask citizens to join us in this effort to preserve what is ours as a nation, that which should never be diminished by the desires of commerce or thoughtless action. We accomplish this goal by pursuing our ends through the democratic process.

We each live but a short time and we cannot forget these lands that others kept open for us. It is for this experience of full life on Earth we rededicate ourselves every day, trusting Wilderness will remain widely consecrated by citizens as theirs to conserve.

Beyond our human intentions lies the evidence that Wilderness belongs. The landscapes, both majestic and subtle, give home and sustenance to this earth’s unfathomable diversity. Within a human life span, it lives. And beyond a human life span it lives, moving to its own timepiece, if we only allow it.

Just as freedom is every American’s birthright so too is Wilderness. We know they are inseparable. We hold this truth dearly as we preserve Wilderness from generation to generation for us, for all species and for its own sake.

Correction: In our Spring/Summer 2016 issue, page 26, we unintentionally credited the incorrect author of the UNM Wilderness Alliance Chapter article. The correct author should be Marie Westover.

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The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is dedicated to the protection, restoration, and continued respect of New Mexico’s wildlands and Wilderness areas.

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#### What is Wilderness?

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

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# WILDERNESS FAQs



Pecos Wilderness boundary sign. Photo: Vincent Franzen, [www.ultrazona.com](http://www.ultrazona.com)



**WHAT IS A WILDERNESS AREA?** The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as “an area where the earth and community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” and “an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.” There are currently 765 designated Wilderness areas, totaling 109,129,657 acres, or about 4.5 percent of the area of the United States.



**WHAT QUALIFIES A PLACE TO BECOME WILDERNESS?** The following conditions must generally be present for an area to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System: 1. the land is under federal ownership and management, 2. the area consists of at least 5,000 acres of land, 3. human influence is “substantially unnoticeable,” 4. there are opportunities for solitude and recreation, and 5. the area possesses “ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”



**WHO DECIDES WHAT PLACES ARE WILDERNESS?** Designated Wilderness is the highest level of conservation protection for federal lands. Only Congress may designate Wilderness or change the status of Wilderness areas. Wilderness areas are designated within existing federal public land. Congress has directed four federal land management agencies—the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service—to manage Wilderness areas to preserve and, where possible, to enhance their Wilderness character.



**HOW MUCH WILDERNESS EXISTS IN NEW MEXICO?** Approximately 1,695,598 acres are protected as Wilderness in the state. Though this seems like a lot, New Mexico actually ranks next to last among Western states in the percentage of its land designated as Wilderness, at roughly 2 percent. On average, Western states (not including Alaska) have 5 percent of their land designated as Wilderness.



**WHERE WAS THE FIRST WILDERNESS AREA ESTABLISHED?** The Gila Wilderness in southwestern New Mexico was the world's first designated Wilderness area, created on June 3, 1924. It's ironic that the state where Wilderness got its start now is lagging behind in total acres of Wilderness created.



**WHY IS WILDERNESS IMPORTANT?** Through the Wilderness Act, Congress recognized the intrinsic value of wildlands. Some of the tangible and intangible values mentioned in the Wilderness Act include “solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation,” as well as “ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.” Wilderness areas provide habitat for wildlife and plants, including endangered and threatened species.



**CAN I HUNT AND FISH IN A WILDERNESS AREA?** Hunting and fishing are allowed in Wilderness areas, subject to applicable state and federal laws.



**IS GRAZING ALLOWED IN WILDERNESS?** Livestock grazing is permitted where it occurred prior to an area's designation as Wilderness. On rare occasions, Congress prohibits grazing in Wilderness at the time of designation.



**CAN I DRIVE IN A WILDERNESS AREA?** The Wilderness Act generally prohibits the use of motor vehicles in Wilderness. The law contains special provisions for motor vehicle use when required in emergencies or as necessary for the administration of the area. Motor vehicles may also be permitted for special uses such as to access a private inholding, to support grazing or to exercise valid existing rights.



**CAN I BIKE IN A WILDERNESS AREA?** The 1964 Wilderness Act prohibits motorized or mechanized forms of recreation, and this includes bicycles. Instead, visitors are required to walk or ride horseback.



**HOW DOES WILDERNESS HELP WILDLIFE?** Habitat fragmentation caused by roads, power lines, fences, dams and other structures seriously affects the ability of animals to move through their ranges. The roadless quality of Wilderness preserves large tracts of habitat needed for healthy populations of animals that need space to roam, like large predators, migratory species and herd animals.



**DOES A WILDERNESS AREA INCREASE THE RISK OF FIRE?** Wilderness areas are to be primarily affected by the forces of nature, though the Wilderness Act does acknowledge the need to provide for human health and safety, protect private property, control insect infestations and fight fires within the area. Wilderness areas are managed under the direction of the Wilderness Act, subsequent legislation (such as the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act) and agency policy.



**I LIVE IN THE CITY ... WHY DOES WILDERNESS MATTER?** Wilderness protects open space, watersheds, natural soundscapes, diverse ecosystems and biodiversity. The literature of Wilderness experience frequently cites the inspirational and spiritual values of Wilderness, including opportunities to reflect on the community of life and the human place on Earth. Most Wildernesses are also carbon sinks that help combat climate change. Wilderness provides a sense of wildness, which can be valuable to people whether or not those individuals actually visit Wilderness. Just knowing that Wilderness exists can produce a sense of curiosity, inspiration, renewal and hope.



**HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT WILDERNESS?** Join the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance! We are your most complete resource for information about wildlands and Wilderness areas in the state. As a member you'll get our newsletters, E-news, action alerts and notices about hikes, service projects and special events. You can help us Keep it Wild! Join on our website at [www.nmwild.org](http://www.nmwild.org) or use the convenient mail-in form on page 23. 🐾

# Forests Continue Along Paths to Plan Revision

All national forests are required to update their forest plans approximately every 15 to 20 years. Forest plans are the bird's-eye view document that guides the forest's individual decisions. The plans specify which areas of the forest will be open to energy development, how and where the forest will permit various activities, and how the forest will manage habitat for endangered species. Additionally, each forest is required to inventory its lands for wilderness characteristics and to decide whether or not to manage lands with wilderness characteristics for preservation and possible designation by Congress.

In each plan we advocate strongly for a robust inventory of wilderness characteristics and preservation of those characteristics for the future. In addition, we often do our own on-the-ground data collection, which we submit to the Forest Service. We have so far found that every forest could be doing a better job both at identifying areas which have wilderness characteristics according to its regulations and at making decisions to protect those areas.

All five national forests in New Mexico (Cibola, Carson, Santa Fe, Gila and Lincoln) are currently undergoing plan revisions, although each is at a different point in the process. The first stage is the Assessment, where the forest looks at current conditions and often releases inventory maps for wilderness characteristics. Second is a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), and lastly, a final EIS. Each phase is accompanied by public meetings and a public comment period.

Below are updates on each of the forests, as well as information on how and when the public can help. On each forest's website, you can sign up to be on its email list, and you will receive notifications at each major step. We will also continue to keep our members updated.

## CIBOLA

The Cibola was the first forest in New Mexico to begin its plan revision. It released its Draft Alternatives (a middle step it chose to take between the Assessment and DEIS) on July 18 and had a comment period which ran through Aug. 31. Unfortunately, even though we and our partners submitted a "citizen's proposal" of areas we believe should be preserved as wilderness, the forest did not include our proposal in any of the draft alternatives. We continue to urge it to do so and expect it to release a DEIS next year. More information can be found here: [http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/cibola/landmanagement/planning/?cid=FSBDEV3\\_065627](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/cibola/landmanagement/planning/?cid=FSBDEV3_065627)

## SANTA FE

The Santa Fe finalized its Assessment earlier this year and released its draft wilderness inventory maps. It had a formal comment period through Aug. 17, and we expect it to issue a DEIS in 2017. More information can be found here: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/santafe/landmanagement/planning/?cid=STELPRD3791442>

## CARSON

The Carson released its Assessment earlier this year. As in the Cibola, despite extensive data and comments by us and other conservation groups on wilderness inventory, the Carson chose not to recognize the majority of wilderness quality lands in its wilderness inventory maps. We continue to advocate for increased consideration of this resource. There are currently no open comment

periods for the Carson, which should issue its DEIS next year. More information can be found here: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/carson/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5443166>

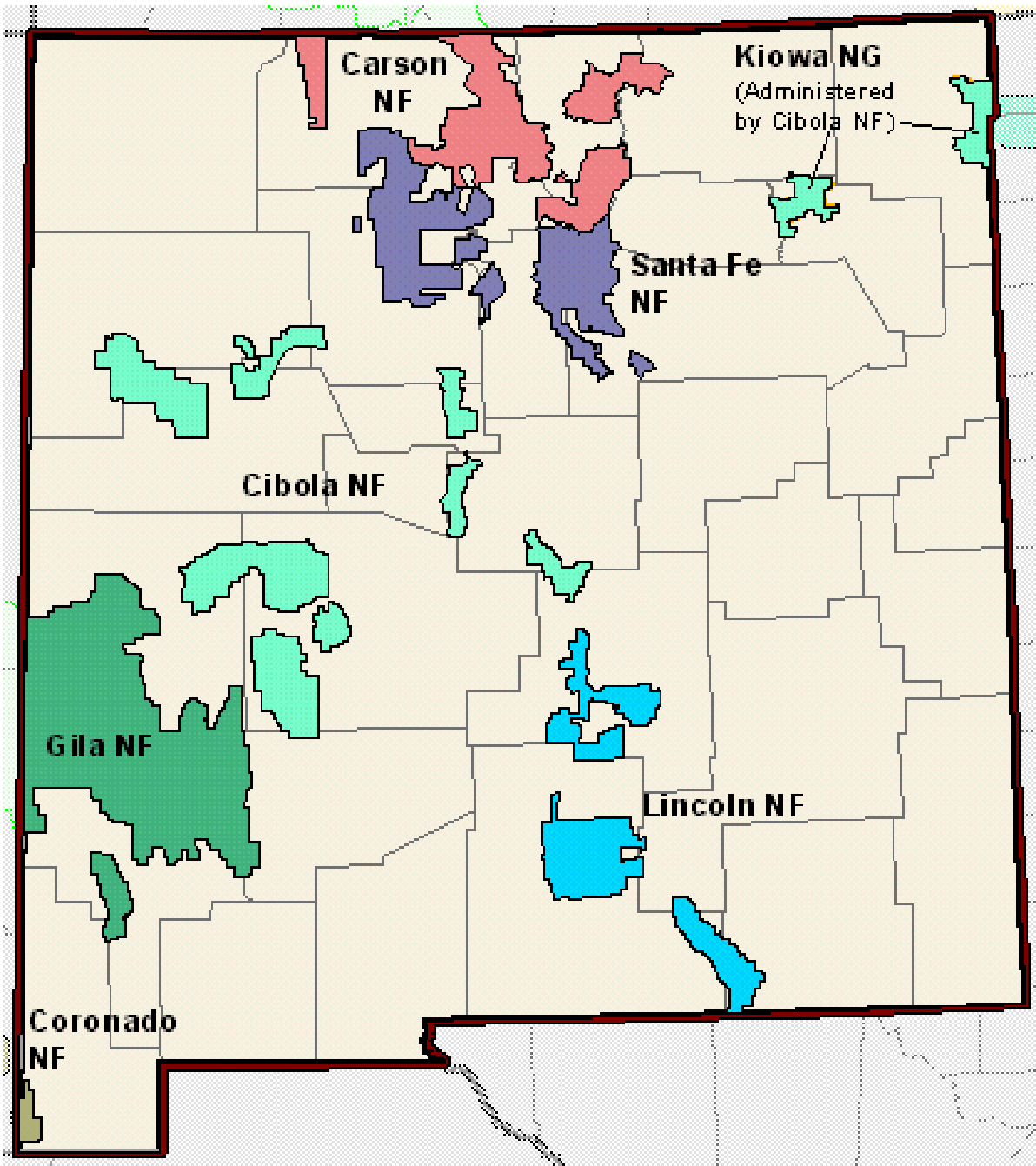
## GILA

The Gila began its revision process in mid-2015 and released its Assessment early this fall. It is holding a round of public meetings in late October and early November and is expected to release a DEIS within the next year. More information can be found here: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/gila/home/?cid=STELPRD3828671>

## LINCOLN

The Lincoln just started its process recently. It is currently gathering information (both internally and from the public) about the current state of the forest. Sometime in the next year, it should release its Assessment and then move onto drafting its EIS. More information can be found here: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/lincoln/landmanagement/planning/?cid=STELPRD3814307>

These planning processes afford us a rare opportunity to influence the management, use and long-term protections, including roadless and potential wilderness areas, for the roughly nine million acres of Forest Service land in New Mexico for the next 20 years. The plans will set the markers for administrative protections and provide us with leverage when we transition to permanent protection campaigns. Your involvement at public meetings and in submitting comments is critical. Please watch for our action alerts. 📢



Map of all five national forests in New Mexico: Cibola, Carson, Santa Fe, Gila and Lincoln. The Coronado National Forest extends into New Mexico but is administered by Arizona. Source: [www.fs.fed.us](http://www.fs.fed.us)





# DESIGNATED AND POTENTIAL WILDERNESS AREAS IN NEW MEXICO

By Dave Foreman, Staff

**H**ow much Wilderness is left in New Mexico? Since the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, federal land-management agencies and citizen conservationists alike have worked to answer that question. The Wilderness Act “mandated” the National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service to inventory all roadless or otherwise potential Wilderness Areas in all national park units and national wildlife refuges by 1974 and send recommendations for designation through the secretary of the Interior Department, and then the president to Congress.

In 1969, the New Mexico Wilderness Study Committee (NMWSC) was formed to do on-the-ground citizen inventories of federal lands to identify possible new Wilderness Areas. By 1972, the committee had drawn in Sierra Club members from the newly set-up Rio Grande Chapter and from the University of New Mexico Wilderness Committee to help with field studies. The NMWSC by that time already had a visionary proposal for a 150,000-acre Unified Guadalupe Escarpment Wilderness made up of Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe Mountains national parks and the Lincoln National Forest roadless lands between the two parks, and for new national forest Wilderness Areas in the Sandia and Manzano mountains near Albuquerque, the San Mateo Mountains south of Socorro, Latir Peaks near Questa and Cruces Basin east of Chama, as well as sweeping expansions of the Pecos Wilderness. The Gila Wilderness Committee (in Silver City) and NMWSC had also mapped a larger proposal than the Gila National Forest had recommended for an Aldo Leopold Wilderness Area from the old Black Range Primitive Area.

The Wilderness Act mandated the Forest Service only to study and make Wilderness recommendations by 1974 for the remaining Primitive Areas (Black Range, Blue Range and Gila in New Mexico). However, Forest Service uneasiness over citizen proposals (“wildcat proposals,” the Forest Service called them) made around the nation for new (non-Primitive Area) national forest Wilderness Areas such as the NMWSC was making for the Sandias and other areas, led the chief of the Forest Service in 1971 to order national forests to do a hurried, slapdash “Roadless Area Review and Evaluation” (RARE). The NMWSC and like groups around the country rushed to do their own citizen field studies of the roadless areas identified by the Forest Service and other areas believed to be roadless by citizens but not inventoried by the federal agency. Dozens of UNM students headed out to the Gila and other national forests in the spring of 1972, along with NMWSC “honchos” hitting northern and central national forests.

Conservation groups nationwide were highly upset by the sloppy roadless area inventory and the picayune Forest Service recommendations from RARE, and that outrage led to a successful legal challenge to the adequacy of the RARE Environmental Impact State-

ment (EIS) and to a second RARE (RARE II) beginning in 1977. The RARE II inventory was much better, finding three-fold the roadless acreage in New Mexico that the first RARE had. The NMWSC threw its volunteer energy into RARE II and produced with The Wilderness Society a comprehensive proposal for 1,816,000 acres of new national forest Wilderness in New Mexico. Nearly all other conservation and environmental clubs in New Mexico signed onto this proposal. But as for RARE, the Forest Service RARE II recommendations for Wilderness in 1979 were lousy and puny.

By 1978, Wilderness Areas had been established in Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe Mountains national parks, Bandelier National Monument and Bitter Lakes and Bosque del Apache national wildlife refuges. The Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service, however, did not recommend Wilderness designation for roadless areas in White Sands and Chaco Canyon national monuments or San Andres National Wildlife Refuge. The El Malpais National Monument was signed into law in 1987, but has not yet had a Wilderness Area designated.

The Bureau of Land Management had been left out of the 1964 Wilderness Act, but the 1976 Federal Lands Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) mandated BLM to inventory roadless areas and make Wilderness recommendations to Congress. Citizen conservationists began their own inventory in New Mexico. In March 1987, the New Mexico BLM Wilderness Coalition published the 230-page book “Wildlands” with maps and descriptions of 55 proposed BLM Wilderness Areas totaling 1,879,289 acres. (The BLM proposed only 28 areas totaling 560,328 acres.)

In 1980, the New Mexico Wilderness Act was signed, designating 609,060 acres of national forest Wilderness. From 1984 to 2014 several other laws designated BLM and national forest Wilderness Areas. As of today there are 1,695,598 acres of designated Wilderness in New Mexico, giving our state the smallest Wilderness Area acreage in the Western states except for Utah. But we have the opportunity to add several million more

acres designated as Wilderness Areas in New Mexico.

After the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance was organized in 1997, the volunteer leadership recognized that the key task before us was getting a more thorough and updated inventory of potential Wilderness Areas on the public lands. The Wilderness Alliance hired one of the Utah Wilderness Coalition field coordinators as well as a co-coordinator, a GIS mapper and dozens of field workers from the spring of 1999 until the end of 2002. The detailed report published in February 2003 concluded:

“Of the 13,533,668 acres of BLM public lands in New Mexico, 957,620 acres, or 7.08%, are currently protected in 53 WSAs [Wilderness Study Areas]. However, NMWA’s inventory indicates that 2,929,914 acres, or 21.65% of BLM lands in 158 units qualify for wilderness designation. The addition of 481,730 acres of State trust lands that fall within the inventory unit boundaries yield a total of 3,411,644 acres.”

This was 1.5 million acres more than the 1987 inventory by the New Mexico BLM Wilderness Coalition. The Wilderness Alliance staff produced a color CD with maps, photographs and descriptions of the areas. Board and staff planned a big rollout of our BLM proposal.

Soon after the Wilderness Alliance began the BLM reinventory, the Forest Service was directed by President Bill Clinton to inventory areas in the national forests remaining roadless nearly 20 years after RARE II. The Wilderness Alliance was very active in working with the national forests in New Mexico to do a full and accurate count. In January 2001, before leaving office, President Clinton signed an executive order instituting the Roadless Area. This rule, perhaps the most significant step ever taken by a federal agency to keep wildlands in their wild condition, generally banned new road-building and most other development in the 58.5 million acres of remaining national forest roadless areas. For New Mexico, the Forest Service found 1,895,539 acres of road-



Pronghorn at Otero Mesa. Photo: Raymond Watt



# POTENTIAL WILDERNESS, continued

less areas. Wilderness Alliance staff found an additional 2,142,852 acres that were also primarily roadless. This acreage was contiguous to inventoried roadless areas or in stand-alone roadless areas of 5,000 acres or larger. So, the Wilderness Alliance identified 4,038,391 acres of roadless lands on national forests in New Mexico and planned to fold this national forest reinventory into the BLM reinventory to produce a map and full accounting of the potential Wilderness acreage in New Mexico.

Now, in 2016, the Wilderness Alliance is resurrecting both and using them as the basis for a statewide map and tally of all federal lands qualifying for Wilderness designation. The Wilderness Alliance has brought out of our dusty archives all of this expensive and labor-intensive work to produce a map and acreage calculation that is the best, most accurate and comprehensive answer to the question of how much Wilderness is left in New Mexico. We’ve also included more up-to-date information, including potential Wilderness for national park units and national wildlife refuges earlier left out.

The Wilderness Alliance has highly detailed maps of potential Wilderness areas (including a statewide map), but the map you see here provides an overview that is clean, straightforward and easy to understand. There are only two categories of areas on this map: In black are the 1,695,598 acres of national forest-, BLM-, Park Service- and national wildlife refuge-designated Wilderness areas. In yellow are the potential Wilderness areas on lands managed by all four federal agencies that the Wilderness Alliance has identified with on-the-ground fieldwork and refined map work, totaling roughly 5 million acres. The map at this time does not include the additional 2.1 million acres of national forest roadless areas found by the Wilderness Alliance for the Roadless Area Rule, but we plan to do further analysis to put them on the map. No effort is made in this two-color map to distinguish national park, national forest, BLM or national wildlife refuge lands. That information will be available on other maps on our website.

Some of these potential areas have been carefully studied by Wilderness Alliance staff and members and have firm, defensible boundaries that could be used as the basis for legislation. Others are not at that level and need further study; however, they represent areas that clearly qualify for Wilderness designation even if their boundaries are not solid. Moreover, this map is an ongoing process and we will regularly update the map as field workers refine final Wilderness proposal boundaries.

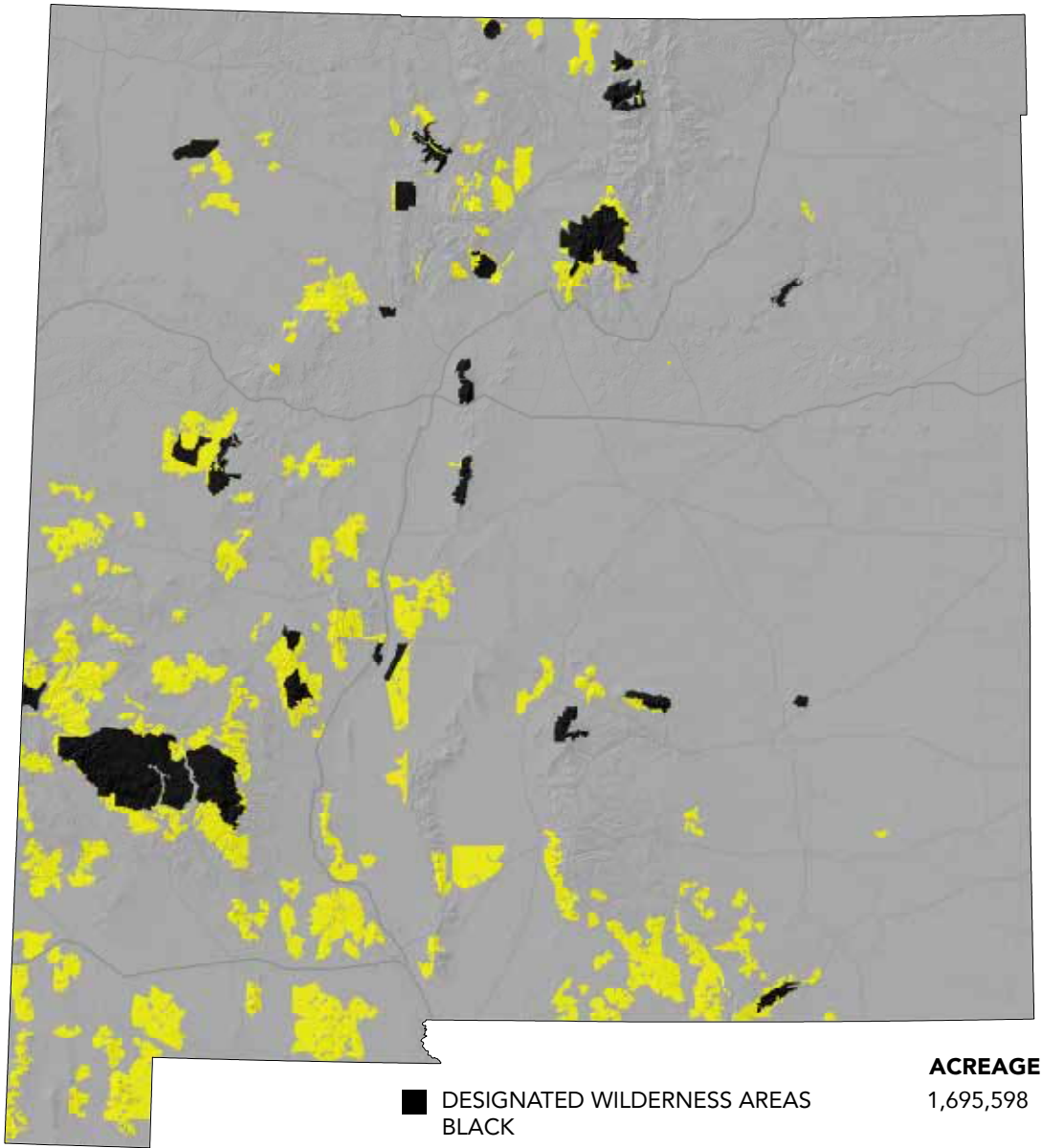
Contact the Wilderness Alliance office if you’d like to help with fieldwork or if you have any comments or corrections. 📍

Editor’s note: The Wilderness history described in this article is discussed in detail in Dave Foreman’s book *The Great Conservation Divide*.



Gila Wilderness. Photo: Nathan Newcomer

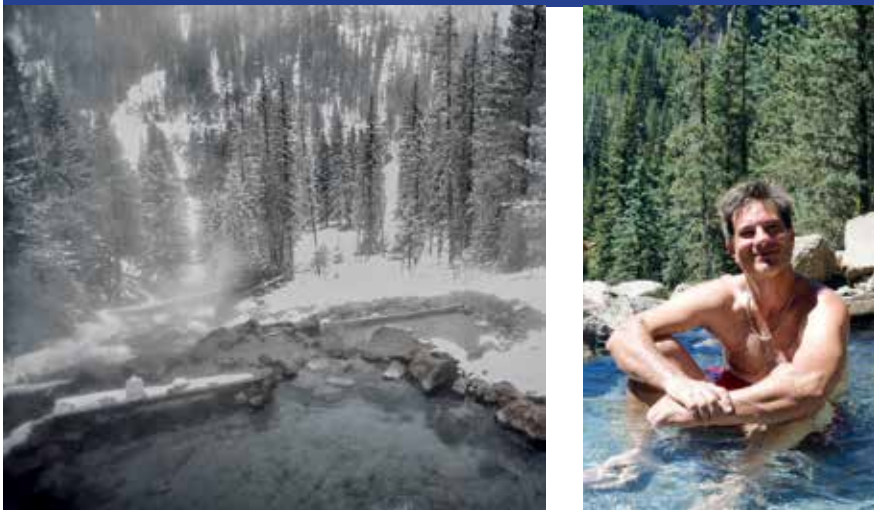
## New Mexico Designated & Potential Wilderness Area Acreage & Map



This 2016 NMWA map of Designated and Potential Wilderness Areas in New Mexico was prepared by Joelle Marier, Dave Foreman, and Kurt Menke, with oversight from Mark Allison.



# Geothermal Leasing Proposal in the Jemez Shortsighted and Unwarranted



Scenic hot springs in the Jemez Mountains that draw hikers and others who enjoy soaking are threatened by possible energy development in the region. From left: Photo: Diego Romero, rayodelalma.com; Photo: Mark Allison

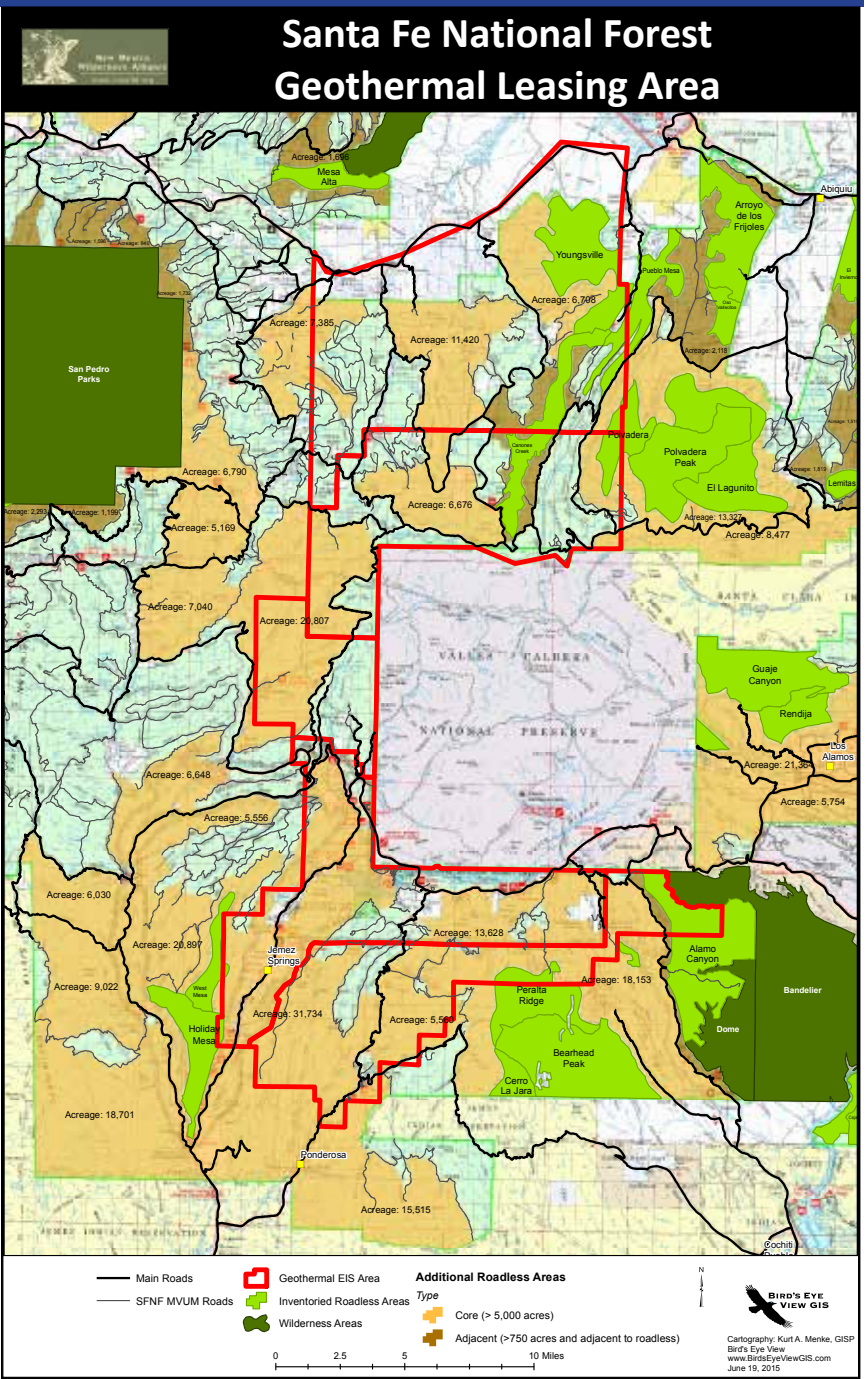
Popular Jemez Mountains recreation sites such as San Antonio Hot Springs, Battleship Rock, Soda Dam and the Las Conchas fishing access are within a large area of Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) land proposed for geothermal production leasing.

In May of 2015, the Forest Service began formal scoping for the proposal to lease approximately 195,000 acres, mostly within the Jemez Ranger District, for geothermal production. The proposal area abuts three sides of the Valles Caldera National Preserve and contains portions of nine Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), as well as the recreation sites. The proposal stemmed from an Expression of Interest from out-of-state company Ormat Technologies. Ormat proposed the lease of 46,000 acres, but SFNF expanded the proposal area based on the U.S. Geological Survey’s maps of high geothermal potential.

Geothermal production, while considered a renewable source of energy, often comes with substantial environmental consequences. Significant surface disturbance is required for well pads and pumps (similar to those used in oil and gas operations), roads, transmission lines and pipelines. Additionally, fresh water is required, and fracking is often used. While it is not our position to oppose all energy development on public land, we feel very strongly that these activities must be sited in appropriate places and must include enough restrictions to effectively mitigate the majority of potential harm. In some cases, this means choosing to not allow development in a certain area.

The area in question is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful and well-loved places in the state. In addition to containing critical Inventoried Roadless Areas, it is home to endangered species such as the Mexican spotted owl, the Jemez Mountains salamander and the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse. Many sacred indigenous sites and hot springs are found in the proposed geothermal leasing area, and its adjacency to the Valles Caldera National Preserve provides an extended continuous landscape for the preserve’s ecosystem health. In addition, the entire community of Jemez Springs is vulnerable to impacts from geothermal development, including increased truck traffic, water contamination, negative effects on tourism and other damage to residents’ quality of life.

The SFNF issued its DEIS at the beginning of July 2016 and held four public meetings in Santa Fe, Jemez Pueblo, El Rito and Albuquerque. While some aspects of the proposal were improved between scoping and the DEIS, such as ensuring there will be no surface disturbance in roadless areas and no leasing within a one-mile buffer around hot springs, the proposal continues to be fundamentally inappropriate. There are insufficient protections in place for endangered species and sensitive areas, and there has been no inventory for wilderness characteristics within the project area. As shown in the attached map, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance believes significant portions of the proposal area may qualify for wilderness designation, and an inventory is a requirement of the Forest Plan Revision process, in which SFNF is also currently involved.



Map of the area considered for geothermal leasing.



A billboard on Highway 550 is drawing attention to the issue of potential geothermal development in the Jemez. Photo: Lois Manno

We believe this is an inappropriate area for commercial geothermal development, and we are committed to ensuring this treasured area’s essential character remains for New Mexico’s citizens and for generations to come.

SFNF is accepting comments until Oct. 28. Our comments to the Forest Service and previous *New Mexico Wild!* articles, as well as links to the DEIS and other documents, are available on our website here: [www.nmwild.org/our-work/wilderness-defense/save-our-springs](http://www.nmwild.org/our-work/wilderness-defense/save-our-springs). Help us advocate for “Alternative 3: The No Leasing Alternative.”





# PROTECT THE PECOS NEWS

## Maintenance on the Historical Acequia – La Sierra Ditch

by John Olivas, Staff



A recent poll of Taos County residents shows broad and strong support for continued access and protection of New Mexico’s public lands. The importance of public lands, Wilderness and the Pecos Wilderness brings together nearly all of the voters in Taos County. Further, after hearing details about the proposal to expand Wilderness protection in the Pecos, 78 percent of those polled support it.

### Importance Voters Place on Public Lands and Wilderness

#### Totally Important

- 95%** How important would you say public lands, including parks, forests and open spaces, are to your quality of life?
- 93%** How important would you say Wilderness is to you?

Source: Third Eye Strategies

In early September, a group of volunteers from the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, The Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club and the community partnered with Mayordomo Jimmy Sanchez of the La Sierra Ditch to do maintenance on the banks of the historic ditch. According to Sanchez, the history of the acequia dates back to the early 1700s. As long ago as 1717, ancestral families of the Mora Valley came together to work on the creation of the La Sierra Ditch, which for the past three centuries has brought water from the Pecos Wilderness down to the Holman Valley to provide irrigation for crops and family gardens.

On this day, volunteers had the opportunity to work hand in hand with three generations, – Sanchez, his son Daryl and his grandson Damian – to help maintain the historical acequia in honor of the many generations that preceded them.



Above left: Volunteers from the community and conservation groups help to perform annual maintenance on the La Sierra Ditch near Mora. Above: Ditch maintenance is an annual community tradition in communities that get their irrigation water from an acequia. Volunteers pitched in to help with the La Sierra Ditch. Photos: John Olivas

The La Sierra Ditch falls within the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance’s “Protect the Pecos” campaign and is one of the traditional uses the conservation effort is striving to protect.

“This campaign is an example of an effort that would protect these historical lands for future generations, including that of my grandson Damian! Thank you for your help with today’s work!” Sanchez said.

Editor’s Note: The Protect the Pecos campaign began in 2009 to permanently conserve 120,000 acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas adjacent to the existing Pecos Wilderness through federal legislation designating the land as Wilderness and Special Management Areas.

The Pecos Wilderness encompasses 223,637 acres spanning the Carson and Santa Fe national forests in northeastern New Mexico. Named for a Native American word meaning “place where there is water,” the Pecos Wilderness is the source of the headwaters for both the Pecos and Mora rivers. Its 150 miles of streams and more than 15 lakes are part of a watershed that is essential to surrounding communities and the acequia systems that irrigate their lands. A landmark of New Mexico culture and tradition, the Pecos is of tremendous value to surrounding towns, neighboring tribal groups, acequia organizations, land grant communities, sportsmen, ranchers and outdoor enthusiasts.

A broad coalition continues to engage community stakeholders in five different counties to build support for increased protections. To join this effort or learn more, visit [www.protectthepecos.org](http://www.protectthepecos.org).

## Please welcome Bernie Tibbetts, our new Santa Fe community organizer!



Bernard Tibbetts is a New Mexico native. He was born in Albuquerque, grew up in Raton and now resides in Santa Fe. He obtained his bachelor’s degree in business with a concentration in information technology at the University of New Mexico. Over the years, Bernard has applied his technology expertise to systems analysis, design and implementation in enterprise resource planning, marketing and education.

His connection to the outdoors and to wilderness is what keeps Bernard centered in a high-tech world. And it is what fuels his passion to help others seek this awareness. As an outdoor educator, he organizes, promotes and leads treks to inspiring wilderness places in New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona and Utah. Bernard explains that a deep and profound connection to wilderness also strengthens connection to self and connection to others.

Bernie will be focusing his time on the Santa Fe National Forest, leading various monitoring, restoration and stewardship activities. He will work to foster community involvement in the public process that guides Forest Service planning and management decisions. Ultimately, we are working toward better forest management and protection. Both the stewardship activities and community involvement in the planning process will align with and support our efforts to permanently conserve 120,000 acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas adjacent to the existing Pecos Wilderness.

If you are interested in volunteering in the Santa Fe National Forest, Bernie can be contacted at [bernard@nmwild.org](mailto:bernard@nmwild.org).

## Thank you, Wells Fargo!

New Mexico Wilderness Alliance receives \$20,000 Environmental Solutions for Communities grant

Wells Fargo & Co. awarded the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance a \$20,000 Wells Fargo Environmental Solutions for Communities grant. We are one of 61 environmental nonprofits in 22 states to receive nearly \$2.6 million from the 2016 grant program, which supports projects focused on land and water conservation, energy efficiency, infrastructure and educational outreach in communities across America. The grant program represents a five-year, \$15 million partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The Wilderness Alliance will use the grant for a range of monitoring, restoration and stewardship activities based within the Santa Fe National Forest. These stewardship efforts will support and inform the Forest Service planning process by engaging the community in the public process to guide forest management decisions towards the goal of better managing and protecting the forest and, in particular, sensitive roadless areas and critical watersheds.







# The Greater Chaco Landscape Needs Your Voice!

By Joelle Marier, Staff

If you've been to northwestern New Mexico, you know what a special place this is. Surreal rock formations, serene landscapes, age-old fossils and diverse cultural history draw many to explore this part of the Four Corners region. Turkey, mule deer, black bear, elk, birds of prey and many others call its grasslands, mesas, forests and canyons home. As the hub for the greater Chaco landscape and home to Chaco Culture National Historical Park, this area not only contains significant cultural resources, but also retains cultural significance for present day indigenous peoples. Humans have had a continuous presence here for over 10,000 years.

Oil and gas development continues to expand in the greater Chaco region. Between 84 percent and 94 percent of local lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are leased for oil and gas. With BLM lands comprising approximately 20 percent of the land base in northwestern New Mexico, high levels of development can result in landscape-scale impacts. Plans to further expand oil and gas development here include BLM lands adjacent to Chaco and within the range of known Chacoan archeological sites.

The Wilderness Alliance has identified over 30,000 acres of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWCs) within the greater Chaco region. Wilderness protection also would preserve places of cultural, geological, paleontological and ecological importance. We have also protested oil and gas lease sales within the viewshed of Chaco Culture National Historical Park to protect archeological resources outside of the park and the scenic vistas and dark night skies that contribute to the overall park experience.

As the Farmington BLM Field Office amends its 2003 Resource Management Plan (RMP) to address potential expansion of oil and gas development in the Mancos/Gallup Formation—an oil and gas play lying beneath 4.2 million acres of federal, state, private and tribal lands in northwestern New Mexico—we have an opportunity to ensure lands surrounding Chaco and remaining wildlands in its vicinity remain undeveloped. In the Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA), the BLM can make management decisions to protect lands in the greater Chaco area, but this is not a guarantee. Public support for protection is a key component to ensuring the BLM makes these decisions well.

Release of the draft RMPA, anticipated sometime this fall, will trigger a 90-day public comment period, during which your voice is needed! Please help us tell the BLM: 1) to let existing oil and gas leases on parcels within the viewshed of Chaco Culture National Historical Park expire without the possibility for renewal; 2) to make unleased lands in the vicinity of Chaco unleaseable; and 3) to recognize Lands with Wilderness Characteristics and decide to manage these lands to preserve their wilderness character.

The greater Chaco landscape needs your voice! Encourage your friends, family and larger community to get involved and stay involved. After all, these are OUR public lands!

Visit [http://bit.ly/Farmington\\_RMP](http://bit.ly/Farmington_RMP) to take action and learn more. 🏔️



Pueblo Pintado is considered a 'Chacoan outlier' site sharing many traits with sites at Chaco yet located several miles from the park. Photo: John Fowler

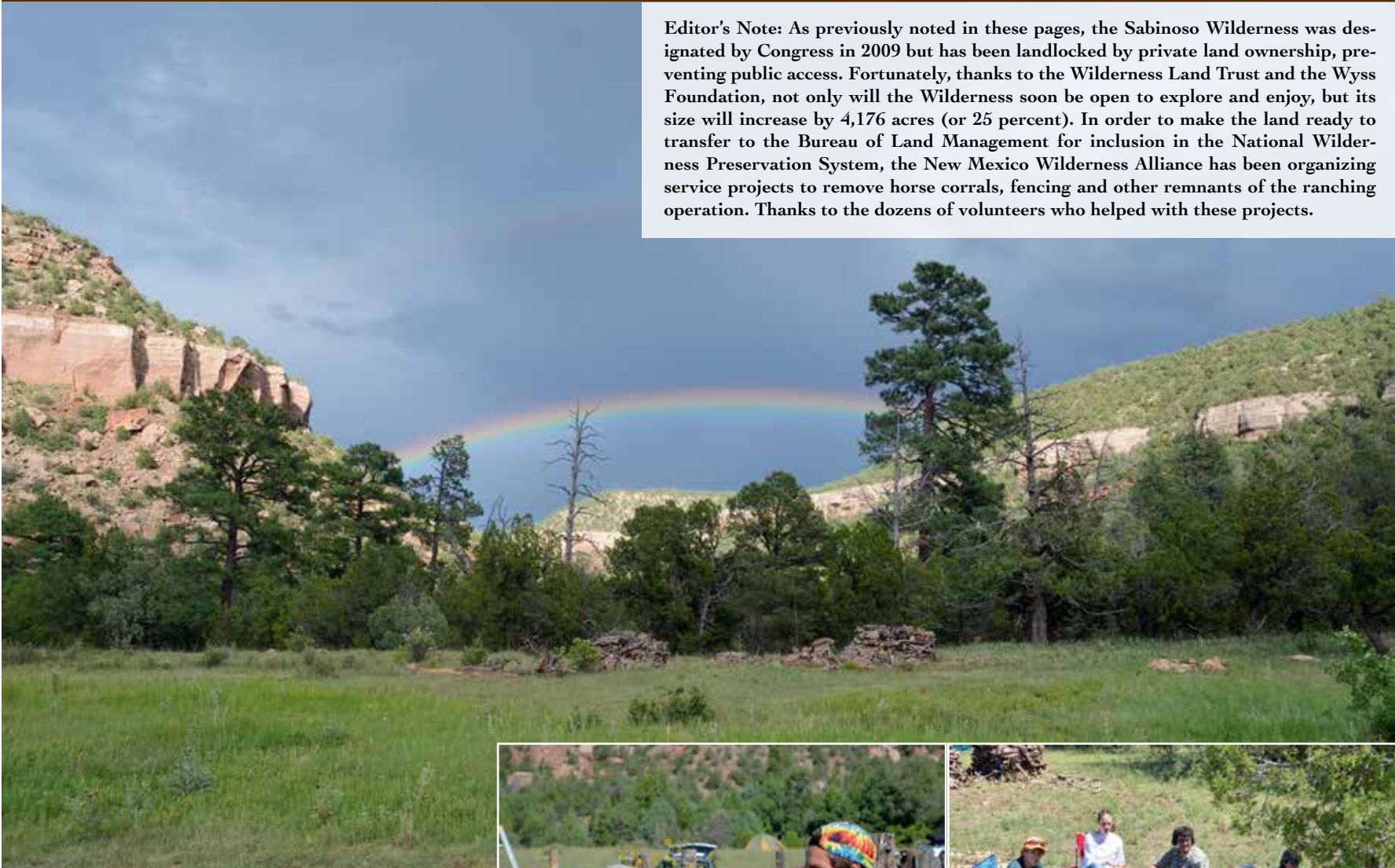


The Lybrook Badlands, near Chaco Culture National Historical Park, provide the foreground for this telling night sky photo. Note the impact of light pollution from oil and gas production along the horizon. "Milky Way II" Photo: John Fowler



# SABINOSO UPDATE

Editor's Note: As previously noted in these pages, the Sabinoso Wilderness was designated by Congress in 2009 but has been landlocked by private land ownership, preventing public access. Fortunately, thanks to the Wilderness Land Trust and the Wyss Foundation, not only will the Wilderness soon be open to explore and enjoy, but its size will increase by 4,176 acres (or 25 percent). In order to make the land ready to transfer to the Bureau of Land Management for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance has been organizing service projects to remove horse corrals, fencing and other remnants of the ranching operation. Thanks to the dozens of volunteers who helped with these projects.



Counterclockwise from top: A double rainbow greets volunteers at Canyon Largo on the Rimrock Rose Ranch, soon to be part of the Sabinoso Wilderness; Advanced Placement biology students from Sandia High School help take down a horse corral; some of the volunteers take a well-deserved lunch break. Photos: Mark Allison



**MOUNTAIN HIGH LODGE**



Handsome Guest Lodge for 10  
Site Built in 2014  
National Forest Boundary  
Gorgeous Apache Creek Valley  
Massive Cottonwood & Pine  
Tularosa River Flows Thru  
Great Income Property  
10 acres for \$449,500

**WHITE ROCK LAKE**



Exclusive & Rare 160 acres  
Totally Surrounded by NF  
Living Water—White Rock Lake  
Top of the World location  
Majestic Mountains  
Gorgeous Ponderosa Pine  
Teeming with Wildlife  
160 acres for \$800,000

**NATURE'S HIDEAWAY**



Beautifully renovated 2/2 Home  
National Forest Boundary  
Gorgeous Gardens  
Shop & Two Barns  
Guest Studio  
Very Private Setting  
Spectacular Views  
5 acres for \$239,000

**WHITE ROCKS RIVER RANCH**



Gorgeous River Property  
Huge Ponderosa & Cottonwood  
Varying Topography  
Great Building Sites  
Pond & Well / Water Rights  
San Francisco River  
Bordering National Forest  
56.3 acres for \$475,000

**NATURE ENTHUSIAST?**  
Create your own legacy  
in the pristine  
GILA NATIONAL FOREST

**Tularosa River thru middle**  
Bordering National Forest  
Trees & Beautiful Views  
Building Site with well  
Grassy Meadows  
Wildflowers Galore  
Access to Utilities is easy  
40 acres for \$275,000

**WATERING HOLE RANCH**



**Custom Adobe Casita**  
Passive Solar Design  
Kiva Fireplace & Woodstove  
Saltillo Tile Floors  
BLM Boundary—Public Lands  
Gorgeous Vista Views  
Adjacent to Conservatory Lands  
480 acres for \$399,000

**MARIANO CASITA RANCH**



**San Francisco River**  
Bordering Gila National Forest  
Gorgeous Cottonwood Trees  
Handsome Ponderosa Trees  
Beautiful Views  
Grassy Meadows  
Southern Exposure  
12 acres for \$160,000

**COTTONWOOD RANCHETTE**



**Handsome Custom Built**  
Authentic Log Home  
High Quality Amenities  
National Forest Boundary  
Barn & Shop with Loft  
Outstanding Mountain Views  
Treed & Grassy Meadow  
21 acres for \$449,000

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# MEXICAN GRAY WOLF NEWS

## Mexican Gray Wolf Protection and Recovery

By Judy Calman, Staff



The Mexican gray wolf is one of the most endangered animals in North America. Hunted nearly to extinction in the late 1800s and early 1900s, there are now approximately 100 Mexican wolves in New Mexico and Arizona thanks to the Endangered Species Act, captive breeding and reintroduction efforts. They remain at risk, however, largely due to the continued misunderstanding and vilification of wolves throughout the West. Wolves are a keystone species and absolutely critical to a healthy Gila ecosystem, America's first Wilderness area and the largest Wilderness in New Mexico.

We continue to advocate for Mexican gray wolf recovery at both the federal and state levels.

### State of New Mexico v. Fish and Wildlife Service

The wolves' struggles have unfortunately been exacerbated by the New Mexico Game

Commission. The commission withdrew New Mexico from the group of agencies cooperating in wolf recovery several years ago. Within the last year, the commission refused to renew a permit for Ted Turner's Ladder Ranch to house endangered predators for captive breeding and denied the Fish and Wildlife Service's application to release captive-bred wolves in New Mexico. Despite the commission's refusal, the Fish and Wildlife Service went ahead with a release in the spring of 2016 when it successfully cross-fostered two wolf pups, meaning it placed captive-born pups inside a wild litter in the Gila.

Because the program is run by a federal agency, is on federal public land, is implementing a federal statute and is federally funded, the Fish and Wildlife Service does not need the state's permission to release wolves. It applied for a permit because the state asked it to, but it has a statutory responsibility to ensure that endangered species recover.

Despite the clear legal authority for the Fish and Wildlife Service to release wolves without the state's permission, New Mexico has sued the agency for what it calls obstruction of its wildlife management authority. States have authority over all animals which are not listed on the federal Endangered Species Act, and New Mexico claims the release of two wolf pups this past spring irreparably impacted its ability to manage elk and deer, despite the extremely small number of wolves in New Mexico (fewer than 60).

The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, along

with several other conservation groups, successfully intervened in the lawsuit on behalf of the Fish and Wildlife Service in July, and we will keep our members updated as the case continues.

### McKittrick Policy

Also continuing is our work with our partners WildEarth Guardians to overturn the Department of Justice's so-called McKittrick policy, an internal agency policy that prevents DOJ from prosecuting anyone for Endangered Species Act violations unless they can prove the person knew the exact biological identity of the species they were harming.

This policy is counter to the act itself and to over 20 years of case law. Additionally, the policy affects ALL endangered species and has led to an enormous decrease in Endangered Species Act prosecutions in the last 17 years since the policy was adopted. This policy is especially troubling for Mexican wolves, which number only about 100 in the wild and whose highest cause of mortality is illegal shooting. Since Mexican wolves were reintroduced in 1998, at least 60 wolves have been illegally shot. Many of the perpetrators who were caught claimed they thought they were shooting a coyote or dog, thereby avoiding prosecution under the policy.

While the case has been moving slowly since we filed it in 2013, on July 27, 2015, the Justice Department's motion to dismiss was denied, and the judge addressed many of our substantive arguments in our favor. Shortly



## Help protect the critically endangered Mexican gray wolf with your artwork

The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance invites submissions for the 2017 Mexican Wolf Conservation Stamp. Artists worldwide are invited to enter two-dimensional drawings, paintings or photographs featuring the Mexican gray wolf. The winning artwork will be featured on the 2017 stamp that will be sold to raise funds to support Mexican wolf conservation and education projects. All artwork must be scalable to the size of the stamp, 4.5 inches wide by 5.5 inches tall. Please submit electronic images of original artwork by Feb. 29, 2017, to [tisha@nmwild.org](mailto:tisha@nmwild.org).





# MEXICAN GRAY WOLF NEWS, continued

thereafter, four groups (Safari Club International, the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association, the New Mexico Livestock Bureau and the New Mexico Federal Lands Council) moved to intervene in the suit on the side of DOJ, essentially arguing that they have a right to shoot predators to protect livestock and a right to avoid prosecution if in doing so they kill a Mexican wolf. Unfortunately, the court granted their motions to intervene on July 25, 2016. We are now preparing for substantive hearings and will continue to keep our membership informed as the case continues.

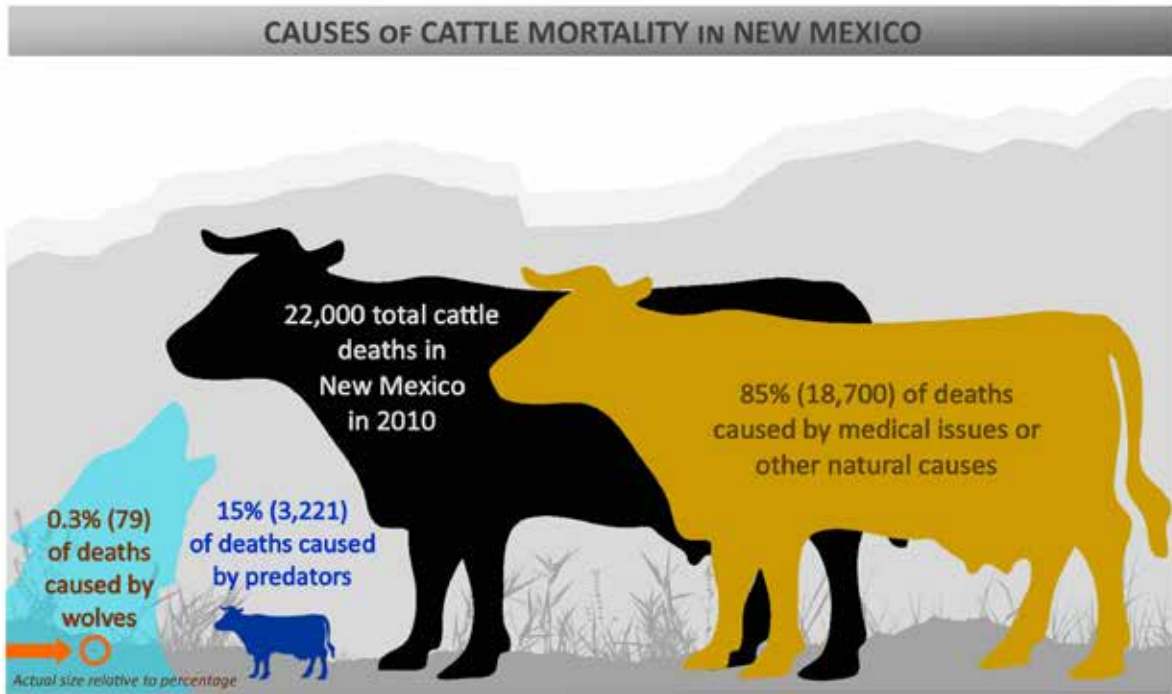
## Fish and Wildlife Service Management Rule

Changes to the Fish and Wildlife Service's Mexican wolf management rule were finalized in January 2015. Despite expansion of the wolves' territory and the new ability for the service to release wolves directly into New Mexico, the new rule greatly expanded the circumstances in which people can kill wolves and did not change the wild population's classification as non-essential, which prevents the wolves from having critical protections. We made the decision in June 2015 to challenge the Fish and Wildlife Service rule in court, along with our colleagues at WildEarth

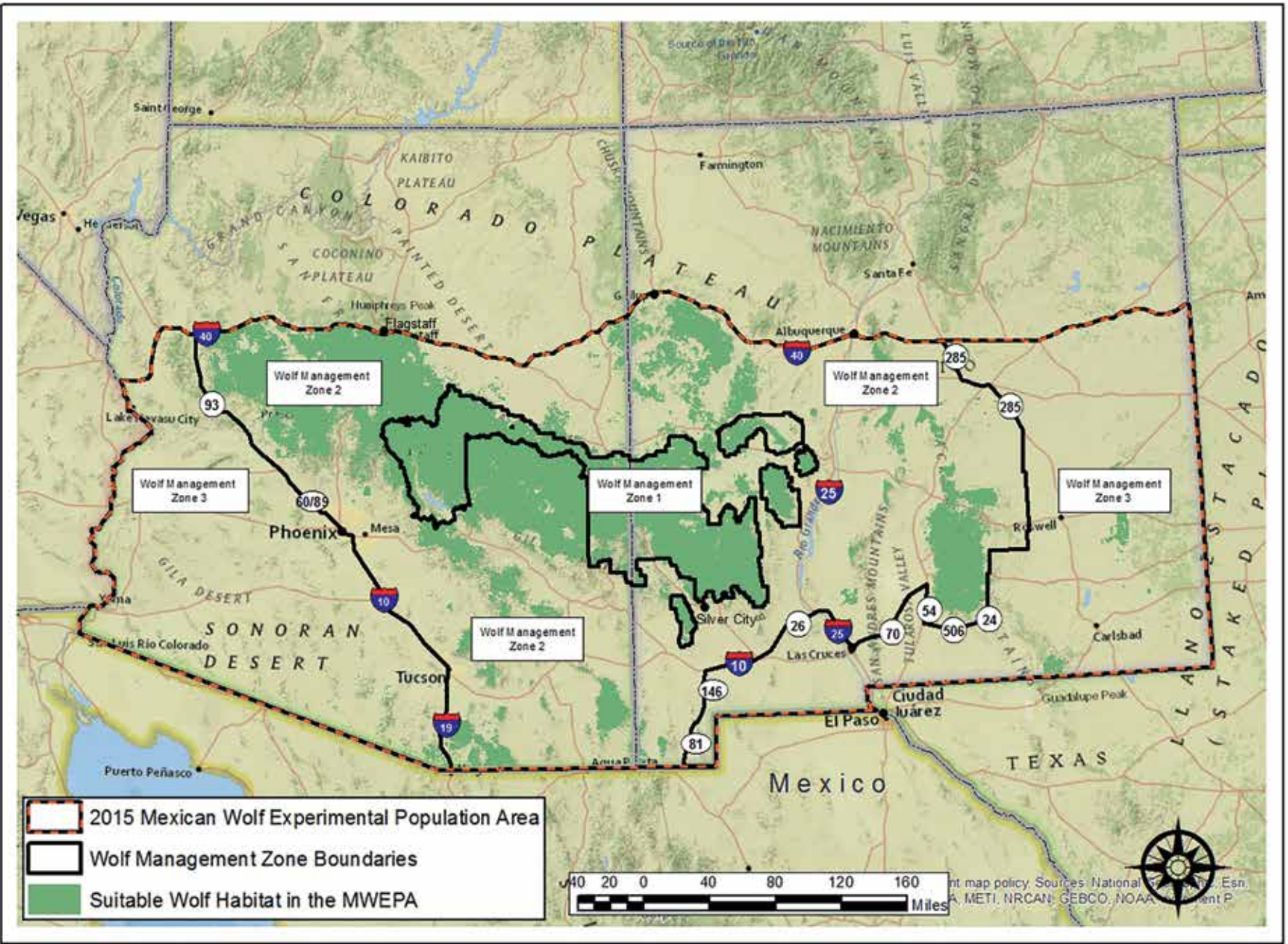
Guardians, Friends of Animals and the Western Environmental Law Center. This case has been consolidated with legal actions filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife and the state of Arizona. 🐾



Order your Mexican Gray Wolf Conservation Stamp and Wolves Belong bumper sticker at [nmwild.org](http://nmwild.org)!



In 2010 in New Mexico, 22,000 head of cattle died. Of these, 3,300 were killed by predators. Of those killed by predators, 2.4% (79 cows) were killed by wolves, or 0.3% of total cattle losses for that year. In contrast, 38% of total losses (8,360 cows) were due to digestive and respiratory problems. Other medical problems led to the vast majority of remaining losses. These numbers hold statistically over many years. Source: USDA Cattle Death Loss Report at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/current/CattDeath/CattDeath-05-12-2011.pdf>



2015 Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area. Source: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



# North of the Border

By Anna Vargas



The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance hosted a two-day rafting trip on the Rio Grande, starting in Colorado and ending south of Ute Mountain, traveling through the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument in New Mexico. The trip provided Conejos County residents, organizers and influential community members a chance to experience the river and discuss their proposal to expand the monument into the San Luis Valley of Colorado. Photos: Mark Allison

A diverse group of Coloradans are advocating the expansion of New Mexico’s Rio Grande Del Norte National Monument to include a portion of the San Luis Valley just over the state line to the north.

In March 2013, President Barack Obama, using executive authority under the 1906 Antiquities Act, designated 242,555 acres in Taos County as the Río Grande del Norte National Monument (RGDN).

As a result, the land, its rich Hispanic and Native American culture, traditional heritage and wildlife habitat are protected and preserved for all future generations. In addition, Taos County has seen a steady increase in visitation and lodgers tax income since the creation of the monument.

Community leaders, business owners, Native Americans, ranchers, teachers and archaeologists of Conejos County in Colorado are working to add 62,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management land to the monument, which now goes from Pilar in the south to the Colorado border in the north. The expansion would contain some of the most ecologically rich and culturally significant lands managed by the BLM.

Similar to the efforts in Taos County, many residents want to ensure that the practices and activities that locals value now will continue to be allowed. These include traditional community rights, water rights, livestock grazing, access to piñon and herb gathering and recreational access to hunting and fishing. As in the current monument, some of the resources to protect in this area are archeological sites; cultural, pre-historic and historic legacies; and ecological diversity. For example, this area is a major flyway for raptors and migratory birds.

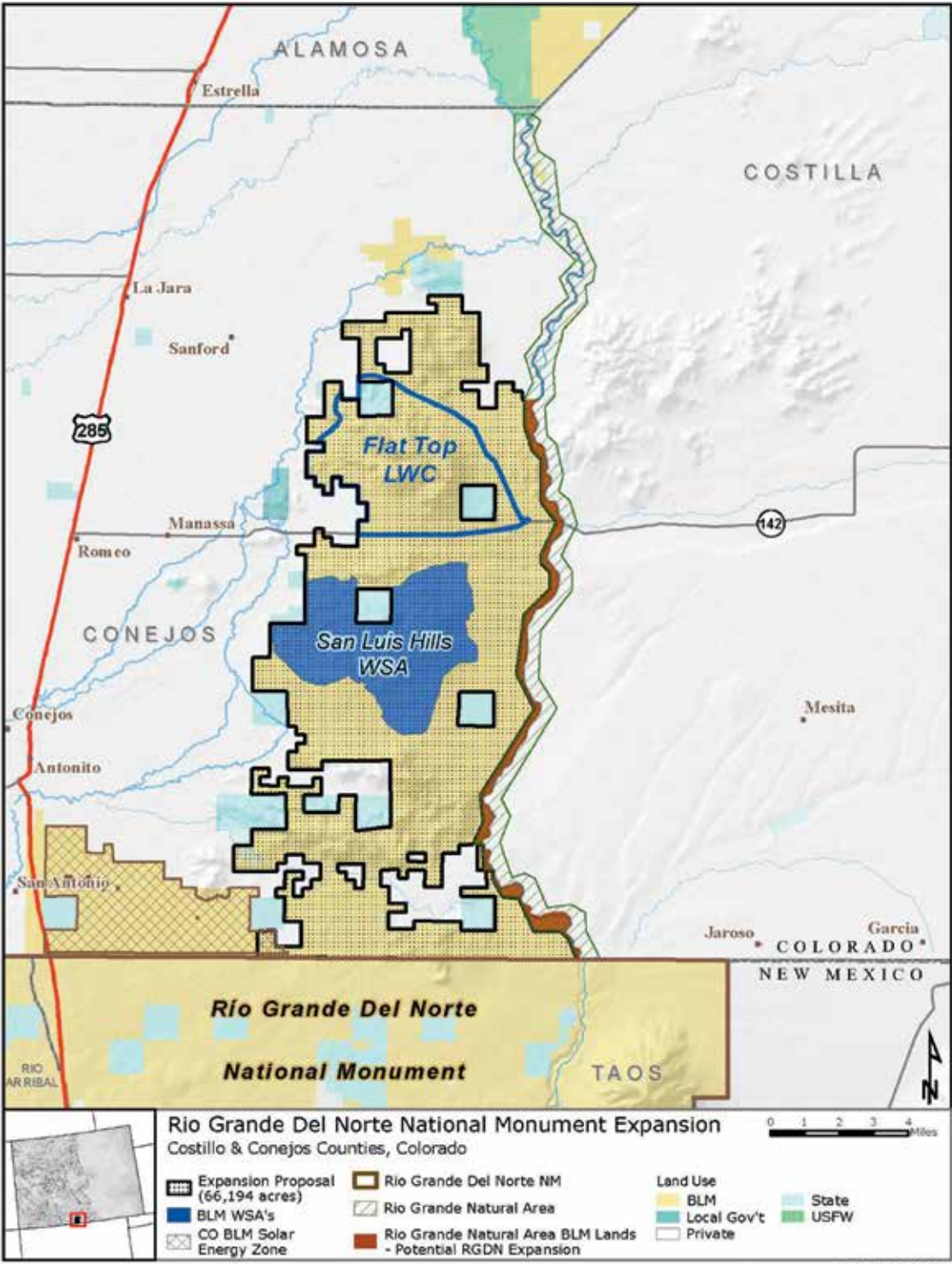
Conejos County faces economic challenges and uncertainty that could threaten the quality of life of many in the valley. Taos and Conejos counties are not immune from the oil and gas development that has exploded in the Four Corners region in recent decades. Protecting our cultural and geographical landscapes for future generations is critical. Sometimes these landscapes cross state boundaries.

Expanding the national monument to include parts of the San Luis Valley would protect our backyards, our front yards and our favorite places to play and hike from the continued threat of exploitative and extractive industries.

I want my little girl, her kids and my great-grandkids to experience this land, to feel it and know what a special place we live in.

Visit <http://www.rgdnexpansion.org> to support community efforts, learn additional details and find ways to help. 🏔️

*Anna Vargas is a daughter, mom, community leader and coalition member working to expand the Río Grande del Norte Nation Monument.*







## Rio Grande del Norte National Monument Wilderness Update By Tania Soussan

**T**he dramatic Cerro del Yuta volcanic cone and the scenic Rio San Antonio areas of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument would be permanently protected as New Mexico's two newest Wilderness areas under legislation working its way through Congress.

A bill introduced in the spring by Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, both New Mexico Democrats, passed the Senate in April as an amendment to the Energy Policy Modernization Act. As of late September, Senate and House conferees were negotiating the final energy bill, which must be voted on by the House and Senate again before going to the president.

"We are closer than ever to establishing the Cerro del Yuta Wilderness and Rio San Antonio Wilderness," Heinrich said in a statement. "For many years now, a broad coalition of New Mexicans have worked incredibly hard to protect these two very special areas...Designating these wilderness areas will complete a national example of community-driven, landscape-scale conservation that will preserve the culture and natural resources and boost the economy of this stunning corner of New Mexico."

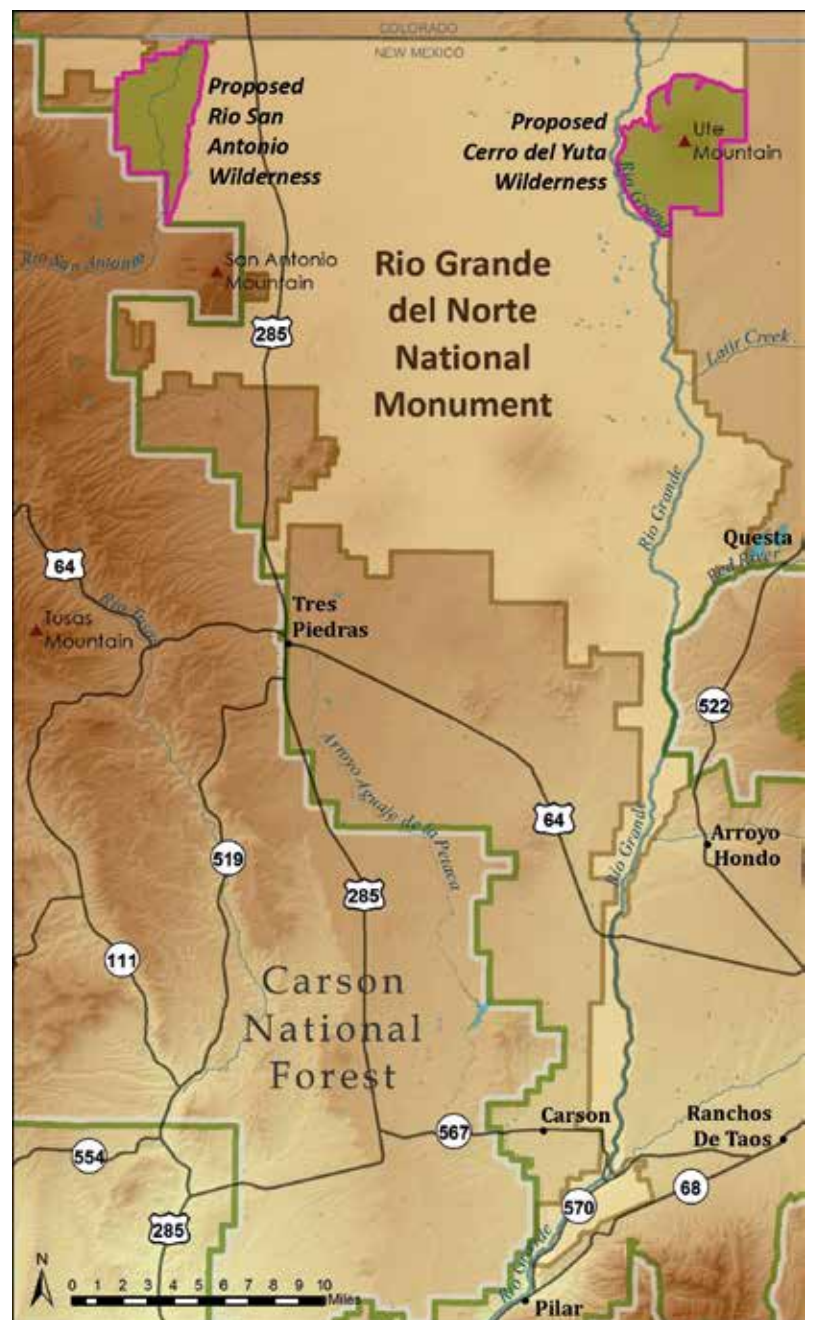
Local elected officials, tribal leaders, business owners, sportsmen, land grant heirs, acequia parcientes, ranchers, veterans and conservationists support the Wilderness proposal.

Cerro del Yuta, or Ute Mountain, rises more than 2,600 feet from the surrounding sage plain. The symmetrical volcanic dome is the centerpiece of the proposed 13,420-acre Wilderness and a well-known landmark in northern New Mexico. With ponderosa pine and piñon-juniper ecosystems, Cerro del Yuta offers important habitat for wildlife, including antelope, raptors and the herds of elk that draw hunters to the area. Cerro del Yuta also is popular among mountain climbers, and the forested slopes offer solitude.

The proposed 8,120-acre Rio San Antonio Wilderness consists of a grassland plain dotted with juniper and bisected by the river, which sits 200 feet below at the bottom of a rugged gorge. At the bottom, riparian vegetation, Douglas fir and spruce are found. Visitors can find outstanding opportunities for solitude.

Designating the Wilderness would build on the economic benefits that the national monument already has brought to the Taos area. The town of Taos has seen a significant increase in lodgers' tax revenue, and gross-receipts revenue to tourist-related businesses in Taos County has grown.

President Obama created the 242,500-acre national monument northwest of Taos through executive action in 2013, but only Congress can create new Wilderness areas. 🏔️



Map by Joelle Marier

## Public Land Transfer Bill Expected Again in 2017 Legislative Session

**A**s in the last five years, we anticipate bills designed to undermine public lands to be introduced at the upcoming 2017 state legislative session. Previous bills like those championed by Rep. Yvette Herrell, R-Alamogordo, have varied over the years from demanding immediate transfer of public lands to the state or calling for the creation of a study committee. This is part of a West-wide effort funded by out-of-state industry front groups to rob New Mexicans and Americans of their birthright. We don't want to tell our children that once public lands were privatized and sold off to the highest bidder. We've been able to kill these bills so far, but it is getting harder. We'll need your help calling your legislators, writing letters and attending the annual public lands rally day at the 2017 legislative session at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe on January 26th, 2017.

We strongly urge our readers to contact their state representatives and state senators and encourage them to vote against these bills. State legislators can be found by inputting your address at the following link: [www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/legislator\\_lookup.aspx](http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/legislator_lookup.aspx)  
Sign up at [nmwild.org](http://nmwild.org) to receive updates. 🏔️



Two percent of New Mexico's land area is protected as Wilderness. Source: The Wilderness Society





# Chocolate on Top – Wheeler Peak

By Isabel Bearman Bucher



View From the Top – Wheeler Peak. Photo: Isabel Bearman Bucher



Horseshoe Lake, Sapphire on the Mountain. Photo: Isabel Bearman Bucher

Ten miles, 3,038 feet upward ascent, 3,045 feet downward descent, 36,309 steps. Wheeler Peak, once named “Too-bur-rit” by the Shoshone, is New Mexico’s highest at 13,164 feet, the last hurrah of the Rocky Mountains. It sits massive in Taos Ski Valley, shadowed by Mount Walter, its underling. Dressed in great gray talus rivers, from afar, its lavender cardboard is pressed against the cornflower blue sky. Close, it’s a summer skirt painted yellow and lavender, with brush strokes of green. It hoards snow in its deep gashes.

This day, 10,000 years after its upthrust, five women—the youngest is 65; the eldest, 78—begin their together up-trek. Each has a reason to summit: Viv, bucket list; Jan and Debbie, the challenge; Joyce, 70th birthday celebration; and Isabel, one more time. From all walks of life, they are independent souls in love with the outdoors, with trekking, with traveling and with each other. They’re all retired from teaching, nursing and business; one is a UNM professor emeritus. They’re called the WOW: Wise Outdoor Women, Women of Wonder. Pick the title. “Together. Friends to the end of the trail,” as Jan is wont to say, tearing up.

Yes.

They all speak often of living in the moment, cherishing each day while nursing physical conditions, knowing they’ve walked through most of their time on this earth. But then, what is time? To them, it’s one foot on a trail, the adventure and the joy of every moment of life, and their true fellowship. All kid tomboys, they figured out early that guys had more fun, and show scars to prove it. All members of Albuquerque’s gyms and senior fitness centers, they’re volunteer leaders, van drivers, hikers and ardent participators. They trek spring, summer and fall; downhill ski, snowshoe and cross country in winter. They hike the world. They do personal choice volunteering, give money to their outdoor charities of choice, are vocal in support of green issues and candidates.

And so, on this beautiful crisp early mountain day in July of 2016, the five begin, yet again. They stop to confer on the up-trail, to fall in love with their journey and their New Mexico, to raise their arms to the cobalt cloudless sky. The going grows more vertical. Resting in the La Cal Basin, Isabel knows the tough up-scrée ballet is ahead. Bighorn sheep observe them nonchalantly, then carry on butting heads and clashing in the timeless mating ritual; marmot sit atop boulders and stare at the strange beings who might drop a crumb.

“Put your feet down like horse hooves,” one suggests, fording the scree rivers. “Less rock’n’roll!”

There are the encounters with much younger folks, who, at first, are unbelieving, then ask their ages. In another moment, their admiration becomes encouragement.

“You guys rock!” they call.

It gives the WOW the energy to “rock-on.” The oval circle, like the

universe, is complete: the young and the old, and the forever Möbius strip of each’s journey.

The last mile is torture for Isabel. It’s count the steps—20, then 15, then 5, before the bend-over for the back stretch. Her pack tumbles forward, butting her head downward to the dirt.

“I’ll forget,” she thinks. “Like childbirth.”

At the top, their arms encircle each other, their eyes meet with the “done it” look, and they turn to climb onto the rock pile that is the pinnacle of their state. Joyce unfurls a rainbow of ribbons that flutters in the thin air. Bodies straighten, hands grab the banner, laughter erupts, they sing “happy birthday,” joined by strangers who clap. Phones click.

“Hey!” hoots a guy. “Like, I’m 52!”

The WOWs applaud, and Isabel returns, “You be just a baby, my man!”

Down off the summit, each travels out into the infinite never-to-be-forgotten vista, surprised, as Joyce presses a bittersweet chocolate square, wrapped in gold, into each dewy palm.

“We’re all what’s in this package,” Isabel whispers. “Bittersweet, wrapped in gold.” WOW—Women of Wonder. Together till the end of the trail. Chocolate on top. 🍫



Butting Heads – Wheeler’s Big Horn Sheep. Photo: Vivian Heyward





# The Sandia Mountains – A Spiritual Resource

By James A. Morris

One late summer afternoon, thunder broke the stillness. The forest darkened. High on the northeastern flanks of the Sandia Mountains, I was nestled between the base of a fir tree and a fallen log. I listened. I gazed up through the green-black of the evergreen canopy while absorbing the silence.

Actually, it was not so quiet. Rather, I felt solitude, despite a forest symphony composed of groans, cracks, murmurs. Even perhaps, if one drifted, there may have been hushed voices. Were these of the ancients who resided on the mountain? Or maybe messages of cloud spirits awakened by the passing storm? Air moved through the trees, branches strained against one another with hesitant creaks, a sort of eulogy. One might even imagine that the infinitesimal pace of growing plants could—in some way, at least for some—be heard. Whether imagination or not, there was a quiet but not silence.

Reaching above 10,500 feet, the crest of the Sandia Mountains of New Mexico provides a vantage point from which one can see to all horizons. In late summer and fall, cool dry air pushes up the western escarpment toward its rendezvous with the warmer and moisture-laden air masses that flow from the Gulf of Mexico. Thunder clouds often form thousands of feet high. At the same time, warmth reigns along the banks of the Rio Grande river, and people go about their daily activities in shirt sleeves.

The Sandia Mountains extend for about 35 miles on the east side of the Rio Grande. For the early inhabitants of the middle Rio Grande valley, the Sandias were perceived as South World Mountain, or Oku Pin. And for many today, the Sandias remain a place for reverence. It is from behind the mountains that the light of day comes. And when the red clouds of sunrise or sunset reflect light upon the city and the river, we can see where the parent of all gods and goddesses—Oku'wapin—dwells and watches over the valley and plains.

Thunder intruded once again, pushing my thoughts back to the moment. Our day-to-day worlds are not of the forest, the mountain, the mesa, nor even the river. Despite the nearness of the Sandias and the Rio Grande, despite their influence upon the pattern of life in the region, the perspectives of most people are formed by distinct realities. Flows of traffic; the regimentation of work, school, play; construction; neon; neighbors, sirens, and billboards; all are part of an urban symphony, quite distinct from the chorale of this forest atrium.



The Thumb, Sandias. Photo: © James A. Morris

Take away the mountain and we can ask whether Albuquerque and the Rio Abajo would be as desirable, as distinct, or even conceivable. Development on and around the mountain coexists, uneasily, with those areas that are still wild. As the mountain is encircled by settlement, questions arise as to the destiny of those qualities that seemingly fulfill both individual and broader social needs. From the Pueblo perspective in their river valley settlements, and as the Spanish belatedly realized, it is in the land, the forests, the streams, the upper canyons, the mountain peaks where riches lay, where the ancient gods live.

Would I have a choice I would stay here among the soft murmur of the forest and the transient, fleeting passages of animal life. In truth, I have no choice. But as the Sandia Pueblos claim this is where their spirituality is nurtured—so mine, so ours. Thus, to our benefit, this resource must be respected. We take with us some of the energy that is given by the mountain. We return to our world, perhaps with a sense of renewal after listening to the mountain.

It is early evening now. Thunder rumbles in the distance, the sound muted amidst flashes of heat lightning. Slipping beneath the lingering clouds, the last rays of silver light illuminate the treetops, just for a moment. The noisy woodpecker is now silent, or may have moved farther away. Underground, surely there is a stirring in the burrows prior to nocturnal foraging.

Essay derived from “Oku Pin, The Sandia Mountains of New Mexico” (Rev. Ed., 2008) by James A. Morris. Available on Amazon as a Kindle e-book. © 2015. 📖

Editor's Note: The Albuquerque Journal and other media outlets have reported that Sandia Peak Ski Co. is considering the possibility of building New Mexico's first “mountain coaster,” a roller coaster that could race beneath the forest canopy. The coaster – on rails elevated off the ground, like a roller coaster – would operate throughout the summer and winter seasons. If approved, it could open as soon as 2018. We are paying close attention to this proposal. It is our understanding that:

- The coaster as understood would be contained within the ski area's existing acreage and may be “gravity”-based, but that is not confirmed;
- No formal proposal has yet been submitted to the U.S. Forest Service;
- The plan would require the Forest Service to approve an amendment to the Ski Area's Master Lease;
- This would trigger the National Environmental Policy Act and, therefore, there would be opportunity for public comment.

We would be concerned about the impacts of additional traffic and noise associated with the coaster encroaching into the Wilderness and about stress and other effects to wildlife, among other issues. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and take action as necessary. We will keep our members up to date.



## UNM WILDERNESS ALLIANCE CHAPTER Pikas Call the Wilderness Home By Marie Westover



Photo: Marie Westover

Wilderness areas in northern New Mexico provide critical habitat for alpine wildlife. One of these special denizens of the Pecos, Columbine-Hondo, Bandelier, Wheeler Peak and Latir Peak wildernesses is the round and fuzzy American pika. If you have

heard “Eeep!” from a rock pile in these areas, then you were probably near a well-camouflaged pika. Pika are closely related to rabbits, with gray fur and rounded ears. Pika are now found almost exclusively in mountainous alpine zones in western North America.

Pika are an indicator species of how other wildlife may respond to climate change in the future. Their alpine habitat is undeveloped and mostly undisturbed by people, thanks in a large part to Wilderness designations. Therefore, changes in pika distribution are probably due to direct or indirect effects of climate change, rather than habitat loss or land-use alterations. New Mexico's pikas, particularly in the Jemez Mountains and Pecos Wilderness, are the southernmost populations of the American pika.

I spent the past summer surveying habitat where pika had been reported in natural history collections to see how pikas may have been affected by climate change. My team and I systematically surveyed sites across northern New Mexico, collecting data on pika presence, absence and density. We also collected habitat data and deployed tiny temperature sensors that will record local temperatures.

This research will lead to accurate predictions of future pika occupancy, updated knowledge of where pika live in New Mexico and improved understanding of their diet through time. Already, we've found changes in pika distribution, including apparent extirpations from low elevation sites. We also found new populations of pika in the Jemez Mountains



# UNM WILDERNESS ALLIANCE CHAPTER, continued

where they had not been documented before, supporting the need to protect these public lands from development.

Wilderness areas support wildlife like pikas and allow for research opportunities in undisturbed natural lands. I hope our project will promote awareness and conservation of

the charismatic pika and our local Wilderness areas. My research this summer was funded in part thanks to an endorsement from the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance for a New Mexico Research Grant through the University of New Mexico. UNM has an active student chapter of the Wilderness Alliance and always welcomes new student

members. I encourage UNM students and lifelong learners to take a hike, get involved and support Wilderness areas and their unique wildlife. 🏔️

*Marie Westover is a PhD candidate in Biology at the University of New Mexico, and a student member of the UNM Wilderness Alliance.*

## Las Cruces BLM Lagging Behind on Wilderness Inventory

The Bureau of Land Management's Las Cruces office is falling down on the job when it comes to inventorying land for wilderness characteristics.

In 2012, the BLM issued two new manuals, which expanded upon the requirement in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to inventory its land for wilderness characteristics according to criteria based on the 1964 Wilderness Act and to make a management decision about whether or not to preserve those characteristics. If the agency decides to manage areas to preserve those wilderness characteristics, the lands will remain in good shape in case Congress decides in the future to permanently protect them. If justified, the BLM has the option not to make preservation of those characteristics a priority, but the agency still must complete the process.

In 2013, the Las Cruces BLM office issued its Draft Resource Management Plan Revision for the TriCounty area (Dona Ana, Sierra and Otero counties). This document must contain the inventory and management decisions. Initially, the office said it had inventoried all areas within the planning area, which totals over 2.8 million acres, but found only 803 acres to manage for preservation. After significant pressure from the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, the agency admitted it had not completed the inventory and agreed to do so before continuing the plan revision.

Meanwhile, in 2012 and 2013, the Wilderness Alliance conducted its own inventory in the TriCounty area. (This region includes many



Otero Mesa. Photo: Raymond Watt

areas we have been advocating for protection of for many years, such as Otero Mesa and the Organ Mountains). While we have not completed an inventory of all the areas we believe should be investigated, we did submit data for 45 units totaling over 400,000 acres.

Despite BLM's assurance that it would complete a comprehensive inventory, we remain seriously concerned that the agency is not implementing its own manuals correctly. The BLM continues to disqualify units for reasons that are explicitly illegitimate according to the agency manuals, and continues to rely on decades-old inventories without checking the areas on the ground. Three years after agreeing to do the inventory, it has made slow progress and is not nearing completion. Part of the problem stems from being short-staffed, and

not having adequate training on implementing the manual correctly. Regardless of the cause, BLM has not shown a real commitment to remedy the issue.

We have repeatedly recommended and requested, both from the BLM in Washington, D.C., and the New Mexico BLM office in Santa Fe, that the agency contract with a group such as the Student Conservation Association, which is contracted to inventory all the BLM lands in California and has tremendous experience successfully completing inventories. So far, BLM has been unwilling to pursue this route for the TriCounty area. We will continue to do all we can to ensure BLM completes a comprehensive inventory for lands with wilderness characteristics consistent with the law and agency guidelines. 🏔️

### Sharing Strategies with Chinese Environmentalists



We were pleased to host a delegation of environmental leaders and activists from China organized by the Global Ties organization to share our methods for engaging the public and communicating with lawmakers to protect wilderness. New Mexico Wilderness Alliance BLM organizer Joelle Marier led the discussion.

### Norma McCallan was 'a wonderful gift'



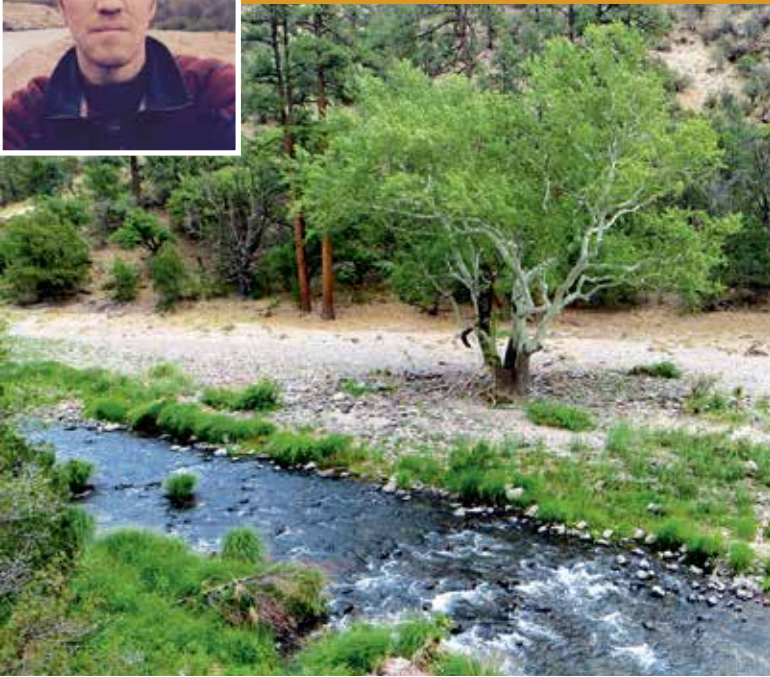
Norma McCallan, known as a tireless and effective advocate for the environment, died in July 2016 at the age of 83. Norma was a longtime member of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and steadfast volunteer for the Sierra Club. She was a dedicated conservationist and an inspiration to all. Norma worked with us to protect the Valle Vidal and Columbine-Hondo Wilderness. In the words of Mark Allison, she was "a wonderful gift" and we will all miss her!

Left to right front row: Norma McCallan, Roberta Salazar, Representative Michelle Lujan Grisham, and Alma Acosta. In the back row are: Mark Allison, Mario Nuno-Whelan, Dustin Chavez-Davis. Photo: Sierra Club – Rio Grande Chapter





# GILA UPDATE By Nathan Newcomer, Staff



Join us in seeking Wild & Scenic designation for the Gila River. Photo: Nathan Newcomer

The headwaters of the Gila River are in the world's first protected Wilderness. It is here that the Nearctic and Neotropical realms overlap to make up a world-class landscape of biological diversity, ecological jumbling and wildness. The Gila headwaters comprise one of the largest Wilderness complexes in the Americas, south of the boreal forest and north of the Amazon rainforest. The region harbors some of the greatest non-coastal breeding bird diversity and density in the United States. It is home, of course, to one of the largest undammed headwater watersheds remaining in temperate North America. Sections of the Gila and San Francisco rivers are included on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory due to their free-flowing nature and their remarkable scenic, geological, wildlife and cultural values. And yet, the Gila River itself remains unprotected while the state of New Mexico continues to pursue a major diversion project on the river.

In April, we learned that proponents of diverting the Gila River had abandoned the Gila Upper Box as one of their recommended sites in the face of overwhelming public opposition. This is an area that is of particular importance

to us due to its Wilderness quality and ecological sensitivity. Here is proof positive that your voices make a difference. And while we should all celebrate our victory, we can't let our guard down for one minute. The Gila River is still very much at risk.

In early July, the New Mexico Central Arizona Project (CAP) Entity approved for environmental analysis a large-scale Gila River diversion proposal that could cost well over \$800 million. After the latest round of project analysis and study, the agency has made little progress in identifying a viable project. The proposed diversion greatly exceeds the amount of available fund-

ing, will harm the river's threatened and endangered species, and will negatively impact recreation opportunities in the upper Cliff-Gila Valley.

One of the CAP Entity's current proposed alternatives consists of a large diversion dam at the Gila gauge at the upper end of the Cliff-Gila Valley, storage reservoirs in Spar and Winn canyons, aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) at multiple locations, pump stations, a reconfiguration of the existing irrigation diversions and ditches, and an extensive system of pipelines and siphons. ASR involves storing water underground in the aquifer when it is more plentiful and then pumping it back out for later use. Technical concerns remain, such as significant environmental impacts, the amount of water the project can provide given the limitations on when water can be diverted under the Arizona Water Settlements Act, and feasibility of aquifer storage.

Additionally, the CAP Entity discussed an initial phase including aquifer storage and recovery, an approach the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation rejected in a 2014 study as infeasible on technical and financial grounds. The amount

of water available with this ASR scheme is unknown due the lack of information about aquifer storage capacity and how long the water would stay in the Cliff-Gila Valley before running downstream. It's possible that all the available funding could be exhausted, with little water being made available.

In light of these continued threats, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is actively working to permanently protect both the Gila and San Francisco rivers by having them designated Wild and Scenic Rivers. We have formally requested legislation be drafted by our U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich. The legislation that we have requested seeks to include the following key elements:

1. Wild and Scenic designation for all sections of the Gila River, to include the West, Middle and East forks and the main stem through the Gila Wilderness.
2. Wild and Scenic designation for all sections of the Gila River from the Wilderness boundary to the Arizona state line that flow through federal public lands, including those administered by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.
3. Wild and Scenic designation for all major tributaries of the Gila River.
4. Wild and Scenic designation for the San Francisco River where it flows through federal public lands administered by the Forest Service.

The Gila River is regionally and nationally significant because it originates in America's first Wilderness area and because the Gila National Forest represents a unique confluence of major ecosystem types within the Mogollon-Datil volcanic field. Currently, no river segment or river mile in the Gila National Forest is permanently protected as Wild and Scenic. Please join us in urging our U.S. senators to draft legislation that would finally and forever protect the Gila and San Francisco rivers. 🦅

The full letter to the senators can be found at [www.nmwild.org](http://www.nmwild.org). Add your name to the petition at [www.nmwild.org](http://www.nmwild.org).



## THANK YOU TO LIGHTHAWK CONSERVATION FLYING

A big thank you to LightHawk for getting our organizers and key decision makers off the ground and into the air for some bird's-eye views of the lands we're working to protect! LightHawk is a non-profit conservation flying organization dedicated to accelerating conservation success through the perspective of flight. All of LightHawk's pilots volunteer their time, expertise and aircraft to support conservation across North America. A special thanks to our recent LightHawk pilots: Lanny Tanning, Richard Hoover, Merry Schroeder, Pavel Lukes, Barry Harper and Jim Grady! You can learn more about LightHawk and its contributions to conservation at [www.lighthawk.org](http://www.lighthawk.org).



New Mexico conservationists up in the air with LightHawk. Photos: from left: John Olivas, Matt Skroch, Joelle Marier





# ORGAN MOUNTAINS – DESERT PEAKS

By Nathan Small, Staff

Like much-anticipated monsoon rains, new partnerships are already growing conservation successes in the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks. Youth-focused nonprofits connecting kids to wilderness, the business-driven Monuments to Main Street Festival, and biological inventories to build healthier ecosystems are just some of the new efforts greening up.

Kids from the La Semilla Food Center’s summer camp spent a day exploring the Organ Mountains Wilderness Study Area outside of Aguirre Springs campground. Kids touched, smelled and savored the outdoor bounty of three leaf sumac, juniper berries and dozens of other edible and medicinal native plants. Exploring the land, where some had never been before, led also to cultural exploration. Fortunately, local leaders like Mary Carter from the Women’s Intercultural Center, La Semilla staff and renowned writer and biologist Dr. Mary O’Connell joined the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance to create a memorable trip and plant seeds for future biologists, farmers, park rangers and more. La Semilla’s mission statement says it “is dedicated to fostering a healthy, self-reliant, fair and sustainable food system in the Paso del Norte region.” With the help of Every Kid in the Park grants for the Friends of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce and the Las Cruces Bureau of Land Management, even more kids were able to see nearby public lands and gain a deeper appreciation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks.

In September, the first annual Monuments to Main Street festival focused on the economic development power of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks. Other rich local festivals, beginning with the Hatch Chile Festival, including Diez y Seis de Septiembre in Mesilla and concluding with Las Cruces’ own Salsa Fest are now leveraged by new national monument trips and community-wide advertising. Guided trips, some paid and some free, took guests in helicopters above Kilbourne Hole and World War II aerial targets, into the Wilderness-quality

and Wilderness-proposed lands in places like Broad Canyon, and even out onto the trail of outlaw legend Billy the Kid.

When students from across the nation gathered in Las Cruces for the Public Land Symposium hosted by Las Cruces BLM in September, they weren’t the first to set foot and work in the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks. Earlier this year, students from the University of Chihuahua, New Mexico State University and the University of Texas-El Paso were led by Fernando Clemente of the New Mexico Specialized Wildlife Services (no relation to the federal Wildlife Services) to do biological inventory work in the national monument. Focusing on key areas, many of which overlapped with proposed Wilderness areas that are part of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act, the students gathered invaluable baseline data that will benefit habitat, species and all of us who look to pro-

tected public lands for their wonderful bounty.

A little more than two years after designation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, community efforts to leverage more success and give back to the iconic landscapes are gaining steam. When Congress finally grants Wilderness protection to the areas proposed in the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act, the mosaic of protected public land will be fully in place to support a growing, diverse community and as a welcoming wild place for our nation. 🌲

Editor’s Note: In June, thanks to U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act (S. 3049) was introduced in the Senate. The legislation would protect eight areas within the new national monument, including parts of the Organ, Potrillo, Uvas and Robledo mountains, as well as Aden Lava Flow and Broad Canyon, totaling approximately 240,000 acres.



Kids from the La Semilla Food Center’s summer camp spent a day exploring the Organ Mountains Wilderness Study Area outside of Aguirre Springs campground. Photo: Nathan Small

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the All Pueblo Council of Governors supports the passage of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act.

– All Pueblo Council of Governors Resolution No. APCG 2016-14, September 15, 2016



## DOÑA ANA COUNTY POLL RESULTS ON WILDERNESS AND THE ORGAN MOUNTAINS – DESERT PEAKS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Voters strongly support legislation to protect Wilderness areas within the monument. More than three-fourths (78 percent) favor passing a law to designate Wilderness Study Areas in the monument as Wilderness so that the land is protected to remain intact without new roads or other structures.

~ Source: Third Eye Strategies

“As It Was” Photo: Wayne Suggs



# No Bikes in Wilderness

Santa Fe New Mexican | AUG. 30, 2016  
A BAD BIKING BILL

As a mountain biker, I am both a witness to and happy participant in the sport that is becoming mainstay of New Mexico's outdoor recreation community. When mountain bikers and conservationists work collaboratively, we share a lot of common ground. That's why I was pleased to see The New Mexican article ("Bill opening wilderness areas to bikes sparks controversy," Aug. 20) about Republican Utah Sens. Mike Lee and Orrin Hatch's new bill that would bring bikes into wilderness areas. Rather than help mountain bikers and fostering the collaborative spirit many have worked decades to build, the bill is a Trojan horse, luring mountain bikes into the misguided idea that increased access and technology are more important than nature, even in our last remaining wilderness areas. The proposed legislation undermines New Mexico's legacy of collaborative conservation that has both protected wilderness and created some of the world's best mountain biking trails and should be stopped dead in its tracks.

— Noah Long, Santa Fe

Santa Fe Reporter | AUG. 24, 2016  
WE ALL RIDE TOGETHER

Mountain bikers didn't mourn the establishment of the Columbine Hondo Wilderness Area, as was reported. Instead, we celebrated, along with the rest of the community, the permanent protection of a spectacular area and the establishment of a new 20-mile loop trail. With less than 2 percent wilderness, New Mexico has relatively less wilderness than other Western states. Wilderness advocates and mountain bikers share a lot of common ground and I consider myself both, just like thousands of others who cherish our country's natural treasures. ... Without the pristine views, clean water, and abundant wildlife, our life in Santa Fe would be very different.

Opponents of federal public lands, like Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), will use any means to attempt to divide and conquer these groups for the purpose of allowing commercial development of our public lands. Instead, let's continue to work together to honor these last wild places and also promote healthy outdoor activities for all citizens.

— Doug Booth, Santa Fe

Santa Fe New Mexican | AUGUST 31, 2016  
PRECIOUS LANDS

In recent years, mountain bikers and conservationists have worked collaboratively to put forward commonsense solutions for protecting some of our state's most sensitive lands while also finding appropriate places for recreation. As a mountain biker, I know that protecting public land and preserving nature from the harmful effects of human technologies must temper our desire for access for the activities we love. Two Republican senators from Utah, Mike Lee and Orrin Hatch, are vowing to bring bikes into wilderness areas ("Bill opening wilderness areas to bikes sparks controversy," Aug. 20), and are provoking an unnecessary battle. Not only has this bill pitted some mountain bikers against the conservation community, but, if it were to succeed, it would make wilderness indistinguishable from other public lands like national recreation areas. If we prioritize recreation above nature on all of our public lands, we will forever lose the experience of untrammelled nature that is so valuable to New Mexico and across the West. New Mexicans should reject short-sighted bills like this one that seek to undermine years of conservation work through veiled attempts to weaken the protections for America's wilderness.

— Luke Pierpont, Santa Fe 🐾

These letters to the editor of the Santa Fe New Mexican reprinted with permission of the authors.

Editor's Note: A fringe element of mountain bikers formed under the name the Sustainable Trails Coalition has allied with two of the nation's most anti-public lands, anti-conservation senators, Republicans Mike Lee and Orrin Hatch of Utah, to recently introduce the Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Areas Act, Senate Bill 3205. This act threatens the very essence of Wilderness and seeks to unravel land protections established in the 1964 Wilderness Act by allowing bikes, as well as many other forms of mechanical transport, in federally designated Wilderness. Mountain bikes are great – they just don't belong in Wilderness. Help us add a strong voice in opposition to this attempt to erode the gold standard of federal protections for our country's most special places. Write your senators and representatives to say we like Wilderness the way it is.

## SOUTHEAST NEW MEXICO'S WILD CHIHUAHUAN DESERT NEEDS YOU!



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If you're in the Carlsbad area, join us for a monthly hike to explore the wildlands we're working to protect. Contact Joelle for more information:  
**505-843-8696 X.110 OR [JOELLE@NMWILD.ORG](mailto:JOELLE@NMWILD.ORG)**

The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is working to gain administrative protection for wild Bureau of Lands Management lands outside of Carlsbad. Expanding development could lead to irreversible land degradation and contamination of area aquifers which could, in turn, affect local groundwater, karst-fed springs and spring-fed riparian areas, as well as the people and wildlife that rely upon them. The BLM needs to hear a strong voice in support of better balance between energy development and land protection in southeast New Mexico. Join us in advocating for protection of southeast New Mexico's wild Chihuahuan Desert.



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# Board Election Results 2016

Thank you to our members who exercised their right to vote in our 2016 board election! Your voice is a valued component of the work we do here at the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.

Members voted to elect Todd Schulke (Silver City) and Roberta Salazar-Henry (Las Cruces) to new three-year terms.

The Board of Directors appointed Ken Cole (Albuquerque) and Carol Johnson (Pecos) to three-year terms.

Congratulations to all!

Let us know if you or someone you know would like to be considered for a future nomination. We're always looking for a diversity of voices from people throughout the state who are passionate about Wilderness and public lands and willing to volunteer their time and effort.



From left: Ken Cole, Board Chair; Carol Johnson, Director; Roberta Salazar-Henry, Director; Todd Schulke, Board Vice-Chair.

# Looking to volunteer in wilderness?

Check out our website at [nmwild.org](http://nmwild.org) for upcoming volunteer service projects.



Photos: Mark Allison



Members attend the annual meeting at Elena Gallegos picnic area. Photo: Tisha Broska

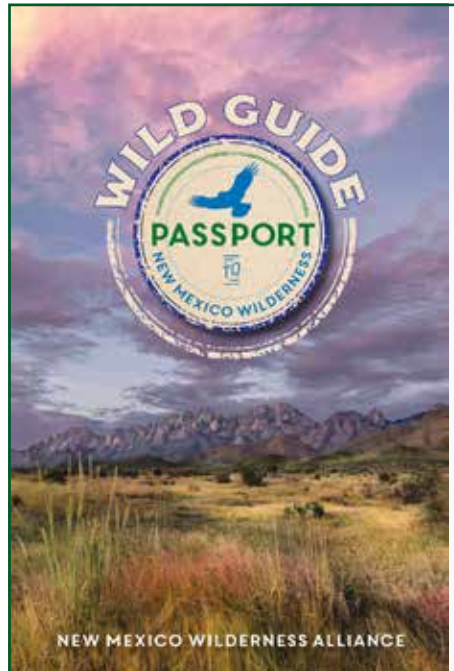
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- # If you...
- Hike or backpack
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  - Kayak or canoe
  - Stargaze or study plants
  - Photograph or paint
  - Enjoy beauty outdoors
  - Love clean water
  - Want to breathe fresh air
  - Crave wide open spaces



## ... then you belong in the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.

### You can help keep New Mexico Wild!

We advocate for the protection of New Mexico’s wildlands and wilderness areas. Education, service projects, public outreach, special events and grassroots support of citizen wilderness proposals are all ways the Wilderness Alliance strives to protect the rarest and most special of landscapes: those that remain relatively untrammelled by man.

As a member, you’ll receive our quarterly newsletter, e-news and action updates, special advisory newsletters, invitations to members-only events, member discounts and more. Your support is vital to our work.

The Wilderness Alliance is the only nonprofit organization exclusively focused on protecting wilderness areas, wildlands and critical habitat in the state of New Mexico. We push hard for protection for the critically-endangered Mexican gray wolf, we hold land management agencies accountable for following the law, and we build broad grassroots community support for wilderness protection.

**Please join us—together we will continue the fight to keep public lands in public hands.**

**[www.nmwild.org](http://www.nmwild.org)**

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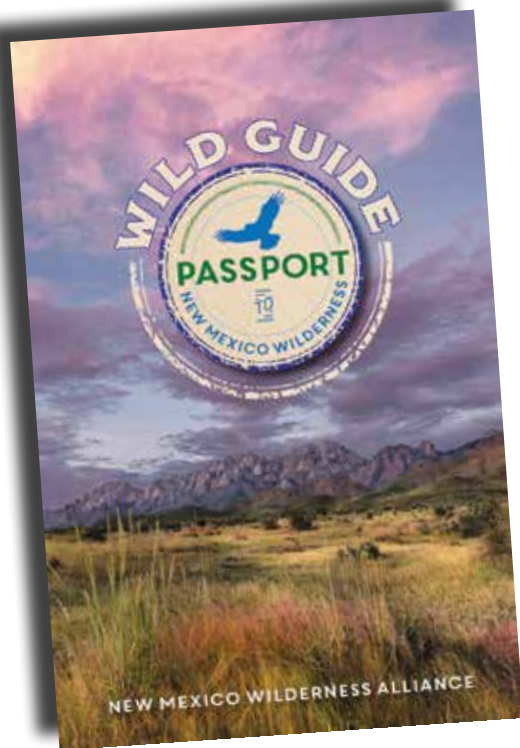
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PHOTO: MIKE GROVES, ORGAN MOUNTAINS, NM



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This comprehensive guide to New Mexico's protected wildlands is the only book that features each of the state's designated wilderness areas and wilderness study areas as well as other treasures, such as the new Rio Grande del Norte National Monument and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument.

# New Mexico Wild Turns 20!

In 2017, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance will celebrate its 20th anniversary. We plan to roll out a series of events across the state. Here in New Mexico-the birthplace of Wilderness in 1924-there have been many successes, and there is much work still to be done.

Stay tuned for notices of upcoming activities in your area. We look forward to celebrating with you!



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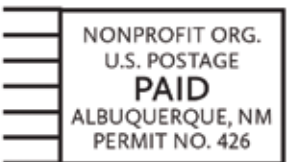
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