

# Defending Nature

New strategies and tools to protect New Mexico's biodiversity

2023 ANNUAL REPORT





# Dear Members and Supporters:

**This past year gave us a sense of hope for the future.**

Amid the stories about record heat, water shortages, habitat loss, and indifference to the natural world, we see subtle but *positive* change. Our work is to make that change more pronounced. We see our purpose as defending nature. This annual report will give an overview of how we are doing that.

Our conservation work made important advances in many areas this year, but perhaps none was more meaningful to many New Mexicans than the future of Greater Chaco. Pueblos and communities across the state united to protect public lands around Chaco Culture National Historical Park. More than 130,000 people commented on U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) plans for Chaco. After decades of advocacy at the federal level, the Biden administration established a 20-year ban on drilling and mining on public lands within a 10-mile radius of the park. This encompasses approximately 336,400 acres and gives Congress time to make the protections permanent.

We know from polling our members that protecting wildlife is the top priority for most. (New Mexico ranks fourth in the nation for biodiversity.) Wildlife supports healthy ecosystems that we rely on for our own health, culture, economy, recreation and even to mitigate climate change. For most of us, protecting wildlife is cause enough. Yet a healthy natural world is essential





to human existence itself. Wildlife provides a measuring stick for how our future will unfold.

The climate crisis is the core threat facing our natural world and its wildlife. With nearly half the state held as public lands and state trust lands, knowing which ecosystems will be most impacted by climate change can direct our priorities in years to come. This past year, we completed a detailed research study on climate and biodiversity in New Mexico. We'll share an overview of that in this report and have the full study available on our website.

As we look ahead with hope, we are encouraged by the steadfast support of our members. We have seen remarkable grassroots support in both advocacy and contributions. Thank you for helping us continue defending nature.

Sincerely,

**Mark Allison**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Wendy Brown**  
BOARD CHAIR

Front Cover: Sandhill cranes at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Dennis Chamberlain

Left: The 2023 annular solar eclipse captured from Chaco Culture National Historical Park, an ancient astronomical observation point. Photo courtesy of Andrew Orr



NEW MEXICO PUBLIC LANDS  
AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE TO  
CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION  
AND MITIGATION:

*IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES FOR  
CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP*



December 2022

Above: The cover of the EcoAdapt study evaluating how protecting public lands can help address climate change and biodiversity loss.

Right: Like the Mexican gray wolf, the Aplomado falcon is considered a "nonessential experimental" population, which means they are not necessary for the continued existence of the species, and the regulatory restrictions for population management are reduced. BLM photo

Far right: Sunset over the Organ Mountains in southern New Mexico. Staff photo

## Defending Nature:

Understanding where our work will have the most impact as climate changes

**The world struggles with two related environmental crises: climate change and mass species extinction. We must address both issues to protect the natural world and ourselves.**

New Mexicans already are experiencing the negative impacts of the climate crisis, including hotter temperatures, reduced snowpack, historic drought, catastrophic wildfires, and related flooding. Climate change threatens our cultural heritage, our traditional uses, our economic well-being, the safety of our communities, and our natural world. Combined with habitat loss and fragmentation from roads, development, and extraction, climate change exacerbates the loss of plant and animal species. Scientists estimate that current rates of extinction are 1,000 times higher than natural historic levels.

This past year, with investment from our donors, New Mexico Wild commissioned a study by EcoAdapt, an independent, nongovernmental organization consisting of a team of climate scientists. The study evaluates how protecting public lands in New Mexico can help address climate change and biodiversity loss. The study was designed to identify where new protections would have the greatest positive impact and to inform our priorities.

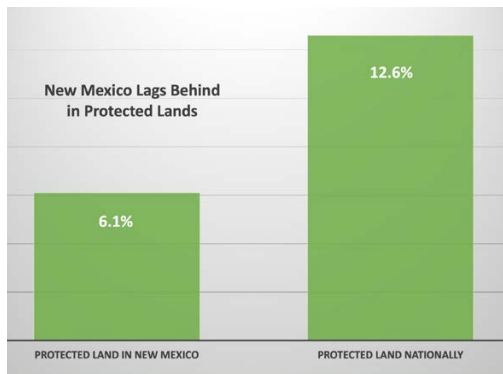
Over the past 25 years, we have assembled substantial data on 5.9 million acres of New Mexico's federal land that merit greater protection. This new study will help us focus on which of those lands are of the



highest priority for protection because of the role they play in adaptation to and mitigation of increasing climate threats. The study provides four important conclusions:

- Protected areas can help us adapt to climate change by maintaining landscape-scale ecological processes.
- Protected areas represent a highly effective strategy to preserve existing biodiversity, particularly when protections are strategically placed. Targeted protection of sites with rare species and isolated populations can reduce their vulnerability to climate change.
- Protected areas that significantly increase landscape connectivity and represent a range of environmental conditions increase species movement and reduce the risk of species loss.
- Protected areas can also play an important role in climate mitigation by preventing the degradation of ecosystems that store carbon as well as by limiting the extraction of fossil fuels.

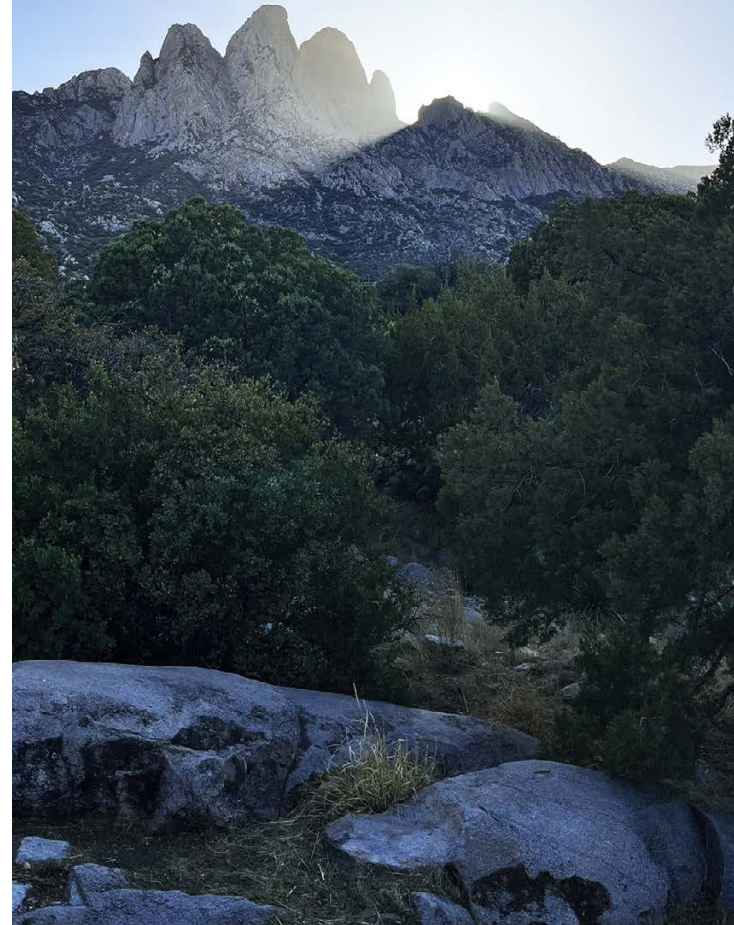
You can view both the summary and full report at our website: [nmwild.org/ecoadapt](https://nmwild.org/ecoadapt).



New Mexico lags behind other states in protected lands managed primarily for biodiversity, at 6.1% compared to 12.6% nationally.

USGS: Protected Areas Database

New Mexico Wild is the state's largest grassroots conservation organization dedicated to the preservation, stewardship, and continued enjoyment of New Mexico's wildlands. We focus on the Wilderness, wildlife, and water of these public lands and the interconnection that makes our natural world thrive.







# Defending Nature:

Our work this past year to protect biodiversity

**T**o really defend nature requires working on many projects, with many partners, and across many geographies. This is a sample of the initiatives New Mexico Wild has been engaged in over this past year to protect biodiversity in our state.

## FIGHT THE SPRAYING

This summer, we learned that the U.S. Department of Agriculture planned aerial spraying of highly toxic pesticides over 40 square miles of BLM land in and around the Rio Chama Wilderness Study Area to reduce the number of grasshoppers. The pesticide also would have killed pollinators and many aquatic insect species. We immediately coordinated a letter from 28 community and Tribal leaders to key federal land managers and our congressional delegation to alert them to our environmental concerns. In just 48 hours, we were able to collect petition signatures from 2,460 members and supporters to fight this ill-advised plan. The result: BLM stopped USDA's plans for the spraying.

## PROTECT THE PECOS

For four years, we have been deeply engaged in efforts to stop exploratory mining near the Pecos Wilderness and Pecos River. Runoff from previous mines in this area killed 90,000 fish in the '90s, and the area has not yet fully recovered. New Mexico Wild helped form the Stop Tererro Mine Coalition, and after years of advocacy work, potential solutions are in sight with the proposed Pecos Watershed Protection Act. Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján are leading the Senate effort, while U.S. Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández is championing a companion House bill. U.S. Rep. Melanie Stansbury is an original co-sponsor of the House bill. This legislation aims to prevent future mining contamination and to protect water quality and

Left above: This monarch butterfly is just one of the many pollinators that would have been decimated by proposed insecticide spraying along the Rio Chama. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Left below: Fisher on the Pecos River. Photo by Jim O'Donnell

community health through a mineral withdrawal of approximately 170,000 acres of the Upper Pecos Watershed near Pecos. The legislation would also designate approximately 11,600 acres of wild and rugged National Forest lands encompassing several headwaters of the Pecos River, as the Thompson Peak Wilderness Area.

## KEEP IT FLOWING

Working with partners through multiple coalitions, we were successful in advocating for Strategic Water Reserve funding in this year's legislative session. The state Legislature allocated \$7.5 million for the reserve, the largest appropriation in its nearly 20-year history. To ensure that river flows serve both people and biodiversity, efforts like the Strategic Water Reserve are vital. We also advocated for the \$100 million Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund, groundbreaking legislation that created New Mexico's first dedicated and long-term funding stream for land and water conservation. We need to have a seat at the table to represent wildlife when water decisions are made. New Mexico Wild staff participate in key advisory and study groups that recommend water decisions to state water managers and elected officials. For example, we are advocating for a state-led water quality permitting program and other regulatory changes to help counter the recent U. S. Supreme Court decision vastly reducing the scope of the federal Clean Water Act.

## SAVE THE LOBO

Wolves are a keystone species and an important indicator of the health of an ecosystem. Twenty-five years ago, an experimental population of Mexican gray wolves was released in southern New Mexico and eastern Arizona. They have been surviving, if not thriving, despite illegal hunting, lack of genetic diversity, and a range that is too restrictive. The good news this past year is that the wolf count increased by 23% with a total of 241 wild lobos in 59 packs. New Mexico Wild continually monitors and acts on policies that would harm these amazing creatures.

**You can learn more about these protection campaigns on our website: [nmwild.org](https://nmwild.org)**

Right above: An acequia near the village of Lourdes, along the Gallinas River. Acequias like this are the lifeblood of traditional agricultural practices in New Mexico, while also supporting valuable wildlife habitat. Photo by Ralph Vigil. Right below: Endangered species like the Mexican gray wolf are particularly vulnerable to habitat loss. This portrait of a lobo was the 2023 Wolf Stamp Contest winner. Artwork by Darien Bogart





# Defending Nature:

## Looking ahead

While annual reports look back at the previous year, we felt that the importance of protecting biodiversity in our state warranted a look at what we plan to do in the near future as well. Although this is not a comprehensive list of our efforts, it will help explain our priorities. We have three major strategies for biodiversity protection:

### 1. Protect more of our public lands for biodiversity and strengthen existing

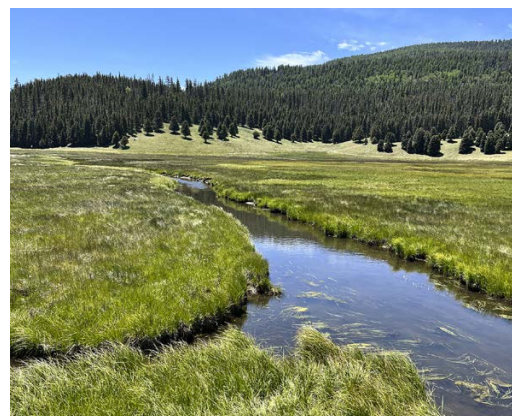
**protections.** We will continue to build support for the recommended Thompson Peak Wilderness as well as protections for the Caja del Rio and Otero Mesa. We hope to expand our new Wilderness Defenders volunteer program to monitor even more of our public lands. Our support for the Native Land Institute will continue as they seek to elevate Native voices in conservation.

### 2. Improve approaches to managing water in the state to ensure that both the quantity and quality of our rivers and streams can support aquatic-dependent

**life.** Our work continues to apply the Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRW) regulations to protect important watersheds around the state. Wild & Scenic River status for the Gila continues to be a major area of advocacy for us. With the addition of a second water specialist to our staff, we can engage with more partners on water-related issues.

### 3. Apply science-based land protection strategies that will help reduce the

**impact of climate change on species loss.** We will collaborate with legislators, agencies, and partners to share critical findings from our new climate/biodiversity study. We will also use that study to set our priorities for land protection efforts. The Land and Water Conservation Fund will be on our priority list to assure that funding goes where it will have the most value for biodiversity.



Right above: Volunteers installing new signage in the Lower San Francisco WSA. Right center: Protecting healthy streams like this one at the Valles Caldera National Preserve is critical. Right below: Staff leading a group of policymakers at Otero Mesa. Staff photos



# Our Work and Financials

We use three approaches for protecting New Mexico's Wilderness, Wildlife, and Water:

## Wilderness Protection

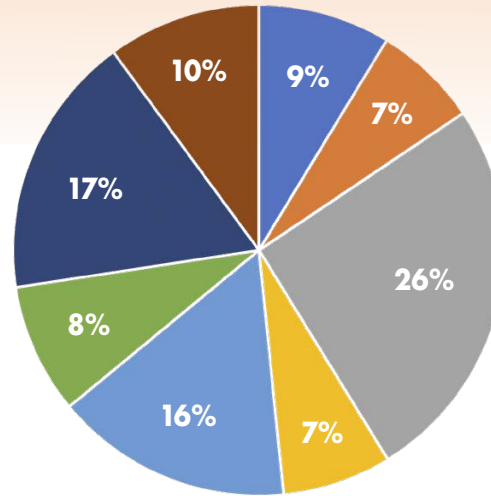
We work to upgrade the status of public lands by developing long-term legislative or administrative protections as well as providing studies on which public lands have the greatest potential for Wilderness status and biodiversity values. This includes place-based campaigns, grassroots organizing, and advocacy with elected officials.

## Wilderness Defense

We strive to improve the management of public lands. This includes a range of legal oversight and watchdog activities to hold agencies continuously accountable for managing public lands consistent with relevant statutes, regulations, rules, and plans.

## Wilderness Outreach, Education, & Stewardship

We share the love of the wild. This includes public outreach, education, and outings to expose all ages to the wild heritage of our public lands in New Mexico.



## TOTAL EXPENSES

FY 2023\*

**\$2,885,973** (100%)

Administrative	\$250,855
Fundraising	\$198,682
Outreach, Education & Stewardship	\$740,364
Wilderness Defense	\$206,768
Wilderness Protection	\$450,706
Native Land Institute	\$247,100
Operating Reserves	\$500,737
NM Wild Action Fund	\$290,761

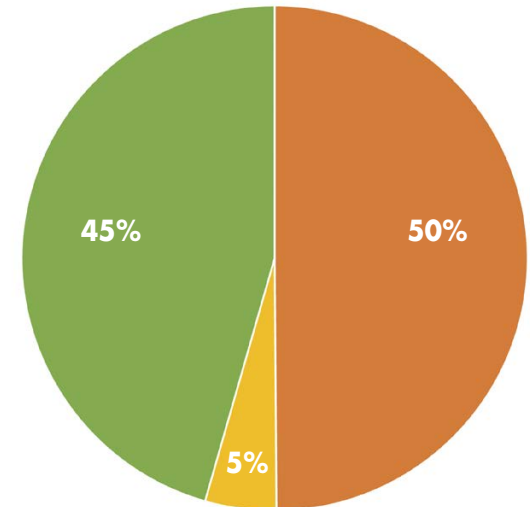
\*Unaudited: 10/1/2022 - 9/30/2023 Consolidated

## TOTAL INCOME

FY 2023\*

**\$2,885,973** (100%)

Grassroots Donors	\$1,439,687
Includes local grants, memberships, contributions, bequests, and other income	
Government	\$131,368
Foundations	\$1,314,918
Includes national grants and contracts	



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On the following pages, we list the thousands of donors who supported the grassroots work of New Mexico Wild this past year.

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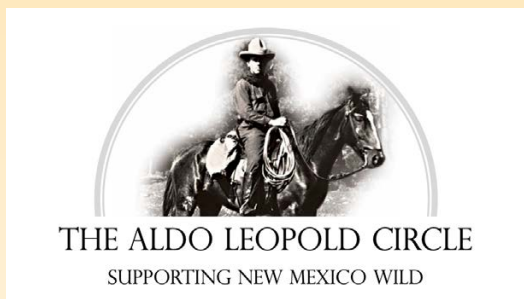
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Mother wolf and pup by Bob Haarman,  
Courtesy Wikimedia Commons

**Endangered:** The Mexican gray wolf, or lobo,  
once on the brink of extinction, was reintroduced into Southern  
New Mexico in 1998. Today, with a population of approximately 241  
in New Mexico and Arizona, these wolves face threats from humans,  
genetic weaknesses, and habitat limitations.

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Mexican spotted owl.  
Photo courtesy Wikimedia Commons

**Threatened:** Mexican Spotted owls are residents of old-growth or mature forests that possess complex structural components. Owls are also found in canyon habitat dominated by vertical-walled rocky cliffs within complex watersheds, including tributary side canyons.



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Biodiversity encompasses all species, from the most charismatic to the humblest pollinators. Each one fills a critical environmental niche. Photo by Garrett VeneKlasen

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TOTAL VALUE OF  
NEW MEXICO WILD  
VOLUNTEER HOURS  
\$194,928

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Jaguar, *Panthera onca*.  
Photo by Churnett, courtesy  
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**Endangered:** Jaguars need vast territories for survival, with habitat, prey, and population affecting their home ranges. In the U.S., these incredible creatures, possibly dispersing males from Mexico, face challenges due to human development like fences and highways disrupting their movement corridors.

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## WILDERNESS RANGER STEWARDSHIP BY THE NUMBERS

**16** Volunteer Events

**40.8** Miles of Trail Cleared

**170** Logs Cut

**67** Signs Installed

**93** Campsites Rehabilitated

**117** Miles of Trail Surveyed

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USFWS Biologist Andy Dean of USFWS holds Gila trout in Mineral Creek in the Gila National Forest. USFWS

**Threatened:** The Gila Trout is a salmonid species native to the Southwest United States and closely related to the rainbow trout. In 2006, this resilient fish was removed from the endangered species list, marking a significant milestone in conservation efforts.



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Cholla blooming in the Sandia Mountain Wilderness, a wild gem at the edge of Albuquerque. Staff photo

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Chiricahua leopard frog. Photo by  
Jim Rorabaugh, USFWS

**Threatened:** The Chiricahua leopard frog  
has a distinctive leopard pattern with cream-colored thigh spots,  
rough skin, and a unique snore-like call, standing out among its  
counterparts in the wild.

# The Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders Program

Established in the name of one of our most visionary activists, these dedicated volunteers work in designated natural areas in New Mexico, helping to monitor Wilderness values and conditions. See page 23 for more information.



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A training session for Wilderness Defenders in the Sandia Mountains. Staff photo

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Jemez Mountains salamander.  
Photo by Jim Rohrbaugh,  
courtesy of USFWS



## Endangered:

The Jemez Mountains salamander is a rare and elusive species found exclusively in the heart of New Mexico's Jemez Mountains. Its endemism highlights the biological diversity of the region and underscores the importance of preserving its habitat.



# Ways to Give

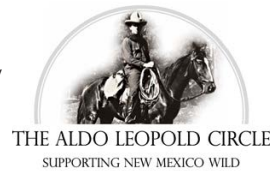
## How you can support the work of New Mexico Wild

### MONTHLY DONATIONS

The easiest way to support New Mexico Wild is by a convenient automatic monthly donation from your credit card, debit card, or directly from your bank account.

### ALDO LEOPOLD CIRCLE

New Mexico Wild offers the *Aldo Leopold Circle* to show our appreciation for members who donate \$1,000 or more each year. What better inspiration for this group than Aldo Leopold who reshaped conservation in our country and did that in part based on his experiences right here in New Mexico.



### LEGACY GIVING/BEQUEST

You can use a bequest in your will to contribute to New Mexico Wild and leave a lasting legacy for the protection of our public lands.

### GIFTS OF STOCK

A gift of appreciated securities (stocks) is an easy way to make an impact today and may offer you additional tax advantages.

### DONOR-ADVISED FUNDS (DAF)

Your charitable DAF dollars are a great way to invest in the important work we do every day.

### QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION (QCD)

By making a QCD distribution of funds from your IRA, you can make a gift that may be excluded from your taxable income and you receive the benefit of supporting New Mexico's Wilderness. You can also designate New Mexico Wild to receive Required Minimum Distributions (RMD) from your retirement plan.

### MATCHING GIFT PROGRAMS

Many companies across the United States match their employees' gifts. By checking with





Above left: Wilderness Rangers on the Crest Trail in the northern Gila Wilderness. Center: staff preparing lunch during an Aldo Leopold Circle outing on the Caja del Rio. Right: staff tabling at an event. Staff photos  
Far left: Aspens show off their fall foliage in the Pecos Wilderness. Photo by Garrett VeneKlasen

your company and requesting a matching gift, you can double or triple your gift!

## TRIBUTE GIFTS

Support Wilderness by giving an honor or memorial gift on behalf of someone who loves public lands.

## FUNDRAISERS

Rally support from your friends and family by fundraising for New Mexico Wild through Facebook or the GoFundMe Charity.

## NUSENDA MEMBERSHIP

As a Nusenda Federal Credit Union member, whenever you make a credit purchase, you'll earn 0.25% cash rewards that are deposited

to your checking account each July. Then, each year, Nusenda makes a matching contribution to New Mexico Wild if you designate us as your charitable preference. Nusenda is one of our largest corporate partners.

## COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN

Federal employees can give to New Mexico Wild via a recurring payroll deduction. Giving a little each pay period turns into a significant gift at the end of the year. To give through the CFC, visit Givecfc.org. Our CFC ID number is 90043.



## VOLUNTEER

There are many ways you can support New Mexico Wild as a volunteer. Visit our website for volunteer opportunities and application.

## WILDERNESS DEFENDERS

If you love backcountry hiking and would like to help monitor our Wilderness areas, the Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders program may be just for you. **Check our website to learn how you can join this group of volunteers.**



## WILDERNESS LEGACY FUND

SUPPORTING NEW MEXICO WILD

**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 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.

If you would like to donate to the Wilderness Legacy Fund, please contact Tisha Broska, Deputy Director, New Mexico Wild, [tisha@nmwild.org](mailto:tisha@nmwild.org) or 505-321-6131.

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The legal name of New Mexico Wild is the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, a nonprofit corporation organized and existing under the laws of New Mexico with its principal address of P.O. Box 25464, Albuquerque, NM 87125-0464.

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