



NEW MEXICO WILD!

Fall/Winter 2023

The Semiannual Publication
of the New Mexico
Wilderness Alliance

PROTECTING CHACO FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS



**A CLOSE CALL FOR
POLLINATORS**

**EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW!
REP. GABE VASQUEZ**



New Mexico WILD!

The Semiannual Publication of the
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 2
FALL/WINTER 2023

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ON THE COVER

A group of young people line the top of a kiva structure at Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Photo courtesy of National Parks Conservation Association, by Shayla Blatchford

Inset: Monarch butterfly. Staff photo

Inset: Representative Gabe Vasquez

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Mark Allison

FINDING OUR STRIDE FOR THE NEXT DECADE



To mark my 10th anniversary at New Mexico Wild, I took a step back this summer to enjoy a sabbatical. I am so grateful for the much needed rest and reflection. I traveled and spent a lot of time completely unplugged, listening to the wind in the pines and waves lapping against rocky shores, canoeing and otherwise communing with nature. My chocolate Labrador, Jed, was great company. Except maybe not so much in the canoe.

This experience underscored for me, once again, how special and unique our public lands are, how fortunate we are to still have wild places and wildlife, how easy it is for us take our vistas and open space for granted, and how privileged we are to be able to find solitude and quiet.

The time away also allowed me to appreciate how lucky I am to have a job as rewarding as this one, where I'm able to work with smart and passionate people in pursuit of values I find truly important, and where our work makes a difference. This last decade has been far richer and more exciting (and fun!) than I could have imagined.

**The power and credibility that come from
having robust and responsive supporters
means the world. You make a difference.**

During this time, with your support, we've more than tripled our operations budget and staff; grown and diversified our membership; begun rewarding partnerships with federal land management agencies for Wilderness rangers, citizen science and stewardship efforts; invested in new areas of in-house expertise, including water; and produced new tools and research to better understand and explain the importance of conservation in the context of climate change and mass species extinction.

We're proud of the critical roles we played in gaining (and defending) two new National Monuments and 14 new Wilderness Areas (the most since 1980) and in expanding two additional Wilderness Areas; securing full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund; winning historic state funding for conservation; and defeating the "billion dollar boondoggle" proposal to dam and divert New Mexico's last free flowing river. This decade saw the creation of a sister organization—the New Mexico Wild Action Fund—to enable direct involvement in electoral and political work, essential to long-term conservation success, and the fiscal sponsorship of the model Native Land Institute to increase the capacity for Indigenous-led leadership for conservation. In this edition, you can read about even more recent progress like the protection of Greater Chaco and Buffalo Tracts.

Lessons for New Mexico Wild? Persistence pays off. Be ready. Do the work. Listen. Be respectful and gracious. Be community based. Build the support. The power and credibility that come from robust and responsive supporters means the world. You make a difference. Working together, through New Mexico Wild, elevates our collective voice. And the work is never done.

Few things are certain, but I'm confident it isn't going to get any easier. And the stakes have never been higher. Action is urgently needed, yet I continue to have hope.

- We're finding new ways to conserve lands waters, and wildlife, through administrative, executive, legislative and legal means.
- Because of your generous support, we're continuing to grow our capacity to engage.
- We're forging exciting new partnerships and collaborations.
- Our stewardship and community volunteer efforts continue to expand.
- We're providing opportunities for young people to experience their public lands and discover their passion.

What will the next 10 years bring? Hard to say, but here are a few things we are thinking about:

- **How do we work toward landscape-level protections and more appropriately pace and scale our vision and efforts?**
- **In an era of increasing scarcity, how do we ensure that wildlife and conservation values are considered in new water regimes?**
- **As Tribes increasingly assert their agendas, what is the best way for us to recognize their special sovereign nation status and find agreement around complicated conservation issues?**
- **How will we balance the desperate need to efficiently increase green energy generation and transmission to decarbonize our economy while safeguarding conservation values?**
- **In a time of rising temperatures and decreasing precipitation, how do we approach forest health, prescribed burning and “restoration”, while also defending life and property and protecting roadless areas with Wilderness character?**
- **How do we best engage our youth and cultivate the next generation of stewards and advocates?**

I look forward to talking more with you about these and other questions.

And in case you missed it, my big take-away from my sabbatical is that our strength as an organization is rooted in our origin story—being created by volunteers and citizen advocates—and in our continuing reliance on members and supporters. The multiplier effect that comes from representing thousands of like-minded people and our deep ties to communities throughout the state inspire me and make me eager to get back to work.

With gratitude,



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WILDERNESS DISPATCHES

Updates on New Mexico Wild Projects Across the State

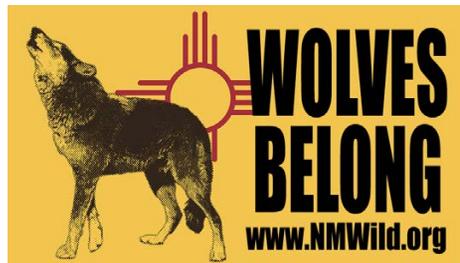
ROADMAP TO MEXICAN GRAY WOLF RECOVERY

BY SALLY PAEZ

New Mexico Wild argued before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit in June that a recovery plan for Mexican gray wolves must be based on the best available science that will provide for their conservation and survival.

Our lawsuit challenges the inadequate recovery plan adopted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), a recovery plan is the roadmap that defines the path for recovering a species to the point where ESA protections are no longer needed, and the species can be taken off the endangered species list. Despite the importance of the recovery plan, FWS adopted a plan for lobos that lacks components that scientists deem necessary for lobo conservation, including the need to address genetic threats by having at least 750 Mexican wolves in the wild in three separate (but connected) subpopulations.

In court, New Mexico Wild and our partners, represented by the Western Environmental Law Center, also argued that federal courts have authority



to enforce these mandatory legal requirements. We are awaiting a decision. Meanwhile, FWS issued its five-year status review of the Mexican gray wolf in August. The review reflects that although the current recovery strategy relies on a strong lobo population in Mexico, the struggling population there is failing to advance toward genetic or population goals. The status review demonstrates that lobos need more help to survive and recover. We continue to advocate for policies based on the best available science to ensure that lobos persist for generations to come. Wolves belong! ▲▲



A group of students from the Aldo Leopold School take in the grandeur of the Gila River. Staff photo

STOP THE ILLEGAL KILLING NOW.

BETWEEN 1998 AND 2021, 131 ENDANGERED MEXICAN GRAY WOLVES WERE ILLEGALLY KILLED. THIS IS THE **LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR LOBOS,** A FEDERALLY PROTECTED SPECIES.

CRIMINALS ARE DESTROYING WOLF FAMILIES, JEOPARDIZING LOBO RECOVERY.

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO STOP THEM.

CONSERVATIONISTS HAVE PLEDGED A **\$53,500 REWARD** FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO ARREST AND PROSECUTION OF WOLF POACHERS.

ANYONE WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THE DEATH OF A MEXICAN GRAY WOLF SHOULD

CALL 1-844-397-8477 OR EMAIL
FWS_TIPS@FWS.GOV.

ENSURE JUSTICE FOR LOBOS. DON'T LET THEIR HOWLS FALL SILENT.

THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT FOR A WILD & SCENIC GILA RIVER

BY BJORN FREDRICKSON

First came the wonderful news in early spring that Rep. Gabe Vasquez, along with co-sponsors Reps. Teresa Leger Fernández and Melanie Stansbury, all D-N.M., introduced the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in the House of Representatives for the first time. Then, thanks to Senator Heinrich's leadership, the companion legislation passed out of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on a bipartisan vote in May. These two milestones bring the bill closer to full passage than ever before.

Demonstrating a deep commitment to conservation and communities in New Mexico's 2nd Congressional District, Vasquez subsequently requested a hearing on the bill in the House Committee on Natural Resources. New Mexico Wild and partners in the Gila Wild and Scenic River Coalition are working to support Vasquez in obtaining a successful hearing for the bill, as this would be yet another significant step toward the permanent protection of nearly 450 miles of the Gila and San Francisco rivers and other area rivers and streams. Protecting the rivers would in turn safeguard a wide array of outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, and other values of regional, national, and international significance. New Mexico Wild and our partners will continue to do everything we can to support our unified federal congressional delegation to find a way to pass and have signed into law this legislation to permanently protect America's first Wilderness river. ▲▲

PECOS WATERSHED FLOODED BY NEW MINING CLAIMS—TAKE ACTION NOW!

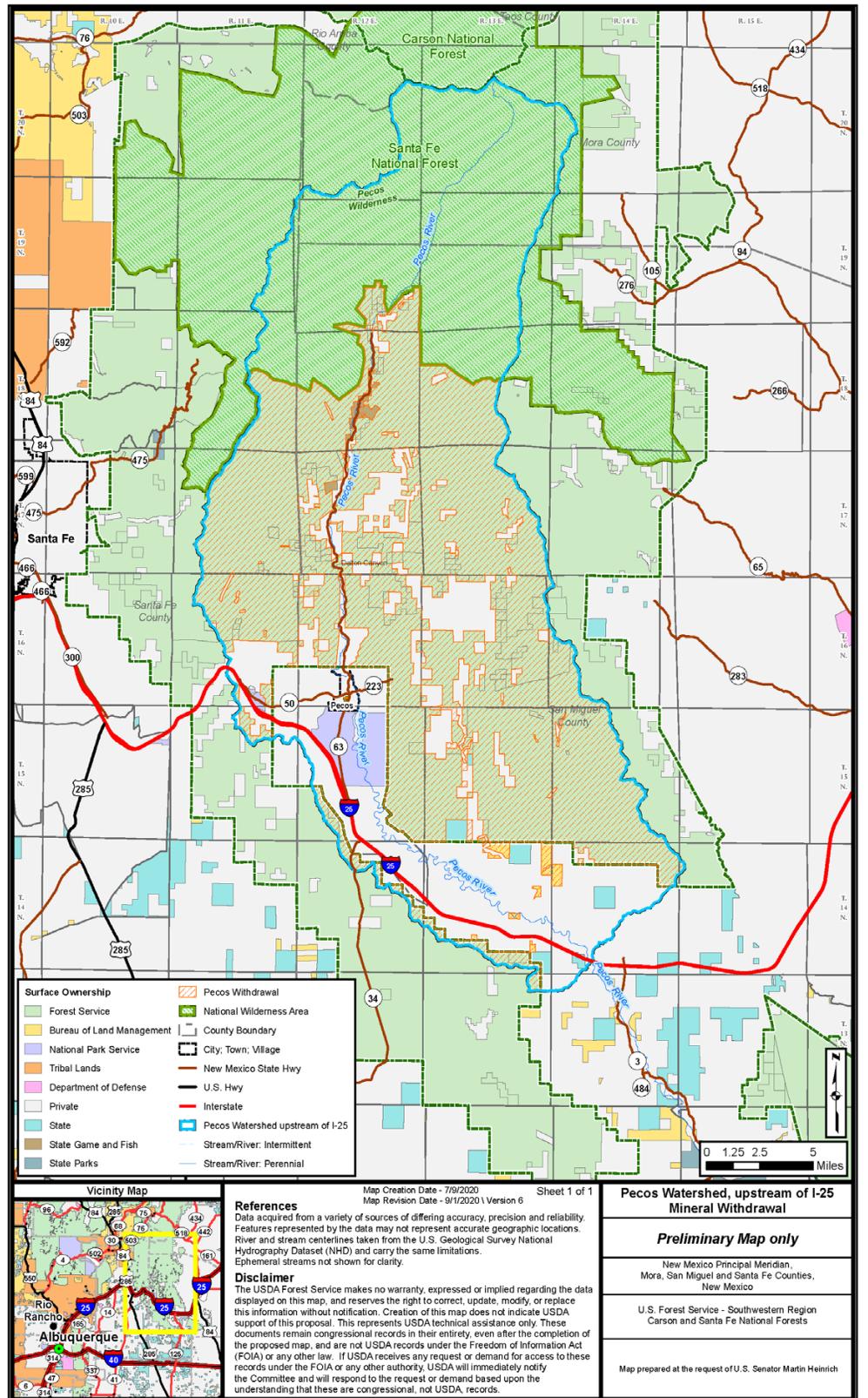
BY RALPH VIGIL AND GARRETT VENEKLASEN

The risks to the headwaters of the Pecos River from mineral exploration and development are real and urgent. For context, in 2019, Comexico LLC, a Colorado-based subsidiary of Australian mining company New World Resources Ltd., acquired 20 mining claims in the Jones Hill area near Tererro. Comexico then applied for permits to conduct exploratory drilling for gold, copper, zinc, lead and silver. This initial exploratory drilling could adversely impact more than 400 acres and five tributaries of the Pecos River.

Alarming, Comexico has now gained ownership of over 236 mining claims throughout the Pecos headwaters. The area now claimed by Comexico covers 4,300 acres and, if developed, would impact the entire Pecos watershed. The expansion of mining claims toward Thompson Peak, located on the ridge near Glorieta Baldy, above the Santa Fe municipal watershed and a short distance from McClure Reservoir, could put the Santa Fe municipal watershed in jeopardy. New Mexico Wild is working with the remarkably diverse Stop Tererro Mine Coalition to stop the Comexico project from moving forward.

The coalition is also working to prevent future mining proposals in this sensitive location by advocating for the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) to apply for an administrative mineral withdrawal to prevent new mining claims and development for up to 20 years, subject to valid existing rights. The administrative withdrawal process is complex and lengthy. The SFNF would file an application with the Secretary of Interior, who would then initiate a two-year suspension of new mining activities. During those two years, the SFNF would complete an environmental review and work closely with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which manages minerals on public land. When the environmental review is completed, the Secretary of the Interior could withdraw the area from new mining activities for up to 20 years. The proposed withdrawal area consists of approximately 166,000 acres in the upper Pecos watershed, north of Interstate 25 (see map).

At the same time, New Mexico Wild and the Stop Tererro Mine Coalition are calling for federal legislation to be introduced to permanently and, more comprehensively, protect the upper Pecos River watershed. In addition to a permanent mineral withdrawal, the coalition is also advocating for designation of approximately 11,500 acres in the Thompson Peak area as Wilderness. ▲▲



The above map illustrates the area proposed for mineral withdrawal on either side of the Pecos River. The segment marked with orange hash marks would be withdrawn from future mining activities.

Please help us put an end to this major threat once and for all!
Go to www.stoptererrormine.org for the latest updates.

We need your help to protect the upper Pecos watershed. Please contact your elected officials in Congress and urge them to introduce legislation to withdraw the minerals in the watershed and to designate the Thompson Peak area as Wilderness. They need to hear from you now!
YOUR VOICE MAKES A DIFFERENCE!



The Pecos River watershed is the lifeblood of outdoor recreation in the area, where visitors and locals alike enjoy activities such as fishing. Photo by Jim O'Donnell

WILDERNESS DISPATCHES, CONTINUED

PROTECTING THE SKY ISLANDS OF SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO

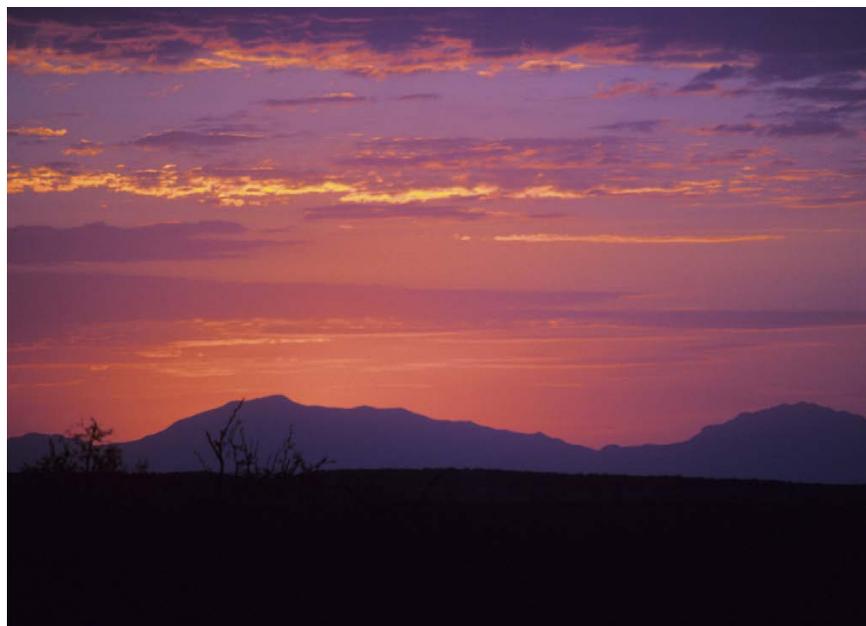
BY BJORN FREDRICKSON AND NATHAN SMALL

Encouraged by the immense community support for Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument and the sizable ecological, economic, and social benefits spurred by its designation, New Mexico Wild staff and partners are engaging with communities to identify new federal public lands protection opportunities within several mountain ranges in Luna and Doña Ana counties.

These “sky islands” that rise out of desert lowlands create an abundance of habitat diversity, supporting rare and unusual plant populations as well as a wide array of wildlife species. The wild character of these ranges also affords species better odds at adapting to a warming and drying climate—an essential ecological process in the deepening climate crisis—as well as ample opportunities for (human) solitude and primitive recreation.

These mountain ranges are also rich in prehistoric and historic cultural resources, including astounding petroglyph panels, dwelling sites, lithic scatters, remnants of mining boomtowns of yore, and portions of the Butterfield Overland and El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro national historic trails. In addition, several of these ranges are distinctly visible from many miles in all directions and are sacred to Tribes in and around New Mexico.

Stay tuned for more information on this effort to come soon. ▲▲



The Robledo Mountains exemplify a “Sky Island” landscape in southern New Mexico. Staff photo



NEW MEXICO WILD HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

December 8th, 6–8 pm

Santa Fe Brewing Company

RSVP required!

www.nmwild.org/events/



An iconic New Mexico landscape, the Buffalo Tract will be protected from gravel mining and other extractive industry. The gravel mine in this photo is adjacent to the Buffalo Tract. Photo by Jaimie Murdock

LOCALS, TRIBES APPLAUD THE PROPOSED BUFFALO TRACT MINERAL WITHDRAWAL

BY SARA BERGTHOLD

The U.S. Department of the Interior has proposed a 50-year withdrawal of 4,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in southern Sandoval County, backed by years of advocacy. This move aims to protect the ecologically and culturally significant Buffalo Tract and Crest of Montezuma. Experts warn against gravel mining due to environmental risks and highlight the area’s role as a critical wildlife corridor.

Beyond its environmental importance, the Buffalo Tract holds deep cultural significance for Indigenous tribes and local communities. It is a sacred place interwoven with the history and traditions of the Pueblo of Santa Ana, the Pueblo of San Felipe, and the residents of Placitas, the community adjacent to the Buffalo Tract. Preserving this area is not only about protecting nature but also honoring the heritage and spirituality of these communities.

Efforts are underway to make these protections permanent through the Buffalo Tract Protection Act, with Senator Martin Heinrich and Rep. Melanie Stansbury as sponsors and Senator Ben Ray Luján and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández co-sponsoring. ▲▲

CALL FOR ART

HELP PROTECT THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED MEXICAN GRAY WOLF WITH YOUR ART

New Mexico Wild invites artists of all ages and skill levels to submit original artwork for our 2024 Mexican Gray Wolf Conservation Stamp Contest. All two-dimensional drawings, paintings, and photographs featuring the Mexican gray wolf are welcome. The winning artwork will be printed on the 2024 Mexican Wolf Conservation Stamp, which will be sold to support Mexican gray wolf conservation and education programs.

THE WINNER WILL RECEIVE A PRIZE OF \$250!
Read complete rules and submit your art by February 29
at nmwild.org/WolfStamp



WILDERNESS RANGERS MAKE STEWARDSHIP MAGIC HAPPEN IN THE NATIONAL FORESTS

BY WILL RIBBANS

We've had a great season working in Wilderness areas across the state, and it's largely because of our amazing volunteer supporters! After a slower season for our Wilderness Ranger Program last year due to limited funding, it's been all hands on deck as we've jumped right back into stewardship work across all five of New Mexico's national forests. In seasons past, we have had ranger pairs assigned to individual forests with a heavy emphasis on data collection. Drawing from that data and other lessons learned, this season we've taken a new approach.

Wilderness Rangers are paid seasonal staff that work with the agencies to address on the ground stewardship maintenance needs in designated wilderness areas. Volunteers who join them in the field are working on the various projects led by Rangers (trail clearing, campfire ring restoration, signage installation, and more).

This year's Wilderness Rangers are working as a roving crew addressing stewardship projects in Wilderness areas statewide. Every year, more maintenance needs arise in Wilderness due to dwindling capacity from the Federal land management agencies to address these needs. Our partnership with the Forest Service has worked to fill this gap through New Mexico



A group of Rangers and volunteers cleared trail, broke down excessive campsites and installed new signage to help mitigate impacts to the alpine lake basins in New Mexico's Wilderness areas. Staff photos

Wild Wilderness Ranger leadership and volunteer support. It's a win-win as we chip away at this backlog of maintenance and bring more capacity and engagement to Wilderness through volunteer support. In fact, we are on track to achieve 1,200 hours of volunteer contributions this season, which the Forest Service values as equivalent to nearly \$40,000. ▲▲



By documenting large groups of trespass cattle at Valles Caldera National Preserve, New Mexico Wild hopes to use this tracking data to compel agency managers to address the issue. Staff photo

THE TROUBLE WITH TRESPASS CATTLE

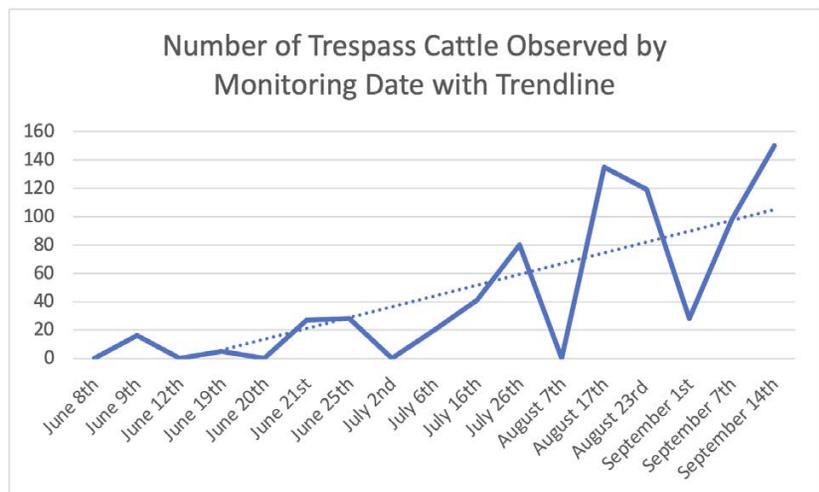
STAFF ARTICLE

Monitoring work by New Mexico Wild volunteers has found that the numbers of trespass cattle that impact fragile ecosystems in the Valles Caldera National Preserve increased over the summer months.

Trespass cattle have been an ongoing issue in the preserve for many years, resulting in impacts to sensitive meadow, riparian and other values. This problem—unauthorized cattle that access the preserve through unrepaired and cut fence lines from permitted grazing allotments on the adjacent Santa Fe National Forest—is in direct conflict with the National Park Service mission to “preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values ... for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.”

Due to the inability of the two agencies to resolve this issue on their own, New Mexico Wild's Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders—a crack team of volunteers who focus on documenting on-the-ground conditions in support of our campaigns and Wilderness defense work—have been integral throughout the summer in monitoring for trespass cattle. The results of this monitoring are sobering—not only are needed fence repairs remaining unaddressed, but observed cattle numbers in the preserve are also steadily increasing.

We are grateful for the efforts of our Wilderness Defenders. The data they are gathering will be instrumental in our work with partner organizations to explore all avenues to pressure the agencies to remove these trespass cattle once and for all. ▲▲



This graph illustrates the increasing numbers of trespass cattle observed by our Wilderness Defender volunteers at Valles Caldera National Preserve.

WILDERNESS DISPATCHES, CONTINUED

COALITION SEEKS PERMANENT PROTECTIONS FOR CAJA DEL RIO

BY MAYA HILTY

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For Santa Fe County Commissioner Camilla Bustamante, protecting the Caja del Rio is a community health and mental health issue.

“I was taught, culturally, being connected with the land helps a person be connected with themselves,” she said. “It is about being who you are because of where you are,” she said to applause at a Caja del Rio Coalition event Friday evening.

A panel of leaders gathered at El Rancho de Las Golondrinas to discuss the cultural and ecological significance of the Caja del Rio, a 106,000-acre area one panelist described as grasslands, piñon juniper and cactus forests, mountains and river canyons between the Rio Grande and Santa Fe rivers. The panelists emphasized different assets of the Caja del Rio but emphasized one thing: the need for its permanent protection. The U.S. Forest Service manages about 67,000 acres of it, and the federal Bureau of Land Management manages the remainder.

Panelist Brophy Toledo said the Caja is important “because the storybooks are written on the walls,” referring to thousands of petroglyphs in the area. Toledo is from Jemez Pueblo and co-founded the Flower Hill Institute, a nonprofit with the mission to preserve the environment and Native cultural resources.

Tony Dorame of Tesuque Pueblo agreed the Caja is a “very, very culturally significant place.”

Founder and executive director of the Indigenous Education Network, Dorame works primarily with youth, and said bringing kids to the Caja del Rio teaches them “some of the bigger things in life that I could never teach in a classroom.”

“It’s about the experience, but you have to be out there to feel it,” he said. “That’s what our ancestors knew.”



The Rio Grande forms the western boundary of the Caja del Rio Plateau.



Another panelist, Carmichael Dominguez, former south side Santa Fe city councilor and school board member, posed protection of the Caja as an environmental justice issue. The poorest and highest minority population in the city live right next door, he said.

The Caja del Rio also provides refuge and habitat connectivity for wildlife, which is extremely valuable in the age of climate change, said Andrew Black, who moderated the panel. Black is a public lands field director for the National Wildlife Federation, founder of Earth Keepers 360 and minister at First Presbyterian Church of Santa Fe.

But the area is threatened, members of Caja del Rio Coalition said, by mining interests, new roads, transmission lines, dumping, shooting and defacing of sacred sites. “To me, permanent protection means no more of that,” said panelist Max Trujillo, a San Miguel County commissioner and leader with Hispanics Enjoying Camping and Hunting Outdoors.

“I was taught, culturally, being connected with the land helps a person be connected with themselves.”

— Commissioner Camilla Bustamante



Protection also means tribal co-management of the area, Trujillo said, echoing others in saying that co-management of the Caja by surrounding Pueblos is “mandatory in order to protect this place the way it should be protected.”

Black said the coalition is open to different ways to protect the area, such as a national monument designation or state-level protections.

One challenge is the coalition wants to see a ban on activities like mining, laying utility lines and building new roads, but wants to allow grazing and traditional uses like herb- and firewood-gathering, he said. The various stakeholders in the coalition have “90% in common: Everybody agrees it should be protected,” Black said. “Where we’re at now is ... we’re calling on our politicians for leadership to bring people together and push through some of the stickiness ... to work out that last 10%.”

Meanwhile, BLM is assessing the pros and cons of creating a shooting range in the Caja del Rio to mitigate unofficial shooting — often at trash — on the land. Black said the coalition generally supports and recognizes the need for an established shooting range on the land.

“A lot of us are saying, we’ve got to create an alternative because right now it’s madness out there,” he said. “We’re not trying to create a range to have more shooting; we’re trying to curtail and manage it, and put it in a responsible setting.” ▲



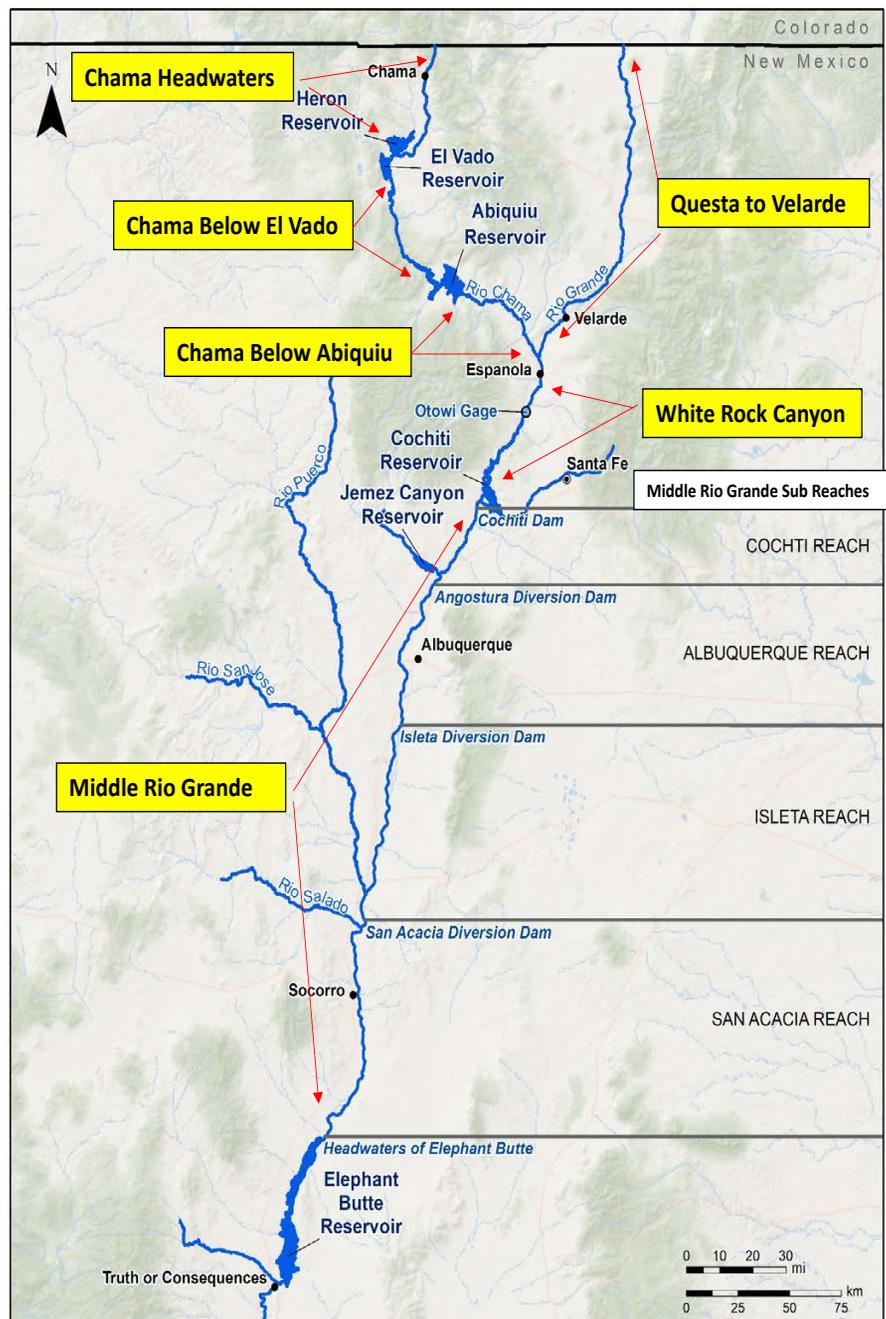
HOW MUCH FLOW DOES A RIVER NEED TO BE HEALTHY?

BY TRICIA SNYDER

New Mexico Wild recently received funding from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to quantify environmental flow needs on six reaches of the Rio Grande and Rio Chama. In partnership with Audubon Southwest and World Wildlife Fund, we will work to identify real streamflow numbers and associated timing needs, as well as potential constraints to achieving those flows and prioritizing the most beneficial management actions.

The effort is built upon the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Rio Grande New Mexico Basin Study. Within the study, sectoral committees have been established, with Audubon Southwest and New Mexico Wild serving as co-leads for the nongovernmental organization committee. Using the needs of indicator species, this committee is developing streamflow hypotheses for each reach.

The BLM funds will take this work a step further to complete a report synthesizing the supporting literature for these streamflow numbers and conduct workshops with experts, which will serve as peer review in real time. The result will be scientifically justifiable environmental flow targets that can serve as a basis for workable solutions to ensure the health of all the plant, wildlife and human communities that depend on these waterways. ▲▲



Rio Grande Basin Study Environmental Flow Reaches: The 6 primary reaches are in yellow boxes. Middle Rio Grande, due to size, includes 4 sub-reaches. Map credit: Paul Tashjian.



Sensitive wetlands, ephemeral and intermittent streams have been left vulnerable by the Supreme Court's reduction of the scope of the Clean Water Act. Staff photo

NEW MEXICO WATERWAYS LEFT UNPROTECTED POST-SACKETT

STAFF ARTICLE

In the wake of a potentially devastating Supreme Court decision about the scope of the Clean Water Act, New Mexico Wild is advocating for greater state protections for waterways.

In *Sackett v. EPA*, the Supreme Court considered where wetlands fit within Waters of the United States (WOTUS), or those waters protected under the Clean Water Act. The court's decision in May drastically upended what would be considered part of WOTUS and set back water protections by half a century.

We don't yet know the full extent of lost protections for wetlands in New Mexico, but it is likely to be more than half of the nearly 500,000 acres found across the state. These areas provide critical habitat, as well as filtering pollutants, controlling flooding and improving communities' climate resilience. The ruling also likely removes protections for ephemeral and intermittent streams, which make up the vast majority of our state's waterways, nearly 200,000 stream miles.

The decision in *Sackett* makes it clearer than ever that New Mexico must implement a state-led water quality permitting program. We will continue to work with partners and the New Mexico Environment Department to establish this program, which would keep decisions on how and when to protect waterways in the state where they belong: in New Mexico. ▲▲

The court's decision...set back water protections by half a century.

UPCOMING EVENTS

New Mexico Wild hosts and collaborates on conservation-focused events all year round.

- HIKES • MEMBER EVENTS • PUBLIC LAND CELEBRATIONS
- WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS • FILM SCREENINGS • CONSERVATION COMMUNITY EVENTS

Get Involved!
nmwild.org/events



WILDERNESS DISPATCHES, CONTINUED

CELEBRATING THE HISPANO CHAMPIONS OF RIO GRANDE DEL NORTE NATIONAL MONUMENT

BY DEVON NAPLES

New Mexico Wild joined with our partners and the community of Northern New Mexico in Taos in May to celebrate the 10th anniversary of one of our state's hardest-won conservation victories: Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. The celebration brought together community members, local leaders and current and former New Mexico Wild staff and board members to honor not just the monument itself, but also the people who dedicated their invaluable time and talent to the campaign to protect this uniquely beautiful and significant place. Esther Garcia and John Olivas were two of the campaign's most crucial organizers. The monument designation likely would never have happened without them, but their broad legacies reach beyond the Rio Grande del Norte.

Garcia was a trailblazer in more than one way. The first female mayor of Questa, she was a strong-minded and outspoken woman. She was instrumental in designating the monument and doing it the right way by honoring the age-old Indo-Hispano traditions of *acequias* and land grants and integrating traditional values and uses into the plan. New Mexico Wild was proud to have Esther serve on our board of directors.

Sadly, we lost Esther in 2020. At the time of her passing, New Mexico Wild Executive Director Mark Allison was already contemplating an award in her name to annually honor a New Mexico conservation leader who carries on Garcia's spirit of justice, diplomacy, wisdom

New Mexico Wild board member Ernie Atencio (left) presents John Olivas with the Esther Garcia Conservation Champion Award. The photo is a shot of the Rio Grande River where it flows through RGDN, by Wayne Suggs. Staff photo



"John's approach to conservation work, particularly in Northern New Mexico, is the embodiment of effective grassroots organizing."

— Ernie Atencio



"Hispanics have always been conservationists. We care about protecting the land and the water, that's how we survive. But no one has ever paid attention. Things are changing."

— Esther Garcia

and passion. At the anniversary celebration in May, New Mexico Wild was consummately represented by board member Ernie Atencio, who presented the inaugural Esther Garcia Conservation Champion Award to a true conservation hero, John Olivas.

Here is an excerpt from Ernie's speech:

"John is a skilled community organizer, land grant heir, sportsman, biologist and advocate for wild places and the communities that steward them. John's approach to conservation work, particularly in Northern New Mexico, is the embodiment of effective grassroots organizing.

As John described to me when I interviewed him in 2013, the campaign that led to the protection of this monument began with a conversation at Esther's kitchen table that lasted for 11 hours. John said, "If the movement didn't happen within the Hispanic leadership, it wasn't going to happen" in Northern New Mexico. "Esther and I spoke the same language" of community and tradition. And it was that partnership that eventually led to Esther coming around to support the monument, but on her own cultural and environmental terms.

This path led John to collaborate with grazing permittees, Taos Pueblo leadership, land grant heirs, *acequia parciantes* and *mayordomos*, local businesses, sportsmen, ranchers, and local governments. That diverse coalition built a campaign that led to President Obama designating more than 240,000 acres of land as the new Rio Grande del Norte National Monument on March 25, 2013.

John is a gentle and humble man, a great listener with a brilliant mind for strategy, and a true visionary. During the decade that John worked with New Mexico Wild, his courageous approach to the work left a mark on the organization that we are proud to honor tonight with this award." ▲

Read Ernie's entire speech here:



Bighorn sheep frequently can be seen in Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. Photo by Garrett VeneKlasen



Rio Grande del Norte National Monument Makes New Friends

STAFF ARTICLE

Ten years after its designation, the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument (RGDN) is at a critical stage. Increased use during the COVID-19 pandemic led to the loss of some access points and strained infrastructure. Impacts of climate change have affected wildlife and habitat. In addition, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Taos Field Office is completing its Resource Management Plan to outline guiding policies for the monument going forward.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that the conservation and local communities engage with the BLM to ensure that the management of the monument and the vision of the people who helped to designate it are aligned. Cracks in the relationships between the BLM and the stakeholders that use the land result in negative impacts for all communities and the land itself. Furthermore, it makes the task of protecting additional land in the future much more difficult.

That is why New Mexico Wild has enlisted the help of lifelong Taoseño Nick Streit to create a Friends Group for the RGDN. A friends group is any nonprofit organization established primarily to assist or benefit a specific park area, a series

of park areas, a program, or the entire National Park System.

Streit has begun to engage with stakeholders and will be working closely with the BLM to help it complete a management plan that takes into consideration the needs of the environment and the local communities, while preserving traditional uses and culture.

Look for upcoming river clean-ups, monument outings and volunteer opportunities. For more information on the Friends of the Rio Grande del Norte, email nick@nmwild.org.

Editor's Note: While the RGDN Friends group is currently a project of New Mexico Wild, the goal is to cultivate sufficient community and funder support to create and sustain an independent Friends organization. ▲▲

Above right: Rafting and kayaking are just a couple of the recreational opportunities offered by Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. Photo by David Cox



Nick Streit, our new Friends of Rio Grande del Norte Coordinator. Staff photo

Thank You Stone Age!

STONE AGE NORTH
6200 Alameda Blvd. NE
Albuquerque
505.209.2081

STONE AGE MIDTOWN
4130 Cutler Ave. NE
Albuquerque
505.341.2016



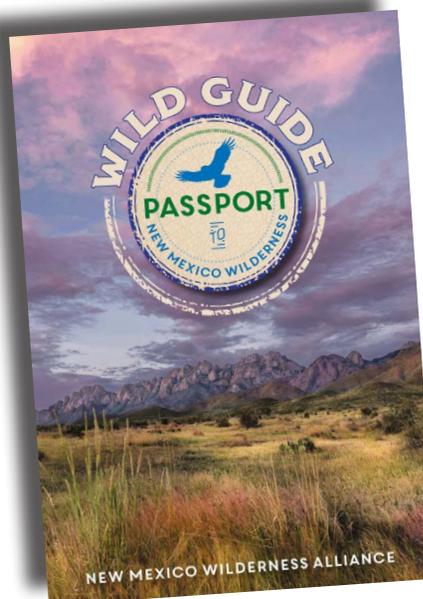
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This comprehensive guide to New Mexico's protected wildlands is the only book that features each of the state's designated Wilderness areas and Wilderness Study Areas as well as other treasures, such as the new Rio Grande del Norte National Monument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

COMMUNITIES

across New Mexico have united to successfully protect Greater Chaco through a recent 20-year ban on new oil and gas drilling within 10 miles around Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The area around Chaco is of deep historical and spiritual significance to Pueblos and Tribes across the Southwest. Many Chacoan sites exist outside the park's official boundaries, so development almost always means the loss of artifacts and sacred sites. It is estimated that the northern portion of the protection area alone has over 4,000 archeological and cultural sites. While humans have had a continuous presence here from time immemorial, the greater Chaco area also constitutes a living cultural landscape of great significance to the Puebloan and Dineh people today. Recognition and respect for this fact alone demanded that protections be put in place.

CHACO

Ar

Over the years, oil and gas activity on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management steadily closer to Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Here is a brief history of oil & gas in the Greater Chaco landscape.

2003: BLM finalized the Farmington Resource Management Plan (RMP), which opened over 90 percent of the area to oil and gas leasing, including nearly all the federal lands surrounding Chaco.

Since **2009:** The oil and gas industry has repeatedly targeted federal lands within 10 miles of Chaco, including highly sensitive areas along the Great North Road and nearly adjacent to the park's boundaries.

2014: In response to the industry's desire to increase drilling activities, BLM initiated a plan amendment process for the Farmington RMP.

2015: After hearing concerns from area residents, Navajo Nation leadership asked the Department of Interior to address the effects of ongoing oil and gas development in the Greater Chaco Region.

2016: The All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG), a governing body that has been in existence for over 400 years, passed a resolution calling for the BLM to protect a 10-mile buffer around Chaco.

acres of eligible lands to the existing De-na-zin Wilderness.

2018: The Navajo Nation and the Pueblos, as well as New Mexico Wild conservation partners, worked with Sen. Udall and Heinrich to introduce the Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act. The legislation would withdraw roughly 316,076 acres of oil, natural gas, coal, and other minerals owned by the federal government.

2018: Following two more historic summits with the Navajo Nation and Pueblo governors, Tribal leaders traveled to Washington, D.C., to urge protection of the Greater Chaco Landscape.

2019: Sen. Heinrich, in his role as member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, invited Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt to visit Chaco and subsequently secured key commitments from him to put all leases within the 10-mile perimeter on hold for one year.

2019: Sens. Udall and Heinrich and Reps. Ben Ray Lujan, Deb Haaland and Xochitl Torres Small, all D-N.M., reintroduced the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act.

2019: State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard signed an executive order placing a moratorium on new oil and gas leasing on state trust lands protecting 72,776 acres.



2017: APCG hosted a historic summit with the president of the Navajo Nation, where they agreed to advocate for a withdrawal of federal minerals within this critical 10-mile area. New Mexico Wild was proud to be invited to provide testimony.

2017: New Mexico Wild urged Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, both D-N.M., to reintroduce legislation to designate the 7,242-acre Ah-shi-sle-pah Wilderness Study Area as Wilderness and add 2,250



Top: A close examination of the masonry at Chaco. Photo by Sara Bergthold

Left: Buffalo dancers performing at Chaco. Photo by Tisha Broska

Above: Mark Allison speaks at the first-ever summit between the Navajo Nation and the All Pueblo Council of Governors. Staff photo

Mexico's Battle to Protect CHACO CANYON An Abbreviated Timeline

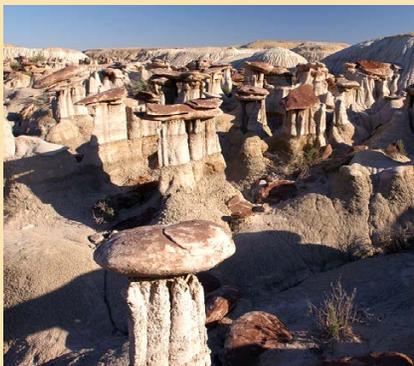
Management (BLM) has crept
gas leasing and protection efforts

2019: The House of Representatives passed the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act on a bipartisan vote of 245-174.



"On behalf of the Navajo people, Vice President Myron Lizer and I thank Assistant Speaker Luján for his support, leadership

and partnership with the Navajo people to protect our beautiful and sacred lands ... (from) adverse effects associated with unchecked oil and gas development in the region," said Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez.



2019: As part of the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, the Ah-shi-sle-pah Wilderness Study Area was permanently protected as Wilderness and the Bisti/De-na-zin Wilderness was expanded.

Top: Navajo President Jonathan Nez.
Photo by Wikiuser159597
Above: Ah-Shi-Sle-Pah Wilderness.
Photo by R. Watts

2020: The BLM released a draft Resource Management Plan Amendment. The Trump administration's "preferred alternative" envisioned opening the entire 10-mile Chaco Protection Zone to oil and gas leasing.

New Mexico's congressional delegation sent a letter to Secretary Bernhardt requesting a 120-day extension on the comment period, particularly due to public participation challenges related to COVID-19. The APCG, the state of New Mexico, New Mexico Wild and conservation partners also requested an extension.

2020: The BLM's "preferred alternative" would add between 2,300 and 3,100 new oil and gas wells in the Greater Chaco region within an area that is already more than 90 percent leased.

New Mexico Wild and our partners jointly submitted comments that reiterated the need to reverse course and close federal lands surrounding Chaco to future drilling, as well as adopt significantly stronger measures to protect cultural resources and tribal communities from the impacts of drilling.

"The Bureau of Land Management process during this time of heartbreak was shameful. Its preferred alternative is cynical. Ignoring the true value of the public lands near this UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the wishes of the communities who live there, would be compounding a tragic history of disrespect and broken trust," said Mark Allison, executive director of New Mexico Wild.

Continued on page 21.

Why Protect Greater Chaco?

Night Skies: Astronomy was a cornerstone of the Chacoan Culture, and preserving the dark skies shows respect to Chaco's history.

Paleontology: The region contains well-preserved fossils such as petrified logs, leaves, turtles and dinosaurs.

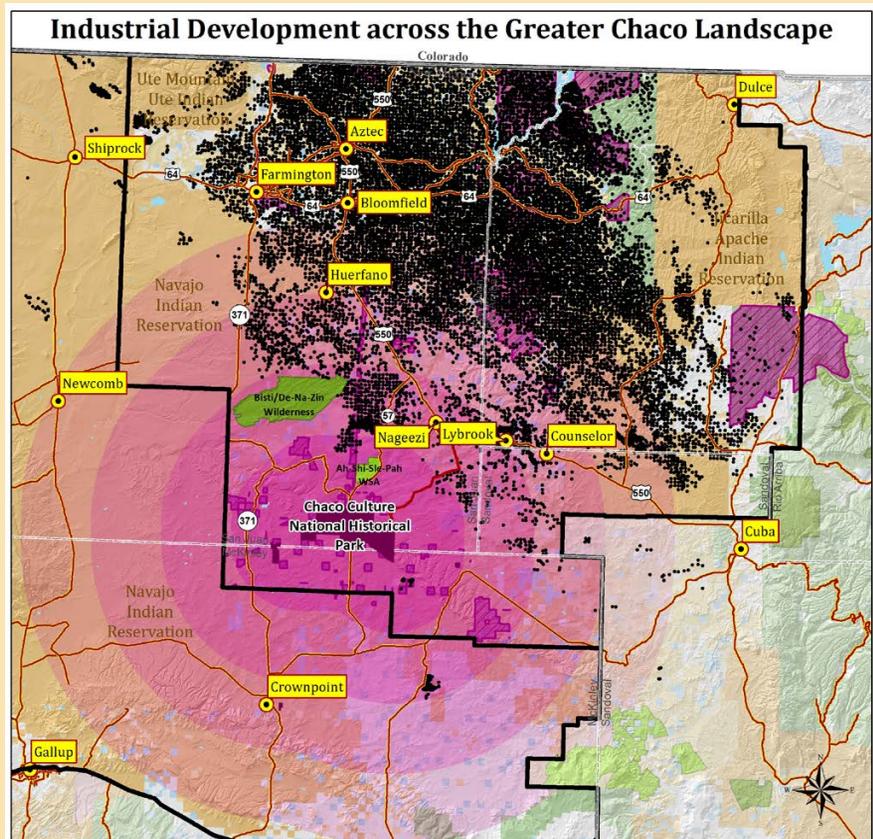
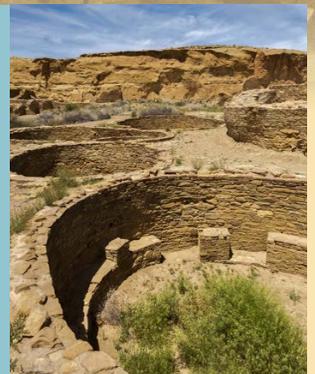
Wildness: A New Mexico Wild inventory found that there are only about 30,000 acres left that are roadless and have Wilderness character.

Natural beauty: The area is scenic, breathtaking and beautiful.

Wildlife habitat: The area is important habitat for turkey, mule deer, black bear, elk, birds of prey and other species.

Climate change: Limiting oil/gas development will reduce release of additional greenhouse gases.

Public health: Development continues to do significant harm to air quality and area residents.



The pink-shaded concentric circles around the park represent 10 and 20 miles. Each black dot represents an active oil/gas well. New Mexico Wild map.

A CONVERSATION WITH REPRESENTATIVE GABE VASQUEZ



MARK ALLISON

Good morning, congressman, how are you?

REP. GABE VASQUEZ

I'm doing well. I'm an avid reader of the New Mexico Wild newsletter, just so you know.

M.A. Well, thank you! Let me just jump in. You're well known for your passion for the outdoors. Were there formative experiences that led to your love of the natural world?

G.V. My grandfather was a farm worker in central Mexico. He was also a hunter and an angler, and, in fact, his dream was to retire in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. He actually used to spear fish carp at Elephant Butte Reservoir. The very first glance that I got at an open New Mexico sky was in Hatch while we were catching catfish and box turtles that were coming in from the grasslands and my dad was telling me the difference between yellow catfish and blue catfish. That really shaped who I am today and how important New Mexico is in terms of the overall ecological integrity of the Southwest. So, both my grandfather and my dad had a great role to play in the way that I think about conservation.

New Mexico is a special place. It's one of the few last remaining wild places, I think, in the country. Places like the Gila National Forest, the Organ Mountains and the Lincoln National Forest that are all in my district. Places that just have a special place in my heart. That's mostly the reason that I am who I am today.

M.A. I hope you can say a bit more about that. We were really pleased to work alongside you for a decade or more on the effort that created the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in 2014. I wonder if your experience building community support for conservation and that monument has a relationship with your decision to

ultimately run for office and be a public servant?

G.V. I don't think that there's a better sense of belonging than in the outdoors in New Mexico, for all of us. And for me, being able to work on the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument campaign while I was a staff member for Sen. Martin Heinrich was one of the highlights of my life and my career, because being able to protect nearly half a million acres of land in my own backyard was just a terrific opportunity for me to connect with my community — and to understand the differences in our community of how we manage our federal lands. And now, I get to go back home and I get to look at the Organ Mountains every day and think about the reason why I ran for Congress in the first place.

It all comes down to protecting the places that we love and protecting the places that we all dearly care about. My mom, who just recently became a resident of Las Cruces, sends me pictures of the Organ Mountains every morning and she says, "Mijo, I wouldn't want to live anywhere else in my retirement and I'm so glad that you brought me here."

I'm sure a lot of people feel that same way in Las Cruces. It's a really special opportunity to have had some involvement in designating these places that are now protected federally for years to come.

M.A. You have such a huge district with lots of different communities and stakeholders. How should we be thinking about the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels and to diversify our economy, and at the same time address the concerns of families and communities that now depend on fossil fuels for their livelihood?

G.V. In a district where we represent the Permian Basin, one of the largest oil and gas producing areas in the entire country, we have to really think about

the people whose livelihoods depend on these jobs. And as you know, Mark, there is funding that goes into conservation programs that comes from this large budget in our state that is derived from oil and gas. And really look at that honestly in a way that honors both the workers and also the contributions that the industry makes to our state.

I've told folks this before and I'm not afraid to say it again to you: I don't take fossil fuel money. I don't take oil and gas money in my campaign, and that is because I wanted to make sure that decisions that I make for people in this community truly are about their future and about their health. They're about the opportunity that exists in southeast New Mexico. So, we have a lot of work to do when it comes to regulating things like the release of methane from leaking and venting and flaring.

I'm very proud of the work this administration has done at the state level to be able to do that. And we're going to continue to make sure that they're producing these energy sources that are so important to our country in a responsible way.

We're going to continue to make sure that we have a balanced approach to federal land management in the Permian Basin. We actually just wrapped up a good trip to southeast New Mexico where we introduced the Energy Workers Health Improvement and Compensation Fund Act. It would require fossil fuel companies to contribute an amount equal to the top 10 salaries in their company into a health fund for these workers that are suffering from the impacts of respiratory diseases from this industry.

M.A. I want to pivot a little bit. You helped conceptualize and lead the effort that created the first of its kind Outdoor Equity Fund in 2019, which New Mexico Wild was very proud to work with you on. Can you say a bit about how that idea originated, why it's important and how organizations like ours can best support that moving forward?

Otero Mesa in southeastern New Mexico. Staff photo



G.V. New Mexico Wild has done such a wonderful job of getting people out onto the lands and landscapes and exploring all parts of New Mexico to better understand how we can conserve these treasures that we have, whether on state lands or federal lands. One of the things that I've always been concerned about is the next generation. That is the future of New Mexico.

How can kids in our communities—both in tribal communities and Hispanic communities in places like Santa Fe and Taos and Las Cruces—understand and appreciate the places that they come from? It's all about our connection to the land. The Outdoor Equity Fund was really built on this premise that unless we provide these opportunities to the next generation of stewards of these lands, we truly won't have the future that we really need. And that comes down to climate change and infrastructure and investment in our public lands. If we don't have the right people at the table, we will never make progress.

If it's up to me, Mark, it's got to be New Mexicans. It's got to be New Mexican kids from our Pueblos, from our Hispanic communities, from Albuquerque, from Santa Fe, down to Las Cruces. They truly make a difference in this conversation about how we invest in climate and build the next generation

of climate leaders and conservation leaders. The Outdoor Equity Fund, which has now been modeled in several different states across the country, is a very successful story for us. It has been supported by Gov. (Michelle) Lujan Grisham, the Outdoor Recreation Division and the Economic Development Department. So, I'm excited for the progress that the Outdoor Equity Fund has been able to make across the state. And having the support of New Mexico Wild along that journey has been really, really important and really impactful.

M.A. That really has been rewarding and exciting. Could you tell us a little bit about your public lands and conservation priorities this term and looking forward, in New Mexico and in your district?

G.V. I want to make sure that supporters of New Mexico Wild and folks across New Mexico know that I have a very clear agenda of what I'm trying to do on the conservation front. That includes looking at the expansion of some of our federally designated lands. That also includes legislation that can help us protect the largest remaining Chihuahuan Desert grassland, Otero Mesa.

The first bill that we introduced was the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act. It's incredibly important. Folks who are read-

ing your newsletter and support New Mexico Wild know we've got our list of things that we want to do in this district and things that we want to get accomplished. And we can't get it done without you or your supporters. New Mexico Wild is so incredibly important to the work that we do. And I want to let folks know that the opportunities in southern New Mexico and this congressional district really are expansive.

I have been able to make some really good relationships with folks like Raúl Grijalva, former chairman and now ranking member of the House Natural Resources Committee. We are working very hard as well with the administration to look at some potential administrative decisions about the future management of lands in places like Otero Mesa. And that was one of my primary motivations for running for Congress.

M.A. Thanks, Gabe, for taking the time to talk with me today. I really appreciate it. We're just so proud of your bold leadership on public lands and conservation and other issues important to us. We really look forward to continuing to work with you to support those efforts. Thank you so much.

G.V. Of course. Thank you, Mark. ▲▲

SAVING AN ICONIC WESTERN GRASSLAND

Advocates for the protection of Otero Mesa, the largest and wildest intact Chihuahuan Desert grassland left on public lands in the United States, are considering the potential for a Tribally led effort to permanently protect this unique landscape in Southern New Mexico.

Otero Mesa is renowned for its significant cultural and archaeological values, historic sites, exceptional wildlife, plant diversity, expansive vistas, and dark night skies. It also sits atop the Salt Basin aquifer, which contains substantial reserves of potable water.

New Mexico Wild has been working to protect Otero Mesa since 2001. Among many other actions, we worked with partners to defeat a past proposal by the BLM to lease Otero Mesa for oil and gas drilling. However, new threats from oil and gas extraction, hard rock mining, development or unmanaged recreation that would permanently impact Otero Mesa's unique resource values could arise at any time.

New Mexico Wild staff were recently honored with the opportunity to visit Otero Mesa with Rep. Gabe Vasquez, D-N.M., leaders from the Mescalero Apache Tribe and Ysleta del Sur (Tigua) Pueblo, and other stakeholders to begin a dialogue on the potential for a Tribally led effort to permanently protect this profoundly special place. We look forward to continuing to explore how we can facilitate and support protecting Otero Mesa for future generations. ▲▲

Right: Rep. Gabe Vasquez, Mescalero Apache tribal leadership, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo leadership, Native Land Institute, and New Mexico Wild at the base of Alamo Mountain. Far right, top: Otero Mesa petroglyphs. Far right, bottom: Rep. Gabe Vasquez points out a feature of the landscape. Staff photos



Wilderness Study Area FAQs

BY BJORN FREDRICKSON

What is a Wilderness Study Area?

Wilderness Study Areas—also commonly referred to as WSAs—are formally protected lands managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service that have Wilderness characteristics such as naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and potentially other special features. The legal requirements associated with WSAs direct the managing agency to evaluate whether they are suitable for designation as Wilderness by Congress. If they are deemed not suitable, Congress may elect to release the WSAs from their protected status.

How many WSAs are there in New Mexico and where are they located?

There are currently 53 WSAs in New Mexico. Of these, 48 are managed by the BLM and five are managed by the Forest Service. In sum, these WSAs total more than 800,000 acres, and they are generally concentrated in western, central and Southern New Mexico.

How are WSAs established?

WSAs can be established in a few different ways. In New Mexico, the vast majority of the WSAs managed by the BLM were designated under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), which upon its passage automatically protected BLM roadless areas greater than 5,000 acres in size that had previously been determined to have Wilderness characteristics. FLPMA also designated smaller “Instant Study Areas” previously identified as “natural” or “primitive” under other legal mandates. Several other WSAs managed by the BLM were designated later under Section 202 of FLPMA, which directs the BLM to conduct ongoing land use planning activities. Finally, a single WSA managed by the BLM was designated by Congress in 1987 under Public Law 100-225. The five WSAs managed by the Forest Service were designated by Congress in 1980 under the New Mexico Wilderness Act (Public Law 96-550).

How do WSAs protect wildlands and are these protections permanent?

WSAs managed by the BLM are protected in accordance with FLPMA mandates and under policy that for most activities requires “non-impairment,” meaning Wilderness characteristics and suitability for Wilderness designation must be maintained. However, these standards allow for temporary impacts as well as a greater level of impact for certain preexisting uses such as livestock grazing, some motor vehicle uses and mining in accordance with valid existing rights. WSAs managed by the Forest Service are protected solely under brief legislative language that requires their preexisting Wilderness character and potential for Wilderness designation be maintained. These protections for BLM and Forest Service WSAs are not as robust as those afforded to designated Wilderness under the Wilderness Act. They are also not necessarily permanent—Congress can and has released WSAs from protected status through legislative action, and members of the Republican Party periodically propose legislation that would release vast numbers of WSAs from protection.

Have any WSAs in New Mexico been designated as Wilderness or released from WSA protections?

Yes, on both accounts. For instance, thanks to advocacy by New Mexico Wild, Congress in 2019 designated numerous WSAs as Wilderness, including several Wildernesses in Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument near Las Cruces, as well as Ah-Shi-Sle-Pah Wilderness in Northwest New Mexico and Rio San Antonio Wilderness in Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. Other examples include the designation of Sabinoso Wilderness in 2009 and Columbine-Hondo Wilderness in 2014, both of which were previously classified as WSAs. Congress has also released portions of numerous WSAs in New Mexico when making associated Wilderness designations. Most notably, this includes the release of approximately 30,000 acres of the West Potrillo Mountains WSA from WSA status associated with the 2019 designation of Potrillo Mountains Wilderness in Southern New Mexico.

Have the BLM and Forest Service found WSAs to be not suitable for Wilderness designation?

Yes. In fact, the BLM and Forest Service have asserted that nearly half of WSA acreage in New Mexico is not suitable for designation as Wilderness, though not because the WSAs lack Wilderness qualities. For instance, in its WSA suitability studies in the 1990s, BLM classified what was formerly the Ah-Shi-Sle-Pah WSA as not suitable for Wilderness designation, along with many other WSAs. The reason? Ah-Shi-Sle-Pah contained recoverable coal reserves, leading the BLM to prioritize resource extraction over land, water and wildlife protections. Fortunately, in the case of Ah-Shi-Sle-Pah, Congress disregarded the agency suitability recommendation and permanently protected this stunning and unique landscape as Wilderness.

What is New Mexico Wild doing to permanently protect WSAs?

New Mexico Wild is working on several fronts to protect WSAs. First, we engage in ongoing agency oversight—often with the assistance of our invaluable Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders volunteers—where agency action or inaction risks degrading the Wilderness characteristics of WSAs. Second, we are working with partner organizations and advocating for change in a flawed BLM policy interpretation that led the agency to discontinue additional administrative WSA designations under FLPMA beginning in 2003. Lastly, we are developing a campaign that seeks Wilderness designation for the remaining 800,000+ acres of WSAs in New Mexico and potentially for substantial additional acreage of adjacent Wilderness quality lands.

Where can I learn more about WSAs in New Mexico?

Become a member of New Mexico Wild or otherwise continue to follow our work to stay up to date on our campaign, advocacy and oversight activities related to WSAs and/or pick up a copy of our “Wild Guide: Passport to New Mexico Wilderness,” which features numerous WSAs. ▲▲

WILDERNESS DEFENDERS COLLECT DATA TO PROTECT PUBLIC LANDS

BY WILL RIBBANS

The Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders are New Mexico Wild volunteers who use GIS mapping software to collect data on current conditions of protected and unprotected public lands in the state. Through both self-guided training and three in-person Defenders trainings we conducted this year, Defenders learned what data to collect and how to do so. Once trained, Defenders go into the field to collect information on access, Wilderness characteristics, ecological impacts, developments, recreational maintenance needs and more. We look forward to holding more in-person trainings in the future.

As the program develops, our campaign priorities evolve and new threats emerge, we are increasingly calling on our practiced Defenders to handle more targeted assignments. For example, this year Defenders have worked to assess lands with Wilderness characteristics surrounding the proposed Terrero Mine to document potential impacts from the mine on the Pecos River Valley and surrounding lands, as well as opportunities for new administrative and legislative protections to prevent future mining impacts. They also collected data and photographs in the Gila Lower Box Wilderness Study Area (WSA), ground truthing recreation improvements proposed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that would impact the WSA. Additionally, Defenders have been instrumental in our trespass cattle monitoring efforts in the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

Through a new partnership with the BLM, our New Mexico Wild Wilderness Defenders will start working this winter to update inventories and on-the-ground conditions of BLM WSAs. This work will provide new opportunities for specific tasks and targeted assignments for these valuable volunteers. All this work helps us better understand the status of our public lands and how we can protect and steward them for future generations. ▲▲



Will Ribbans giving a training near the Organ Mountain Wilderness. Staff photo



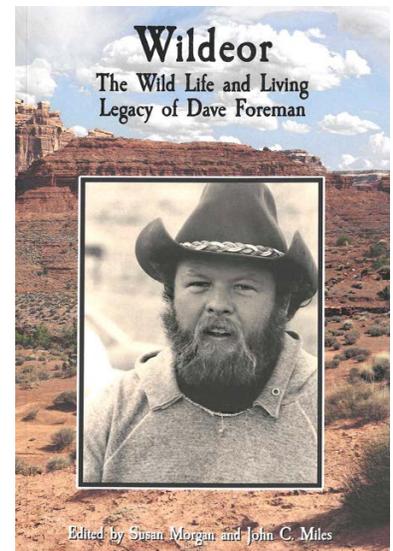
Conservationists from all over the country came out to remember Dave Foreman and Nancy Morton. Dave Parsons leads the group in a wolf howl as others gather to share stories and songs about the amazing contributions Foreman and Morton made to conservation and the ways they inspired others to protect everything wild. Staff photos

NEW MEXICO WILDEOR FOREVER

BY WENDY M. BROWN, NEW MEXICO WILD BOARD CHAIR

The memorial campout for Dave Foreman and Nancy Morton at Bandelier National Monument in June was incredibly powerful for me. I felt their absence keenly. However, the gathering also brought the value of our work at New Mexico Wild into razor sharp focus. The tributes from so many whose lives they had touched highlighted their lasting contributions to conservation. Surrounded by the unique beauty of Bandelier, bathed in the sweet rain we needed so much, and with songs and poems and rowdy laughter, was just perfect.

Afterward, my husband and I camped and hiked in the forest outside the monument, listening to coyotes howl and ravens croak overhead, and we felt Dave and Nancy were speaking directly to us. “Be happy—but don’t give up the fight! Be grateful—but give something back!”



We can’t all be visionary activists like Dave or quietly committed backcountry devotees like Nancy—but we can all be “Wildeors” (read the newly published book about Dave with that title and be inspired)! We can all do something to protect the wild places and creatures that we CANNOT live without. We can volunteer our time, write our legislators, or pen letters to the editor, have a real conversation with someone who might not agree with us—as well as get the hell out and enjoy the country that folks like Dave and Nancy worked so hard to protect for us!

Editor’s Note: New Mexico Wild is working to keep Dave and Nancy’s vision going through the Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders Program and the Nancy Morton Wilderness Internship. In the spirit of Dave’s love of wild places, we’re seeking volunteer Wilderness Defenders who will cultivate relationships with designated natural areas in New Mexico, helping to monitor Wilderness values and conditions. This information will be incredibly useful as we continue to advocate for greater levels of protection. With more than 36 million acres of public land in the state, we can use as many boots on the ground as possible. www.nmwild.org/wilderness-defenders-program

Nancy was a volunteer Wilderness activist for more than 40 years, working to protect Wilderness in California and New Mexico. To honor Nancy’s inspiration, generosity and relentless commitment to Wilderness and wildlife, New Mexico Wild has established the **Nancy Morton Wilderness Internship** to keep her fiery heart for Wilderness burning. www.nmwild.org/internship ▲▲



A Close Call for Pollinators (and Everything Else) in the Rio Chama Watershed

New Mexico Wild Celebrates BLM Decision to Halt Aerial Spraying of Toxic Insecticides

BY BJORN FREDRICKSON

New Mexico Wild and thousands of our members applauded and thanked Pamela Mathis, Taos Field Office Manager for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), for her decision in June to deny a proposal to spray a toxic insecticide over nearly 40 square miles of federal public lands in New Mexico.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) proposed spraying carbaryl due to the potential loss of forage for cattle should native grasshopper and cricket species swarm. The proposed spray area was comprised mostly of lands managed by the BLM, including a Wilderness Study Area and an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. It was also located close to other protected areas, including the Chama River Canyon Wilderness and the Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River, as well as the Jicarilla Apache Nation.

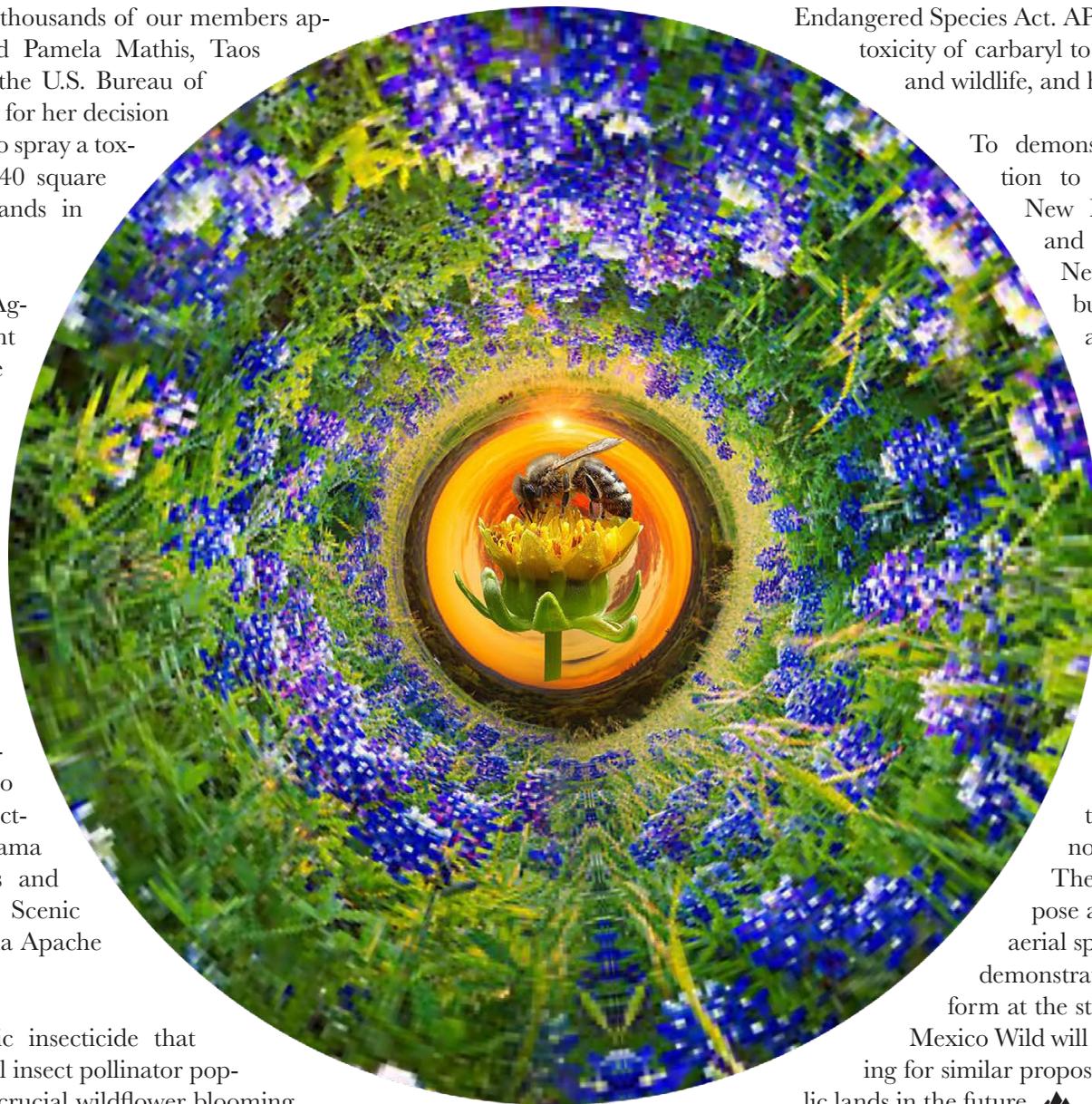
Carbaryl is a highly toxic insecticide that would have decimated local insect pollinator populations at the height of a crucial wildflower blooming period and posed a threat to multiple species listed under the

Endangered Species Act. APHIS has acknowledged the toxicity of carbaryl to non-target pollinators, fish and wildlife, and humans.

To demonstrate widespread opposition to this proposed operation, New Mexico Wild coordinated and sent a letter signed by 28 New Mexican conservation, business, Tribal, agricultural and community leaders to Mathis, New Mexico APHIS leadership and the state's congressional delegation. We also developed a petition and gathered 2,460 signatures in under 48 hours, which demonstrates the vocal and broad-based public opposition to this proposal.

The denial of this specific proposal does not mean that similar operations will not be proposed in the future. The ability of APHIS to propose and undertake broad-based aerial spraying of toxic insecticides demonstrates a need for pesticide reform at the state and federal levels. New Mexico Wild will remain vigilant in monitoring for similar proposals that would impact public lands in the future. ▲▲

Digital photo montage courtesy of Dennis Hayes.



BIOLOGIST DR. DAVID LIGHTFOOT WEIGHS IN ON GRASSHOPPERS

NM Wild: Can you talk a little bit about your work as a Ph.D. biologist at UNM?

David Lightfoot: I'm a grasshopper ecologist and taxonomist. I just last summer finished 30 consecutive years of monitoring grasshopper communities in New Mexico. I just received my DNA sequencing on a big study that I'm doing on North American grasshoppers to understand their evolution and their taxonomy.

NMW: The recent proposal from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to spray pesticides in Rio Arriba County was intended to decimate populations of grasshoppers that compete with cattle for forage. Are there better and safer ways to manage rangelands than this approach?

DL: Livestock overgrazing is promoting population outbreaks of grasshoppers. APHIS (the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) puts out grasshopper density maps every year. I think they're fairly accurate in showing where the high densities of grasshoppers are. I would like to overlay a GIS layer of rangeland condition onto a layer of APHIS grasshopper density maps. I bet that there would be a very high correlation of the worst range condition with the most grasshoppers. That's what I've seen on public rangelands across the West.

NMW: How does over-grazing promote the occurrence of grasshopper blooms?

DL: Most grasshoppers prefer dry sunny environments. Their eggs are laid in the soil in little egg pods, and the soil needs to be somewhat dry. It can't be saturated with water, and it needs to get warm from the sun in order for the eggs to develop and hatch. So most temperate grasshoppers actually do better in situations where there is bare soil exposed to the sun, where the vegetation is not too dense. Livestock overgrazing is actually creating an environment for grasshoppers to do even better than if it wasn't grazed. In other words, the livestock overgrazing is promoting populations outbreaks of ecological generalist grasshoppers.

NMW: It sounds like overgrazing is the biggest threat to rangeland health. Do you think that grasshoppers are a threat to rangelands?

DL: No, I don't. I think that grasshoppers are an important part of rangeland ecosystems. Grasshoppers are an important food source for birds and other animals. The view that native grasshoppers are like non-native and invasive species that we have to kill is just wrong. They are, in fact, native species; they're part of our natural ecosystems and part of natural rangeland food webs. They're ecologically important. Even the herbivory by grasshoppers has an important function for plants, for compensatory growth of the plants and for increasing nutrient cycling, which improves rangeland health.

NMW: Do we have any invasive grasshopper species in New Mexico that are problematic?

DL: No, not at all. All rangeland grasshoppers of New Mexico are native species.

NMW: What are your thoughts on APHIS's proposed plan to spray carbaryl near the Rio Chama watershed earlier this summer?

DL: To me, it is a huge waste of taxpayer money to benefit very few people. And it is highly destructive to our native animal communities. Those poisons don't just kill insects. Carbaryl targets the nerve synapses, and it blocks an enzyme called acetylcholinesterase that stops the nerve from firing. The nerve synapses just keep firing. When an animal is hit with this, including vertebrates, they just go into convulsions and twitching. It's a nerve toxin. The animal just basically convulses to death, it's horrible. (Carbaryl) does impact vertebrates, but they can chemically neutralize the toxin faster than invertebrates. The Environmental Assessment for the proposed spray project that APHIS produced stated, "We conclude that this spray will have no significant adverse effect on any animals or other insects." That statement was simply a lie. ▲▲



New BLM Public Lands Rule Has the Right Priorities

STAFF ARTICLE

This summer, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposed a new Public Lands Rule that would prioritize landscape health and place conservation on equal footing with extractive uses. The BLM manages 245 million acres of public lands for the American people, including 13.5 million acres in New Mexico.

In 1976, Congress enacted the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which directs the BLM to manage lands for multiple uses and sustained yield. This federal law has always required the BLM to manage our federal public lands to promote a wide array of public values, including conservation:

(I)t is the policy of the United States that ... the public lands be managed in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archeological values; that, where appropriate, will preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition; that will provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals; and that will provide for outdoor

recreation and human occupancy and use(.) FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. § 1701(a)(8)

Despite the legal requirement for the BLM to manage federal public lands for these purposes, for over 40 years, the agency has prioritized resource extraction over all other uses. Of the 13.5 million acres of BLM-managed lands in New Mexico, almost 90% are open to oil and gas development, and a 150-year-old mining law makes mining a priority use above all others. Only about 11% of BLM lands are managed to protect ecological and cultural values.

We have reached a critical crossroads where the BLM's management of our public lands could be leveraged either to mitigate the effects of drought, catastrophic fires and storms, the loss of nature, and other climate-related impacts or to exacerbate these problems. The proposed Public Lands Rule tips the scale in the right direction and better aligns BLM's management priorities with public values and federal law. The proposed rule includes provisions to protect and restore intact, healthy landscapes, to designate Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), and to ensure that

agency decisions are based on science and data.

The BLM should be commended for proposing the Public Lands Rule, and we are grateful to New Mexico Wild's members for showing up to support the BLM. Over 1,300 people responded to our action alert and submitted public comments in support of the proposal. And the BLM's June public meeting in Albuquerque was packed to capacity with public lands advocates. The BLM plans to publish a final Public Lands Rule in the coming months. Thank you for your advocacy. Your voice truly makes a difference. ▲▲



The new rule will help ensure that species like the burrowing owl have a better chance of thriving on lands managed by the BLM. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons



GET OUT!

New Mexico Wild Online Hiking Guide Featured Area

hike.nmwild.org

Peña Blanca Trail

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

TRAIL INFO

Trailhead: 32.2142° N 106.6024° W

Length: 2.92 miles round trip

Trail Type: Out and Back

Difficulty: Intermediate - Not difficult by any means for seasoned hikers but may be difficult at times for novice hikers.

Route Type: Exploration

Water: No water - There is no water source along the hike or in the general area, not recommended hiking without water on person.

Solitude: Lightly Used

Best Season(s) to visit: Fall, Winter, Spring

USGS 7.5" Topographic maps: Bishop Cap-32106-B5

Low and High Elevations: 4,523 and 4,715 feet above sea level

DESCRIPTION

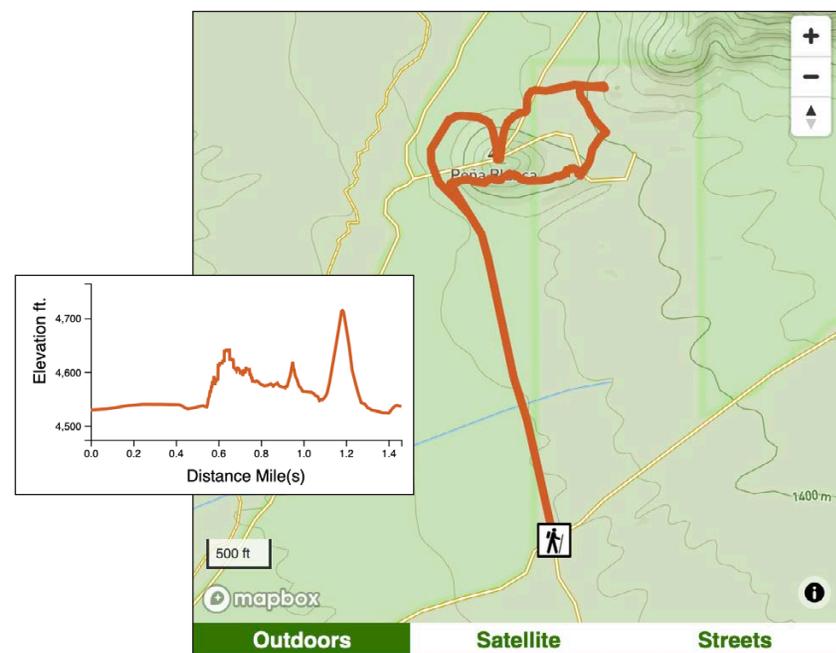
After parking your car, head northwest cross country toward the rock formation in front of you. The little hill on the western edge of the range is the Peña Blanca outcrop, with its main body being the larger portions to its eastern side. Start off by hugging the southern base of the formation as you traverse it heading east. There is a well-used but uneven path to follow. After about two hundred yards of cliff-hugging, you will reach the eastern edge of the detached formation. Duck under the rock that juts out and appears to block the path and take a look around. There is another small outcropping of rock about one hundred yards due east. Head for that, working carefully down the steep slope between your current position and that destination. There is much to explore in this area, with plentiful evidence of ancient peoples and their culture. Feel free to explore to your heart's desire, but please be respectful. When you are finished exploring come back the way you came.

GETTING THERE

From Las Cruces, take I-25 South to the junction with I-10 East. Take exit 151 for Mesquite and turn left. Follow this road, B059 for approximately 5.5 miles to a small dirt lot and turnoff. This "parking area" can be easy to miss, so make sure you keep an eye on your mileage to keep track of where you are. This will act as your starting point.



Top and right: Opportunities for solitude abound at the Peña Blanca overlook. Photos by Tisha Broska



ECOSYSTEMS

Grassland—Grasslands can be characterized as an area in which the vegetation is dominated by a nearly continuous cover of grasses.

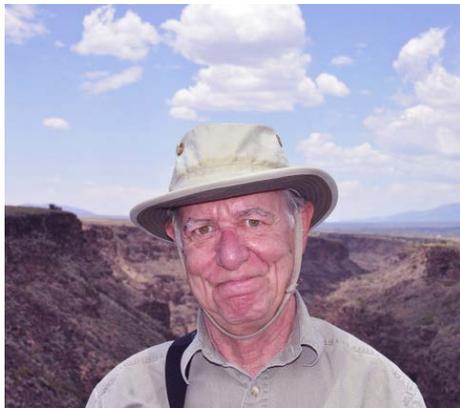
Desert Shrub—Desert shrublands are located in desert regions with hot, humid climates and dry, sandy soils. The plants in these shrublands often appear more widely distributed compared to those found in wetter regions.

Piñon-juniper—Piñon-juniper woodlands generally occur between 4,500 to 7,500 feet in elevation, transitioning from grasslands or shrublands at lower elevations, and to ponderosa pine or other montane forest associations at higher elevations.

Ponderosa Pine - Ponderosa pine trees occur as pure stands or in mixed conifer forests in the mountains and have a lush green color and pleasant odor.

ABOUT THE ORGAN MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS

At the heart of the Organ Mountains Wilderness are the striking granite crags and spires known as the Organ Needles. The highest point in the area tops out at slightly more than 9,000 feet. The Organ Mountains are one of the steepest mountain ranges in the Western US. The Chihuahuan Desert, a major New Mexico ecosystem, is well represented in the South-Central Desert Region. The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument is the heart of this rugged landscape. In 2019 Congress permanently protected as wilderness 240,000 acres, a triumph for New Mexico Wild, which worked for over ten years to protect wilderness protection for land within the national monument. ▲▲



“I HAVE ALWAYS FELT THAT THE BEST REASON TO HAVE MONEY IS SO YOU CAN GIVE IT AWAY. AND WHEN I CROSS OVER INTO THE NEXT GREAT ADVENTURE, IT WILL GIVE ME GREAT PLEASURE TO KNOW THAT I AM LEAVING BEHIND A LEGACY GIFT THAT IN SOME SMALL WAY WILL MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.”

—ERIC VAN HORN, LEGACY SUPPORTER

Create Your Wild Legacy

New Mexico Wild's Wilderness Legacy Fund provides a way for donors to protect our public lands far into the future. The Fund is designed to accept gifts through bequests and other planned giving methods, but outright donations to the Fund are welcome.

The Legacy Fund is ideal for unrestricted gifts because the future needs of the organization may change, and unrestricted gifts offer the greatest flexibility. However, restricted gifts for a specific purpose may also be accepted for the Fund with approval from the New Mexico Wild Executive Director.

The Wilderness Legacy Fund is administered and invested by the New Mexico Foundation with headquarters in Santa Fe, NM.

For more information contact
Tisha Broska, Deputy Director
tisha@nmwild.org or call
505.321.6131



WILDERNESS LEGACY FUND
SUPPORTING NEW MEXICO WILD

Chaco Timeline, continued from page 13.

2020: New Mexico Wild and partners sent a letter to the Biden transition team, outlining recommendations for protections and subsequently met with administration officials.

2021: Sen. Heinrich called on the Biden administration to administratively withdraw federal minerals around Chaco New Mexico Wild, on behalf of coalition partners, requested that the rest of New Mexico's congressional delegation support an administrative withdrawal.

2021: Department of Interior announced that the BLM would consider a 20-year withdrawal of federal lands and minerals within a 10-mile radius around Chaco.

2022: BLM announced a 90-day comment period for its proposed withdrawal of 351,480 acres of federal lands/minerals around Chaco.

New Mexico Wild and partners provided public testimony, submitted technical comments, organized rallies and townhalls, met with newspaper editorial boards, and generated over 80,000 supportive public comments.

2023: The full New Mexico congressional delegation—including Sens. Luján and Heinrich as well as Reps. Teresa Leger Fernández, Melanie Stansbury and Gabe Vasquez, all D-N.M.—reintroduced the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act.

2023: A decade of advocacy bears fruit! In June, the Department of Interior, after engaging in extensive consultation with Pueblos and the Navajo Nation throughout 2022 and receiving over 110,000 supportive comments from the public, approved a 20-year mineral withdrawal.

2023: The work continues to have the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act signed into law to prohibit oil and gas development permanently.

The Greater Chaco area deserves even more protections to further address public health, climate change and ecological concerns. ▲▲

New Mexico Wild was honored to have an information table this year at the spectacular annual Gathering of Nations Pow Wow in Albuquerque. Photo courtesy of Gathering of Nations Ltd., photo by Will Huston



REMEMBERING JIM WALTERS

BY STEVE WEST

Jim Walters, a career National Park Service employee, came to New Mexico in 1982 as the resource management specialist at Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe Mountains national parks. He was in charge of the mountain lion program, responding to area ranchers who claimed the lions were wiping them out and that the park service was turning lions loose in the park and the national forest.



During this fiasco, Walters attended numerous public meetings and hired a professional to collar and study mountain lions, analyze scat and provide a report on what mountain lions were actually doing. He also had many meetings with ranchers in his office where he questioned them about what they were saying (but never had the proof) as he tried to get them used to the idea of protecting mountain lions. One of his file cabinets was labeled “Mountain Lion Releases.” I'm sure the ranchers saw it. I asked him about it one time (knowing that releases weren't happening), and he said, go ahead and open it up. I did — it was filled with dried cow shit. That was Jim Walters at his finest. ▲▲

Read the full tribute to Jim Walters on the website:



CHECK OUT OUR CAREERS PAGE
FOR OPPORTUNITIES
TO JOIN OUR TEAM.

Apply@nmwild.org/careers



STATE LEGISLATIVE OUTLOOK

STAFF ARTICLE

With another year of record surplus state revenue of about \$3.5 billion, the timing is right to invest strategically in conservation measures that can really move the needle. The 30-day legislative session that begins in January will focus on the state budget and provide an opportunity to address funding priorities.



Last session, New Mexico Wild helped pass SB 72, the **New Mexico Wildlife Corridors Act**. This legislation established a permanent fund for highway wildlife passage infrastructure. Crashes involving wildlife cost drivers and the state nearly \$20 million annually. We are advocating to add at least \$50 million to the fund. Wildlife passage infrastructure is incredibly expensive, but human lives and wildlife health hang in the balance!

Last year saw the fruition of years of effort with the passage of SB 9, creating the **Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund**, with an initial infusion of \$100 million. We continue to work with a diverse coalition of stakeholders to appropriate at least another \$250 million for the fund, with an end goal of \$350 million.



We also continue to broadly push for implementation of the **New Mexico Water Policy and Infrastructure Task Force** recommendations. These 17 recommendations, with over 100 associated actions, can significantly improve water management across the state if they are implemented now. Our water priorities for the 2024 session are also included in this list of task force recommendations.

Last session, we worked with partners to pass SB 337, the **Water Security Planning Act**, revising regional water planning in the state. This year,

we will advocate for additional funds to move this effort forward.

We also will continue to advocate for additional funding for the New Mexico Environment Department to set up a **state-led water quality permitting program**. The decision in Sackett v. EPA has made it clear that we must act now to ensure the protection of our streams and waterways across the state.



Lastly, we will advocate for ensuring both the one-time and recurring funding needs related to the **New Mexico Water Data Initiative**. New Mexico is leading the nation in building accessible and usable water data. Ensuring this effort is appropriately funded is critical for building a sustainable and resilient water future. ▲▲

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics at Risk

STAFF ARTICLE

Given the challenges we face to address climate change and biodiversity loss, public lands with Wilderness characteristics should be closed to oil and gas leasing and drilling. These pristine places provide habitat for fish and wildlife, maintain clean air and water, help stabilize our changing climate, and provide recreation opportunities.

However, Wilderness quality lands managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) receive varying levels of protection, depending on how they are designated, and the vast majority remain open to extractive uses at the expense of other values important to the American public. Polls demonstrate that most Western voters support the protection of public lands from over-development and fossil fuel production.

Congressionally designated Wilderness is off limits to oil and gas leasing and development because the Wilderness Act generally prohibits motorized equipment and development and devotes pristine places to conservation, recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, and historical uses. Similarly, Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are generally closed to oil and gas development because the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976

(FLPMA) mandates that BLM manage WSAs so as not to impair their Wilderness character until Congress either designates them as Wilderness or releases them for other uses.

Unfortunately, most Wilderness quality lands in New Mexico have not been designated as Wilderness or WSAs and therefore lack protection from oil and gas impacts under federal law. The good news is that the BLM has regulatory tools that allow the agency to provide administrative protection to areas identified as Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWCs) and to close these areas to oil and gas leasing and development. The potential impact of the BLM's regulatory authority is huge: The BLM has identified over 344,000 acres of LWCs in New Mexico, and through citizen inventories, New Mexico Wild has identified another 2.9 million acres of LWCs that should be considered for protection.

BLM regulations and policies direct the agency to conduct ongoing inventories of LWCs and to consider protecting LWCs as part of its land management planning decisions. The BLM planning process includes opportunities for input and engagement. Members of the public and organi-

zations like New Mexico Wild can leverage these participation opportunities to advocate for the BLM to close special places to oil and gas leasing and development and to manage these places for conservation, wildlife habitat, cultural resource protection and recreation. Stay tuned for opportunities to participate and tell the BLM that lands with Wilderness characteristics have more public value when they maintain our natural and cultural heritage. ▲▲

Below: an oil well in the Permian Basin near Carlsbad. LWCs in southern New Mexico are particularly threatened by oil and gas extraction.



WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

JEREMY ROMERO

Jeremy is the Regional Connectivity Coordinator for the National Wildlife Federation's Rocky Mountain Regional Center and Public Lands Team. As a native New Mexican, conservationist, sportsman and outdoor enthusiast, he knows firsthand the importance of working with partners and the need to engage in initiatives to better protect our lands, waters, wildlife and culture in New Mexico. Jeremy is excited to build capacity and support New Mexico Wild and other organizations and partners that do exceptional work toward conserving our most precious resources and values.



DEBBIE SPICKERMANN

Debbie is the President of the Santa Fe chapter and a board member of the New Mexico state chapter of Back Country Horsemen of America. She organizes work rides to clear trails in both the Santa Fe and Carson national forests, and the Santa Fe chapter works closely with other volunteer groups such as TRAMPS, the National Smokejumper Association's Trails Restoration & Maintenance Project Specialists. She is a conservationist, angler, hunter, and outdoor enthusiast. Besides horseback riding, she enjoys whitewater rafting, rock collecting, geology and exploring. She is a member of the Los Alamos Geological Society. ▲▲



WELCOME NEW STAFF!

SEBASTIAN HERRING

Nancy Morton Wilderness Intern

Sebastian is in their senior year at UNM studying Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with a focus in Ecofeminism. Previously working as a community healthcare nurse, Sebastian strives to take these skills and values and apply them to community organizing efforts within the realm of wilderness justice.



LUKE KOENIG

Gila Grassroots Organizer

Luke grew up in Maryland where a 200-acre forest across the street from his childhood home and yearly family camping trips instilled in him a life-long love for the natural world and its undeveloped corners. He studied philosophy and environmental studies at St. Mary's College. There, he led a student effort to restore a natural history area, worked in the campus farm, led a windsurfing club, and established a campus apiary—experiences that taught him the deeper relationships with land and water that are possible when we get together as a community. Luke has led field work in the remote canyons of Grand Staircase-Escalante, worked for the NPS in Yellowstone, and most recently, managed the volunteer program for Wild Arizona. He eventually made his way to Silver City, NM, which he's proud to call home. ▲▲



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/aldo-leopold-circle/

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.

Credit card payment

Name _____
 Credit Card Number _____
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Other payment options:

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

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



New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
P.O. Box 25464
Albuquerque, NM 87125
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE OF NEW MEXICO WILD

The Hispano Champions of Rio Grande del Norte National Monument

New Mexico's Battle to Protect Chaco Canyon: A Timeline

A Close Call for Pollinators in the Rio Chama Watershed

A Conversation With Representative Gabe Vasquez

Roadmap to Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery



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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