



## Member Advisory Newsletter

# New Mexico faces a species extinction crisis. *But there is hope.*

### From your Executive Director....

I recently stumbled upon a book in our office library entitled "The Race to Save the Lord God Bird." The ivory-billed woodpecker (the Lord God Bird) was just recently declared extinct, along with 22 other plants and animals in the United States. (Such was its striking beauty that people purportedly exclaimed "Lord God!" when they saw it.) A Washington Post article noted that "even the scientist who wrote the obit cried."

Yes, species sometimes become extinct, as they have throughout the planet's history. What we're currently experiencing though is radically different, both in cause and effect. Scientists estimate that current extinction rates are 1,000 times higher than natural background rates and that humans – we – are the reason for that. Extinction. A forever loss. A unique creature or living thing, a whole species that will never walk the earth again, or soar the skies, or swim the waters, or reach for the sun. The scientist can be forgiven for shedding tears.

Despair can overwhelm us. The best medicine for despair is doing something about it. The best antidote for grief is doing it with others. The best outlet for outrage is advocacy.

Thank you for being an advocate for the wild.

Mark Allison  
Executive Director  
New Mexico Wild



### What science tells us about species extinction.

If we look at vertebrate extinction rates before the arrival of humans, scientists estimate that the globe saw two extinctions per two million species. Today that rate is 106 extinctions per two million. Even that number does not rise to the mass extinction level. However, there is a more troubling measure. Studies suggest that only 1.46% of mammals have become extinct during human history. Yet if you look at threatened species, that number jumps from 1.46% to 23.48%. The time is now to do everything we can to slow and reverse human caused species extinction.



The Southwestern willow flycatcher is listed as an endangered species. Loss of riparian habitat has been a significant cause of its decline. (Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

### How the United States has addressed at-risk species.

The Endangered Species Act creates two types of listings. A species is *endangered* when it is at serious risk of extinction in a specific geographic range. It is *threatened* when it is at risk of becoming endangered. In the U.S. 1,600 species are listed in these categories and in New

Mexico, we have 59 listed. This past year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declared 23 species in the country extinct.

The listings are based on the best science available, but they often have political repercussions. To protect endangered species, the Department of the Interior can designate "critical habitat" which provides management for the area in which the listed species lives as well as a recovery plan. Over more than five decades since the Act was signed, it has proven to be a successful tool at saving specific species from extinction. The challenge ahead, however, is that as species extinction accelerates, this tool may not be able to keep pace with the challenge.

### **How protected lands and waters can help meet the extinction crisis ahead.**

The Endangered Species Act is a vital part of reducing species extinction. However, in a world facing climate change, a species-by-species

approach may not be enough. We believe a more holistic approach is to protect the lands and waters on which many species depend. When we protect landscape scale areas, such as the 39 Wilderness areas in New Mexico, we give species a chance to adapt and survive changing climate conditions. With nearly 1.97 million acres, New Mexico's Wilderness provides the highest level of protection available. Even with that remarkable asset, more needs to be done.

The Biden Administration's new 30X30 goal is just this type of conservation at scale. The intent of the goal is to protect 30% of the U.S. lands and waters for conservation by the year 2030. It is an ambitious goal but one that may be in reach in New Mexico, where our abundant public lands provide great opportunity for increased protections.

We owe future generations a world with diverse and abundant life as we work to manage the looming extinction crisis. Your help is vital.



*“The extinctions ongoing worldwide promise to be at least as great as the mass extinction that occurred at the end of the age of dinosaurs.”*

Edward O. Wilson



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