

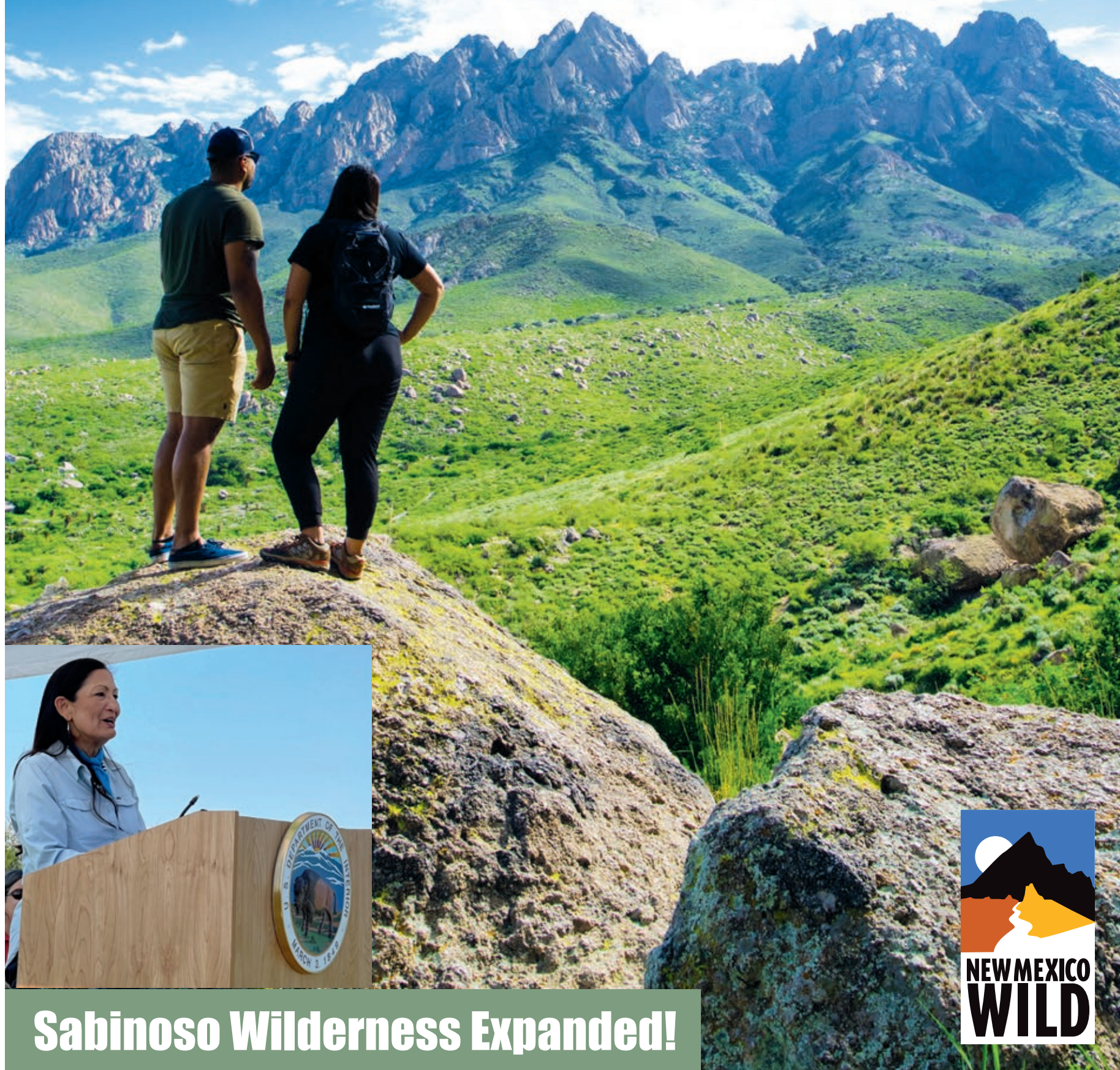
# New Mexico

The Semi-annual Publication of the  
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

Winter 2021

# WILD!

## THE RACE TO SAVE NEW MEXICO'S WILD PLACES



**Sabinoso Wilderness Expanded!**



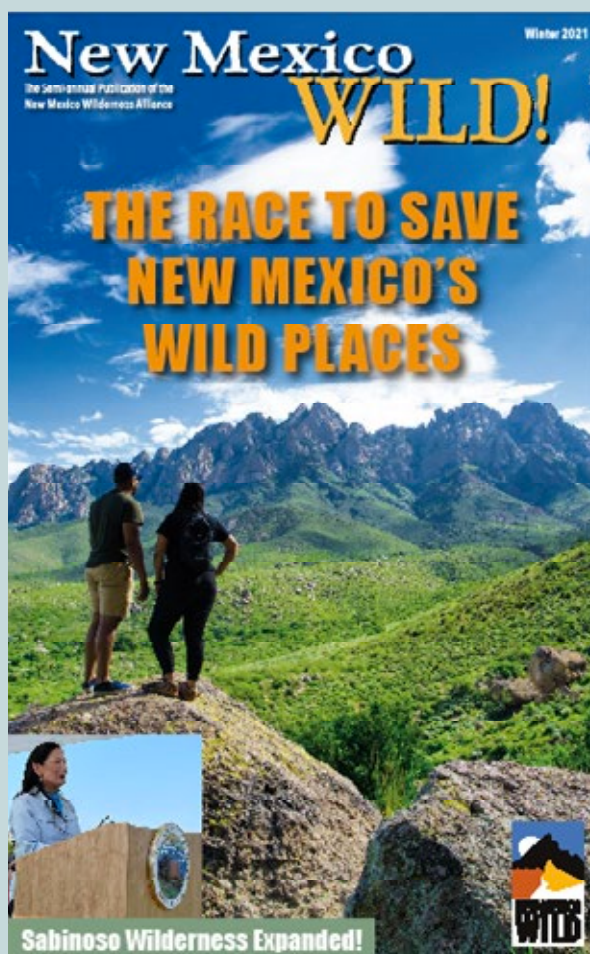


# New Mexico WILD!

The Semiannual Publication of the  
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance  
**VOLUME 18, NUMBER 2**  
**WINTER 2021**

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ON THE COVER: Hikers on the La Cueva Trail in the Organ Mountains; photo: Krystyna Gonzalez. Inset photo: Interior Secretary Deb Haaland speaking at a Sabinoso Wilderness celebration; photo: Garrett VeneKlasen

## AN ANTIDOTE TO ECO-ANXIETY

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the latest edition of our newsletter. Inside you'll see updates of a small sampling of the exciting conservation issues, place-based protection efforts and stewardship activities that New Mexico Wild is working on throughout the state. Give it a read, you'll feel better!



And who couldn't use more of that? A quick scan of the news can leave one shaken. *HuffPost* recently ran an article entitled "11 Sneaky Signs you have 'Eco-Anxiety.'" *The New York Times* featured an article headlined "We're Living Through One of the Most Explosive Extinction Episodes Ever." Covering a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the *Washington Post* quotes the United Nations secretary general as saying "the world is on a catastrophic pathway" and that it is "code red for humanity." Not to be outdone, *Politico* reports "Humanity is Doomed."

Yikes! I want my mommy!

While I'm certain there is real value for our mental health by reducing our consumption of news and "doom scrolling" (see, we even have a term for it now), these issues are unfortunately not something we can ignore any longer.

Climate change is no longer something abstract, some warning to be filed away for another day, something vague in the unforeseeable future, but something here and now that is affecting all of us — farmers, ranchers, acequia parciantes, industry, outdoor recreationists, people who live in rural communities and those in cities, the young, the old, those who breathe air, who need water ... you get the picture.

Wildlife is threatened by the effects of climate change, too, of course. And climate change compounds an already occurring and separate but, of course, related, crisis — mass species extinction.

I recently stumbled upon a book in our office library entitled "The Race to Save the Lord God Bird." It struck me more than it might as just recently, the ivory-billed woodpecker (the Lord God Bird) was officially 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, by orders of magnitude. 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. Charismatic megafauna and little things living in obscurity, completely unknown to us. A concept so utterly final and representing such irretrievable loss, that is hard to comprehend. The scientist can be forgiven for shedding tears.

The reasons behind the extinction crisis are many, but among the most significant is the loss of large, core habitat areas and the important wildlife corridors that connect them. Extractive industry, deforestation, encroaching development and the fragmentation that comes with roads degrade and destroy the places that wild things need to live.

Wild places themselves are endangered. They are finite. Certain places, once lost, are irretrievable, at least in human time frames. They are disappearing at a rapid rate, and that includes New Mexico — the fourth most biodiverse state in the country.

The limits of doing business as usual are desperately apparent. The unsustainability intuitively obvious. Our task is urgent. The call to action immediate.

To slow and avoid the worst consequences of climate change and mass species extinction, we need audacious, creative solutions focusing our attention and resources and the ingenuity of the human spirit as never before. (If the Greatest Generation had World War II, this generation has, well, The World.)

At the same time, our behavior, our thinking, our relationship with the natural world must be one that includes humility, acknowledging that there is much we don't know, that it is not only OK, but essential that we have the restraint to avoid the impulse to control and manage every living thing, every wild place. More than that, we must proactively safeguard what we have left.

If it is too much to ask that we save wildness for its own sake, might we conserve as much of the natural world still left as we can for *our sake*, to allow ourselves the possibilities of new discoveries, to safeguard our very home and life support system? For to destroy wildness, to make it extinct, is to destroy ourselves, to destroy that from which we came and which we need to survive.

It's grim stuff for sure. But I am excited and encouraged. (No, really, I am!) I am humbled and inspired by our supporters and volunteers, our partners, by our board of directors and, of course, our staff.

You'll see the team is growing as we attempt to respond to these tremendous challenges and opportunities facing our state. We've added capacity for Tribal and Pueblo engagement, traditional communities outreach, state legislative work and digital communications. Take a look at our staff roster ([www.nmwild.org](http://www.nmwild.org)), and I know you'll be impressed with the range of skills, backgrounds, passion and expertise.

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.

I'm excited because, with your help, we're doing something about it. It's never too late, and whatever we do and accomplish is better than doing nothing. And we accomplish a lot.

In the following pages, you can read about our work to secure more funding for conservation in New Mexico; volunteer opportunities; and federal legislation to permanently protect our wild places and rivers. You can read about the recent expansion of formally designated Wilderness; our work promoting equitable access to the outdoors; celebrating the inseparable connection between New Mexico's natural and cultural heritage; citizen science; and more. Oh, and cool swag to sport on the trail.

If you are one of the 30,000 or so people in New Mexico and across the country picking up a copy of this newsletter, thank you. If you aren't already, get involved! There are lots of ways to make a difference. And you might just feel better!

For New Mexico's Wilderness, waters and wildlife,



*New Mexico Wilderness Alliance*

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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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# WORK TO PROTECT CHACO CANYON PROGRESSES

BY JOEY KEEFE, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

Readers of previous issues of this newsletter are likely aware of the threats posed to the Greater Chaco Region by increasing oil and gas activities in the Four Corners area of New Mexico. With over 90% of the lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management within 10 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park already leased for oil and gas development, our work to save this culturally significant landscape has never been more important.

In September, Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez included legislation to permanently withdraw all federally managed lands within a 10-mile buffer zone around Chaco from future oil and gas lease sales within a House budget reconciliation bill, the first significant legislative effort to advance protections for Chaco during this Congress. Rep. Leger Fernandez should be commended for her due diligence in listening closely to the concerns of New Mexico's Indigenous communities and other local stakeholders to inform this decision.

The legislative strategy by Rep. Leger Fernandez is the most recent step in a long line of actions taken by New Mexico Wild's allies in Congress to permanently protect Chaco from oil and gas drilling. Sen. Martin Heinrich and former Sen.

Tom Udall introduced the original piece of legislation to create the 10-mile buffer zone around Chaco in May 2018 and later introduced an updated version of the bill in April 2019.

At the same time that the updated version of the bill was introduced in the Senate, former New Mexico Reps. Ben Ray Luján, Deb Haaland and Xochitl Torres Small introduced the same legislation in the House of Representatives. That version of the bill passed the full House in October 2019 but made no further progress in the Senate.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Chaco and its surrounding areas are sacred to both the Navajo Nation and the Pueblos of the Southwest. Chaco contains myriad archaeological sites, including entire structures from thousands of years ago. It is still used today for religious ceremonies and attracts visitors from all over the world, greatly contributing to the local economy.

Given Chaco's cultural, spiritual and natural importance to New Mexico and so many key stakeholders, it is troubling that the oil and gas industry persistently places the region squarely in harm's way. Unfortunately, industry has cynically convinced some Navajo allottees that

the legislation would affect their lands and hurt their economic interests – something the legislation explicitly does not do.

New Mexico Wild has asked House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to keep the Chaco protection language in the reconciliation bill. If it is stripped, we will urge that the Chaco legislation be immediately reintroduced and passed in both the U.S. House and Senate. In addition to continuing to push for the passage of the legislation to permanently protect Chaco, New Mexico Wild and our partners have requested that Interior Secretary Haaland safeguard Chaco through an administrative mineral withdrawal that would prevent new oil and gas leasing for twenty years. Sen. Martin Heinrich led the charge for this strategy (and State Land Commissioner Garcia Richard has also encouraged this action).

We are hopeful knowing that leaders like Sens. Heinrich and Luján, Reps. Leger Fernandez and Melanie Stansbury, and Sec. Haaland have Chaco's best interests at heart. We are confident they will keep working with Indigenous communities, New Mexico Wild and our conservation partners to ensure the Greater Chaco region is permanently protected from rampant mineral development. 🏔️



Chaco Culture National Historical Park; photo: Alison Ruth Hughes



# Celebrating an Expanding Sabinoso Wilderness

## STAFF REPORT

Sabinoso Wilderness; photo: Lois Manno

The Sabinoso Wilderness east of Last Vegas is one of New Mexico's best kept secrets among public lands lovers. But Sabinoso was the talk of the conservation community this past summer when a key donation expanded its boundaries, creating more opportunities to enjoy its red rock canyons and streams.

In March 2021, The Trust for Public Land purchased the adjacent land formerly known as Hobo Ranch and offered the 9,855-acre parcel as a donation to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Taos Field Office to increase the size of Sabinoso. The BLM ultimately decided to accept the donation of land known as Cañon Ciruela after accepting public comments on the issue, many of which came from New Mexico Wild supporters and members.

On July 23 we were fortunate to participate in an event to celebrate the addition to the Sabinoso Wilderness. The celebration was headlined by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján, and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez. The Cañon Ciruela ribbon cutting ceremony was particularly poignant given the years-long battle to ensure the public is able to access this stunning landscape.

Sabinoso became Wilderness on March 24, 2009, when President Obama signed into law the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009. The area has fantastic ecological, scenic and cultural values. Outstanding recreational opportunities also abound in the area, including hunting, hiking, geological study, horseback riding and landscape photography. Despite this initial victory, the area was completely landlocked by private land until 2017 when The Wilderness Land Trust purchased and donated the Rimrock Rose Ranch, creating the first public access and expanding the initial Wilderness boundaries.

The addition of the Cañon Ciruela lands to Sabinoso increases the size of the Wilderness to 29,855 acres and will add a second public access point for present and future generations to enjoy the area. New Mexico Wild is committed to providing whatever support is necessary to the BLM's Taos Field Office over the next several months as they improve nearby roads and build a parking lot to provide easier access to Cañon Ciruela. At the time of publication, public access to the new addition is still pending. Please be patient and stay in touch with New Mexico Wild and the BLM's Taos Field Office for up to date information.

The donation will also permanently protect a critical tributary watershed that feeds into the existing Wilderness. As we have mentioned in many other articles in this newsletter, designated Wilderness Areas are vital to our efforts to protect New Mexico's Wilderness, wildlife and water before these precious natural resources are lost forever. Thanks to The Trust for Public Land's donation and the help of other key partners like the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, our efforts continue to pay dividends. 🌲



Interior Secretary Deb Haaland speaking at a Sabinoso Wilderness celebration; photo: Garrett VeneKlasen



Senator Ben Ray Luján speaks to the crowd; photo: Garrett VeneKlasen



# Organizing on the Caja del Rio



**BY GARRETT VENEKLASEN,  
NORTHERN CONSERVATION  
DIRECTOR**

Caja del Rio; photo: Garrett VeneKlasen

**T**he Caja del Rio Plateau southwest of Santa Fe is arguably one the most culturally historic regions in all the Americas. The landscape is a singular cultural artifact — a colorful and magical New Mexican and American history book written on the land. The Caja is the finest example of cultural history the entire Southwest and possibly in all the Americas, because of all the Indigenous, Hispano and “modern” American crossroads intersecting in one landscape.

At the same time, the Caja is also a critical crossroads for wildlife, connecting the northern edge of Cochiti Pueblo, the eastern edge of Bandelier National Monument and the uplands of the Valles Caldera National Preserve with valuable winter habitat. Nineteen miles of wild and untamed Rio Grande intersect the two landscapes, providing a critical migratory route for waterfowl, raptors, songbirds, bighorn sheep, elk, deer, bear and cougar. Like the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro that bisects the Caja and has connected Mesoamerican Indigenous and Hispano travelers into North America since time immemorial, the Rio Grande corridor here too connects wildlife from the southern Rockies all the way to the Gulf of Mexico and beyond.

Sadly, the Caja is being threatened by many external stressors. Los Alamos National Laboratories has proposed new power and internet lines (and a highway!) which could irreversibly fragment the land, scar its cultural resources and degrade wildlife habitat and connectivity. Development, growth and water mismanagement by the city of Santa Fe; illegal dumping; unregulated motorized abuse; vandalism and many other issues are slowly but surely degrading Caja’s remarkable integrity.

But there is a great deal of hope for this one-of-a-kind landscape. Over the past year, New Mexico Wild and its Puebloan, Hispano and NGO partners have been organizing a formidable community led effort to permanently protect the Caja. Cochiti, Tesuque, Kewa (Santo Domingo) and Jemez Pueblos are working to outline a plan to permanently conserve the Caja. Keegan King, a political and public policy consultant and for New Mexico Wild, is working with us and the sovereign nations who recognize the Caja as ancestral lands to come up with a cohesive federal protection plan.

Led by rancher Julian Gonzales, Darrin Muenzberg, whose family has lived in the area for centuries, (y Tinajero de Barreras y Lucero) and many other local grasstop and grassroots leaders, traditional Hispano communities – including those from La Bajada, Peña Blanca, La Cienega, La Cieneguilla, Agua Fria and Jacona – are talking among themselves about maintaining traditional uses and access. Grazing permittees, land grant heirs and acequia parciantes are all integral voices in the planning process. Outdoor recreation interests are also being consulted.

Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján; Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez; Interior Secretary Deb Haaland; state Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard; Santa Fe County Commissioners Rudy N. Garcia, Henry P. Roybal and Anna Hansen; Santa Fe Mayor Alan

Webber and Santa Fe city councilors have visited the landscape and are committed to working with local stakeholders to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are being met when discussing permanent protection for the Caja. Conversations are also continuing toward involvement of local Puebloan and traditional Hispano communities in assisting federal agencies to manage the land in harmony with their shared heritage of stewardship.

In the coming months, New Mexico Wild and its partners will continue robust community outreach and will be holding public meetings throughout Santa Fe County. If you are interested in holding a meeting or just getting more involved, please contact: [darrin@nmwild.org](mailto:darrin@nmwild.org); [julian@nmwild.org](mailto:julian@nmwild.org); [keegan@atsaya.com](mailto:keegan@atsaya.com); [garrett@nmwild.org](mailto:garrett@nmwild.org) 📍



Caja Del Rio; photo: Brian O'Donnell



Caja de Rio; photo: Garrett VeneKlasen





# PECOS UPDATES

## STAFF REPORT

The battle to stop the proposed Pecos/Tererro mining exploration bid by Comexico LLC continues to play out as the company attempts to secure permits from the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resource Department (EMNRD) and the Santa Fe National Forest.

Comexico, the Colorado-based subsidiary of an Australian company, wants to search for minerals in the Jones Hill area, which is at the headwaters of the Pecos River and feeds five tributaries of the upper Pecos watershed.

As part of the permitting process through the state Mining and Minerals Division, Comexico must submit detailed and separate ecological, hydrological and cultural surveys of the area in and around the locations they plan to do their exploratory drilling. EMNRD’s staff will review and analyze the surveys and request review and analysis from various other state agencies. The public then will have an opportunity to comment on both the survey and EMNRD’s analysis.

Recently, Comexico submitted its cultural survey to both EMNRD and the Santa Fe National Forest. When the survey was released to the public, both Tesuque and Jemez and representatives of the former Pecos pueblos had a great deal to say. Essentially, Comexico concluded that the

Jones Hill area has no significant cultural assets. Clearly, they made no attempt to reach out to Pecos/Jemez or Tesuque, who would tell them that the area holds significant cultural significance as well as has numerous sites sacred to both Pueblos.

Joseph Toledo, the cultural leader of the Pueblos of Pecos/Jemez, quickly responded with an eloquent memorandum of concern sent to both EMNRD and the Santa Fe National Forest.

“We surely have ecological footprints that can be only negatively impacted by the proposed study. Our footprints should not be disturbed. We have sacred sites that are still active and in use to today. These sites are to be protected from any disturbances, far or near. These sites are critical to maintaining harmony in the Universe ...,” Toledo wrote.

Comexico’s tone deafness and disregard of Pecos/Jemez and Tesuque’s sovereign interests is a glaring red flag that should be of great concern to everyone.

The comment period for EMNRD is still open. Please take a moment and submit your comments at [nmwild.org](http://nmwild.org). The louder our voice, the better chance we have of derailing this proposed exploratory mining debacle.

## OUTSTANDING NATIONAL RESOURCE WATERS (ONRW)

Both the upper Pecos watershed (starting at Dalton Canyon upstream and including all its tributaries) and the upper Jemez/San Antonio and upper Rio Grande/Hondo recreational ONRW petitions are on track and supported by the leadership at the state Environment Department.

The Clean Water Act provides for the designation of Outstanding Waters. However, it is through state-level action that specific waters — like rivers, lakes and creeks, for example — are designated and protected. Any entity or person in New Mexico can nominate any water with outstanding ecological and/or recreational values for designation.

Many watersheds are threatened by increased temperatures and lower flows. We need to take action to protect high-quality water resources and ensure that they continue to provide clean water for irrigation, recreation and sacred ceremonies. The need to take state action is even more pressing because the federal government is eliminating or reducing federal protections.

We will keep you posted on the progress of the Water Quality Control Commission hearings for both petitions and inform you on when to attend and support these proposed designations. 📌

The Pecos River; photo: Hunter Ten Broeck





# NEW MEXICO GAME COMMISSION UPDATES

BY LOGAN GLASENAPP, STAFF ATTORNEY

## STREAM ACCESS

Recreationists of all interests celebrated a major victory on Aug. 12 when the state Game Commission voted nearly unanimously to protect our constitutional right to public stream access. At the meeting, the commissioners were asked to consider and vote on five applications submitted under the controversial Landowner Certification of Non-Navigable Waters rule, which allows landowners to restrict access to streams running through or adjacent to their property. All five applications were rejected, with not a single vote cast in favor of approval!

The Landowner Certification rule is currently being challenged by our conservation and recreation partners, and we expect a decision from the New Mexico Supreme Court any day now. New Mexico Wild submitted a friend of the court brief in that case, providing additional information regarding the constitutional and legal historical perspective of stream access in New Mexico.

Since statehood and reaffirmed almost 80 years ago by our state Supreme Court, every New Mexican has had a constitutional right to access public waters for recreation. We have been fighting to fully restore this right after six years of subtle and highly organized attacks. Our work continues beyond the Game Commission as we await a new ruling from the Supreme Court and look towards the future and a need for legislative action.

## OHVs

New Mexico Wild, along with several conservation and wildlife organizations, has submitted

a request to the Game Commission asking that they take immediate and serious action to curtail illegal off-highway vehicle (OHV) use on our public lands. Illegal OHV use fragments critical wildlife habitat, increases wildfire threat, exacerbates erosion and greatly impacts watershed functionality.

Among our requests were several common-sense, achievable and immediately implementable solutions, including:

- Implementing an ambitious statewide outreach and education campaign targeting OHV users and OHV organizations.
- Coordinating a statewide collaborative enforcement action plan involving the New Mexico Department of Game of Fish, the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and State Land Office, as well as sheriffs and state police.
- Utilizing OHV Trail Fund dollars to increase signage; to build new gates and barrier structures; and, of course, to decommission and rehabilitate illegal OHV routes.
- Undergo a substantial rulemaking to establish and strengthen existing rules prohibiting and punishing illegal OHV use.

## OTTERS

The Game Commission is continuing a decades-old discussion about reintroducing river otters to the Gila River system in southwestern New Mexico. The Gila is home to the nation's first Wilderness, the native Gila trout and countless Native American cultural sites and artifacts. The river otter is a keystone species

to this riparian ecosystem, and careful and well thought out reintroduction would, in theory, greatly benefit all species in the area. We are tracking and engaged in this discussion. We are always happy to hear your thoughts on these and other issues.

Please email [logan.glasenapp@gmail.com](mailto:logan.glasenapp@gmail.com) if you'd like to share your thoughts on river otter reintroduction. 🦦



A sign prohibiting the use of motorized vehicles in Wilderness; photo: Garrett VeneKlasen



A non-navigable segment of the Cimarron River; photo: Garrett VeneKlasen



# AN UPDATE ON FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT

BY LOGAN GLASENAPP, STAFF ATTORNEY

## BLM UPDATES

With a new administration comes a renewed effort and strategy to protect public lands under the authority of the BLM. The Farmington, Carlsbad, Rio Puerco and Tri County resource management plans (RMPs) will all progress over the next few months as the Bureau of Land Management state office places them at the top of its priority list. Also on that priority list are final management plans for the Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks national monuments. All of these RMPs present tremendous opportunities to position New Mexico as a leader in the 30x30 effort to slow and ideally reverse the extinction crisis by protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030.

There are massive swaths of Wilderness quality lands present across BLM lands in New Mexico. Often, the first step to adding these lands to the National Wilderness Preservation System is recognition by the land management agency that the land fits Wilderness criteria. For BLM, this means being included in the official Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) inventory collected whenever an RMP is updated.

As we’ve seen, the opportunity to help make complete LWC inventories comes around every 30 years or so. We will, of course, be calling upon our supporters and fellow Wilderness stewards to make their voices heard when the time comes in defense of the as yet untrammeled lands in our state.

We expect the Rio Puerco and Tri County RMPs to begin their public engagement in late 2021, with Farmington offering opportunities for public input in mid to late 2022, and Carlsbad sometime later. The monument plans will present opportunities for public input in late 2021 or early 2022. As always, keeping up with these newsletters, following New Mexico Wild on social media and subscribing to our eNews are the best ways to make sure your voice is heard when the time comes!

## FOREST PLANS

Our three northern national forests – the Carson, Cibola and Santa Fe – are nearing the end of their forest plan revisions. The Gila National Forest will not be far behind, likely releasing its proposed final plan in early 2022. Finally, the Lincoln National Forest recently published its draft forest plan and accompa-

nying draft environmental impact statements. We have been engaged in these processes for nearly a decade, including submitting our own Wilderness inventories for several of these forests, working with coalition partners to submit substantive technical comments and gathering thousands of comments from our members in New Mexico and from supporters from across the country.

We are once again calling on you to make your voice heard on these critically important documents. Simply put, our national forests are likely going to recommend disappointingly low numbers of Wilderness areas and continue to prioritize extractive use above conservation. The moment to object to the three northern forest plans is now, as is the moment to provide comments to the Lincoln National Forest regarding its draft plan. Visit [nmwild.org](http://nmwild.org) to learn more. We will be sure to help our members provide substantive comments by sending out social media and email alerts and providing sample language to help loosen any writer’s block. Every year, we see more land and trees sacrificed to extractive and overly consumptive uses but it’s not too late to meet the 30% preservation goal as envisioned by President Biden’s executive order. 🌲

A hiker on the Crest Trail in the White Mountain Wilderness within the Lincoln National Forest; photo: Andy Osorio.





# Recapping Latino Conservation Week 2021



**BY SIMON SOTELO III, COMMUNITY GRASSROOTS ORGANIZER**

**T**his year, New Mexico Wild and our partners ramped up our Latino Conservation Week outreach, taking the annual celebration of Latino contributions to conservation statewide. We started with a kick-off in Santa Fe to introduce the idea and goals of Latino Conservation Week to the state. More than 200 representatives from New Mexico Wild, the Continental Divide Trail Coalition, New Mexico Wildlife Federation and many other organizations dedicated to ensuring the recognition of Latinos and Hispanics in outdoor spaces participated. There were several prominent keynote speakers at the event, including Sen. Martin Heinrich and Axie Navas, director of the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division.

We coordinated events throughout the state, including in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Chama, Cuba, Silver City and Las Cruces. We were thrilled to host a successful clean-up of the Caja del Rio Plateau outside of Santa Fe. The Caja del Rio protection campaign is going to be a major priority for us at New Mexico Wild over the next few years, so it was exciting to see so many people come out and show care to this vulnerable landscape.

With the help of New Mexico Wild Wilderness Ranger Isa Nello we hosted a Backcountry Cook-Off in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains. The 20-plus people in attendance were split into groups of two to four to prepare meals using Wilderness-appropriate ingredients and cooking equipment. Isa documented the recipes and has turned the collection into a backcountry cookbook that will be made available to the public soon. We hope this cookbook will keep the campfires burning and inspire more New Mexicans to spend multiple consecutive days in Wilderness.

The week of events culminated in the third annual “Art & Conservation” show in Silver City at the Diana Ingalls Leyba Studio & Gallery. Around 35 pieces of original artwork were on display. There were four cash prizes given out in honor of the best works entered. The first, second and third place winners were part of the juried portion of the show. There was also a “Hoi Polloi” (viewers’ choice) award, which was chosen not only by visitors to the gallery but also via New Mexico Wild’s social media accounts. More than 120 people attended the show in person, with precautions taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. 🐾



Left: Darrin Muenzberg and his family at the Caja del Rio cleanup event; photo: Brittany Fallon. Right: Simon Sotelo III and other New Mexico Wild staff at the Latino Conservation Week kickoff event; photo: staff



## A TRIBUTE TO A DEVOTED SUPPORTER



Thomas Becker sitting atop Triangle Peak; photo: Kathryn Rogers

**By Kathryn Rogers**

Thomas Becker was born in Germany and grew up there, but he was a traveler and wanderer; as a young man, he moved to New Orleans, where he worked as a mathematician and taught at Tulane and the University of New Orleans. He loved the mountains, though, and eventually moved out west, living in the Tahoe area and in Salt Lake City.

There, he worked for a financial tech company, creating algorithms that brought him a good living. He lived frugally, but he did indulge in a very nice camping van, which he drove throughout the American West so that he could camp off the beaten path and climb mountains to his heart’s content.

Besides being an expert hiker, he was a marvelous storyteller, an avid musician, and a lover of independent coffee houses.

Thomas Becker died suddenly of natural causes at his home in Salt Lake City in early September 2020, just shy of his 68th birthday. He had climbed a mountain just a few days before. He is survived by his siblings, Cornelia and Bertold, as well as nieces and nephews. Thomas’s gentle, loving spirit added immeasurably to the lives of all those who knew him.

He left most of his wealth to nonprofit organizations, mostly ones that protect and restore wild places, such as New Mexico Wild. His contributions to Wilderness, wildlife and water will forever be missed.



# RANGER UPDATE 2021

Each season for a Wilderness ranger looks different depending on the needs of the Wilderness and the next steps toward understanding the character of these special areas. We are closing out our fifth season partnered with the U.S. Forest Service and our first with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in New Mexico’s Wilderness areas with the goal of completing Wilderness character monitoring and on-the-ground stewardship. Each season has looked different.

This season has been interesting to navigate with the continued presence of the COVID-19 virus. We’ve seen a massive increase in recreational activities in Wilderness as folks are finding respite in the wild. This has provoked many conversations within our team about the future of outdoor recreation in New Mexico’s Wilderness and how best to manage increased use in our wildest areas. One thing is clear: Educating the public about the importance of Wilderness and how to recreate responsibly should remain a major goal for all who care about protecting our wild lands. We encourage all folks getting out on public lands to educate themselves in how to do so in the least impactful way. Preparation is key. Please check in with us if you have any questions about how to prepare for your next trip in Wilderness or, better yet, come join us in the field!

Here is a snapshot of work completed in New Mexico Wilderness this season:

## SANTA FE NATIONAL FOREST – Pecos and Dome Wildernesses

- Teaching a new generation about the values of Wilderness and Wilderness stewardship.
- Talking with visitors about Wilderness and Leave No Trace (LNT).
- Developing a Wilderness Education Plan to guide future educational activities in the Pecos Wilderness.
- Working with volunteers to clear trails in the Pecos and conduct solitude monitoring in the Dome Wilderness.
- Increasing efforts to improve Wilderness character in the Pecos.
- Spending the summer in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.



Volunteer and Rangers at Cave Creek Caves in the Santa Fe National Forest; photo: Zack Bumgarner

## CIBOLA NATIONAL FOREST – Sandia Mountain, Manzano Mountain, Withington and Apache Kid Wildernesses

- Working on all four Cibola Wilderness Baseline Assessments.
- Installing trail signs in Apache Kid Wilderness.
- Hosting cook-off for Latino Conservation Week at La Cueva Campground.
- Implementing Education Action Plan.



Walker Martin securing a trail junction sign in the Apache Kid Wilderness; photo: Brennan Davis

- Implementing solitude monitoring across all four Cibola Wildernesses.
- Finishing Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Advisory Document for the Manzano Wilderness.

## GILA NATIONAL FOREST

- Createing Solitude Monitoring Plan for the Blue Range Wilderness.
- Facilitating multiple stewardship days involving trash clean up.
- Partnering with local nonprofits and Forest Service districts to implement trail work.
- Presenting Leave No Trace principles as well as Wilderness education to multiple youth programs.
- Planning and hosting a Latino Conservation Week event.
- Collecting trail conditions data across the Glenwood District.



Volunteers working near Blue Range Wilderness in Gila National Forest; photo Will Ribbans

## BLM TAOS FIELD OFFICE – Sabinoso, Rio San Antonio, Cerro del Yuta and Chama River Canyon Wildernesses

- Field monitoring in Sabinoso Wilderness, including reporting on the extent of degradation due to the presence of illegal cattle and surveying the amount of visitor use via the Rimrock Rose Ranch entrance.
- Field monitoring in the Cerro del Yuta and Rio San Antonio Wildernesses, including establishing visitor use monitoring strategies for the 2021 hunting season.
- Surveying campsites throughout the Rio Chama Wilderness Study Area/Chama River Canyon Wilderness.
- Outlining potential stewardship projects in these Wildernesses, including updating trail signage at the Rio Cebolla campground on the Rio Chama as well as planning projects such as installing Wilderness boundary portal signs for the Rio San Antonio Wilderness and the Cerro del Yuta Wilderness.
- Constructing trailhead kiosks for installation at the southwest portal to the Cerro del Yuta Wilderness and the Rimrock Rose Ranch portal to the Sabinoso Wilderness 🪵



Sabinoso Wilderness Area; photo: Walker Martin



# NEW MEXICO COMMITS TO

## STAFF REPORT



Campers at the Big Tesuque Campground; photo: Aaron Bradley

In August, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed an executive order calling for New Mexico to conserve 30% of its lands and waters by the year 2030. The move puts New Mexico among just a handful of states to commit to what is often referred to as the 30x30 climate resolution – a national movement with local roots.

Former New Mexico Sen. Tom Udall sponsored the initial federal resolution aimed at protecting 30% of the nation's lands and oceans by 2030 (S. Res. 372), with Sen. Martin Heinrich co-sponsoring. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland sponsored the 30x30 climate resolution in the House of Representatives during her tenure in Congress and was instrumental in bringing the issue to the forefront nationally. Within weeks of assuming office, President Joe Biden issued an executive order committing the entire federal government to the same goals at a national level. So far, the 30x30 goal has been an integral part of the Biden administration's approach to addressing the dual challenges of climate change and mass species extinction crises.

The executive order issued by Gov. Lujan Grisham follows a similar blueprint to the national 30x30 climate resolutions, substituting oceans with rivers, lakes and streams due to the state's landlocked status. The order recognizes the degradation of New Mexico's natural resources – from drinkable water to vulnerable wildlife species that are critical to our diverse ecosystems – due to a climate that is growing warmer with each passing year. The order also rightfully asserts that the conservation of public lands and waters is an effective tool for mitigating climate change.

At New Mexico Wild, we are firm believers that the best way to combat the effects of climate change and the mass species extinction crisis through conservation is by designating more of our public lands as feder-

ally protected Wilderness Areas. Currently, only roughly 2.5 percent of New Mexico's federally managed public lands are designated as Wilderness. The outlook is not much better at a national level, as only about 4.5% of federally managed public lands in the United States are designated as official Wilderness Areas. Clearly, there is a lot of work still to do to protect New Mexico's quickly disappearing wild places.

We feel that we can help by continuing to do what we always do, and that is to urge our federal agencies to designate more acres of protected Wilderness at every available opportunity. For instance, the Lincoln National Forest is currently in the process of updating its management plan, and the draft it has put forward contains a paltry number of new Wilderness recommendations. As of this writing, we are mobilizing thousands of New Mexicans to submit public comments to the forest to demand more acres of recommended Wilderness and remind the agency that it has a duty to further President Biden's 30x30 conservation goals.

We have seen numerous times how this public pressure can spur our federal agencies to act. As mentioned in another article in this newsletter, thousands of public comments persuaded the Bureau of Land Management's Taos Field Office to accept a donation from The Trust for Public Land that increased the size of the Sabinoso Wilderness by nearly 10,000 acres. Robust public input is effective, which is why we are grateful for supporters like you and will continue relying on your advocacy as we approach the 2030 deadline.

In light of this lack of properly protected lands in the state, we are glad to see that Gov. Lujan Grisham's executive order calls for the creation of a task force to identify conservation opportunities that will advance the state's 30x30 goals. The task force will be comprised of



# 30X30 CLIMATE RESOLUTION



the executives of various state agencies who will be tasked “to support and implement programs designed to conserve, protect, and enhance lands and natural environments across the State in furtherance of the foregoing goal.”

The creation of this task force is a logical first step. New Mexico has never had a comprehensive plan for tackling climate change, and it makes sense for leaders of relevant agencies to meet periodically and decide on clear, reachable goals. However, we know that this ambitious effort is going to require ample resources which have been hard to come by historically.

As such, we will continue our outreach to Gov. Lujan Grisham, the relevant departments in her cabinet and state legislators to encourage these leaders to pursue new and innovative funding avenues for these 30x30 initiatives. For example, millions of dollars of federal stimulus money have been made available to New Mexico, and it would make perfect sense to apply some of those funds to these conservation efforts. The 30x30 climate resolution – both at a state and federal level – is an exciting new approach to conserving our precious natural resources. Now the hard work begins to actually reach these goals, and we hope that you will join us in these efforts. You can learn more about our 30x30 work by visiting [nmwild.org/30-x-30](https://nmwild.org/30-x-30). 🌲



Left: Achenbach Canyon, photo: Krystyna Gonzalez; Right: People floating on the Rio Grande; photo: Aaron Bradley



# BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE THROUGH CLIMATE INFRASTRUCTURE

## STAFF REPORT



President Biden’s climate infrastructure goals align with our mission to ensure more equitable access to the outdoors; photo: Aaron Bradley; below left: The Build Back Better Plan would allow agencies to prioritize climate infrastructure over developments like a proposed dolomite mine near the Florida Mountains; photo: Krystyna Gonzales

In addition to his 30x30 executive order that aims to protect 30% of the nation’s land and water sources by 2030, President Joe Biden intends to address the nation’s climate change crisis through federal infrastructure policy. His comprehensive Build Back Better plan not only addresses traditional needs like crumbling infrastructure and funding for federal highways, but also aims to build and restore infrastructure that will reduce our nation’s carbon footprint.

The plan includes innovative features such as funding to clean up orphaned oil and gas wells on our nation’s federal public lands. Too often oil and gas companies leave New Mexico taxpayers burdened with the cost of cleaning up their messes. The orphaned wells cleanup language in the federal infrastructure legislation would help restore these polluted lands at no cost to taxpayers while employing hundreds of New Mexicans with well-paying jobs.

Meanwhile, the Build Back Better plan recognizes that public lands, city parks and other open spaces are vital to the health of our communities and calls for the establishment of even more of these places to ensure all of America’s children have equitable access to the outdoors. This model resonates with us at New Mexico Wild, as we continue to push our state legislature to increasing funding for the recently established Outdoor Equity Fund.

This is a refreshing approach to infrastructure policy, yet it has met resistance in Congress from leaders who do not prioritize conserva-

tion and environmental protection. President Biden’s infrastructure legislation passed the U.S. Senate with the help of New Mexico Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján. But despite the best efforts of New Mexico’s leaders, the deadlocked Senate stripped many of the climate-related provisions that made it such an ambitious and noble proposal.

There is still hope that the more environment-friendly House of Representatives could restore much of what was lost in the Senate version of the bill before the final language heads to President Biden’s desk for his signature. In late August, New Mexico Reps. Teresa Leger Fernandez and Melanie Stansbury stepped up to the plate and help pass a budget framework for the bill that includes many of the climate-related funding sources that had previously stripped from it. We are working to support these leaders as they shepherd the legislation through the rest of the process in the hopes that the version that reaches President Biden’s desk is as close to the initial Build Back Better goals as possible.

Our nation’s federally managed public lands have always been intended for multiple uses, yet it seems that many national leaders are still prioritizing oil and gas development over conservation designations and infrastructure developments that might actually begin to reverse the effects of climate change. We don’t believe that approach is acceptable or sustainable, so we will continue supporting all efforts to build and restore infrastructure that is beneficial to the future of our planet. 🌱





# 2022 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: 30 DAYS OF EXCESS CASH IN A CONTINUING PANDEMIC

BY BRITTANY FALLON, POLICY DIRECTOR

As with much in this era, there is considerable uncertainty about the 2022 legislative session, except for one thing: There will be money, and lots of it. Over \$3.1 billion, in fact.

## BILLIONS IN FEDERAL DOLLARS

This \$3 billion+ comes from several sources. In March, New Mexico was apportioned roughly \$1.7 billion from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which aims to help states recover economically from the COVID-19 shutdowns of 2020. Congress is also debating an additional infrastructure package right now, which New Mexico will undoubtedly benefit from.

While New Mexico’s ARPA spending is still being decided in the courts, looking toward other states’ spending shows promising opportunities. One common thread among over a dozen states is putting tens of millions of dollars toward outdoor recreation access and infrastructure. Across the U.S., parks and Wilderness areas saw record-breaking attendance as COVID surged and people sought to recreate outside, blowing the door open on a suffering and chronically underfunded parks system.

The New Mexico State Parks division has long been underfunded for both staff and infrastructure, with maintenance backlog estimates as high as \$40 million for things like trash cans, maintaining roads and handling wastewater from RVs. While one-time ARPA dollars likely cannot be used for staff positions, they could be used to boost our trails system, create better signage, improve access for underserved communities, bolster wildlife protection efforts and generally better prepare our parks for continued popularity. This is what New Mexico Wild will continue to advocate for with whomever the state Supreme Court decides in favor of when it comes to ARPA spending.

## THE SKINNY ON STATE SURPLUS DOLLARS

In addition to the above \$1.7 billion in federal money, at the time of this writing New Mexico is estimated to have \$1.4 billion (and possibly more come January) in “new” money for the state Legislature to allocate in just 30 days. While this is largely due to the skyrocketing price of oil, let’s not forget that the boom and bust cycle of this destructive industry results in far more economic uncertainty than it does

certainty, thus keeping New Mexico’s economy in disarray year after year.

How lawmakers plan to spend these surplus dollars remains to be seen. The 2022 legislative session is a 30-day “short session” beginning on Jan. 18 and ending Feb. 17. Even though the Legislative Finance Committee convenes around the state to hear budget issues all summer and fall, 30 days is a very short amount of time to finalize spending such a large surplus when even in lean years, the Legislature gets messy and opaque over matters of money. One additional thing to note is that we don’t know yet whether the public will be allowed to attend the session in person or simply virtually.

The good news about insider money games is Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham is firmly in our court when it comes to conservation and the need for funding. Her administration is requesting budget increases for all conservation state agencies, especially State Parks. As we have for the past several years, we will advocate for her budget increases for all of the environmental agencies. With the governor’s August announcement of her 30x30 executive order to preserve 30% of New Mexico lands by 2030, I believe we can also expect that she

Story continued on page 19

Mountain bikers in the Sandia Mountain Foothills; photo: Aaron Bradley

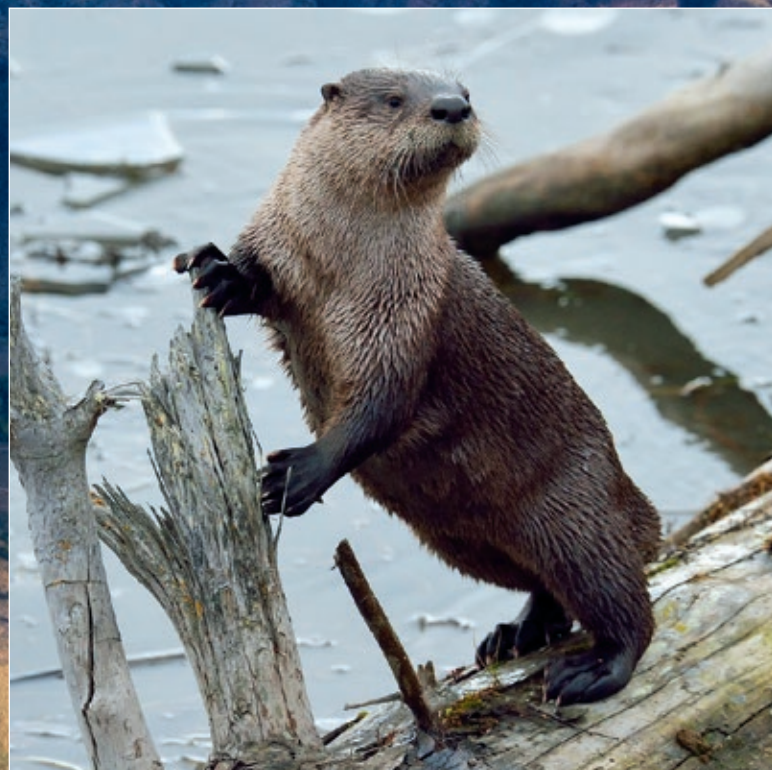




# RIVER OTTER RESTORATION TO THE GILA RIVER?



BY MELISSA SAVAGE, CONTRIBUTOR



An aerial view of the Gila River running through the Gila Wilderness; photo: EcoFlight. Inset: A river otter; photo: WikiMedia Commons

The lively, rambunctious river otter is native to New Mexico. However, the last naturally occurring animal in the state was killed on the Gila River near Cliff in 1953. As the top predator in our aquatic systems, otters play a key role in structuring healthy river ecosystems. Now that the Upper Rio Grande has a thriving population of reintroduced otters, the Gila River is the next site to be repopulated.

In 2006, the New Mexico Game Commission unanimously approved a plan to reintroduce river otters into the Upper Rio Grande and Gila River watersheds. And from 2008 to 2010, 33 otters from Washington state were released into a tributary of the Rio Grande on Taos Pueblo land. The Rio Grande population is now thriving, with around 100 otters delighting river runners, visitors and otter watchers.

But in 2011, the commission voted to pause release of river otters into the Gila River until there was more information on potential impacts of otters on endangered species. New reports, including a thorough biological assessment of the potential effects of Gila otter restoration and a review of fish population studies, are now completed. The Game and Fish Department is still very cautious, and an otter restoration is not planned in the near future.

Otter predation may very well have a beneficial impact on threatened and endangered fish species in the Gila River. The absence of otters has allowed the proliferation of nonnative fish and nonnative crayfish. Crayfish are especially destructive, eating small fish, fish eggs and vegetation, and have been identified as one factor in the decline of threatened and endangered species. The decline of the endangered chub species in the Gila, for example, can be attributed mainly to nonnative fish species like catfish and bass. Otters typically eat larger, slower nonnatives like common carp, suckers, catfish and bullhead.

Restoration of river otter to the Gila River system in New Mexico would have numerous benefits, ranging from improving ecosystem integrity to conservation of other native aquatic species. The restoration of otters has been highly popular throughout the state, supported by river runners, hikers, children, ecologists, trappers, visitors and anglers. Sightings of otters have already brought pleasure to scores of people along the Upper Rio Grande. River otters are part of our state's natural heritage and their restoration to the Gila River would be welcome. 🦦





# PUSH TO PROTECT THE GILA CONTINUES

BY NATHAN NEWCOMER, GILA GRASSROOTS ORGANIZER



Michael Darrow, Fort Sill Apache Tribal Historian, and Teresa Martinez, Executive Director of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition, speak during a panel on the cultural importance of the Gila River at the Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers of Opportunity Conference; photo: Joey Keefe.

The campaign to permanently protect the last free-flowing rivers in south-west New Mexico gained steam in early October 2021, as New Mexico Wild hosted the Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers of Opportunity Conference outdoors at the Terrace Gardens on the campus of Western New Mexico University in Silver City.

After more than a year of being unable to engage with the public due to the pandemic, we successfully and safely brought together local landowners, sportsmen and women, business owners, elected officials, tribal leaders, and conservationists to re-engage with the communities of Grant County. The conference showcased the area’s remarkable river values through panel discussions and field trips that highlighted the natural and resources the rivers provide, as well as the potential economic development that could come from a federal Wild and Scenic designation. Panelists included New Mexico Commissioner of Public Lands Stephanie Garcia Richard, as well as local community and elected leaders.

The discussions that took place at the conference put the numerous personal connections to the Gila River watershed on display and revealed why proposed legislation to protect the river as Wild and Scenic is so important to our communities in the Gila region. Sen. Martin Heinrich echoed this sentiment in a video to attendees where he reiterated his full commitment to reintroducing the *M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers Act* in partnership with Sen. Ben Ray Luján before the end of this year. Much progress has been made during these challenging times in local efforts to protect the Gila River for future generations, and we will continue to work diligently with these communities and our conservation partners to ensure that this important legislation is not only reintroduced, but also passed into law through the U.S. Congress.

Sen. Heinrich’s message on the reintroduction of the *M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers Act*, can be viewed online at [nmwild.org](https://nmwild.org).

We thank the sponsoring organizations and local community partners for their continued support for permanent protection of the greater Gila Watershed. Without their support and that of the local businesses and residents, this campaign would not be possible. Our organization and coalition of supporters are committed to a future where the Gila River watershed is permanently protected.

The Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers of Opportunity Conference sponsors included: American Rivers, American Whitewater, Conservation Lands Foundation, Fort Sill Apache Tribe, Gila – Rio Grande Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Gila Conservation Coalition, Gila Resources Information Project, Grant County, Heart of the Gila, New Mexico Trout Unlimited Council, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, The PEW Charitable Trusts, Southwest New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce, Turner Foundation, Town of Silver City, Upper Gila Watershed Alliance, and Western New Mexico University. 📍

## Thank you to Our Conference Sponsors!





# 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 1,972,507 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 2.5 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 Wild! 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.



will go to bat to fund that effort. My hope is that we will see substantial money invested in conservation through a combination of federal stimulus and state dollars.

NON-MONEY MATTERS

In short sessions, any non-budget related legislation must receive an executive message from the governor in order to be considered “on the call” for the Legislature. With the large amount of money on the table and an election around the corner, we can expect a very limited number of executive messages. It is extremely difficult to pass legislation in such a short session, and focus is therefore usually the key to success.

We are hoping to focus on one narrow piece of legislation which dovetails nicely with the 30x30 executive order, a bill amending the Natural Heritage Conservation Act to allow voluntary land acquisition. This state conservation program, which has not been funded since Gov. Bill Richardson was in office, is a little outdated and doesn’t give New Mexico flexibility when it comes to properties for sale that could help initiatives like wildlife corridors or 30x30 efforts. We are hoping to change that by giving the state another way to purchase property, which will simultaneously allow New Mexico to better match new federal dollars set aside for this purpose from the Great American Outdoors Act. New Mexico

could receive \$3 million to \$5 million per year from this federal program, but only if we can match the money every year using state dollars – something we don’t currently have in place. Amending the Natural Heritage Conservation Act, and then funding it, will move the needle closer to our long-term goal of matching federal conservation dollars.

Finally, House Speaker Brian Egolf hosted a Climate Summit in late October to discuss legislative solutions to climate problems facing

the state. New Mexico Wild co-hosted the conference, focusing on state 30x30 goals and the need for long-term conservation funding. We are looking forward to the opportunity to educate legislators and the public about the need to better fund the places that the state promotes for tourism every day. Getting New Mexico’s economy less dependent on oil and gas is critical to curb climate change, but we also must plan toward a sustainable outdoor recreation economy that includes both adequate infrastructure and conservation funding. 🌲



More funding is needed to protect the places New Mexico promotes for tourism; photo: Krystyna Gonzales

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# WELCOME NEW STAFF



Sarai Cajiao

### Sarai Cajiao, Digital Communications Coordinator

Sarai was born and raised in Quito, Ecuador. She was introduced to the Land of Enchantment for the first time 11 years ago as a foreign exchange student. In 2016, she came back to New Mexico after obtaining a bachelor's degree in Graphic Design & Visual Communications at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador. She has worked for several magazines and newspaper publications like the Albuquerque Journal and Brewers Crew Magazine creating promotional and advertising content for numerous clients. She volunteers at Wildlife Rescue, loves to hike and spend time in nature. Sarai is excited to contribute in protecting New Mexico's lands, waters and wildlife. She believes that we were born to take care of wildlife, not to destroy it. "Nacimos para cuidar la vida silvestre, no para destruirla."



Darrin Muenzberg

### Darrin Muenzberg, Northern New Mexico Traditional Communities Coordinator

Captain Muenzberg (y Tinajero de Barreras y Lucero Godoy) is a long-time New Mexican, like numerous generations of American miners, muleteers, merchants, machinists, and mariners before him. Darrin is proud of his Hispano, Chicano, and Coyote heritage in the region. While "following the work" as his forebears have for centuries, he has remained anchored in his ancestral village of La Bajada, where he lives with wife Eva, and son Baern Candelario. The traditional lifeways of the Caja del Rio, La Majada, El Camino Real, and Santa Fe River acequia culture, have sustained the families of La Bajada since the 17th century. Stewardship, and respect for the revelation of nature, lie at the heart of those community beliefs. He has served as Chairman of the La Bajada Traditional Village Committee since 2006. He was a founding member of the Santa Fe River Traditional Communities Collaborative in 2011, and was elected as a Commissioner of the La Bajada Community Ditch & Mutual Domestic Water Association in 2013. "La Lucha Sigue!"



Ralph Vigil

### Ralph Vigil, Northern New Mexico Organizer

Ralph is a twelfth-generation Nuevo Mexicano from Pecos whose passion lies in his work protecting the precious resources that have sustained New Mexico's traditional acequia communities for hundreds of years. He is the Chairman of the New Mexico Acequia Commission where he has fought tirelessly to protect acequias and the watersheds that feed them for 16 years. Ralph is also the owner of Molino de la Isla Organics, a small organic farm that grows healthy, acequia-grown food for his community and helps educate the public about acequia culture and its contribution to the environment that sustains them. Ralph was instrumental in the founding of the Stop the Tererro Mine Coalition, bringing stakeholders from the environmental, traditional, and Pueblo communities together to protect the Pecos River and its tributaries. It is Ralph's goal to ensure that New Mexico's natural resources and traditional communities are cared for, respected and protected for future generations.



Emma Yoder

### Emma Yoder, Young Adult Volunteer

Emma recently moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico through Young Adult Volunteers, a yearlong service program focused on addressing systemic oppression and engagement with local community. Born and raised in Ohio, Emma graduated from Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia with degrees in History and Sociology. During her year in Albuquerque, Emma looks forward to utilizing her past experiences in environmental groups to aid the restoration and protection efforts currently underway at New Mexico Wild and exploring the rich cultures and vast wilderness New Mexico has to offer.



The UNM Wilderness Alliance, our volunteer arm at the University of New Mexico, recently partnered with the National Park Service for a backpacking work project in the Bandelier National Monument; photos: staff





# Rio Chama Citizen Bug Project Update

The Rio Chama citizen bug project we started in 2020 took another step forward in 2021. Rhett Spencer, the project organizer, engaged 208 volunteers resulting in 624 volunteer hours. The adult aquatic insects that participants collect will help us determine the environmental impacts of water that is released from the El Vado Reservoir.

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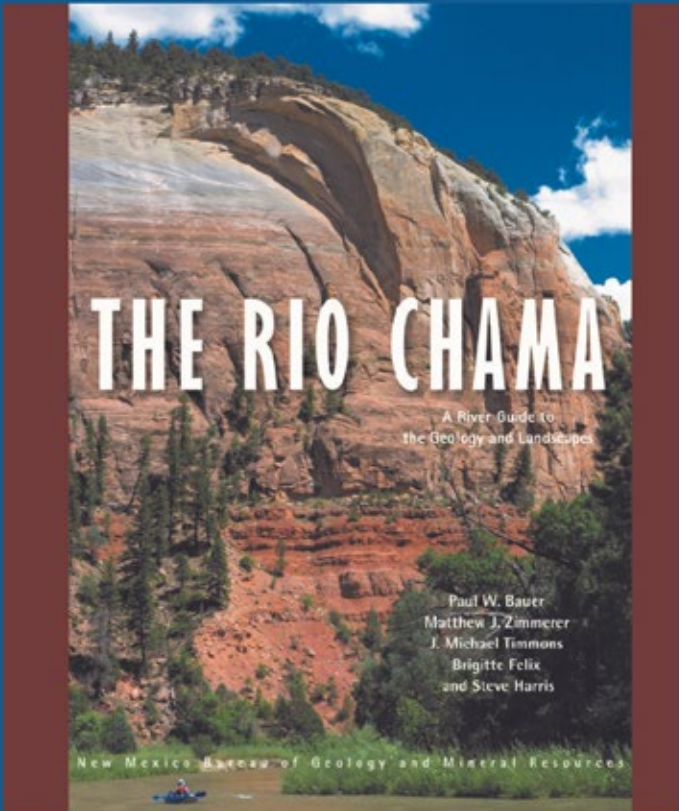
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*The Rio Chama: A River Guide to the Geology and Landscapes* contains detailed river maps of the seven sections of the Rio Chama, plus its three resplendent reservoirs, from the Colorado headwaters to its confluence with the Rio Grande near Española.



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# ADVENTURES OF A WILDERNESS WRANGLER

BY NATHAN SMALL, WILDERNESS WRANGLER

It's easy to feel tossed around by continuing COVID-19 challenges and daily news cycles. Because of that, I've treasured each of this summer's trips into New Mexico's Wilderness and Wilderness-quality areas more than ever.

In protected lands like Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument or the Gila Wilderness south of Snow Lake, there is relief and purpose. Each place gives us an opportunity to unplug from the daily grind and protects against the worst effects of the climate crisis.

In limbo lands, like the Big Hatchet Wilderness Study Area, uncertainty abounds. Mere miles from the Mexican border, bulging with biodiversity, how we treat this special landscape says volumes about how we respond to today's growing challenges.

And riding horses Omaha and Lori Darlin into Faulkner Canyon, in the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, alongside the Robledo Mountains Wilderness and through a timeless bridge between the Rio Grande and roads west, I traversed through a growing



Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument; photo: Paul Bardwell

community and sprouting homes with other riders to enter a neighboring world lush after life-giving rains.

Throughout the summer, I saw every stripe of bumper sticker; on Independence Day, I witnessed American flag-draped mules; and throughout New Mexico's summer, I've encountered culturally diverse people using our wild public lands. The same diversity disappeared during a brief trip into Utah and Wyoming's High Uintas Wilderness, further

illustrating recent census results that highlight New Mexico as one of the nation's most diverse states.

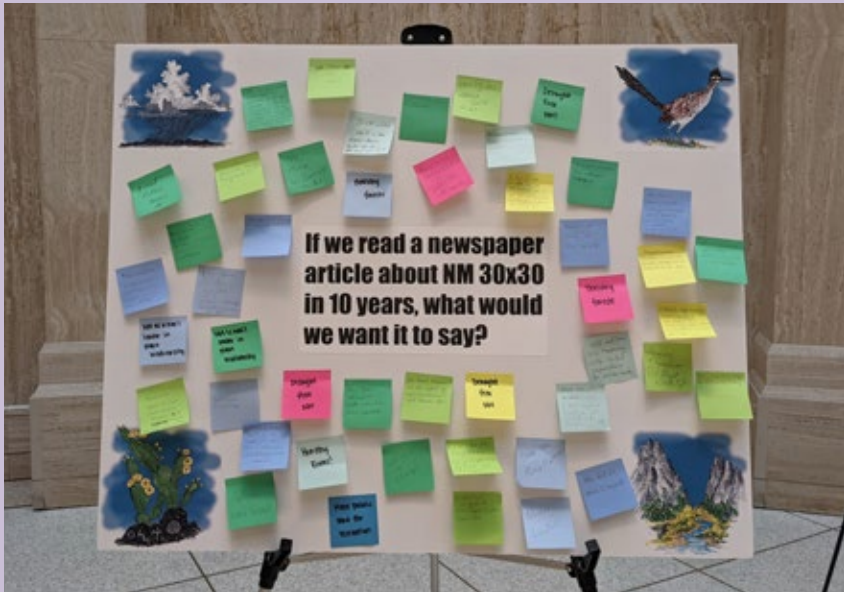
Our challenge is clear. The climate crisis demands inclusive community conservation efforts, empowering New Mexico's diverse population to safeguard our shining natural heritage. It'll take an extraordinary amount of people power, and a fair amount of horsepower, too, but I'm convinced we are up to the task. 🐾

## NEW MEXICO CLIMATE SUMMIT RECAP

New Mexico Wild helped New Mexico House Speaker Brian Egolf convene a climate summit in Santa Fe in October. The goal of the summit was to help state leaders develop policy ideas to tackle the climate change challenges New Mexico faces.



From left to right: outdoor Recreation Division Director Axie Navas, Forestry Division Director Laura McCarthy, House Speaker Brian Egolf, New Mexico Wild Northern Organizer Ralph Vigil, Tesseque Pueblo Governor Mark Mitchell; photo: Emma Yoder.



An interactive chart at the summit; photo: Emma Yoder.



Summit attendees gather in the Rotunda at the New Mexico State Capitol Building; photo: Emma Yoder.

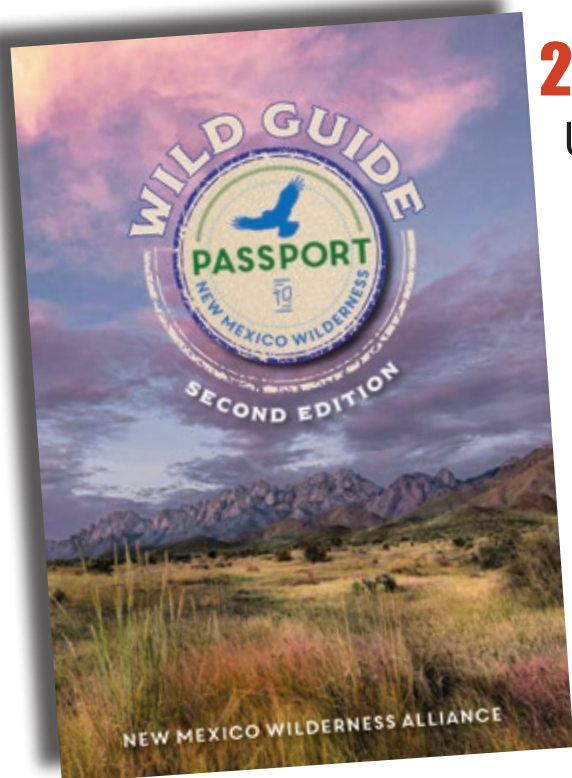


Outdoor Recreation Division Director Axie Navas speaks during a panel discussion at the summit; photo: Brittany Fallon.



## If You Love Wilderness, You Need This Book!

### WILD GUIDE: Passport to New Mexico Wilderness



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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.

## CITIZEN SCIENCE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

RIO CHAMA BOATERS  
CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS SPRING 2022

Do you have plans to run the Wild and Scenic section of Rio Chama in 2022?

We are looking for volunteers to collect insect samples during your trip. We will provide training and sampling kits at the launch and meet you at the take out to retrieve the samples. Please contact [rhett@nmwild.org](mailto:rhett@nmwild.org) if you are interested in learning more about this project.

Email [will@nmwild.org](mailto:will@nmwild.org) to learn more!



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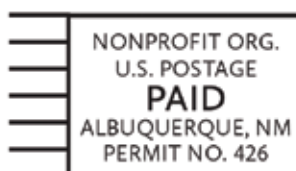


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New Mexico Wilderness Alliance  
P.O. Box 25464  
Albuquerque, NM 87125  
Not a member yet? Go to [nmwild.org](http://nmwild.org).



Cactus in the Caja del Rio; photo: Garrett VeneKlasen



# DONATING FROM YOUR IRA: IT CAN BE SUCH A **SMART** WAY TO GIVE

Getting older has some advantages. At age 70½ you can donate tax-free from your IRA if you make the gift directly to a qualified charity such as New Mexico Wild. When you reach age 72, the IRS requires a minimum IRA distribution each year which is normally taxable. If you donate directly to a qualified charity, you can avoid that required distribution becoming taxable income. In fact, you may be able to set up an automatic payment with your IRA investment company to make giving even easier. First step is to see your tax advisor to discuss the best option for you.



## WHERE THERE’S A WILL, THERE’S A WAY CONSIDER A LEGACY GIFT TO NEW MEXICO WILD

If you’d like to help protect wilderness for future generations but feel you cannot make a significant gift today, consider making a charitable contribution through your will in the form of a bequest. It is simple to designate New Mexico Wild for an estate gift and your contribution will help protect our public lands far into the future.

You can learn more about making a bequest through your will at:  
[nmwild.org/legacy-giving-bequest/](http://nmwild.org/legacy-giving-bequest/)  
or by contacting Tisha Broska at [tisha@nmwild.org](mailto:tisha@nmwild.org), 505-321-6131.



## THE ALDO LEOPOLD CIRCLE SUPPORTING NEW MEXICO WILD

## JOIN A SPECIAL GROUP OF SUPPORTERS WHO HELP SUSTAIN NEW MEXICO WILD

The Aldo Leopold Circle helps sustain our vital work protecting the Land of Enchantment. Members of the Aldo Leopold Circle contribute \$1,000 or more each year to New Mexico Wild. The group participates in special events and outings and receives exclusive briefings on conservation issues in New Mexico.

For more information: [nmwild.org/leopoldcircle/](http://nmwild.org/leopoldcircle/)

## Help us protect the Wilderness, Wildlife, and Water of New Mexico

### I want to make a one-time donation

- ☐ \$25 (Student/Senior)
- ☐ \$35
- ☐ \$50
- ☐ \$100
- ☐ Other amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_



### I want to become a monthly sustaining donor\*

- ☐ \$10
- ☐ \$30
- ☐ \$60
- ☐ \$100
- ☐ Other amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\*If you are already a monthly sustainer, thank you! You can use this form to increase your recurring donation. Donations totaling \$1,000 or more over the course of a year become members of our Aldo Leopold Circle.

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- 1) Enclose your check payable to: New Mexico Wild
- 2) Donate online at [nmwild.org/donate](http://nmwild.org/donate)

Mail your membership form to New Mexico Wild, PO Box 25464, Albuquerque, NM 87125. Thank you!