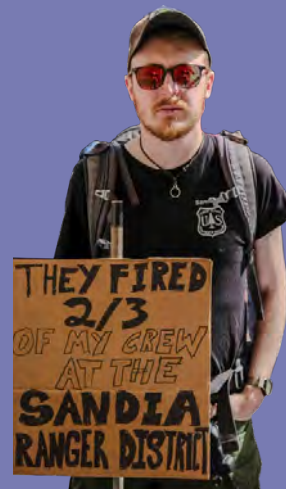




Spring/Summer 2025
The Semiannual Publication
of the New Mexico
Wilderness Alliance

NEW MEXICO WILD!



New Mexico Unidos PUBLIC LANDS



COMMON GROUND

PLUS: A CONVERSATION WITH STEVE HARRIS



New Mexico WILD!

The Semiannual Publication of the
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

VOLUME 22, NUMBER 1
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ON THE COVER

A love of public lands transcended political and cultural divides on March 7 when hundreds of New Mexicans rallied at the State Capitol in Santa Fe to send a clear message to Washington: Hands off our public lands!

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Mark Allison

THE PUBLIC LANDS FIGHT OF OUR LIFETIME



People who know me know that I don’t exaggerate. I’m not excitable or histrionic. I don’t use hyperbole. I don’t cry wolf and I’m not Chicken Little. I’ve fought many battles and weathered many storms. I’m calm in a crisis. I’d like to think people say that I have a steady hand on the helm. Reserved. Reasonable. Unflappable even. I’m not a polemicist by nature. But, and you may know where this is going already, it’s time to give it a go!

We are facing the most breathtakingly reactionary anti-public lands, anti-conservation administration in the country’s history. The breakneck pace at which the executive orders and announcements on environmental matters are being issued make it challenging even to catalog the list of reckless and appalling attacks. The accompanying uncertainty and chaos compound the assault. Relevant cabinet and land management leaders are impossibly conflicted or preposterously unqualified, mostly both.

New Mexicans have always been overwhelmingly supportive of our public lands, waters and wildlife. Public lands unite us.

Bedrock environmental and conservation rules and laws dating back generations are being subverted and jettisoned. Public servants are being ritualistically demonized and humiliated, with mass indiscriminate firings from agencies already significantly under-resourced. The Constitution itself, on elements as fundamental as the separation of powers, is being strained, with more than a little uncertainty that it will hold.

From a conservation perspective, there is one threat in particular that casts a pall over them all: the concerted effort toward the mass disposal of our public lands that would take this uniquely American birthright—YOU are a public lands owner and WE are public lands owners—and transfer lands to the states or more directly privatize them by selling them to the highest bidder.

Public lands are inextricably linked to our culture and identity in New Mexico; they are where we hunt, fish, mountain bike, backpack and camp with our families. They are essential to tourism and our rapidly expanding outdoor recreation economy. Public lands provide essential services like carbon sequestration, clean water filtration and air purification. They enable the continuation of traditional practices and safeguard cultural resources. They are critical to protecting biodiversity. They are tied to our history and to our future. Without public lands, we lose public access. Imagine going to your favorite place to camp with your family only to see a “No Trespassing” sign.

Heck, even though our national parks set a visitation record in 2024, the president wants to get rid of visitor centers, including the one at Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument right here in New Mexico. Public lands belong to each of us, no matter how big our wallet, and they need to remain so.

“But Mark,” you may say, “you are being hysterical and alarmist. This could never happen.”

Don’t bet on it.

This isn’t the first attempt at public land seizure but it is the most significant. It is more sophisticated and better resourced. And these are no longer fringe ideas put forth (only) by crusty crackpots or welfare ranchers. Not just felonious armed militants, like those who occupied Malheur Wildlife Refuge, who wrap themselves in the flag and delude themselves and their followers that they are Thomas Paine reincarnate. (And who, adding insult to injury, dug a

latrine and defecated on a Native burial site while there. I suppose under the theory that if you are going to figuratively defecate on America, you might as well do it literally as well.)

No, not just the troglodytes or tin hatters anymore, the people pushing this radical land grab are now in power. They are minding the store. They occupy the highest levels within the administration and Congress. You don't have to take my word for it. Listen to what they are saying. And believe them.

But they aren't just talking, they are doing. As I write, land seizure proponents are trying the courts (Utah has already attempted a landmark lawsuit challenging federal authority over 18.5 million acres of BLM land). They are attempting to do so through rules changes in the U.S. House of Representatives, through the budget reconciliation process and through federal legislation.

Maybe this is based on a fundamental misunderstanding and worldview that doesn't appreciate how special and unique the public lands of the United States are compared to the rest of the world. Or maybe it simply views them solely as an "asset on a balance sheet" (Secretary of Interior Doug Burgum) and an opportunity to enrich themselves and their friends.

Proponents of privatizing lands now in the public trust have tried numerous mechanisms and rationales over the decades to justify their attempts. This time they are doing so under the pretext of creating affordable housing.

One such example in Congress is a proposal from Utah Sen. Mike Lee that would prompt the broad liquidation of public lands under the guise of creating more housing (the "HOUSES Act"). That the legislation doesn't mention the word "affordable" once is telling, making it possible, even likely, that the lands could be sold to anyone from politically connected billionaires to wealthy real estate developers who want to create high-end housing for the super-rich.

The affordable housing crisis is real and there are many ways serious policy makers at all levels of government could help, by addressing density restrictions, regulatory reform to encourage development of multifamily rental units and increased access to financing. (That these same elected officials are cutting resources for affordable housing at the same time puts the lie to their professed motivations.)

The mass disposal of American's birthright of treasured public lands is not the first, second or 10th answer to this problem. (I was an affordable housing advocate and developer for 20 years and I don't believe for a minute these people care about low income and working families' housing woes.)

I don't care how you voted in the last presidential election. New Mexico Wild has always been proud to count Democrats, Republicans and Independents as members. But I don't recall giving away our public lands being discussed during the campaign. However people voted, they didn't vote for this.

New Mexicans have always been overwhelmingly supportive of our public lands, waters and wildlife. Public lands unite us. If we let ourselves fall into this cynical attempt to divide us, the only winners will be the uber wealthy and foreign governments like China who will divide the spoils while we all lose.

My heart was filled when in March hundreds and hundreds of New Mexicans of all political persuasions gathered at the

Continued on page 7.

Mark impersonates Gary Oldman as Winston Churchill doing a modified Never Surrender speech at the 2024 holiday party and member meeting. Staff photo



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WILDERNESS DISPATCHES

Updates on New Mexico Wild Projects Across the State

THE FIGHT FOR THE CAJA DEL RIO CONTINUES

STAFF ARTICLE

For years, we have advocated for protecting the Caja del Rio, the magnificent 107,000-acre plateau just outside of Santa Fe. That urgent need for protection was never more evident than after the recent decision of the U.S. Forest Service to allow the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) to construct a 14-mile utility corridor across these lands. Near the Rio Grande and Bandelier National Monument, the Caja is one of the most ecologically rich and culturally significant landscapes in the American Southwest. These historic lands are sacred to many Pueblos, an important wildlife corridor, traditionally used by local Hispano communities and a recreational resource for many. The utility corridor will be 100 feet wide with 17 new transmission towers and will include roads to build and service the project. This disastrous outcome could have been avoided had the Caja del Rio been permanently protected through a national monument designation.

The NNSA proposal to transect the Caja with high-power transmission lines has faced strong opposition from sovereign Tribes, the All Pueblo Council of Governors, local Hispano communities, the Santa Fe County Commission and thousands of New Mexicans.

New Mexico Wild filed a formal objection on behalf of the coalition and met with the Forest Service as the lead objector, citing violation of federal laws that require more substantive cultural and environmental assessments and demanding a full environmental impact statement, the completion of an ethnographic study, serious evaluation of alternatives and, ultimately, the denial of this project.



The Caja national monument campaign has enjoyed overwhelming community support for the past several years but was unable to gain traction with the U.S. Department of Interior until there was consensus among the Pueblos. After a draft decision was released by the Santa Fe National Forest authorizing the new transmission corridor, Tesuque Pueblo called on our congressional delegation to help permanently protect the Caja del Rio as a national monument. A unanimous resolution of support from the All Pueblo Council of Governors passed quickly thereafter, enabling the coalition to secure a letter from the Santa Fe County Commission, the coalition's own

Caja del Rio in springtime riot.
Photo by Garrett VeneKlosen

letter (signed by 25 Indigenous, Hispano, government, business, grazing permittee, faith and conservation leaders) and a letter to the administration from New Mexico's entire congressional delegation asking for the creation of a national monument.

New Mexico Wild was central to these developments. Years of community-building, as well as critical work facilitating highly delicate conversations within and between stakeholder groups, resulted in a remarkable series of events, accomplishments and momentum. Disappointingly, despite our best efforts, and despite a supportive congressional delegation and a sympathetic administration, we were informed that there simply was not enough time to get this across the finish line before the change of administrations.

Still, we're proud of the coalition and this remarkable effort. Despite new challenges, we will continue working with communities and partners to fight for permanent protections until we are successful. ▲▲



From Left: Esther García's granddaughter Megan Archuleta and daughter Lori Archuleta, New Mexico Wild Deputy Director Tisha Broska, award recipient Ernie Atencio and New Mexico Wild Executive Director Mark Allison.

THE 2024 ESTHER GARCÍA CONSERVATION CHAMPION AWARD

STAFF ARTICLE

New Mexico Wild Executive Director Mark Allison was honored to present the 2024 Esther García Conservation Champion Award to Ernie Atencio at the annual holiday party and member meeting in December.

Atencio's deep connection to Northern New Mexico conservation spans decades and includes helping to secure the designation of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument and the protection of Chaco Canyon. After nine years of service on New Mexico Wild's board of directors, he stepped down in 2024. His approach to conservation emphasizes community engagement and cultural understanding, reflecting the values that García championed. "Ernie exemplifies the bridge-building and inclusive approach to conservation that Esther García stood for," Allison said. "His dedication to protecting New Mexico's lands while honoring local communities and traditions makes him an ideal recipient of this award."

García was a conservation trailblazer. The first female mayor of Questa, she was instrumental in designating the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument and honoring the age-old Indo-Hispano traditions of acequias and land grants, integrating traditional values and uses into the plan. New Mexico Wild was proud to have her serve on our board of directors.

Sadly, we lost García in 2020. At the time of her passing, Allison was already contemplating an annual award in her name to honor a New Mexico conservation leader who carries on García’s spirit of justice, diplomacy, wisdom and passion. ▲▲

Last fall’s issue of this newsletter featured a conversation between Mark Allison and Ernie Atencio. Read it here: bit.ly/NMWAatencio



**EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION:
THE OUTDOOR ACADEMY**

BY BEN MORTENSEN

The Outdoor Academy, an innovative program by the Friends of the Rio Grande del Norte, is dedicated to empowering Taos youth through outdoor education, mentorship and hands-on experiences. Engaging diverse students from Taos High School and Taos Pueblo Day School, the academy immerses participants in outdoor recreation, environmental stewardship and career pathways. The program provides necessary gear at no cost to ensure that financial barriers don’t prevent youth from exploring the outdoors.

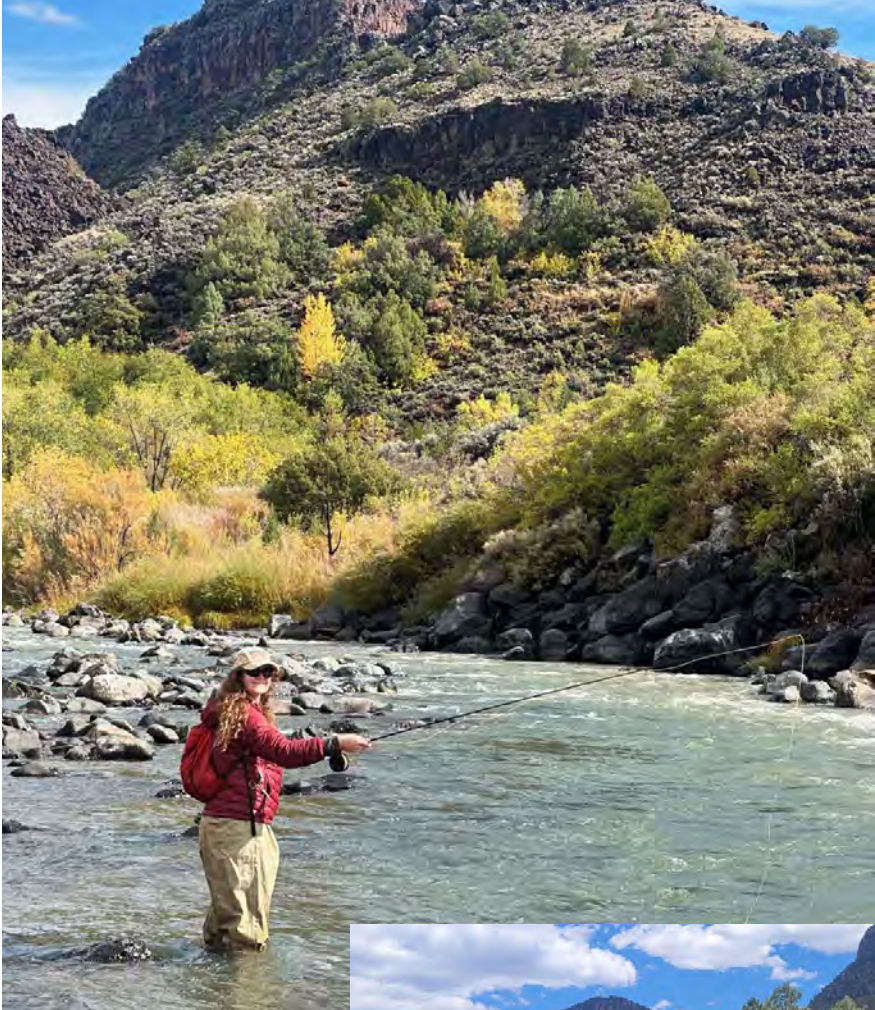
Through programs like fishing events, guide schools and certifications necessary for outdoor professions, students learn essential skills while developing a deep respect for public lands. These young people not only build expertise in outdoor recreation, but they also connect with the lands that surround them in a way that fosters lifelong stewardship.

In light of recent attempts to seize public lands across the U.S., the Outdoor Academy’s mission has become even more vital. Public lands are integral to the program, providing an invaluable backdrop for hands-on learning and career development. Without access to these lands, the academy’s efforts to train the next generation of outdoor professionals would be severely hindered.

Paid internships with local outfitters give students real-world experience, preparing them for careers in both guiding and conservation. These opportunities depend on the continued availability of public lands for exploration, environmental education and sustainable recreation. If these lands were taken away, not only would the students lose access to the very resource-



The Friends Group hosts a community float to celebrate youth white water rafting guide school graduation. Staff photo



Above: Outdoor Academy student Uma Geisler fly fishing amongst the fall colors.

Right: Outdoor Academy gets local kids outside for a community fishing day. Staff photos



es they are learning to protect, but they would also lose the chance to build careers that help them work in the places they have grown up exploring.

The Outdoor Academy is more than just a program—it’s a lifeline for students, a bridge to careers and a reminder of the importance of preserving public lands for future generations. It’s critical that we protect these lands, ensuring that young people can continue to experience and learn from them. ▲▲



In January, New Mexico Wild Conservation Director Bjorn Fredrickson (front) and Executive Director Mark Allison (4th from left in back) hosted graduate students from the Harvard Schools of Public Health, Education, Government, and Business at the Albuquerque office to discuss the importance and impact of New Mexico Wild’s protection campaigns and how various wilderness protection efforts have short-term and long-term impacts not only on the local economy but also on human health and social wellness. Staff photo

WILDERNESS DISPATCHES, CONTINUED

UNITED FOR THE PECOS: A COMMUNITY'S FIGHT FOR PERMANENT PROTECTION

BY RALPH VIGIL

For the past five years, our coalition of acequias, land grants, farmers, ranchers, conservation groups and environmental advocates, along with our congressional delegation, has worked tirelessly to ensure the permanent protection of the Pecos watershed. In December, we celebrated a major victory as Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland initiated a two-year temporary withdrawal of approximately 165,000 acres of public lands in the Upper Pecos watershed from new mining claims and federal mineral leases, subject to valid existing rights.

This temporary withdrawal is a crucial step toward securing the region's water and air quality, cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreational values. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service will now begin a process to propose a 20-year withdrawal to protect these lands further.* The proposed area spans San Miguel and Santa Fe counties, covering multiple Pecos River tributaries and wetlands that make up the Upper Pecos Watershed.

The community remains united in this fight and sought state legislative support through HJM 5, a memorial sponsored by Rep. Anita Gonzales of Las Vegas and Sen. Liz Stefanics of Cerillos. The memorial aimed to reinforce state support for the administrative withdrawal and for the Pecos Watershed Protection Act, introduced in Congress by Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján and Reps. Teresa Leger Fernández and Melanie Stansbury.

Although the memorial got stalled in committee and did not pass, a state-level victory for the Pecos came in the form of an executive order from the State Land Office imposing a moratorium on new mining on state land



San Miguel County Commissioner Max Trujillo joins the discussion at the Pecos public meeting. Staff photo

parcels within the upper Pecos River watershed. The moratorium, issued by State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard on March 12, sends a clear message to the federal government that the state of New Mexico insists that the mineral withdrawal move forward.

After the BLM abruptly canceled an official February public meeting in the village of Pecos, the coalition moved forward with a public meeting and rally. Community leaders and members voiced their disappointment over the cancellation, especially given the lack of opposition to these protections. The message remains clear: We will not stop until the Pecos is permanently protected.

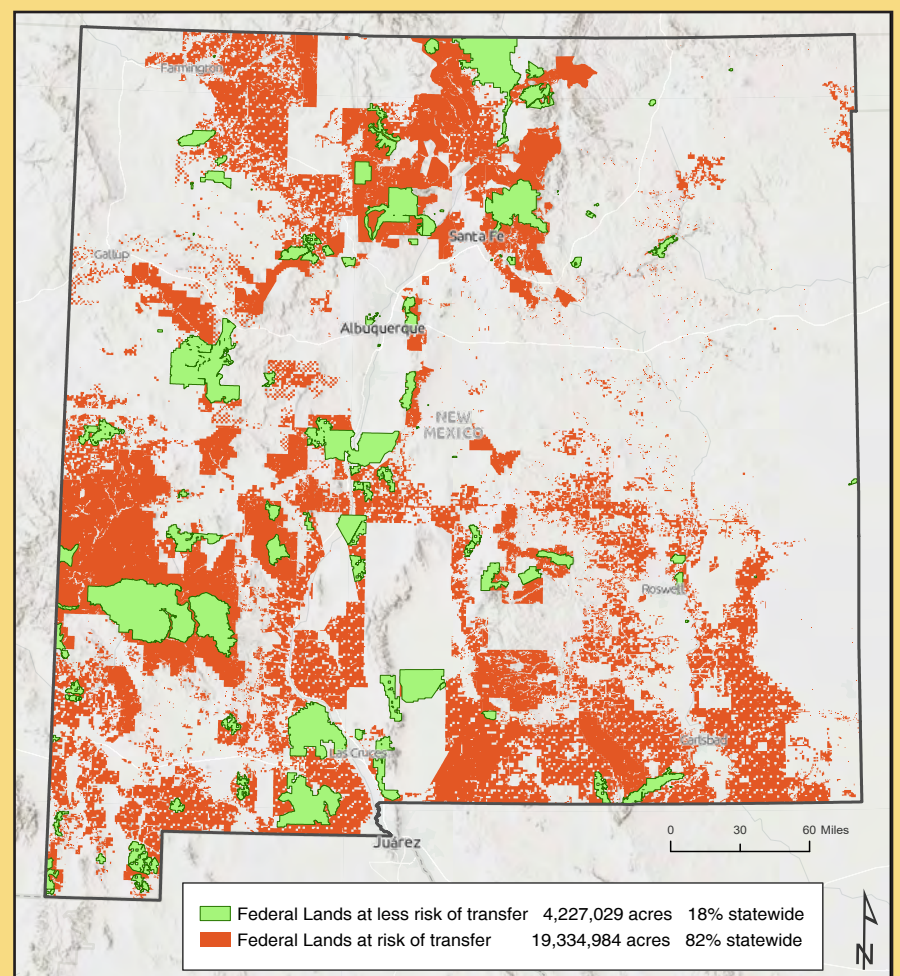
**The future for the Pecos is uncertain under the current administration and we urge everyone to stay engaged. Go to www.stopteerrromine.org for the latest developments. ▲▲*

FEDERAL PUBLIC LANDS AT RISK OF TRANSFER TO STATE OR PRIVATE CONTROL

This map depicts our best estimates of the federal public lands that are at greater risk of transfer to state and/or private control and those that are at lower risk of such transfer. These estimates are based on recent efforts by land seizure proponents to use the courts to force the transfer of public lands out of federal management; a focus in these recent judicial efforts on what are called "unappropriated" public lands, which are vaguely defined; and overt public statements by some federal land seizure proponents about their goals and intentions.

Given this, we estimate that federal lands that are designated via congressional action (federal law) or via executive or administrative action as clearly directed by federal law are at lower risk of transfer. Such lands include national parks and preserves, wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, national recreation and conservation areas, national monuments, and national wildlife refuges. These lands constitute approximately 18% of federal lands in New Mexico.

The transfer of any or all of the 82% of remaining federal public lands in New Mexico that we believe are at higher risk of transfer would at a minimum result in a change in management of these lands to increase economic outputs through resource extraction and development, with corresponding impacts to fish and wildlife populations, habitat, recreation opportunities, water quality, cultural resources, traditional uses, and more. Due to budgetary constraints related to state management of large landholdings, transferred federal public lands face a high likelihood of ending up in private control. This worst-case scenario would almost certainly result in total and permanent loss of public access to these lands. ▲▲



state Capitol. They drove from Silver City, Las Cruces, Taos, Chama and everywhere in between. Veterans and hunters and anglers and tree huggers and bird watchers and students, outfitters, business owners and grazing permittees. All to stand together to demand that we keep public lands in public hands.

Elected officials who ignore this collective voice will do so at their peril, mark my words.

A word about the indiscriminate firings of land management staff (otherwise known as public servants, our friends, family, neighbors): Attacks on federal land management agencies have a direct connection to land seizure efforts. For agencies already shamefully under-resourced, the gutting of these public employees apparently wasn't enough, it is being done in a way intended to demonize and humiliate.

Public servants deserve our thanks and appreciation for their dedication and sacrifices, not animus and ridicule. Even if you think reductions in force are merited, I don't see how it is "efficient" to do so indiscriminately, with no apparent analysis or process to determine which positions, might be advisable to cut why and when.

Make no mistake, these cuts will have direct, negative consequences for New Mexico. Wildfire preparedness and recovery, water quality, trail maintenance; and conservation. The list goes on. The timely processing and oversight of grazing and fuel wood collection permits. Lost revenue for outfitters and tourism dependent businesses (felt most acutely by rural gateway communities, the growing outdoor recreation economy one of the few bright spots for these economically depressed areas). Cultural resources. Traditional practices. YOUR outdoor recreation plans.

Internal government memos anticipate thousands of Forest Service campsites and trails could be closed this summer. On a recent trip to the Oregon Coast, my wife and I visited the Bureau of Land Management-run Yaquina Head Lighthouse area and were lucky to do so, as the hours of operation and services were significantly reduced because half of the staff had been laid off.

After decimating our land management agencies, those responsible will—you watch—use this further reduced capacity as yet another pretext for the need to privatize our public lands.


In our now nearly 30-year history, New Mexico Wild has confronted previous administrations hostile to our natural world and while there have been setbacks, we've been largely successful defending wilderness, wildlife and waters. This time feels different.

We will utilize the tools that have reliably served us in the past, including using administrative procedures to delay and defer destructive decisions when we can. We will advance state level laws, regulations and conservation funding. We will deploy our Defenders and members to document the deterioration of conditions in the field. We will work with state attorneys general to strategize and coordinate. Even as the need to watchdog federal agencies increases, we will stand in solidarity with public employees. I expect we will find ourselves needing to take more legal actions, even as the courts, including and particularly, the Supreme Court, appear more activist and hostile. As always, we will organize to show in no uncertain terms how overwhelmingly popular our public lands and protected areas are and what is at stake.



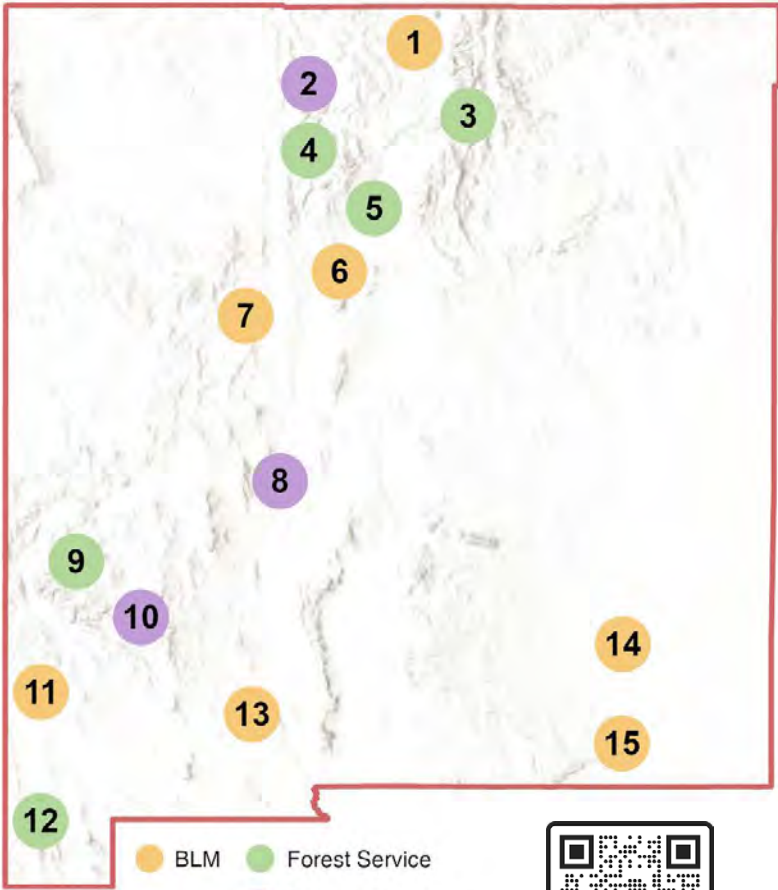
If some of the tools noted above are not available to us, or prove to be less effective than needed, especially when confronted with blatantly illegal or unconstitutional acts, we will need to find new tools and new strategies to meet this historic time. This is the public lands fight of our lifetime.

We must not squander the birthright of our public lands as Americans, for once gone they will be forever lost. And I ain't Chicken Little.


Mark

Benjamin Sears attended the Public Lands Rally in Santa Fe to speak up for public lands. He was fired from the Sandia Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest on February 14th in what thousands of laid-off Forest Service workers deemed the Valentines Day Massacre. Staff photo

New Mexico Wild's 2024 Public Comments and Administrative Protests: Our Voice Across the State



LEARN MORE ON OUR WEBSITE



WE ♥ VOLUNTEERS



2024 Ranger Data

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of logouts completed: 388 | Signs/kiosks installed: 13 |
| Miles of trail cleared of downfall: 64 | Acres of invasive bull thistle infestation treated: 45 |
| Miles of trail cleared of brush: 17 | Hours contributed by stewardship volunteers: 1283 |
| Miles of trail surveyed: 660 | Stewardship projects organized: 9 |
| Campsites rehabilitated: 17 | |
| Illegal campsites dismantled: 118 | |

2024 Volunteer Awards

Top Stewardship Volunteers: Lauri Costello,
Laura McGough, Violet Morris

Top Defenders: Tina & Steve Ehrman

Top Cattle Monitoring Defender: Glen Banks

Top Tabling Volunteer: Savannah Warmus

Top Newsletter Volunteer: Donna Lenz

Cross Program Champions: Jon Holtzman, Doug Vitt



Volunteer Appreciation Event:

In February, we gathered for an evening of beer, pizza and awards to celebrate our 2024 volunteers, who supported our efforts with trail work, planting days, tabling, newsletter deliveries, wilderness monitoring and more. We are beyond grateful to be in community with talented people with a passion for our public lands!

VOLUNTEER WITH US!
**Wilderness Needs You Now,
More than Ever.**



The Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders Program

Through this 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.



The Wilderness Defenders explored Ceja Pelon in March to document significant paleontological and geological resources, in light of a proposed oil and gas lease sale by BLM.

Another Way to Give: QCD

By making a QCD (Qualified Charitable 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.

Learn more at
nmwild.org/other-ways-to-give



Steve and his partner on the San Juan River. Staff photo

A CONVERSATION WITH STEVE HARRIS THE RIO'S FAVORITE UNCLE

Editor's Note. Excerpt from Paul Bauer, Ph.D. Emeritus Principal Geologist New Mexico Bureau of Geology & Mineral Resources, New Mexico Tech:

"If rivers represent the allegorical lifeblood of New Mexico, then Steve Harris has been the state's unofficial cardiologist for the last 40 years. Steve's familiarity with the Rio Grande, from source to sea, is legendary. He has explored it all. He understands its history, its hydrology and ecology, its special places, its former glory, its fragility, and its future potential. He has also explored, and advocated for, the other rivers of New Mexico, such as the Gila, Pecos, and San Juan. Steve is a rare combination of technical expert, motivated journalist, skilled educator, and passionate river advocate. His vision, dedication, and skill have irrefutably changed our perspectives and influenced priorities and policies in the progressive use and protection of the state's water resources and the importance of healthy riparian ecosystems."

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Mark Allison: In the boating and river community, you are known as "Uncle Steve," though I'm aware of one highly placed elected official who has referred to you as "River Daddy." Let's just stick with "Uncle," though, shall we? How did you come to have that moniker?

Steve Harris: You have to be pretty old to know me as Uncle Steve. When I started boating out in California in the 1970s, everybody had to have a nickname. You were Catfish or ... a number of us became Uncles. The company we were working for on the Stanislaus (River), had a deal with the summer camp. Every week they got a new batch of fourth-graders and part of their program was to take them down the river. So, you'd start out trying to relate to the fourth-graders, "Hi, I'm Uncle Jim and I'm the leader of this trip. And that's Uncle Josh and that's Uncle Steve." That kind of banter went on the whole trip. There are a number of us still out there that refer to each other as Uncle.

MA: How were you introduced to rivers and outfitting in the first place? Is this something that you did with your family growing up?

SH: I trace it back to when I was 10 years old. My mom took me to Gilcrease Art Institute in Tulsa, which is a great place to visit all full of cowboy art and Indian art and so forth. To get there, we had to pass the confluence of the Cimarron (River) and the Arkansas (River) in Oklahoma. It was flooding and we stopped and looked at that and it just made a big impression on me. It was just

fascinating. That was really my first introduction to rivers. When I was 15, I had a neighbor friend who had a new canoe, and we went out and ran the Brazos and the Colorado rivers in Texas and I got the paddling bug that way.

MA: Your career was as a commercial outfitter, but you're also well known for being an advocate for rivers. How did your work as an outfitter lead to advocacy?

SH: It was a fascinating journey. I was a Forrest Gump in the '60s—party to a lot of things. One of the historic things I witnessed was that the river I was living in a cabin on was the subject of a dam project, and that's the Stanislaus. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was building New Melones Dam. There was a group of mainly river guides—college students, hippies—who decided to use the initiative process to try and stop the dam. So, I helped circulate petitions in supermarket parking lots in the Bay Area to get Save the Stanislaus on the ballot. Ultimately, I think the electorate wanted to save the river, but the initiative was written in such a way as "you want to save the river, you voted no."

I was already a rookie guide on the river when this was going on and I really liked that lifestyle. Then the drought hit California in '74 and '75, and I went back to my roots which is Oklahoma and Texas and New Mexico. My unfinished business—my bucket list—included running the Rio Grande in the Big Bend area. So, I did that, and one day I was out there with a friend of mine, and we were floating through the lower canyons on the third or fourth day. He said, "Boy, it would be great if we could do this all the time." And I said, "Well, we could. I know how to be a river outfitter. It's not rocket science." And of course, quickly, once you become involved in a business, and especially one that's really regulated, you don't think as much about freedom of the wild as Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and Forest Service permits, which are a fairly demanding bureaucratic exercise. So, you become sort of an agency lobbyist—working within agencies on

something that relates to their mission. Being an outfitter in that place, in that time, is pretty political and being an advocate on behalf of the river ... I think it's just like the ethical imperative. The river gives me so much, I ought to reciprocate a little bit.

MA: That story you told about losing the vote on the dam—do you think that that was related to how the ballot initiative was worded, and it might have been confusing?

SH: It was. There's a lot of history behind this. There's a whole book by Tim Palmer about the fight for the Stanislaus. The Supreme Court actually ruled that the Corps of Engineers couldn't just fill that dam on their own because the state owned the water. So, the Supreme Court saved the river for a couple of years. My friend Mark Dubois (founder of Friends of the River), who's still in the conservation game, chained himself to a rock in the path of the reservoir as soon as they declared that damn finished. He told

Uncle Steve enjoys a riverside cigar on the Rio Chama. Staff photo



one person where he was and wrote an open letter to the Corps of Engineers: “If you flood this river, you will drown me.” It was published in the Modesto Bee and the San Francisco Chronicle. So nonviolent direct action taught me about advocacy. It’s not something I would have gravitated toward if I had not had this life experience with loving your river and then seeing it jerked away.

MA: In your advocacy work as you’re talking to state legislators or through your outfitting business as you’re introducing people to their first ever float trip, have you noticed that there’s something that a lot of people really just don’t know or understand about rivers?

SH: Well, the classic one— every river guide’s got this story: You meet the people who are about to get on your boat and they ask, “When does the river get back to this point?” It’s surprisingly common. But my real answer to your question is that people don’t understand that it’s a deeper subject because rivers affect everybody. People think rivers are beautiful or exciting or terrifying but don’t really affect them. Everybody’s affected by (rivers) but not everybody understands them. I was once over by the University of New Mexico football field, and the lawn was being irrigated and water was flowing off the stadium grass and onto the street. Pretty soon, a maintenance guy came around and I said, “Hey you’re wasting water here!” He said, “Oh, it’s okay. We have our own well.” Those who understand elementary hydrology know that rivers and groundwater are intimately connected. But certainly, we don’t make water management decisions with hydrologic reality in mind. Rivers are such imaginary beasts and people are full of their own ideas of magic and wishful thinking. Rivers are just there. In a society like ours at this time, if you can exploit it and turn a profit then by golly, that’s what we’re going to do.

MA: You’ve introduced so many people—it must be thousands—to rivers, many of whom I’m sure have fond memories or even went on to be lifelong advocates. You have this reputation of being generous and patient and knowledgeable and certainly passionate. That is quite a legacy. What can you tell our readers about that?

SH: This relates back to all those debates in the years of trying to pass the Wilderness Act: “You’re going to spoil it by going there.” You’ve got this conundrum of love it or love it to death. That’s something I think about a lot. A lot of people are opposed to commercial outfitting on public water. But the river is not going to speak for itself. All it’s going to do is flood and dry up and flood and dry up and try to exist within whatever channel it’s allowed by us. I just feel personally so connected to rivers. I think it’s important to get them all the friends you possibly can. Because the trend even in New Mexico is toward more and more degradation, not healthier and healthier rivers but fewer and less healthy rivers.

MA: I want to talk about some of the things that you’ve done to address that. Can you talk a bit about the Connecting People With Rivers Program that you started?

SH: If you believe passionately in something, which is protecting rivers for me, but it could be anything, then you try and figure out, strategically,



what can I do here? The biggest asset we’ve got is those boats and shuttle vehicles and the river itself. People in agencies and in elected office are making decisions about rivers without actually experiencing the river the way that a river runner would. They were receptive to getting out there to experience it. They’ll have a more realistic view of what they’re damming or diverting or dividing and perhaps be more receptive to positive changes and more friendly policies. So, we did that for years and some good ideas came out of it. I think the most important thing was getting working relationships with people. After three days floating with somebody, they’re kind of a close acquaintance or somebody you really connect with and that could help later on when you’re trying to pass initiatives.

MA: Talk about Rio Grande Restoration. What is that? Why did you start it?

SH: We started outfitting in 1979 on the Rio Grande. The way we knew how the snowpack was developing was the Wolf Creek Pass snow report. “We’re at 300 inches.” Well, at 300 inches, you’re going to have a hell of a good river season. If it’s 150 inches, maybe not so much. In 1988, they had a big snowpack, but it melted early. And Colorado was panicking. They were sending down as much water as they could in February, March and April before the tourists arrived. So, we learned that the management law of the river was the Rio Grande Compact and under the compact, we’re reliant on Colorado to deliver the water that the agreement specifies. That year, what promised to be a good rafting season was really a bust; people didn’t know that you could run low water and enjoy it yet. So, the outfitters were grumbling about this and they said, “We ought to just go to Colorado and buy water rights so we can keep water in the river.” So, we formed Rio Grande Restoration with that idea in mind. We were quickly disabused of that as a possibility. Colorado, foreseeing such ideas, had passed an anti-water export statute. This is really fundamental to understanding the way the Rio Grande is managed. If it crosses the state line, it rings the compact bell. It counts. It is a delivery. If Albuquerque wanted to respond to a prospectus for a 30,000-acre-foot purchase of a water right in the San Luis Valley, that’s fine. They could do that, but they wouldn’t get the benefit of the water. It

would go to the compact recipients. It would go to the system downstream. So, the game was kind of blocked and still people say, “Wouldn’t it be nice if we could get Colorado to send water on a more favorable schedule for New Mexico?” But I’ve come to the conclusion that we’re damn lucky that they abide with what they agreed to.

MA: In 2005, you were part of the effort that created the state’s Strategic Water Reserve, a program that we’re trying to make even better this state legislative session by making its funding more secure and allowing transactions to be used to support groundwater, for example. Can you say a little bit about what led you to work on the Strategic Water Reserve?

SH: The idea came out of Think New Mexico, a think tank that has a new initiative every year. They said, “We need to do something on water.” So, they asked around. (Think New Mexico Executive Director) Fred Nathan credits Paula Garcia (executive director of the New Mexico Acequia Association) with coming up with this. The idea is that when you’ve got a drought year and you can’t make your compact deliveries and the endangered fish are all dying and the Feds are coming in and closing head gates, if you had a strategic water reserve, you could keep the system functioning. I worked with the state engineer at the time, Estevan López, as well as Norm Gaume (river advocate and water management expert). The New Mexico Farm Bureau got on board with this which contributed a lot to its success. Think New Mexico has an excellent way of lobbying. They’ll create bills that are bicameral, meaning a senator and a representative sponsoring, and bipartisan, meaning a Republican and a Democrat sponsoring. I think that’s one reason that the Strategic Water Reserve was successful. Then Estevan and Norm and I did a lot of work with the acequias and other agriculturalists that were a little bit oppositional. We passed it with two tries.

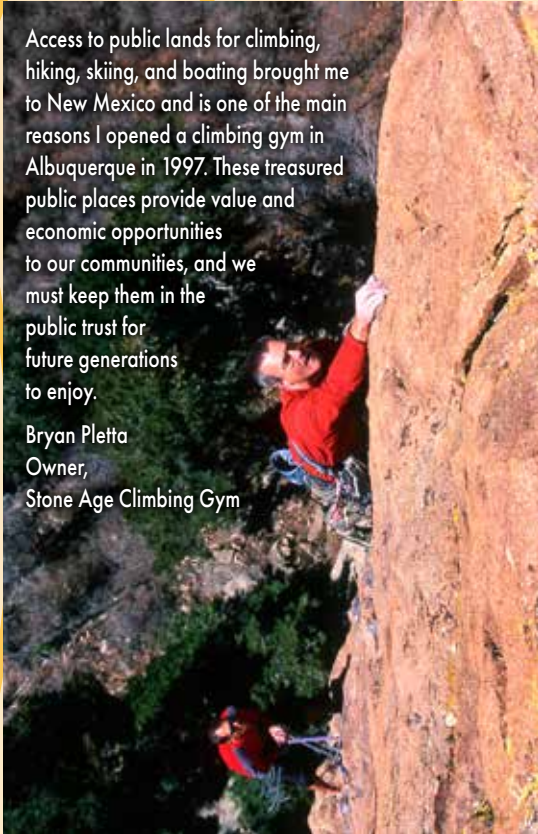
MA: Interesting about the Farm Bureau. What compelled them to support it at the time?

SH: This was collaborative conservation. You’d go and ask people, what do you hate about this? What can’t you live with? Here’s the idea. Save our rivers. Everybody wants healthy rivers. But yes, farmers are afraid of losing some or all of their water supplies so you had to give them assurances, and the assurance was that the transactions into the water reserve would be willing sellers only. So that was a huge hurdle. It explicitly says there’ll be no taking. We’re not going to condemn for this purpose. Also, recognizing that agriculture is *the* water user—80% of the Rio Grande and the San Juan and many of these Southwestern rivers is used on farm fields for irrigation. That use is legitimate and must be accommodated, and at the same time we want to keep the Feds off our backs and we want to enforce endangered species protections and keep the compact from throwing interstate comity into pandemonium. Then there was a little Trojan horse in there that we managed to slip by the Farm Bureau. I thought it was clever, but it’s often overlooked. In the bill, water can be acquired by the state for endangered species compliance or for compact compliance—or to prevent future listings under the Endangered Species Act—which to me is code for ecosystem purposes. The one remnant for river ecology and river recre-

For The Love of the Land

Access to public lands for climbing, hiking, skiing, and boating brought me to New Mexico and is one of the main reasons I opened a climbing gym in Albuquerque in 1997. These treasured public places provide value and economic opportunities to our communities, and we must keep them in the public trust for future generations to enjoy.

Bryan Pletta
Owner,
Stone Age Climbing Gym



All Bodies On Bikes in New Mexico relies on public lands to be able to safely and equitably access the outdoors and experience remote landscapes by bike. ABOB has organized day trips and overnight trips utilizing areas like the Caja Del Rio. Continued access to these landscapes will benefit members who find a sense of belonging and connection to nature and their bikes.

All Bodies On Bikes, New Mexico Chapter



This world is divided in so many ways, but our connection to our public lands is what brings our community together. Our connection to the land will always be what sustains us and makes us stronger. Public lands are one of the most important aspects of who we are as a community, and we have a duty to protect and sustain them.

Guadalupe Cano
Silver City Mayor Pro Tem and Councilor
District 4



FiTaos is an outdoor education organization that takes local students in Taos snowshoeing, connecting them to nearby public lands. Through snowshoeing, students learn about ecology and snow science. I believe that having these lands taken away would diminish the work that we do and would be a deep betrayal of trust to my community.

Elizabeth LeBlanc
Executive Director of Field Institute of Taos
(FiTaos)



Public Lands are people, plant, and pollinator shared spaces...which are interconnected through place and stewardship synergies. The immense biodiversity of our enchanted lands requires conscientious engagement from the soil to the sky—all beings benefit from respectful relationships. Let us care for our querido Nuevo Mexico as it cares for us to reciprocate for generations to come.

Melanie Kirby
Educator at Institute of American Indian Arts



As a soldier, I was sent to fight for my country. War presents many challenges for veterans. We face mortal risks, lose comrades, witness mass destruction of civilian life and their environment, see the values with which we were raised negated, and come back strangers with our "realities" no longer valid as we seek meaning for the rest of our lives. Like many veterans, I have found being in Nature soothing and healing. For example, I have often gone to the Upper Pecos to hike and camp, to enjoy the forests and animals in their natural setting, and to realize that much of the world can offer balance and peace aside from the chaos and stress of war.

Ken Barger
Veteran



We must protect the last of our public lands and wild places from being destroyed by the mechanized world. These places of solitude and serenity are imperative to Veterans, first responders, and those living in these hectic cities.

Brett Myrick
Fifth generation New Mexican, former U.S. Navy SEAL (Team 5), and resident of Gila, New Mexico



Our lands are sacred and part of our very selves and our communities. Our Common Home is like a sister and mother whom we share beauty, soul and life with. We live in ignorance if we believe land and water are for sale and profit. Removing protection from lands, water and air is wrong and would add to our demise as a human community. Public Lands help us ground and remember that we are part of Earth, and all is sacred and Kin.

Sister Joan Brown
Franciscan Sister and co-founder and retired Executive Director of New Mexico and El Paso Interfaith Power and Light



The public land estate of today has always been federal land, never state land. States claiming land should be "returned" to them make a false claim. From the '40s "land grab" to the '80s Sagebrush Rebellion, to today, a historic struggle over the "peoples' land" continues.

John C. Miles, PhD
Professor Emeritus, Western Washington University; resident of El Prado, NM



The vast and remarkable public lands within and around Taos County are our community's cultural and economic lifeblood. Proposals to sell off and privatize our public lands, as well as the recent mass firings of cherished local USFS and BLM employees, will have profound and lasting negative impacts county-wide.

AnJanelle Brush
Taos County Commissioner



Access to public lands fosters a deeper connection to nature, promoting curiosity, respect, and mental well-being. My daughter's outdoor experiences have reduced her anxiety and boosted her happiness. As an Early Childhood Educator, outdoor play strengthens students' bodies, encouraging them to appreciate nature, and reminds us to view the world with fresh eyes.

Melissa Caudillo
Early Childhood Educator



Public lands are the heart of New Mexico's cultural heritage and economic vitality—fueling our outdoor recreation economy, supporting small businesses, and preserving our diverse traditions. At a time when 47.4% of our state is public lands, the Partnership for Responsible Business believes that defending these irreplaceable resources from unchecked development, extractive industries, unsustainable recreational use, and climate change is essential to protecting our heritage, our environment, and the resilient, equitable communities we cherish.

Alexandra Merlino
Executive Director, Partnership for Responsible Business



Having access to the outdoors is so important to me because it is where I most like to be. Public lands give me opportunity to enjoy nature, learn about my environment. I have been able to experience so many adventures, like kayaking, camping, hiking and rafting. I've also had opportunities to learn about the ecosystem, insect identification, birding and the importance of protecting our lands.

Jolene
New Mexican Youth

New Mexicans share what's at stake in the fight to keep public lands in public hands



I'm a public law attorney. I'm also an avid runner, cyclist, and lover of the mountains. Access to nature throughout the year, and for a variety of activities, from camping to skiing, mountain biking to hiking, is a primary reason why I love living in New Mexico.

Erin McSherry
Santa Fe Attorney



Public lands are the most accessible way for everyone—regardless of income—to experience the outdoors. Open Space Brewing exists because of our time spent on public lands. Protecting them means our future generations have the same opportunities to explore and thrive.

Alexa Tubbs & Matt Leef
Co-founders of Open Space Brewing,
Santa Clara, NM



New Mexico's public lands let me explore incredible cave systems and connect with a caving community. Privatizing public lands would limit access and break the communal bond that inspires our shared responsibility and appreciation for these fragile environments.

Andrew Orr
Caver



As Land Grant Secretary, I stress the crucial role of public lands in sustaining our traditional practices—harvesting firewood, rock, grazing livestock, hunting, fishing, and gathering medicinal herbs. These resources are vital for our cultural identity and well-being. The current cuts to federal land management diminish our access to these resources and jeopardize our heritage and safety, particularly as wildfires pose an increasing threat to our ancestral lands.

Louis Gallegos
Secretary of the San Miguel del Bado Land Grant



As a mother, I take my children to our public lands to run, play, and learn about the importance of the trees and wildlife that inhabit the space. As a community leader, we go to these spaces to reconnect and learn about our history and advocate for our future. As an individual, I use these spaces for medicine, for peace, for growth.

Laura Flores
Latino Outdoors New Mexico Regional Coordinator



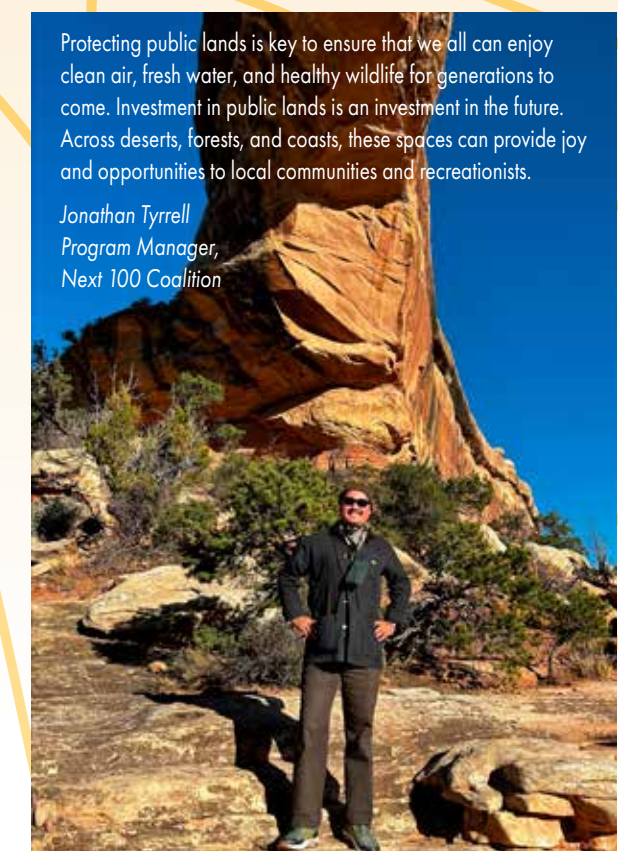
As an avid birder, I am constantly seeking access to natural habitat that contains a source of water. Birds thrive in these places, which almost entirely exist as protected public lands. Immersion in Nature is a balm for the soul, as necessary for human thriving as community and friendship. For most of us, public lands are the primary means by which we can experience that primal connection with Nature.

Lois Farrington
Birder



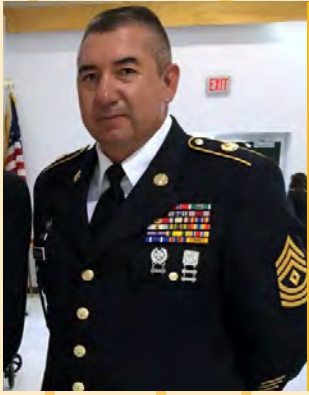
For me, having access to explore and experience public lands is an integral part of appreciating the astounding marvels that nature grants us. Removing access would be a detriment to our stewardship of their well-being. In addition, escaping to the wonders found on public lands is imperative for my well-being.

Steph Bunt
Backpacker



Protecting public lands is key to ensure that we all can enjoy clean air, fresh water, and healthy wildlife for generations to come. Investment in public lands is an investment in the future. Across deserts, forests, and coasts, these spaces can provide joy and opportunities to local communities and recreationists.

Jonathan Tyrrell
Program Manager,
Next 100 Coalition



As a veteran, public lands offer me a chance to reflect on what I've done with my life and freedom. They offer a connection to nature that doesn't know what evil human beings can do. Outdoor activities ground me religiously by fostering physical and mental well-being. These areas also honor veterans' service, offering a sense of peace, solitude, and feeling of belonging. What we fought for was not in vain.

*Julian Gonzales
Veteran*



As someone who finds solace in hiking and camping, public lands are my sanctuary from the noise of modern life. These lands represent more than just recreation areas—they are living libraries of natural history and biodiversity, where anyone can experience nature in its purest form. I believe we have both the privilege and the responsibility to protect these wild places, not just for future generations, but for nature's own sake. We're just visitors here.

*Kelli Berghold
Hiker*



I grew up fishing the amazing and diverse public fisheries of New Mexico and now share this outdoor passion with my son Taylor. I can't imagine life without having public access to my lifelong fishing addiction!

*Terry Ellis
Santa Fe resident
and angler*



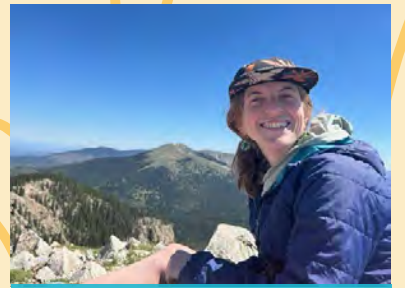
Prayer is the time we set aside to remove obstacles between ourselves and God. For those following the way of Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, this often means stepping away from human civilization and immersing ourselves in nature. The remarkable public lands around Taos County are our community's lifeblood. Proposals to sell off and privatize our public lands, as well as the recent mass firings of cherished local USFS and BLM employees, will have lasting negative impacts.

*David Chasteen
Taoseño and Novice in the order of Ecumenical Franciscans
for members of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.*



We are fortunate to have access to a variety of public lands surrounding Santa Fe. From the swooping singletrack of the Nambe Badlands to the alpine forests of the Sangre de Cristos, mountain bikers are able to enjoy a world-class trail experience that wouldn't be possible without our cherished public lands.

*Alex Gibson
President, Santa Fe Fat Tire Society*



I've seen firsthand how our public lands provide vital spaces for recreation, conservation, connection to nature, and community. For our Latine communities, public lands are an opportunity to celebrate our culture, reclaim our experiences outside, and grow appreciation for our natural spaces. Protecting public lands from exploitation is essential for ensuring that everyone can continue to enjoy the healing and cultural connection that outdoor spaces provide.

*Maria Rodriguez
Latino Outdoors New Mexico
and Quivira Coalition Volunteer*



Public lands have made me who I am. Spending time on public lands inspires my work and offers me a place to unwind and recharge for my environmental justice work! Trails are my church and my therapy.

*Carlos Matutes
GreenLatinos New Mexico
Community Advocate*



The amazing public lands of northern New Mexico offer some of the best hunting and fishing in the country. As a multi-generational outdoorsman and business owner that relies heavily on use of public lands, privatization of these resources would be devastating to my personal lifestyle and livelihood. Public lands offer a lasting opportunity to celebrate the cherished traditional land use of hunting that has sustained our community for centuries.

*Marcos Herrera
Owner, Taos Hunting Company*



I grew up hunting, fishing, and camping, and I understand how important public lands are to my community. For many of us Taoseños these lands provide economic and personal sustenance—losing them would threaten our way of life.

*Mario Vargas
High School senior in Taos
and future wildland firefighter*



Natural flowing waters and lands are the public's treasure here in New Mexico. Relaxing, rejuvenating, inspiring, challenging, and healthy, they make us RICH! Whether kayaking as a group, or casting in solitude, we all benefit from public stream access. Keep Public waters and lands available to all.

*Scott Carpenter
President, Adobe Whitewater Club*



Public lands are the heart of New Mexico's outdoor heritage, fueling our economy, supporting small businesses and preserving the traditions that connect us to the Land of Enchantment. As outdoor recreation continues to grow, protecting and ensuring equitable access to these spaces is essential—not just for adventure, but for our communities, cultures and way of life.

*Karina Armijo
Director, Outdoor Recreation Division, New
Mexico Economic Development Department*

**TELL US WHY PUBLIC LANDS
MATTER TO YOU!**





CHACO



**LANDSCAPES
AT A
CROSSROADS:
WHAT WE STAND TO LOSE**

These comparative images reveal New Mexico's treasured wild places as they exist today—and the alarming reality they face without immediate protection.

From Chaco Canyon and Otero Mesa's sacred sites to the Caja del Rio's ancient volcanic landscape rich in biodiversity to the Gila River's life-giving waters, these side-by-side views sound an urgent alarm. We stand at a critical tipping point. These aren't just scenic vistas—they're irreplaceable cultural landscapes, deeply connected to Tribal and Hispano communities who have stewarded them for thousands of years. Right now, these places face unprecedented threats that could erase this heritage forever. Once lost, these landscapes cannot be restored.

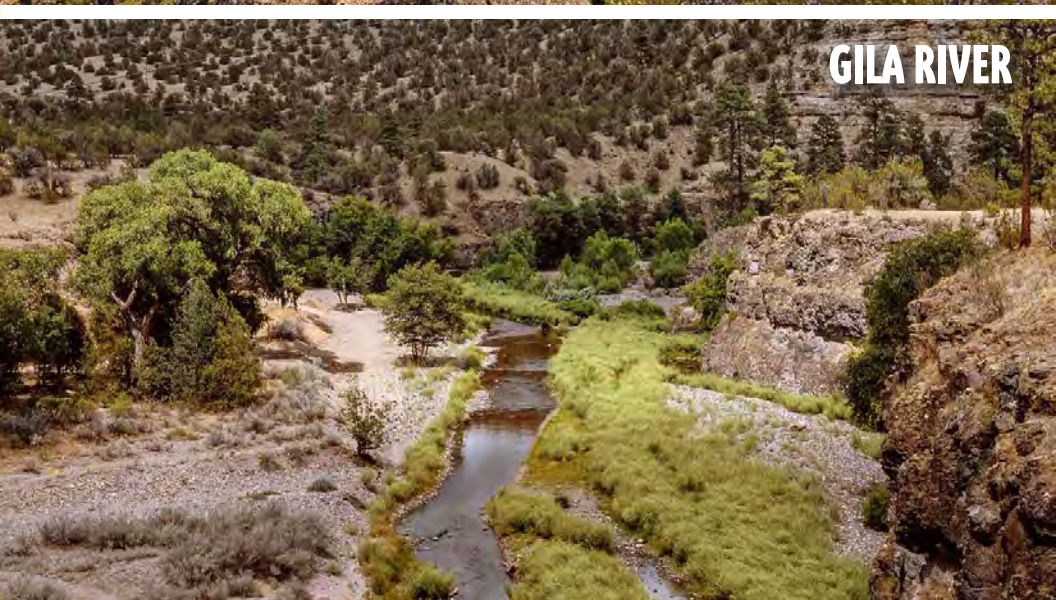
The time to act in their defense is not tomorrow—it's today.



CAJA DEL RIO



OTERO MESA



GILA RIVER





GET OUT!

Announcing the New Mexico Wild
Online River Guide!
NMWild.org/river-guide



RIO CHAMA—WILD & SCENIC

El Vado Dam to Big Eddy Boat Ramp

Location: North-central New Mexico in Rio Arriba County, about 75 miles northwest of Santa Fe

Segment description: El Vado Dam to Big Eddy Boat Ramp on the Santa Fe National Forest

Segment length: 31 miles

Elevation range: 6,710 to 6,244 feet

Land ownership/management: Santa Fe National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, Jicarilla Apache Nation, State Game Commission, private

Featured recreational uses: Rafting, kayaking, camping, fishing, waterplay

Boating info: The wild and scenic segment of the Rio Chama is a classic New Mexico float for multiday trips starting at Cooper's El Vado Ranch or day runs between Chavez Canyon Boat Launch and Big Eddy Boat Ramp. Rapids are up to Class III. Flows are optimal during spring runoff, and in many years summertime dam releases allow for at least weekend floats, with flows above 500 cfs recommended. A river permit is required for trips launching at Cooper's El Vado Ranch.

Best seasons: Spring, summer

River access: Cooper's El Vado Ranch can be accessed via Highway 112 from US 84 near Tierra Amarilla. For Chavez Canyon Boat Launch and Big Eddy Boat Ramp, use Forest Road 151 off US 84 just north of Ghost Ranch. Note that Forest Road 151 is a rough dirt road and is frequently impassable when wet.

Overview: The Chama River canyon has attracted human beings for 10,000 years or more. Utilizing the high-quality cherts of nearby Pederal Peak and the ebony obsidian of the Jemez Mountains for hunting tools, Paleo and later Folsom peoples thrived along the banks of the Chama, leaving their mark on the canyon in the form of countless petroglyphs, grinding stones, and hunting sites. Later, Tewa people migrating from the Mesa Verde region constructed large communities along the Chama and its tributaries, including a regionally significant cultural and trade center inhabited from about 1000-1600 CE.

Floating the Chama is like taking a trip back through time. The 140-mile tributary of the Rio Grande, born along the Continental Divide in Colorado's San Juan Mountains, cuts a spectacular canyon through a rainbow of Mesozoic sedimentary layers, shale, basalts, granite, and gypsum outcrops dating to 110 million years ago. The Chama Canyon, 1,500-feet deep in places, also shelters the fossilized tracks of Allosaurus in a deeply wooded side canyon.

The aptly named Tiger Wall is known for its outstanding desert varnish—vertical stripes on sandstone cliffs—reminiscent here of tiger stripes. These markings are composed of clay particles rich in iron and manganese and are created by mineral-rich waters running down the cliff face during storms, building up over centuries.

This geography makes the Chama Canyon a visual delight. An excellent place for photography, the canyons are also known to attract painters. Georgia O'Keeffe created many of her more well-known works in this area.

In the 1930s, the federal government and the state of New Mexico dammed the Chama to regulate seasonal flows and store water for downstream farmers. To this day, farming in the watershed has a significant impact on the river, with many of its tributaries diverted in whole or in part for small-scale agricultural operations in bottomland areas.

One of the main dams forms El Vado Reservoir, which is augmented with water from the San Juan River basin that is pumped under the Continental Divide to bring New Mexico its allotment of the Colorado River.

This stretch of the river is co-managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)



Map by Akashia Allen

and the Forest Service. In 1988, Congress designated a 24.6-mile section of the river in the area known as Chama Canyon as a wild and scenic river, offering that section of the river the most important protections a free-flowing stream can have in the United States.

The Chama River Canyon Wilderness designation offers still more protection to the river as well as the uplands. The wilderness area encompasses over 47,000 acres of sagebrush flats and conifer and riparian forests.

The Chama canyon shelters a rich ecosystem of ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, piñon, juniper, mountain mahogany, oak, currant, and serviceberry along the rim and a riparian forest of cottonwood, alder, willow, and hackberry below. These rich forests in turn support an array of wildlife from mountain lion and black bear to elk, mule deer, coyote, beaver, and racoon. Ducks, American dipper, bald and golden eagles, mergansers, heron, hawks, and owls all nest among the canyon's soaring sandstone cliffs.

These waters are likewise rich in aquatic life. The area is well known for sport fishing as large brown and rainbow trout abound. Native species include fathead chub, longnose dace, and catfish, among others.

The river truly offers something for everyone, including boating, fishing, hiking, bird watching, and solitude. Both the wilderness designation and the wild and scenic river designation ensure protection of this vital desert ecosystem filled with cultural resources and natural wonders.

Still, the Chama is best known for its whitewater opportunities. The Chama wilderness run is simply one of the best multiday whitewater voyages in the entire Southwest. The run is a mix of slack water and Class II and III rapids.

Below El Vado Dam, the Chama is extremely popular with paddlers. Private boaters may float the Chama downstream from the Christ in the Desert Monastery, between Chavez Canyon and Big Eddy, without a permit. However, overnight trips between Cooper’s El Vado Ranch, located immediately downstream of El Vado Dam, and Chavez Canyon require a river permit from the BLM Taos office, which is run through an on-line lottery system. Demand is high and permits are increasingly difficult to obtain. Cooper’s El Vado Ranch also charges a user fee for river access.

The popularity of the Chama means that this section of the river can be crowded at times, making it necessary for boaters to not only watch out for one another but to exercise patience and generosity.



Boaters enjoy a bluebird day on the Rio Chama. Photo by Irene Owsley

The Chama can be quite cold and swift, especially in the spring. Boaters are cautioned to be aware that hypothermia is a significant risk.

The lower 8 miles of this segment include two campgrounds in addition to the Chavez Canyon and Big Eddy river access sites and a dirt road paralleling the river that provides for easy access under dry conditions. A Benedictine monastery, Christ in the Desert, is located at the southern end of the Chama canyon 15 miles up the same dirt road. ▲▲

Special thanks to the
sponsors of the
Online River Guide:

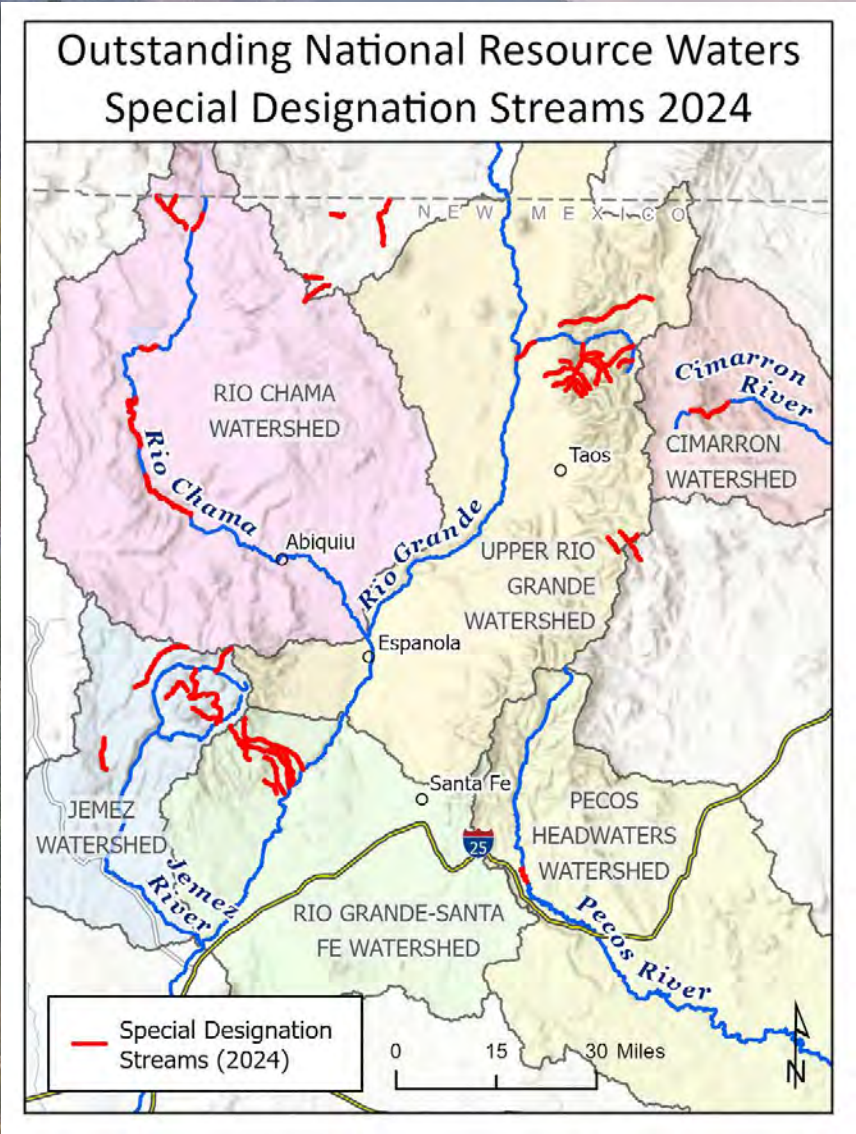
STONE
FOREST

WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION



NEW MEXICO
OUTDOOR RECREATION DIVISION

Celebrating a Win for Our Precious Waters



In December 2024, the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission designated over 250 river miles as Outstanding National Resource Waters to prevent degradation of water quality within the Rio Grande, Rio Chama, Cimarron, Pecos, and Jemez watersheds. This ensures clean water for acequias, ranchers, recreation and wildlife while preventing new pollution. Protecting these pristine waters is essential for our culture, economy and future generations.



A Historic State Legislative Session for Water and Wildlife!

CLEAN WATER PROTECTION BILL DELIVERS VITAL WATER SAFEGUARDS

New Mexico's waters scored a monumental victory in the 2025 state legislative session. Senate Bill 21, the Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Act, packaged two crucial bills together to achieve state-level clean water protections after federal rollbacks of the Clean Water Act left up to 95% of New Mexico's streams and 88% of the state's wetlands vulnerable. Due to New Mexico's arid climate, most streams no longer qualify for federal protection because they do not flow year-round, and many wetlands lack the required continuous surface connection to a stream. Nonetheless, these waters play a critical role in ensuring safe and healthy drinking water for New Mexico communities, ensuring farms and ranches have a clean water supply, mitigating against flood and drought damage, and protecting New Mexico's wildlife habitat and other areas.

SB 21 also transfers pollution prevention permitting for waters that are still federally protected from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to New Mexico, a move that 47 other states have already taken.

The bill also establishes additional groundwater protections by giving the Environment Department the authority to hold polluters responsible for hundreds of neglected contaminated groundwater sites and by allowing the state to take the lead on clean-up for sites that have no clear responsible party.

At the time of publication, the bill awaited a signature by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. New Mexico Wild Rivers and Waters Program staff worked on this bill and would like to thank sponsors Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth, Sen. Roberto "Bobby" J. Gonzales and Rep. Kristina Ortez.

STRATEGIC WATER RESERVE STRENGTHENED

In another tremendous win for New Mexico's water, Senate Bill 37 cemented crucial improvements to the Strategic Water Reserve. The reserve was created in 2005 through broad bipartisan support and allows the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) to acquire water or water rights through voluntary transactions. This water can be kept in New Mexico's waterways for two purposes: to meet our obligations under interstate compacts and to benefit threatened or endangered species, including to prevent future listings. SB 37 improves the reserve by creating

a non-reverting fund to ensure money will be available until a water rights transaction can be completed. The bill also adds aquifer recharge, an essential use that supports healthy groundwater levels, as a third purpose for the reserve. Lastly, the bill allows the ISC to prioritize transactions that benefit supplementary uses, like recreation or cultural uses, as well as the primary purposes. The Strategic Water Reserve is an important water management tool, and thanks to the passage of SB 37, it now has the structure and resources it needs to reach its full potential. Thanks to sponsors Sens. Liz Stefanics and Peter Wirth and Reps. Meredith A. Dixon and Matthew McQueen. At the time of publication, the bill awaited a signature by Gov. Lujan Grisham.

GAME COMMISSION REFORM PASSED AND SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish manages the state's cherished wildlife, an ecological and economic resource that is deeply tied to our traditional land use values and helps sustain our \$3.2 billion outdoor recreation economy. New Mexico's outdated and underfunded wildlife management system has been suffering from a politicized game commission, a crisis of funding and an inadequate mission that leaves many crucial native species unprotected. Senate Bill 5 renames the agency the New Mexico Department of Wildlife and provides the tools needed for a 21st century wildlife management system to oversee the state's important wildlife species, including but not limited to game and fish species.

SB 5 passed the House and Senate with bipartisan support. Thanks in part to the voices of New Mexico Wild members and supporters, the governor was persuaded to sign the bill on March 20. Unfortunately, she used a line-item veto to remove a critical part of the legislation that would have mandated a judicial process to remove commissioners. New Mexico Wild and its legislative team are committed to addressing this in future legislative sessions.

New Mexico Wild and the entire SB 5 coalition wishes to thank Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth, Sens. Pete Campos and Crystal Brantley, House Speaker Javier Martinez, Reps. Matthew McQueen and Nathan Small, and House Majority Whip Dayan Hochman-Vigil for their leadership on this bill protecting our wildlife, cultural traditions and recreational opportunities.

\$50 MILLION IN FUNDING FOR WILDLIFE CORRIDORS SECURED

Over 1,200 wildlife-vehicle crashes are reported annually across 60 hotspots in New Mexico. That is likely an undercount. Legislators appropriated \$50 million for the Wildlife Corridors Fund this legislative session to help address this deadly hazard. Last year's proposed \$50 million appropriation was cut to just \$5 million but New Mexico Wild staff and partners returned to the table this session to secure full funding.

Before the appropriation this session, only \$8.5 million was available for wildlife collision mitigation as called for by the 2019 Wildlife Corridors Act. Wildlife crossings like overpasses and underpasses are the gold standard of mitigation strategies, but more fiscally viable projects like fencing, lit signage and maintenance of existing collision mitigation infrastructure will now be funded, thanks to this appropriation. Special thanks to Gov. Lujan-Grisham, President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart, Rep. Small, Sen. George Muñoz, Rep. Hochman-Vigil and all of our legislative champions who supported this important appropriation.

UPPER PECOS WATERSHED PROTECTION STALLS IN COMMITTEE

House Joint Memorial 5—which supports federal action to safeguard critical water resources, the local economy, the environment and cultural heritage in the Upper Pecos watershed—passed on the House floor in March. The memorial was sponsored by Reps. Anita Gonzales, Joseph Sanchez and Tara Lujan, House Majority Floor Leader Reena Szczepanski and Sen. Stefanics. It expresses official state support for federal administrative action, such as the proposed mineral withdrawal initiated by the Department of Interior in December 2024, and federal legislative action, such as the Pecos Watershed Protection Act introduced by Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan and Reps. Teresa Leger Fernández and Melanie Stansbury. Unfortunately, the bill was tabled in the Senate Rules Committee and didn't reach the Senate floor for a vote. New Mexico Wild and our partners will continue to support efforts to secure permanent federal protections for the Pecos Watershed. ▲

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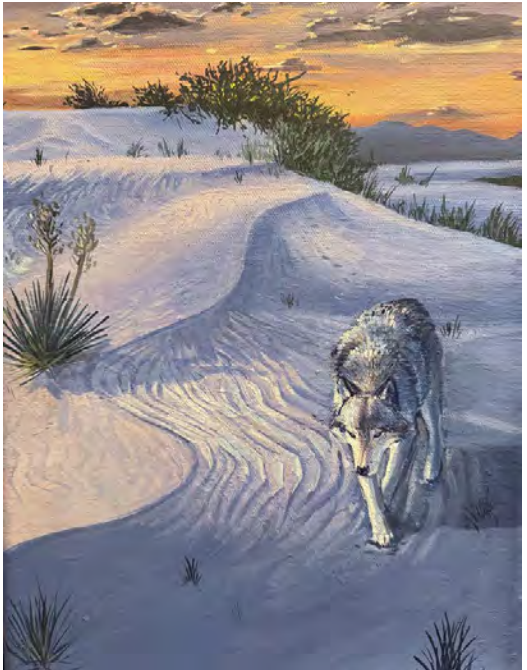
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CONGRATULATIONS 2025 NEW MEXICO WILD WOLF STAMP ART WINNERS!



ADULT 2ND PLACE: Gay Scheibel
Loving Mom, oil on canvas



ADULT 3RD PLACE: Celesté Mendez
Dune Wanderer, acrylic on canvas



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ADULT WINNER: Ashley Lujan
Crescit Eundo, 4.5 in. x 5.5 in., colored pencils and watercolor

Meet Ashley Lujan, a diverse self-taught artist with a love of bringing things to life with the stroke of a pencil. She was born and raised in New Mexico’s neighboring city and state, El Paso Texas. Loving the outdoors of New Mexico’s enchanted land, she wants to bring awareness to the Mexican gray wolf with her art piece - “Crescit Eundo.” Since childhood she always loved all forms of art and used many different mediums, but colored pencils came to be her specialty. As an adult she now explores New Mexico’s great wilderness hoping to see the resurgence of the Canis Lupus Baileyi. Her art has given her a beautiful opportunity to merge both of her passions together to help spread awareness.

Instagram: Kaoticley



YOUTH WINNER:
Naya Rehnberg (age 7)
Winter Wolf,
marker and pencil on paper



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2024 Wolf Count Released

On March 3, 2025, the Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Team released its 2024 Mexican gray wolf population count, which found a total of 286 wolves in the wild in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. This marks an 11% increase from 2023 and the ninth consecutive year of population growth. While New Mexico Wild celebrates news of the increased numbers, we remain concerned about the genetic health of the population, and we stand ready to oppose any reductions in funding or legal protection that could negatively impact the recovery of this critically endangered species. ▲▲

Wolf Lawsuit Update

On March 5, 2025, the Federal District Court in Tucson, AZ held a hearing on our lawsuit challenging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s management rule for the Mexican gray wolf. New Mexico Wild and partner organizations, represented by the Western Environmental Law Center, argued that the management rule fails to (1) treat our single wild population of Mexican wolves as “essential” to the survival of this endangered species in the wild; (2) improve the low genetic diversity of the single wild population; and (3) allow Mexican wolves to expand their range, including into suitable habitat north of Interstate 40. The conservation organizations asked the federal court to send the management rule back to the agency for revision and are now awaiting a decision from the court. ▲▲

New Mexico Wild and partners appear in district court in Tucson to argue for stronger Mexican wolf protections.

Staff photo



THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

PROTECTED LANDS, BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF IT ALL

BY SIMON DONESKY

In 1972, mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz first coined the term “butterfly effect,” stating that “whatever we do affects everything and everyone else, if even in the tiniest way.” He famously claimed that “when a butterfly flaps its wings, a breeze goes around the world.” There are few better places to appreciate this interconnectedness and complexity than in nature.

Years before Lorenz used the term, Aldo Leopold had intuited the butterfly effect in the context of the natural world. In “A Sand County Almanac,” Leopold states that “the first step of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the parts,” suggesting that all species should be protected, as they may be essential parts of an ecosystem in ways beyond current understanding. Anthropogenic manipulation has ripple effects often surpassing what we can foresee.

Unfortunately, we have already lost essential parts of natural systems before ever understanding their importance, sometimes before even knowing of their existence. The pace of these losses only continues to accelerate. One such loss is in the declining population and di-

versity of butterflies.

One of my first experiences of the butterfly effect came in childhood, though not through mathematics or meteorology. It came to life for me during countless afternoons spent chasing butterflies in the fields near my home in New Hampshire. I remember vividly the first time I spotted a painted lady, its orange and black wings glowing in the sunlight. I was mesmerized by its fragile beauty and the way it seemed to embody freedom and connection to the natural world. At the time, I didn’t realize that these small moments would spark a lifelong fascination and eventually guide my career. I have since dedicated my work to protecting rare and endangered butterflies across the United States. This journey started close to home, on a project protecting the endangered Karner blue butterfly and ultimately brought me to the University of New Mexico where I have spent the past six years.

New Mexico is an excellent place to study butterflies, with some of the highest diversity in the country and many endemic subspecies. Despite this, butterflies are vastly under-pro-



Organ Mountains Hairstreak (*Satyrium polingi organensis*): This butterfly is endemic to the Organ Mountains and has historically only ever been found in the Organ Mountains Wilderness. Recently, one individual was discovered in the San Andres mountain range on the White Sands Missile Range. Photo courtesy of nmrare.org

ected in our state. New Mexico’s Department of Game and Fish does not currently have regulatory authority over invertebrates; they are not included in the state’s definition of “wildlife.”* As a result, all insects—butterflies included—are left vulnerable in a world rife with human-made threats. ▲▲

**READ THE FULL ARTICLE
ON OUR WEBSITE.**



Thank You Stone Age!

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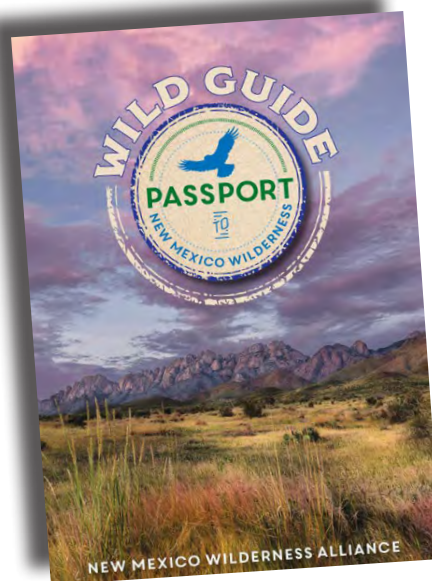


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This comprehensive guide to New Mexico’s protected wildlands is the only book that features each of the state’s designated Wilderness areas and Wilderness Study Areas as well as other treasures, such as the new Rio Grande del Norte National Monument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

WELCOME NEW STAFF!

Shelby Bazan | Wyss Fellow Conservation Organizer

Born and raised in Albuquerque, Shelby has a great passion for the city, land and culture. She has a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of New Mexico. Shelby is an environmental educator and spent many years with the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program where she was a facilitator for students’ learning and exploration of the Middle Rio Grande bosque. She became a volunteer outings leader with Latino Outdoors New Mexico in 2021 and takes local Latine families and community members into outdoor spaces to experience joy, curiosity and connection. In her spare time, you can find Shelby crafting, biking, hiking/ birding/herping or attending live music. She’s excited to utilize and grow her ability to bring folks together as the Wyss Fellow Conservation Organizer.



Nell Decker | Nancy Morton Wilderness Intern

Nell grew up on a small farm in Minnesota, where she developed a deep connection to the outdoors. Her passion for adventure led her to work as an ice climbing and backpacking guide in Alaska and a ski instructor in Wyoming. With a degree in film and media production, she combined storytelling with outdoor leadership and later co-founded a pop-up glamping company in New Mexico. Now, she brings her experience in media and outreach to New Mexico Wild, working to protect the state’s landscapes.



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NEW MEXICO WILD WAS HONORED TO RECEIVE A LEGACY GIFT FROM THE ESTATE OF ALDO LEOPOLD’S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER, ESTELLA LEOPOLD, IN 2025. ESTELLA WAS AN ACCOMPLISHED CONSERVATIONIST AND BOTANIST WHOSE MERITS EARNED HER ELECTION TO THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES IN 1974. ESTELLA PASSED AWAY IN 2024 AND LEFT A MEANINGFUL GIFT DEDICATED TO NEW MEXICO WILD’S CONTINUED WORK IN THE GILA WILDERNESS.



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



NEW MEXICO WILD ACTION FUND

New Mexico Wild Action Fund is a 501 (C)4 not for profit organization dedicated to advancing policies, increasing civic participation in the democratic process, and cultivating and electing candidates for local offices that support policies and positions that protect New Mexico’s wilderness, wildlife, and water.

Visit www.nmwildactionfund.org to learn more about how you can help.

PUBLIC LANDS FAQs

Icons courtesy of Vecteezy

WHAT ARE PUBLIC LANDS?

America's public lands are areas collectively owned by all United States citizens. Most of these lands are available for public use and benefit, serving values that include recreation, environmental conservation, science, preservation of cultural heritage and resource extraction, depending on the specific designation of the land. Examples include national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, wilderness areas, national conservation areas and areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).



often marked "no trespassing," and the public cannot access it without permission from the landowner.

WHAT IS THE THREAT TO PUBLIC LANDS?

Anti-public lands politicians and organizations have developed a strategy to use administrative, legislative and legal actions to rob Americans of our public lands, handing them over to state governments or private developers. Recently, indiscriminate mass firings of federal employees and the withholding of critical funding are compromising federal agencies' ability to properly steward public lands. Although politicians have the power to provide necessary staff and funding, some politicians will point to poor management as a justification to transfer or sell off public lands. Once we lose our public lands, they will be gone forever.



HOW MUCH PUBLIC LAND IS THERE NATIONALLY?

The national government owns about 640 million acres, or 28% of all land across the United States, on behalf of the American people.

WHO MANAGES THIS PUBLIC LAND?

The following agencies administer the vast majority (about 95%) of national public lands:



- Bureau of Land Management: About 256 million acres
- U.S. Forest Service: About 193 million acres
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): About 91 million acres
- National Park Service (NPS): About 78 million acres



HOW MUCH PUBLIC LAND IS IN NEW MEXICO?

In New Mexico, the BLM, Forest Service, FWS and NPS manage about 23.5 million acres of public lands, about 30% of our state.



WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC LANDS IN NEW MEXICO?

New Mexico hosts a diverse array of public lands.

- BLM: The BLM manages some of New Mexico's national monuments, including Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, Río Grande del Norte, Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks, and Prehistoric Trackways. The BLM also manages wilderness areas, including Ojito and Bisti/De-Na-Zin. Other popular destinations managed by the BLM include Cabezón Peak, San Lorenzo Canyon, Nambé Badlands, Angel Peak Scenic Area, Diablo Canyon, the Gila Lower Box Canyon, Three Rivers Petroglyphs, White Ridge Bike Trails and Santa Cruz Lake.
- Forest Service: Most of New Mexico's wilderness areas are managed by the Forest Service. For example, the Gila Wilderness and Aldo Leopold Wilderness are in the Gila National Forest; the Pecos Wilderness and Chama River Canyon Wilderness are in the Santa Fe National Forest; the Sandia Wilderness and Apache Kid Wilderness are in the Cibola National Forest; the Wheeler Peak Wilderness and Cruces Basin Wilderness are in the Carson National Forest; and the Capitan Mountain Wilderness and White Mountain Wilderness are in the Lincoln National Forest.
- FWS: The Fish and Wildlife Service manages national wildlife refuges, including Bosque del Apache, Sevilleta, Valle de Oro, Bitter Lake and Maxwell.
- NPS: Areas with several different designations fall under NPS management. They include Carlsbad Caverns National Park, White Sands National Park, Valles Caldera National Preserve, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, Petroglyph National Monument, Pecos National Historical Park and Bandelier National Monument.

WHO DECIDES HOW TO MANAGE PUBLIC LANDS?

The U.S. Constitution gives Congress the sole authority to decide how to manage our public lands. Congress acts through legislation. Congress has passed laws that designate specific wilderness areas, national monuments and national wildlife refuges. Congress enacted the Antiquities Act of 1906, which authorizes the president to create national monuments. Congress has also passed laws that require agencies like BLM and Forest Service to develop land use plans for the areas they administer. Many federal laws and regulations establish a right for the public to participate in the land use planning process. By comparison, states like New Mexico offer far fewer opportunities to participate in state land management, and, of course, the public generally has no right to weigh in on the management of private land.



WHY ARE PUBLIC LANDS IMPORTANT?

Public lands belong to everyone and are managed for the benefit and enjoyment of all current and future Americans. Public lands are widely supported and drive local economies. Public lands protect clean water and air, fish and wildlife, and cultural resources, and they provide opportunities for traditional uses, recreation and access to nature. Public lands support extractive industries, including grazing, oil and gas, mining, logging and renewable energy development. Public lands also drive the outdoor economy, which accounts for \$1.1 trillion in output, surpassing extractive industries.

HOW DOES THE RIGHT TO ACCESS NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DIFFER FROM THE RIGHT TO ACCESS OTHER PLACES?

Our national public lands are managed for multiple public benefits and are generally open to public access, meaning Americans and visitors can use them for recreational activities. In contrast, New Mexico's state trust lands are managed to maximize profits to support public schools and institutions, and public access to recreate on state trust land is limited. Yet more restrictive, private property is



WHAT CAN WE DO TO DEFEND OUR PUBLIC LAND HERITAGE?

Everyone can take steps to defend these lands.

- Contact your elected officials to express support for keeping public lands in public hands.
- Support place-based land protection efforts such as national monuments and wilderness areas, which would make it harder for bad actors to sell off or give away public lands.
- Donate volunteer time or money to conservation organizations like New Mexico Wild.
- Participate in public rallies to show your support for public lands.
- Attend hearings and comment on land management decisions.
- Stay informed and educate others about the importance of these special places.
- Follow Leave No Trace principles when visiting public lands.



Together, we can make a difference! ▲▲

IN REMEMBRANCE

Wesley Leonard

A dedicated conservationist and passionate advocate for New Mexico’s wild lands, Wesley Leonard leaves behind a legacy of unwavering commitment to environmental preservation. As the director of the Center for Environmental Resource Management at the University of Texas at El Paso, he devoted his career to protecting natural resources and ensuring a sustainable future.



A founding member of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance in 1997, Wesley played a vital role in shaping the organization’s mission and impact. For more than 50 years, he hiked, backpacked and explored the vast and beautiful landscapes of New Mexico, developing a deep knowledge and appreciation for its diverse wilderness. His experience as a wilderness specialist with the Bureau of Land Management in the Las Cruces District further strengthened his dedication to conservation efforts.

Wesley’s passion for protecting public lands was evident in his tireless advocacy and leadership. During his time as New Mexico Wild board chairman, he worked diligently to ensure that we stayed laser focused on our mission—safeguarding New Mexico’s wilderness for future generations. His steadfast dedication helped shape conservation efforts in the region, and his influence will continue to be felt for years to come.

Those who had the privilege of knowing Wes will remember his wisdom and determination. He will be deeply missed, but his legacy will live on in the landscapes he worked so hard to protect. ▲▲

IN REMEMBRANCE

Grecia Nuñez

It is with great sadness that we share the passing of Grecia Nuñez, a beloved former New Mexico Wild staff member. Grecia, who held the position of Public Lands Fellow (2018-2019), was a passionate advocate for connecting minority youth with the outdoors and breaking down barriers to accessing public lands. Mentored by the late David Soules, a board member of New Mexico Wild, Grecia was an integral part of our team, working to protect the Gila River and other important public lands throughout Southern New Mexico. Through her innovative #hiking_in_hoopz initiative, she inspired Latina women to embrace both their heritage and love of nature. Growing up in Vado, New Mexico, her conservation journey began with Groundwork Doña Ana and led her to work in multiple national parks and the Peace Corps before returning to serve her home state. The first member of her family to attend college, she ultimately earned a Juris Doctor from American University Law School. Grecia’s warm smile, dedication and pioneering spirit will be truly missed. ▲▲





SCAN ME

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For more information: nmwild.org/aldo-leopold-circle/

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Citizen Science Volunteers Needed



Rio Chama Boaters

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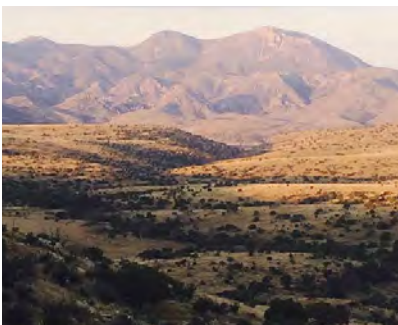
SPRING 2025

Do you have plans to run the Wild and Scenic section of the Rio Chama in 2025?

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



New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
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Albuquerque, NM 87125
Not a member yet? Go to nmwild.org.



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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