

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: STEPHANIE GARCIA RICHARD



Fall/Winter 2024

The Semiannual Publication
of the New Mexico
Wilderness Alliance

NEW MEXICO WILD!



**CELEBRATING
STEWARDSHIP**



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The Semiannual Publication of the
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

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ON THE COVER

Anglers take advantage of great fall conditions and beautiful fall colors in the Rio Grande del Norte national monument. Photo by Taylor Streit www.taosflyshop.com

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Mark Allison

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, WILDERNESS



Perhaps most people think of New Mexico Wild as an advocacy organization focused exclusively on upgrading protections for public lands, waters and wildlife. We are certainly that, though that's not all we do. We've always had robust citizen science, volunteer engagement and stewardship components. In fact, our organization grew out of private citizen volunteers.

We know that formally protecting a special place, whether that is a designated Wilderness Area, a National Monument or a Wild and Scenic River, isn't the end of the conservation effort, but in many ways only the beginning.

We see our stewardship work as hugely beneficial to the land, but also a wonderful way to create opportunities to engage our members, to introduce young people to their public lands and to put people on a path to a lifelong passion for nature.

Wilderness areas offer critical habitat and corridors for wildlife. They also play a significant role in climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency in combatting mass species extinction.

While our job includes holding public land management agencies accountable when we see abuses, neglect or poor management, our stewardship work affords us opportunities to partner with those agencies and to develop relationships with the smart, passionate public servants who work there. By entering into cooperative agreements, we're able to hire professional staff to do work that the agencies don't have the capacity to do.

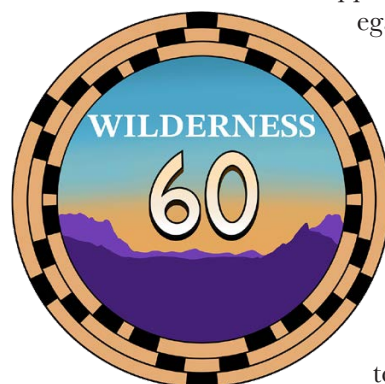
This issue celebrates stewardship and highlights some of the ways we do that, both through volunteers and paid staff.

In addition, inside are updates on our protection efforts, highlights on recent victories and setbacks, and emerging new threats. We're also pleased to feature an exclusive interview with New Mexico's Commissioner of State Lands, Stephanie Garcia Richard.

A recent survey of our members found the No. 1 issue respondents were most passionate about was "ensuring a sustainable future for New Mexico's rivers and water resources." Inside you can read about some of our water protection efforts, including big plans for the upcoming New Mexico legislative session starting January 21.

Related to our federal work, fewer than 1% of bills introduced in the House and Senate in 2023 and 2024 have passed, and this Congress may be on track to be the least productive of any since the Civil War. Nevertheless, as happens about this time every year, speculation is growing about the prospects of a public lands package coming together in Congress. While we can't know if or when this might happen, I can tell you that we've worked closely with our congressional delegation to make sure our top legislative priorities are positioned as well as they possibly can be, including bills for a Gila Wild and Scenic River, Pecos Watershed Mineral Withdrawal and Cerro de la Olla Wilderness.

Unfortunately, this congressional dysfunction is happening at the same time as the United States Supreme Court is becoming increasingly activist and hostile towards the environment and conservation. Rulings this term on multiple cases have significantly constrained the ability of federal agencies to regulate air and water quality, toxic chemicals and greenhouse gas emissions, upending



decades of precedent. We will be navigating the implications of these decisions for years to come, making our jobs that much more difficult at exactly the wrong time.

On a happier note, 2024 marked the 60th anniversary of the Wilderness Act and the 100th anniversary of the world's first administratively designated Wilderness area, right here in New Mexico.

The Gila Wilderness in southwestern New Mexico was premised on a profoundly new land ethic based on humility and restraint, where wild places are allowed to be “self-willed” and which was predicated on the understanding that ecosystems and species, including humans, are interconnected. For non-Indigenous, Western thinking, this was a radical way to look at our relationship with the natural world, one that countered the humancentric and nature-dominating sentiment that came before.

The bipartisan Wilderness Act was transformational in its intent and implications. For the first time, a law enabled protection of lands for their inherent wildness, safeguarding them forever from commercialization and extraction, roads, mechanization, and motorization, providing a new tool to counter relentless development and commodification.

The law is uniquely American and asserted a new citizen-led right in protecting public lands, from what had been top-down federal agency discretion to one that empowers ordinary citizens to petition their representatives to do so legislatively.

Today, New Mexico is fortunate to have 39 Wilderness areas, representing 1,981,947 acres or about 2.5 percent of our total land area. While a small percentage, these lands play essential roles safeguarding cultural resources and sites sacred to Indigenous peoples; traditional uses such as hunting, fishing and herb gathering; and opportunities for recreation and solitude. They are a boon to our tourism and outdoor recreation economy.

Wilderness areas offer critical habitat and corridors for wildlife. They also play a significant role in climate change mitigation, adaptation and resiliency and in combatting mass species extinction.

Even as we celebrate this milestone anniversary, we know there is more to be done. We owe it to future generations — human and wildlife alike — to do what we can to save what is left before it is gone forever. We're grateful to continue to do so with sovereign tribes and pueblos, traditional communities, businesses, faith-based groups, and other stakeholders.

All supporters of Wilderness don't necessarily have the same motivations, nor must they. Regardless, their support is deeply rooted in the values, traditions and culture that make us proud New Mexicans and Americans. We honor wisdom and prudence, recognize an obligation to posterity, and cringe at thoughtless waste.

We're grateful for the foresight of those who came before us and proud of the special role New Mexico played — and still plays — in conservation.



Mark “assisting” with a citizen science project on the Rio Chama. Read more about our bug collecting project on page 8. Photo by Tisha Broska



ALBUQUERQUE MAIN OFFICE
WE HAVE MOVED!

6000 Uptown Blvd. NE, Ste. 350
Albuquerque, NM 87110
505-843-8696
info@nmwild.org | www.nmwild.org

SILVER CITY FIELD OFFICE

301 W College Ave. #14 | Silver City, NM 88061
505-843-8696

NEW MEXICO WILD STAFF

Mark Allison, Executive Director, Albuquerque

Tisha Broska, Deputy Director, Albuquerque

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WILDERNESS DISPATCHES

Updates on New Mexico Wild Projects Across the State

CAJA DEL RIO TRANSMISSION LINE THREAT LOOMS

STAFF ARTICLE

A diverse group of New Mexicans, including representatives from many sovereign Pueblo communities, voiced strong opposition to a federal proposal to run a new electric transmission line 14 miles across public lands on the Caja del Rio Plateau during a town hall meeting this summer. More than 600 people attended the July meeting held by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) at Buffalo Thunder Resort and Casino.

New Mexico Wild continues to participate in advocacy for the Caja as a member of the Caja Coalition, which in August urged the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to deny the NNSA request to build the transmission line and towers. In a letter, the coalition said a needed special use permit and amendment to the Santa Fe National Forest Plan should be rejected because the NNSA has failed to adequately engage directly with Tribes. Tribal leaders have expressed their opposition and noted that the agencies are failing to consult with Tribes.

Over 23,000 public comments were submitted in opposition to the proposed transmission line during the NNSA public comment period, and the vast majority of attendees at two NNSA public meetings cited strong opposition to the project. Local Hispanic leaders also spoke out in opposition to the project and called for unity in protecting the Caja. In addition, the Santa Fe New Mexican editorialized against the powerline.

Thanks to the participation of our members and supporters, from attendance at public meetings to submission of written comments, the agencies have heard broad, emphatic opposition to this misguided proposal. Unfortunately, the USFS has released a draft decision approving a transmission line through the sacred Caja Del Rio plateau. This is a stark reminder of the cost of not proactively safeguarding our special places. New Mexico Wild will be submitting a formal objection to the USFS, calling for the decision to be reversed and for the proposal to be denied. We'll continue to fight for the protection of this extraordinary landscape. ▲▲



More than 600 people attended the July meeting held by the U.S. Department of Energy National Nuclear Security Administration. Staff photo

PROTECTING THE UPPER PECOS WATERSHED: A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

BY RALPH VIGIL

Our ongoing efforts to protect the Upper Pecos Watershed from mining interests have been both challenging and rewarding. Partnering with the Upper Pecos Watershed Association (UPWA) and the Stop Tererro Mine Coalition, we are working diligently to secure an administrative and legislative mineral withdrawal of 166,600 acres and legislation to designate 11,599 acres of Wilderness within the Thompson Peak Recom-



mended Wilderness area. This initiative aims to safeguard the watershed from potential mining threats and preserve its natural beauty and ecological integrity.

Regular meetings with congressional staff and various agencies have been crucial in advancing the mineral withdrawal application. We are pleased with the progress made and extend our gratitude to our delegation and agencies for their efforts and unwavering support.

Youth engagement has been a cornerstone of our campaign. Collaborating with River Source's Youth Conservation Corps Pecos crew and UPWA, we have involved young people in meaningful conservation activities. In June, we organized an educational hike to Thompson Peak, where participants learned about the impacts of mining on the Pecos and the importance of protecting this vital watershed. The youth also presented their conservation work and activities at their graduation in July, highlighting their commitment to environmental stewardship.

In addition to these efforts, we worked with UPWA to pass proclamations in San Miguel County and the village of Pecos, designating September as Upper Pecos Watershed Awareness Month. We kicked off activities with a Sept. 5 public meeting to update the community on our progress and initiatives.

To further engage the community, we held a Pecos River-themed youth art contest in partnership with UPWA and River Source. Youth from San Miguel, Santa Fe and Guadalupe counties submitted their artwork along with a short paragraph on why they love the Pecos and why it should be permanently protected. The month-long celebration culminated in a river cleanup from Pecos, New Mexico, to Pecos, Texas, accompanied by a youth fishing derby on Sept. 28. The event concluded with a celebration and announcement of the art contest winners.

Through these collaborative efforts, we continue to make strides in protecting the Upper Pecos Watershed, ensuring its preservation for future generations. ▲▲



Top left: The incredible vista from Thompson Peak. Left: An educational hike to Thompson Peak attended by youth interested in the area. Staff photos

Right: The Mimbres Peaks region harbors numerous prehistoric archaeological sites. Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock

MIMBRES PEAKS: ASTOUNDING SKY ISLANDS IN SOUTHWESTERN NEW MEXICO

STAFF ARTICLE

Mimbres Peaks is an unofficial geographic name for a series of sky islands in Luna County that abruptly rise out of the desert floor. A growing coalition of Tribes along with business, social justice, and conservation organizations (including New Mexico Wild) is working to permanently protect these ranges, which include Cookes Peak and the Florida, Good Sight and Tres Hermanas mountains. While not included in this campaign, the Cedar Mountains in southwestern Luna County merit mention, too.

All five of these ranges harbor a wide array of phenomenal archaeological and historic resources, sensitive and unique wildlife species, unmatched geological features, scientific values, outstanding opportunities for solitude, and topographical relief that is critical in allowing species to successfully adapt to the climate crisis. Our sky islands of southwestern New Mexico are also essential in feeding mountain springs and streams and recharging surrounding aquifers.

The craggy summit of Cookes Peak is a prominent landmark visible from across southwestern New Mexico. This range harbors more than 50 documented prehistoric archaeological sites (and likely many more) and is home to numerous historic sites—the 17th century Fort Cummings, a World War II bombing target and numerous historic mines with an associated ghost town.

The Florida Mountains are also visible for many miles in every direction and conjure the jagged spires of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth realm of Mordor. The cliffs and needles of the Floridas host numerous natural arches, semi-precious gemstones and rock art and are home to New Mexico’s sole population of Persian ibex, which draws wildlife enthusiasts and hunters from across the United States, if not the four corners of the globe.

The Good Sights appear humble from afar but conceal a steep escarpment and rugged peaks. These mountains are home to many wildlife species—golden eagles, burrowing owls, mountain lions, fox, mule deer, quail, pronghorn and javelina—and host an array of prehistoric alcove shelters, petroglyphs and bedrock mortars, as well as remnants of the historic Butterfield Overland stagecoach trail and other historic sites.

The Tres Hermanas loom above Columbus and are characterized by their three distinct peaks. This range also hosts diverse wildlife, including badgers, and is renowned for rich archaeological resources, including petroglyphs and room blocks.

The Cedar Mountains are comprised of scattered peaks and low, rolling grass-covered hills and valleys, as well as occasional summits with spectac-



ular views of the mountains of southwestern New Mexico. This range is renowned for its exceptional archaeological sites and cultural resources.

Join us in protecting these special natural places. Learn more about the campaign to designate Mimbres Peaks as a National Monument at protectmimbrespeaks.org. ▲▲

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

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

Get Involved!
nmwild.org/events



You're Invited

**NEW MEXICO WILD
HOLIDAY PARTY
& ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 5-7 PM
Gruet Winery
Albuquerque Tasting Room
8400 Pan American Freeway NE
For more information or to RSVP, visit
www.nmwild.org/event/holiday-party/**



WILDERNESS DISPATCHES, CONTINUED

FEDERAL COURT RULES FOR CLEAN WATER IN FLORIDAS MINE CASE

STAFF ARTICLE



The rugged Florida Mountains will remain protected from dolomite mining, thanks to a new court ruling. Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock

In August, the U.S. District Court for New Mexico ruled in favor of a coalition of environmental organizations that challenged the development of a dolomite mine in the Florida Mountains near Deming. The court determined that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by neglecting to adequately consider the potential water quality impacts associated with the mine's processing mill.

The lawsuit, filed by New Mexico Wild and partner organizations, challenged the BLM's approval of the mine, asserting that the agency's environmental review was deficient and failed to comprehensively evaluate adverse effects on water, air, wildlife, a Wilderness study area and other resources in the region. Although the court did not rule in the groups' favor on all issues, the court did find that BLM failed to adequately consider pollution from magnesium sludge, a waste product of dolomite processing.

In finding for the groups on the water quality issue, the court rejected the BLM's position that permitting requirements from state or local governments excuse the BLM from addressing environmental impacts as part of the NEPA process. The court's decision underscores the critical importance of rigorous environmental assessments and the necessity of adhering to NEPA's mandate to consider all direct, indirect and cumulative environmental consequences before authorizing projects with significant impacts.

The proposed mine has faced strong opposition from the local community and environmental advocates. The project has the potential to contaminate groundwater, disrupt wildlife habitats and degrade the scenic beauty of the Florida Mountains. The court's ruling serves as a powerful reminder that federal agencies must fulfill their legal obligations to protect the environment and ensure that development projects are conducted in a responsible and sustainable manner. ▲

GILA NATIONAL FOREST PLAN LEAVES US WANTING MORE WILDERNESS

BY BJORN FREDRICKSEN

The Gila National Forest is in many ways the centerpiece of New Mexico Wild's ongoing and future work—it represents the highest concentration of intact and connected wildlands remaining in New Mexico and is a stronghold for biodiversity, supporting innumerable imperiled and rare species.

The Gila's untamed river canyons and parklike plateaus will be essential for these species to adapt to our dual climate and mass extinction crises, and the national forest hosts more than 450 miles of wild rivers and streams, for which we are seeking permanent protection under the proposed M.H.

Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. It is also home to the world's first Wilderness, initially administratively designated by the U.S. Forest Service in 1924—a full 40 years prior to the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act.

We were therefore thrilled at the start of the summer to join local conservation partners, Indigenous communities and the Forest Service to celebrate the centennial of the Gila Wilderness and to envision the next century of conservation action. We collectively rejoiced in the fact that the highest form of protection for our public lands today is a legacy that began right in our backyard and has since matured into the National Wilderness Preservation System that protects more than 110 million acres nationally. Wilderness is something we can take considerable pride in here in southwestern New Mexico, for good reason.

However, as the centennial celebrations faded, we were dismayed to learn that the new Gila Forest Plan recommended a meager 72,103 acres of additional Wilderness. While this acreage may sound sizable, it is paltry compared to the 600,000 acres found eligible as Wilderness by New Mexico Wild. Dozens of volunteers contributed over 15,000 hours during a multiyear inventory process that covered only a fraction of the Gila's wild country. While only Congress can permanently protect Wilderness, agency designations of recommended Wilderness are critical in that they require that those land be protected to retain their wildness and roadless character and, thereby, their eligibility for future Wilderness designation. We were also disappointed in the Forest Service's limited eligibility findings for Wild and Scenic Rivers, which play a similar role in recommending future conservation action to Congress.

Absent robust protections, the creep of development and extractive pressures will continue to threaten our unprotected wildlands and rivers, including in the Gila. As such, New Mexico Wild will continue advocating on behalf of our thousands of members statewide for changes in the Gila Forest Plan to appropriately protect our irreplaceable wild places. ▲



STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN REVISION HOLDS UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

BY GARRETT VENEKLASEN

Understaffing at the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and a lack of data about many rare species threaten to compromise an update of the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), which is needed to receive federal funding.

The SWAP, which is managed by the Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), is part of a national initiative to conserve native fish and wildlife. Currently there are 235 native Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in New Mexico, including endangered and threatened species, keystone species and species that could be affected by climate change.

The current version of the SWAP, including a minor revision approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, was completed in May 2019. In order to receive substantial federal funding administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico, like all other states, must update its SWAP every five years. A fully revised draft of the 2025 plan will be made available for pub-



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lic comment prior to submission to the Fish and Wildlife Service in the fall of 2025 ahead of the October 1 due date.

The Achilles heel of the NMDGF's SWAP revision process is a considerable lack of staffing dedicated to non-game and, especially, SGCN species. Many species (including a substantial number of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates) cannot be added to the list because the agency does not have enough data to justify their listing. Additional staffing of non-game biologists within the Wildlife Management Division would rectify this insufficiency of data.

Agency modernization that transitions NMDGF to a Department of Wildlife is also a critical step in this process and we thank the Department for holding stakeholder meetings to identify changes to the department that will codify agency modernization protocols. New Mexico Wild has been honored to be a member of the SWAP assessment core team and commends staff for the professional, inclusive and science-driven process. ▲▲

IDEAS SURGE AT ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS WORKSHOP

BY TRICIA SNYDER

We all know rivers need water. But just how much water and when it's needed hasn't been quantified in a scientifically justifiable way for many of New Mexico's waterways. As part of our efforts around the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District- led Rio Grande in New Mexico Basin Study, we're working to do just that for six reaches of the Rio Grande and Rio Chama.

In collaboration with Audubon Southwest, World Wildlife Fund, New River/New World Consulting and a suite of other partners, we've developed frameworks that identify environmental flow needs for each of these reaches. For over a year, we've been working with experts throughout the region to further refine these frameworks.

In early August, we held a workshop bringing together experts in hydrology, indicator species, geomorphology, policy, water management, water quality and more to identify key constraints and opportunities. Over the course of three days, more than 50 attendees dug in deep to identify what challenges—existing infrastructure, limiting policy and authorizations, management paradigms, etc.—exist to allow us to reach the flow targets and, more importantly, what opportunities we might leverage or build to overcome these challenges.

We couldn't be prouder of the work we're doing as part of the Basin Study and beyond. Our next steps will be to further collaborate and seek advice from our Tribal and acequia partners, both on the frameworks themselves and the opportunities and constraints we've identified through the workshop. We plan to finalize the report by March 2025. Phase 2 of the project will include further refinement of these opportunities and implementation steps, as well as communications for a variety of audiences on our findings. Stay tuned for more! ▲▲



Participants listen at the recent Environmental Flows workshop. Staff photo



The Rio Chama watershed is safe from pesticide contamination... for now. Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock

VICTORY FOR POLLINATORS, PEOPLE, AND PUBLIC LANDS IN THE RIO CHAMA WATERSHED!

BY SALLY PAEZ

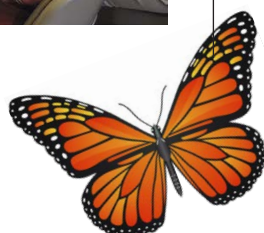
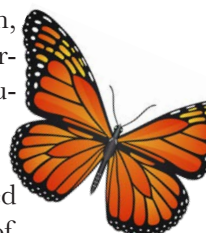
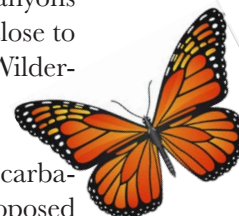
For the past two summers, the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) recklessly proposed to aerially spray pesticides on public lands in the Rio Chama watershed to kill native grasshoppers and increase forage for cattle. Opposition from conservation organizations and the public shut down those plans, and a court decision this year permanently ended the spray program.

The New Mexico proposals were part of the APHIS Rangeland Grasshopper Program, which authorized the agency to spray pesticide on millions of acres in 17 Western states. The New Mexico project area included 25,000 acres in the Cebolla area of Rio Arriba County, mostly on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. The area is popular for boating and hiking and includes the Rio Chama Wilderness Study Area and the Chama Canyons Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The proposed spray was close to the Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River, the Chama River Canyon Wilderness and an Important Bird Area.

APHIS proposed to use any of four different chemicals for the spray: carbaryl, chlorantraniliprole, diflubenzuron and malathion. Carbaryl, proposed for the 2023 spray, is especially dangerous for non-target species. It is highly toxic to insects, including native pollinators, and harms mammals, fish, birds and larval amphibians. Additionally, carbaryl is a likely human carcinogen and can cause nausea, headaches, dizziness, anxiety, mental confusion, convulsions, coma and respiratory depression.

In response to APHIS's ill-conceived plans, New Mexico Wild worked alongside partners to educate the public and challenge APHIS's lack of transparency and insufficient environmental review. Following widespread public opposition, federal agencies canceled the planned sprays in both 2023 and 2024. New Mexico Wild thanks our members for their energetic engagement on this important issue. We also appreciate the strong leadership demonstrated by the BLM, which refused to implement the APHIS program without thorough environmental review and public transparency. Soon after the 2024 spray was canceled, a federal court rejected the entire APHIS Rangeland Pesticide Program, validating the concerns we had raised. The court found that APHIS failed to take a hard look at the program's impact on sensitive species, such as pollinators and birds, and violated the law by focusing solely on reactive pesticide applications, ignoring other pest management techniques. Additionally, APHIS failed to analyze the site-specific impacts of individual sprays or to consider the cumulative impacts of pesticide use on nearby lands.

New Mexico Wild celebrates the court decision and congratulates our conservation partners that secured the ruling, including Advocates for the West, the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation and the Center for Biological Diversity. We hope this legal victory will result in a less toxic approach to managing our public lands for the benefit of watersheds, ecosystems and people. ▲▲



WILDERNESS DISPATCHES, CONTINUED

RIO CHAMA EL VADO DAM: STRUCTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

BY TISHA BROSKA

Constructed in 1935 by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and rehabilitated in the 1950s and 1960s, El Vado Dam faces significant structural issues, including a leaking steel plate membrane, erosion and a compromised spillway.

These problems, coupled with downstream environmental impacts identified in a 1992 assessment, have led to ongoing challenges in the Rio Chama. Issues include the absence of annual spring pulse flows, non-varying cold-water temperatures affecting aquatic life, and chronic turbidity harming macroinvertebrates and fish.

New Mexico Wild has been working with Citizen Science volunteers to establish baseline water quality conditions in the Wild and Scenic reach of the Rio Chama during repairs to El Vado Dam from 2020 to 2024. The goal of the study, which covered the stretch between El Vado Dam and Big Eddy Take-Out just above Abiquiu Reservoir, was to gain a better understanding of the river ecosystem resiliency through the relationship between flow and sediment management at El Vado Dam, water characteristics, and macroinvertebrate diversity.

While the El Vado Dam repairs are on hold and being reviewed, New Mexico Wild and partners are advocating for the installation of a gated intake tower to improve water quality and sediment management to benefit the river ecosystem. A gated intake tower would eliminate year-round turbidity in the Rio Chama, maintain the reservoir capacity by flushing sediment during spring pulse releases and vary the water temperature in the Rio Chama for the benefit of macroinvertebrates and fish.▲▲

Sign our petition to add your name to the advocates supporting improved management for the Rio Chama Wild & Scenic River.



New Mexico Wild joined staff from Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation for a Rio Chama water sampling trip. The team also collected insect samples during the trip as part of our Citizen Science sampling effort. Staff photo

LATINO CONSERVATION WEEK 2024

BY KEILA GUTIÉRREZ



Volunteers celebrating Latino Conservation Week through stewardship in the Bosque. Staff photo

Reflecting on the interwoven nature of people and land, we sought to celebrate Latino Conservation Week at a wild space in our own backyards. Under leadership from Hispanic/Latinx staff at both organizations, NM Wild partnered with the City of Albuquerque's Open Space to gather volunteers in the Middle Rio Grande bosque and give back to this ecosystem so central to New Mexico's diverse Hispanic/Latinx communities. Public lands accessible to all stretch for miles between Santa Ana and Isleta pueblos and beyond into the south. The bosque is at the heart of our state's identity and culture, both literally and figuratively, from its original native stewards to the many communities that intersect upon it today.

For many of us, this is the most accessible wild space we have; a place to recreate outside and get away from city noise. While the landscape of the Middle Rio Grande valley is certainly highly impacted and shaped by human activity, it is a unique and rare example of a riparian corridor providing precious habitat for flora and wildlife running through some of the most densely populated areas in our state. We met in the South Valley and hiked under the thick canopy of cottonwoods to our site, where we planted New Mexico privet, three leaf sumac, Wood's rose, and false indigo. We watered our plants as we went and installed watering boxes around some to improve chances of successful establishment. We also spent some time removing invasive Ravena grass. Thank you to our wonderful volunteers and to our partners at Open Space for your leadership in this project! ▲▲



Planting native species and removing invasive ones helps return the Bosque ecosystem to its untrammeled past. Staff photo

FRIENDS OF RIO GRANDE DEL NORTE STEWARD YOUTH AND LANDSCAPE

BY BEN MORTENSEN AND NICK STREIT

Now in its second year, the Friends of Rio Grande del Norte National Monument is busy engaging and educating local youth about conservation and actively partnering with federal land managers and community groups on stewardship projects.

New Mexico Wild helped create the stewardship group last year as part of our commitment to ensuring the wild spaces we fight to protect are well managed and cared for. Rio Grande del Norte National Monument (RGDN) is one of New Mexico's most iconic landscapes, and the friends group works hand-in-hand with local, state and federal agencies to make sure local communities can participate in the monument's management.

One of the strongest metrics for measuring the friends group's success is its growing partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The friends group meets regularly with the Taos Field Office staff, collaborating with them on several major initiatives such as the restoration of the iconic La Junta Trail, the protection of Cerro de la Olla and the cleanup of historic dumping sites near the Slide Trail. By working with the BLM and community stakeholders, the friends group is helping to build and strengthen ties between organizations, creating a powerful network that can come together for the benefit of all.

The friends group believes that to foster the next generation of stewards, we must meet them where

they are and help them engage with their public lands in meaningful and impactful ways. To do so, we started the Outdoor Academy youth education program that teaches classes in public schools, hosts events on the monument and has created programs that train students to become professional guides in New Mexico's outdoor industry. This year, Outdoor Academy will teach weekly classes at both Taos High School and Taos Pueblo Day School, helping to educate over 250 Taosño students about conservation, stewardship and recreation in the monument.

We foster community engagement through local stewardship initiatives. For example, we are working with Backcountry Hunters and Anglers to modify fencing across the Taos Plateau, removing woven wire fencing and preparing the area for future wildlife friendly fencing. This work has a direct benefit to wildlife habitat and connectivity on our monument.

It is our strong belief that the Rio Grande del Norte is a unique and special National Monument. The RGDN should remain a guiding light for the use of the Antiquities Act in land protection. Continued stewardship of the monument is paramount as campaigns to protect other areas point to RGDN as a shining example of how monument designation can protect a landscape, benefit a local economy and protect traditional uses. ▲▲



Above: Outdoor Academy participant with a double on Santa Cruz lake. Photo by Vidal Gonzales

Middle: Taos Academy fishing club gets out on the water with guides from Taos Fly Shop. Staff photo

Bottom: Future fishing guide Mario with a Rio Grande cutbow. Staff photo



MONUMENTAL EXPANSION

New Mexico Wild celebrates and congratulates Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández, D-N.M., and the Trust for Public Land on the recent acquisition of the spectacular 3,700-acre Klaver tract in Northern New Mexico! Now officially in the hands of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management Taos Field Office, it will be an amazing addition to the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH STEPHANIE GARCIA RICHARD STATE LAND COMMISSIONER



Editor's Note: The State Land Office manages state lands and funds public education and other institutions. Commissioner Garcia Richard is tasked with overseeing 9 million surface acres and 13 million mineral acres. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Mark Allison: After more than a decade-long effort, we were pleased to see Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announce last year a 20-year administrative mineral withdrawal for Chaco Culture National Historical Park to prevent new leasing on federal public lands within 10 miles. We continue to work with our federal delegation to see legislation passed to make this permanent. Our readers remember that you, as state land commissioner, were the first by years to issue a mineral withdrawal for state trust lands around Chaco. I was hoping you could talk a bit about your thinking on this. What was that consideration like? Have commis-

sioners used mineral withdrawals regularly in the past, and why did you feel it was important to take this action?

Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard:

I was also glad to see the federal mineral withdrawal. And I know it was a difficult process, but I think in the end, a good one because, hopefully, we'll get some ethnographic studies out of it and have an in-depth look at this area that's so sacred to so many people in our state and across the region, not just in New Mexico. Mineral withdrawals are something we do here regularly. The difference with this one is that usually we sell them for consideration. So, a company, I'll give Netflix as an example, wants to build their studio. They don't want anyone coming in and

houses in the area, some at Pueblos in the area. And we signed it at the Counselor Chapter House, originally. So, we really wanted input from people who live in the region, live near impacts of the oil and gas industry to come and testify as to why this was important. I will say that while it wasn't a mineral withdrawal, Commissioner Ray Powell, back when he was commissioner, did an MOA (memorandum of agreement) on Mount Taylor. It was an agreement between the land office and Tribes to say, if we're going to do any development on Mount Taylor, we're going to consult with Tribes who have cultural affinity to the area first.

MA: Was that primarily a concern about uranium mining?

SGR: Absolutely. So, while it wasn't a withdrawal technically, it was a commitment to consult on any future development. If there were any Tribal interests that didn't jive with future uranium mining, then the Land Office wouldn't do it. And we have carried on that MOA; it still stands.

MA: My understanding is that you recently extended the moratorium on the Chaco withdrawal. How long does that last?

SGR: That's going to go until 2043. And it's at the mercy of whoever the administration is, unless it has financial consideration behind it. So that's what we're doing now is looking for a party or parties that would be willing to pay for that land use restriction mineral withdrawal so that it remains in place.

MA: Well, thanks again. What we saw is really bold leadership and being so out front and listening to communities and the vast majority of New Mexicans, and that gave that effort a lot of momentum. You really modeled the kind of leadership that we were looking for from all levels of government, so thank you.

Can you talk a bit about the State Land Office's mandate to generate revenues for beneficiaries? What does that mean? Does that place any tensions or constraints on your ability to promote conservation or recreation on trust lands?

mining the minerals out from under them, so they will pay for a withdrawal. The Chaco withdrawal, in order to make it permanent and last past my tenure, will probably at some point have to have some financial consideration with it. But it was brought forth by the community, really. I was approached by residents who live in the area and by Tribal members and it was their request that started this ball rolling. To remind your readers, we had a round of public meetings—some at chapter



Top: Commissioner Garcia Richard speaks at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Buena Vista Energy Center solar array on state trust lands in Otero County, New Mexico. State Land Office staff photo

Above: Commissioner Garcia Richard placed a moratorium on oil, gas, and mineral leasing on state trust lands near Chaco Canyon as one of her first official acts as Commissioner in 2019. Staff photo



Left: New Mexico Wild staff presents Commissioner Garcia Richard with the Conservation Champion Award for her support of Gila River Wild and Scenic protection in 2019. Staff photo



Right: New Mexico Wild hosts flyovers of proposed Wilderness in the Pecos region for policymakers. Residents of Tererro and the Jones Hill area have long dealt with contamination from other nearby mines that were irresponsibly managed. That's why Commissioner Garcia Richard opposes any new mining operations on this sensitive landscape and watershed. Staff photo

SGR: Absolutely. You can see in my previous answer how that tension naturally exists between wanting to conserve an area and this mandate that is statutory in nature—it's actually lined out in our constitution as well—to raise revenue. I consider it less of a tension and more of a balance that needs to be struck. The mandate is actually dual. It's to raise revenue, but not at the long-term expense of what is named "the trust." The trust is those natural resources, land, wildlife, watersheds, ecosystems, that we at the Land Office steward on behalf of New Mexicans. We don't want to impact the long-term health of the trust with our revenue-raising activities. For 100 years, revenue generation here at the Land Office was extractive in nature. It started with logging, then mining. When oil and gas was discovered 100 years ago, it went to that. We have taken a slightly different perspective, where we are looking at renewable forms of revenue—things that do

MA: We're a conservation group, and that's the lens through which we see issues. But we do very much value public access, and we see that as an equity issue as well. So outdoor recreation is important. Regarding recreation, for example, would you have to put in place a fee structure associated with the public's use?

SGR: There is already a fee associated with the public's use. It is what I consider to be a nominal fee. It has not been raised as long as I've been here. It's \$35 for a year-long permit, for New Mexicans and 10 of their family members to recreate on state land. What I'm talking about more is a structure almost along the line of a concessionaire. Someone to lease land and take over the responsibilities of maintenance, trash pickup, providing amenities like parking and bathroom facilities, that kind of thing. I'm talking about partnering with folks who can help us manage the use of the land.

es were doing their duty in cleaning up. Since we implemented that program, we have plugged over 500 wells, not on the taxpayers' dime, but on the industry's dime. We've cleaned up tens of thousands of acres, remediated them and gotten rid of toxins. We have saved taxpayers about \$50 million doing that because it costs about \$100,000 to clean up a well. And we have taken about two dozen companies to court. The vast majority of folks clean up when they're asked, but there are those problem individuals, and they have this cavalier attitude toward public resources. They don't take us seriously when we say we really mean it. So, we've taken them to court, and we've had positive judgments come from the courts on our cases.

MA: Really remarkable results. It sounds so reasonable and so common sense. It's just amazing we weren't doing more of that in the past. Are there other rules or policies around oversight or accountability that you're particularly proud of in your tenure as commissioner?

SGR: Protection of resources really is the way we see it. I'll just give you a few examples. The first one was back in 2019. We stopped the use of fresh water from state land for oil and gas purposes. It's that very typical thing that that we see in the West where scarce resources become this very valuable commodity. And on state land it was being used—I'm talking about millions of gallons of potable water for human consumption—was being sold for use in the oil and gas fields. That's where the balance comes in, because it's a lucrative commodity for the State Land Office. But it would damage the resource irrevocably into the future because the water becomes a waste product. So, we put forth an order to say that if you're going to use water on state land, you can't sell it to the oil and gas industry for that use. Another example is that we worked with state agencies promulgating the rule for methane capture on state land, because that's a resource

Continued on page 19.

"For 100 years, revenue generation...was extractive in nature. We have taken a slightly different perspective, where we are looking at renewable forms of revenue—things that do not deplete the resource and things that might have a lower impact on the resource. Outdoor recreation is a prime example."

not deplete the resource and things that may have a lower impact on the resource. Outdoor recreation is a prime example. But it has to be done with a management plan in mind. So, we have worked with stakeholders. We've got a couple of advisory groups—one is a conservation advisory group, and New Mexico Wild sits on that—to talk with folks about the appropriate level of activity on state land. Where are the gaps and barriers? The Land Office doesn't have law enforcement, for example. We open most of our land to hunting in New Mexico, but we don't have a way to help manage that unless we rely on New Mexico Game and Fish. When we're looking at ways to open up state trust land, we need to do that methodically and with intention.

MA: Can you talk about your Accountability and Enforcement Program and explain what that's all about to our members?

SGR: There's the mandate on raising revenue. There's also the mandate on stewardship. I'm elected by New Mexicans to steward our public resources. For me, that means going back to the folks who are leasing this resource from us and ensuring that they are doing everything that they are contractually obligated to do to maintain, improve, remediate and clean up the resource. That's where Accountability and Enforcement was born. In the fall of 2020, we started this program. Essentially, we used the terms in the oil and gas leases to ensure that oil and gas companies using state public resour-

Stewardship Com

In this age of unprecedented development, many of us exist in contexts where Wilderness feels by default associated with otherness, intrinsically separate from everything having to do with people. The wisdom of Native stewards of the lands we inhabit and contemporary scientific thinking alike would agree that this notion of isolation is an illusion; from the presence of microplastics in the tissues of deep sea animals to our dependence on the metabolic pathways of forests thousands of miles away, we are connected to the land in more ways than we can imagine. The concept of Wilderness from a legal standpoint in the United States was founded in large part on the pillars of this isolation framework. While we know this ideology misses some nuance, it does provide us with the foundation to legally defend what we and our readers know to be true: Areas away from the noise, light, pollution and activity of industry and urban development are inherently precious and worthy of protection. This duality of concepts, isolation vs. connectedness, leaves us with somewhat of a paradox in our approach to the stewardship of Wilderness. Where do we take on a role of proactive management and where do we aspire to leave wild spaces untrammled and undisturbed? These are questions we must continually ask ourselves while recognizing we may never reach a perfect consensus. The best we can do is to involve ourselves in reciprocal relationships with Wilderness, immerse ourselves in wild spaces while being mindful of what we can give in return, and strive to develop models of stewardship that meaningfully draw together the hands and voices of the communities that call a particular landscape home.



WILDERNESS RANGERS UPDATE BY KEILA GUTIERREZ

Now in its eighth year, New Mexico Wild's Wilderness Ranger Program continues to grow and evolve. This partnership between New Mexico Wild and the U.S. Forest Service was formalized in 2017 to increase stewardship capacity across New Mexico's Wilderness areas, while engaging the community in their preservation. Our state is home to 17 federally designated Forest Service Wildernesses across our five National Forests (the Carson, Cibola, Gila, Lincoln and Santa Fe). These are areas awarded the highest level of protection of any public wildland in our nation. Our Wilderness Rangers work on various stewardship efforts—including rehabilitation of disturbed sites, downed tree removal and brush clearing on trails, and collection of data on various Wilderness conditions—all while engaging volunteers on projects. Following are some 2024 season highlights.

In the Carson: Rangers have been working on a forest-wide inventory and rehabilitation of campsites, getting a handle on the kinds of impacts protected Wilderness areas are seeing from camping use. We often find campsites concentrated around alpine lakes, rivers and trails. Wilderness regulations mandate minimum camping distances from trails and water sources to maintain opportunities for solitude, protect delicate habitats, preserve water quality and minimize disturbances to water access for wildlife. Having a full inventory of campsites helps us and the Carson plan and implement restoration of areas seeing heavy impacts. On one recent project, Rangers led a crew of volunteers in the Wheeler Peak Wilderness, where we worked together to disperse 43 nonconforming campsites. We also improved conforming sites by clearing them of trash and optimizing fire rings for safe use to encourage visitors to camp in these more sustainable locations.

In the Santa Fe: A recently finalized agreement between New Mexico Wild and the Santa Fe National Forest lays out a five-year plan for thoroughly assessing conditions and re-establishing trails following the catastrophic Calf Canyon/Hermit's Peak

Top: Rangers discuss their project in the Wheeler Peak Wilderness.

Top Right: Butterfly on native thistle.

Above: Before & after of a rehabilitated illegal campsite in the Wheeler Peak Wilderness.

Right: Forest Service system trails inside the Hermit's Peak-Calf Canyon burn scar, color coded by assessment priority level. NM Wild Rangers are on track to have covered and collected data on all trails by the end of the 2024 season, setting the Forest up to begin planning and implementing strategies for trail reestablishment and/or rehabilitation.

Far Right: Removing invasive plants is a key part of our work in the Gila. Staff photos

THROUGH Community AND Conservation



“Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.”

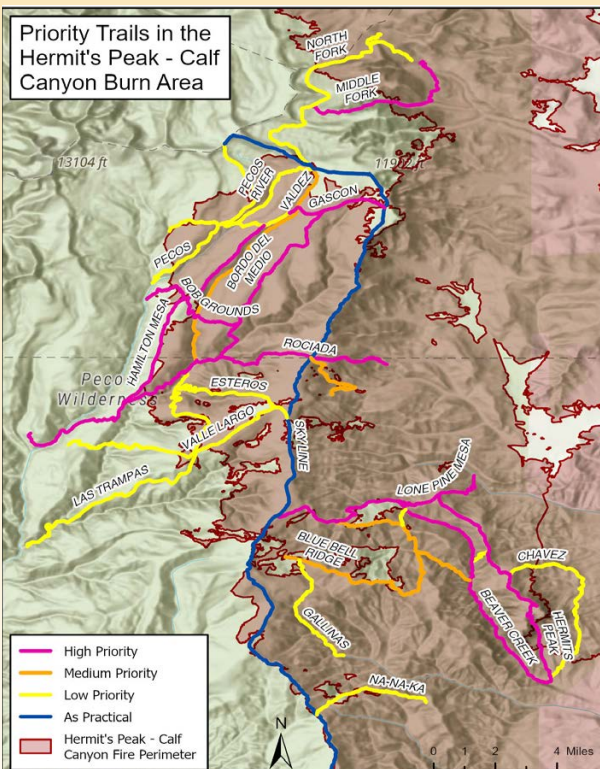
—Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*



Fire of 2022. Our Rangers have been hard at work getting trained on and implementing specific protocols for data collection on this burn scar and have surveyed over 150 miles of trail. This data is providing

the Forest Service with the groundwork to strategize on trail system rehabilitation, which will take place over the next several years and meaningfully involve New Mexico Wild as well as numerous partners and contractors local to the communities impacted by the fire. Our efforts inventory features of interest, such as signage and water drainage, and provide insight into their condition and replacement needs. Additionally, we are surveying the state of existing trail tread and the sustainability of trail locations to provide the Forest Service with crucial information needed to develop a plan on how to rehabilitate trail corridors and whether to reroute stretches to locations better suited for long-term maintenance following the impacts of the fire on the landscape.

including as a food source for many native pollinators. Four exotic thistle species are present in our state, posing threats to native habitat health and diversity. As tends to be the case with fauna and flora bearing sharp teeth, regardless of native status, thistles have been the subject of much eradication throughout our state’s history, and many of these efforts have failed to differentiate between noxious exotics and healthy native species that are often endangered and rare. Because of this, our Rangers were trained on careful identification and effective treatment methods for bull thistle. So far, we’ve worked on several small infestations in the Willow Creek and Whitewater Baldy areas and made a significant dent on our target infestation—an approximately 40-acre patch of bull thistle in the Whitewater Baldy burn scar. We’re excited to continue this work in the 2025 season. ▲▲



In the Gila: New Mexico Wild was recently granted funds by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture for the treatment of noxious weeds in the Gila National Forest. To get this work off the ground, this season we have been collaborating with the Forest Service and Heart of the Gila to treat a large patch of invasive bull thistle in the Whitewater Baldy area. New Mexico is home to 12 native thistle species which play important roles in their respective habitats,

WILDERNESS DEFENDERS UPDATE

BY AKASHIA ALLEN

The Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders program honors our co-founder by engaging volunteers in the collection of field observations on our public lands. Volunteers document disturbances to Wilderness quality lands using a smartphone app to record GPS locations, photos and notes. This data helps New Mexico Wild inform campaign interests, develop stewardship projects with our Wilderness rangers, and keep land management agencies accountable.

After completing training, either online or in-person, Wilderness Defenders choose from any of the 53 Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in New Mexico to visit. This year, we are focusing on the WSAs to be nominated in a Wilderness designation proposal.

We also have a cattle monitoring project in partnership with the Valles Caldera National Preserve (VCNP). Trespass cattle on the Valles Caldera threaten the health of riparian areas, native fish and wildlife and the recreational enjoyment of visitors. As a result of our previous involvement and the work of other organizations, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has set aside \$1 million to repair fence lines along the northern border of the preserve, and a wrangler has been hired this year to round up the trespass cattle. After all our work and engagement with agencies and elected officials, an interagency agreement

between the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) and VCNP has been adopted to define how the agencies will handle trespass cattle and fencing issues along their shared boundary. The agreement outlines fence rebuilding and maintenance, cattle incursions, communication requirements and more. The parties will jointly pilot a voluntary virtual fence system with interested USFS grazing permittees.

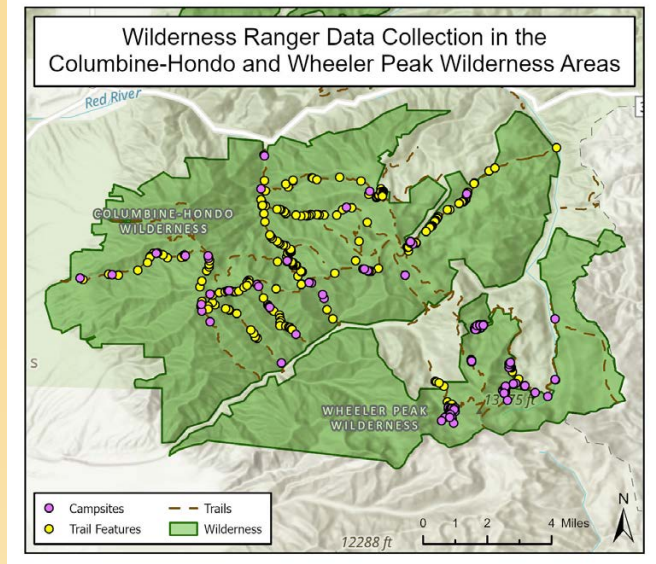
New Mexico Wild volunteers will continue to monitor cattle to keep pressure on the agencies to follow the agreement. We will also start monitoring sections of the fence line to document the repair and maintenance process.

So far this year, Wilderness defenders have collected over 300 observations in 14 wild areas across the state. These observations include access points, development and road issues, and ecological impacts. ▲▲



Trespass cattle near a riparian area in Valle San Antonio inside the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Photo by Lavran Johnson

An example of data NM Wild rangers routinely collect on designated wilderness areas statewide. "Trail features" inventory items of interest and maintenance needs such as missing/damaged signage, logs on trails, overgrown trail sections, and more. "Campsites" are recorded for visualization of site density across a given wilderness, and to assess whether sites conform with wilderness regulations. Nonconforming campsites are rehabilitated by rangers on the spot or earmarked for future projects.



New Mexico Wild's stewardship work would not be possible without the generous participation of our amazing volunteer community. We are filled with gratitude for the enthusiasm and commitment of folks coming together from all corners of our state to get involved in Ranger-led projects or contribute to our Defender data collection efforts.

Interested in getting involved?

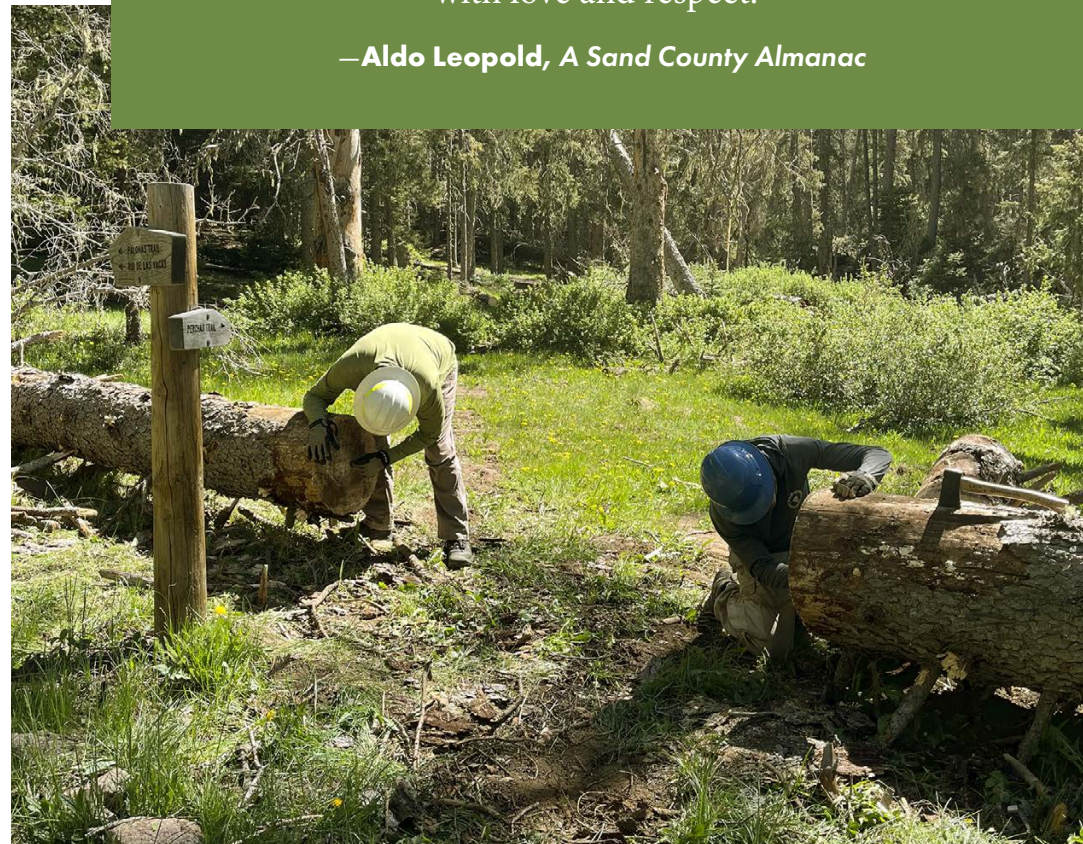
You can sign up to volunteer on Wilderness Ranger projects at nmwild.org/events or register to become a Wilderness Defender at nmwild.org/wilderness-defenders-program.

A special thank you to our partners including the Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service staff!

Together, we are protecting and conserving public lands for future generations.

"We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

—Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*



Before & after of a logout operation in the San Pedro Parks Wilderness. Staff photos

STATE LEGISLATIVE FORECAST

STAFF ARTICLE

The 2025 state legislative session is shaping up to be another big year for water! During this 60-day session, we'll continue our advocacy to secure New Mexico's water future for all the plant, wildlife and human communities who depend on it. Staff will also be working to pass much-needed reforms to the State Game Commission.

We'll be supporting two New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)-led pieces of legislation that would help protect New Mexico's waterways from pollution and degradation by establishing a **state water quality permitting program**. The first bill would make needed changes to the New Mexico Water Quality Act to provide NMED the authority to protect waters that are no longer covered by the federal Clean Water Act. The massive rollbacks in clean water protections seen in the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Sackett v. EPA* and previous decisions have left New Mexico's waters the most vulnerable in the nation. With over 96% of the state's waters no longer federally protected, it is of the utmost importance to set up this state program as quickly as possible. Our Rivers and Waters Program Director, Tricia Snyder, is serving on the NMED Surface Water Advisory Panel, working with a diverse group of stakeholders to help the department determine precisely how protection of these waters will work. Fol-

lowing passage of this legislation, an administrative rulemaking with opportunities for public comment would follow before the program is officially put in place.

The second bill would authorize NMED to begin taking over permitting for the small number of New Mexico's waters that remain federally protected under the Clean Water Act. This would enable those permits to be issued here in New Mexico, instead of out of a regional U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) office in Dallas. New Mexico is one of only three states in the nation to delegate authority over these water quality permits to the EPA.

Along with a broad coalition of partners, we plan to work with the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) to craft a statute revision to improve the effectiveness of the **Strategic Water Reserve**. The reserve works to keep more water in New Mexico's streams and rivers for two purposes: to support interstate stream compact compliance and for the benefit of endangered species, including the listing of new species. We successfully advocated for a \$7.5 million appropriation for the reserve in the 2023 session. Now, we hope to expand the reserve's mission to include recreational flows, providing more flexibility to find multi-benefit solutions to our water challenges, and to establish a permanent fund that will make it easier for the ISC to retain appropriations from year to

year. Water rights transactions are complicated and take a long time to complete, so it is imperative that funds be available when they're needed.

We will also continue our budget advocacy efforts, working to ensure that our water agencies have the resources they need and moving forward solutions to some of our toughest water challenges with broad support. Two high priorities will be full funding for the **Water Data Initiative** and the **Aquifer Mapping Program**, which can help give us the data to make informed decisions around our most precious resource.

Finally, legislation is expected to be pre-filed to reform the **State Game Commission** and compel modernization of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) in alignment with conservation values. Following the passage and subsequent pocket veto by the governor of a similar bill in 2023, New Mexico Wild and partners have collaborated extensively with NMDGF Director Michael Sloane, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's staff and state legislators to revitalize the effort. House Energy, Environment & Natural Resources Committee Chairman Matthew McQueen plans to evaluate the concerns of stakeholders who oppose the reforms, with legislation language being finalized ahead of the 2025 session. ▲

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

OUR JOURNEY TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE BEGINS WITH THE PUBLIC LANDS RULE.



The Bureau of Land Management's new Public Lands Rule provides the agency with the tools needed to ensure our public lands will be enjoyed for generations to come. The Rule prioritizes the health of public lands and places conservation on equal footing with extractive uses of the land.

THANK YOU to the Biden Administration and Bureau of Land Management for adopting the Public Lands Rule, to New Mexico's Members of Congress and local elected leaders who supported the Rule, and to the many New Mexico Wild members who submitted public comments in favor of the Rule.

A CONVERSATION WITH NEW MEXICO WILD BOARD MEMBER **ERNIE ATENCIO**



Above: Ernie presents New Mexico Wild's inaugural Esther Garcia Conservation Champion Award to fellow Norteño John Olivas in 2023.

Left: Ernie Atencio in 1988 at Mesa Verde National Park, where he was then working as a ranger.

Editor's Note: After nine years of service on New Mexico Wild's board of directors, Ernie stepped down this summer. He is the Southwest Regional Director for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), covering 64 park units in the Four Corners states. This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Mark Allison: Hi Ernie, thanks for making time and great to see you. How did you get into conservation? You've been doing this work for a long time in various ways. What drew you to it originally?

Ernie Atencio: I'm not sure if you've heard this story, but it all goes back to what we participants called a "Hoods in the Woods" Outward Bound trip when I was 18 years old, right out of high school. I got the one scholarship at my inner-city high school for a 23-day Wilderness course in the Sangre de Cristos in Colorado, near the sand dunes. It just blew my mind and opened up a whole new world I didn't even know much about. I had some yearnings about being out there but didn't have a clue how to do it. It started there. I fell in love with wild places and saw the incredible power of places like that. Little by little, I ended up working for Outward Bound for a while, leading trips, then as a park ranger for many years. My roots are here in Northern New Mexico, for many centuries. I had an epiphany during graduate school—while doing fieldwork on the other side of the planet—about coming back to Northern New Mexico. The irrigation system where I was working on the Tibetan Plateau is a perfect parallel to the acequia system here in Northern New Mexico and it transported me back to Dixon as a young kid. I later learned that it may have originated there and made its way across to Northern Africa, Spain and then here, just a few miles north of where I live. Within about a year after grad school, I had a job offer to work for Amigos Bravos, which brought

me back to Northern New Mexico. I worked for Amigos Bravos for a few years, did some contract work and publications for the Quivira Coalition and was on the board of Quivira for many years. I was also involved with the Northern New Mexico chapter of the Sierra Club and was the executive director of the Taos Land Trust for many years. There has been so much I've had the opportunity to do with NPCA across the Southwest, especially the Chaco withdrawal. It's only for 20 years from now, but I think we'll get that legislation passed for permanent protection, or if we haven't broken our petroleum addiction by then, it's just going to be too late.

MA: You served on the board of New Mexico Wild for nine years. Being on a board of directors is a volunteer position, in addition to everything else you have going on. Can you say a bit about why you devoted the time and energy to be on the board of New Mexico Wild? What has it meant to you personally?

EA: As I've told you before, I'm particular about the organizations I support. I really appreciated the approach New Mexico Wild has been taking, especially under your leadership, Mark—being more open to listening to community voices and different ideas about what conservation means in Northern New Mexico. I was really proud to participate and be part of that. I didn't realize how much the organization has grown in those nine years. It's great to see, and it's just from doing good work. I think New Mexico Wild has really become a leader and a shining example of how to do this work in New Mexico. I'm proud to have been part of that.

MA: What would you say to people thinking about serving on a board of directors, either New Mexico Wild's board or any conservation board?

What guidance might you have for future board members about their role and responsibility?

EA: That's a good question. This staff is on a good path—you're doing great work, and the organization's growth shows that. I think board service is an opportunity to work quietly behind the scenes to slowly push for this kind of cultural change, to provide oversight and general guidance, but don't get in the way of the executive director and the staff if they are on a good path. The board needs to be a step removed from the day-to-day and let you and the staff take care of that. Most board members are good about that, but I know that the tendency to micromanage can complicate things.

MA: That's a great distinction and an important point. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate your time this morning and thoughtfulness, as always. But also, I appreciate your years of service—not just with New Mexico Wild, but for lands, waters and wildlife in New Mexico. Beyond just being present on the board, I've always appreciated being able to call on you for guidance and advice and the way you model how to do this work. I've always looked up to that.

EA: That's great to hear. Honestly, it's been a totally unexpected blast. I never imagined myself in this work—I didn't even understand it. When I was in my late teens, early 20s, I'd heard about the Sierra Club and other organizations, but I didn't even know how to join an organization like that. I was a slow starter. But it's been a great adventure.



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



HELP PROTECT THE MEXICAN GRAY WOLF THROUGH ART!

New Mexico Wild invites artists of all ages and skill levels to submit original artwork for our 2025 Mexican Gray Wolf Conservation Stamp Contest. We welcome all two-dimensional drawings, paintings, and photographs featuring the Mexican gray wolf. No generative AI artwork will be accepted. The winning piece will be featured on the 2025 Mexican Wolf Conservation Stamp. Proceeds from stamp sales will directly support Mexican gray wolf conservation and education programs.

Grand Prize: \$250

Submit your art by February 28, 2025

For complete rules and to enter, visit nmwild.org/WolfStamp

*Your creativity can make a difference
in wolf conservation!*



Wandering Wolf Demonstrates Need For New Approach to Wildlife Stewardship

BY SALLY PAEZ

The travels of a Mexican wolf named Asha have captured the imagination of wildlife lovers across the Land of Enchantment. Over the last couple of years, Asha has twice ventured north of Interstate 40, which marks the boundary of the population area established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for these critically endangered animals.

Unfortunately, Asha's intrepid forays came to an abrupt halt when FWS caught her and placed her in captivity with male wolves, with the hope that she would mate. Ultimately, Asha did mate with one of her co-captives in the spring of 2024, but for unknown reasons, the pairing did not result in pups. FWS decided not to release Asha or her mate into the wild this year because they did not successfully produce pups.

The decision to keep Asha and her mate in captivity not only deprives these wolves of freedom, it also deprives wildlife managers and advocates of a unique opportunity to learn from an experienced wild wolf. Asha has demonstrated the ability to safely negotiate wildlife corridors, cross busy highways and avoid conflicts with humans and livestock. She found her way to Valles Caldera National Preserve, which has excellent wolf habitat and abundant prey.

It is time for wildlife managers to adopt a modern approach to wildlife stewardship. Outdated and unscientific management, like the arbitrary I-40 boundary, is the result of political pressure. Mexican wolves cannot recover unless FWS follows the science and supports the natural dispersal of Mexican wolves into suitable landscapes, such as Valles Caldera. The wild lands of New Mexico are incomplete without the howl of wild wolves. ▲▲



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KEEP BIG BEND WILD!

BY BOB KRUMENAKER

Visiting Big Bend National Park provides a powerful and rare opportunity to experience vast wild lands and almost unlimited vistas. Hikers can venture for days without encountering the sights or sounds of modern civilization. Even though most of us enjoy Big Bend without leaving the roads or trails, the knowledge that these undeveloped wild lands are protected is one reason we love Texas's oldest and largest national park.

The good news is that National Park Service (NPS) policy commits to protecting Big Bend's Wilderness-eligible lands in their undeveloped state forever.

In 1978, the NPS formally recommended that about two-thirds of the park be designated as federal Wilderness. In 2023, the NPS found that an additional 63,500 acres were eligible for Wilderness designation. But an act of Congress is required to make a Wilderness designation permanent, as agency policy and commitment can change. Without legislation, there's no guarantee future park managers or political leaders won't act on a different view.

AN ACT OF CONGRESS IS REQUIRED TO MAKE A WILDERNESS DESIGNATION PERMANENT, AS AGENCY POLICY... CAN CHANGE.

Formal designation as Wilderness has many advantages. Foremost is assuring that future management will continue to protect the Wilderness experience so that our grandchildren can enjoy the park as we do.

A Wilderness designation will also permanently protect dark skies, iconic Chihuahuan Desert habitat and wide-open spaces beloved by park visitors.

We can fulfill the vision of previous generations at Big Bend National Park. A loosely organized Keep Big Bend Wild (KBBW) citizens group is working closely with park leadership to raise the visibility of this issue. KBBW is building community support that will make it more likely our political leadership will introduce a bill in the next Congress.

How can you help? Engage the people you know! The goal is to show that a broad spectrum of people and businesses believes protecting the wild lands of Big Bend forever is in the public interest. New Mexico Wild has been a supporter from the beginning. Please let us list you as a supporter, too—especially if you live in Texas.

You can comment or ask questions on the KBBW website (www.keepbigbendwild.org) or contact me at bob.krumenaker@keepbigbendwild.org or the NPS at BIBE_webmaster@nps.gov. KBBW members are happy to talk with anyone and meet with groups across Texas and beyond to discuss making Wilderness designation at Big Bend a reality. ▲▲

Bob Krumenaker retired as superintendent of Big Bend National Park in 2023 and is now a member of KBBW, living in Carlsbad.

Thank You Stone Age!

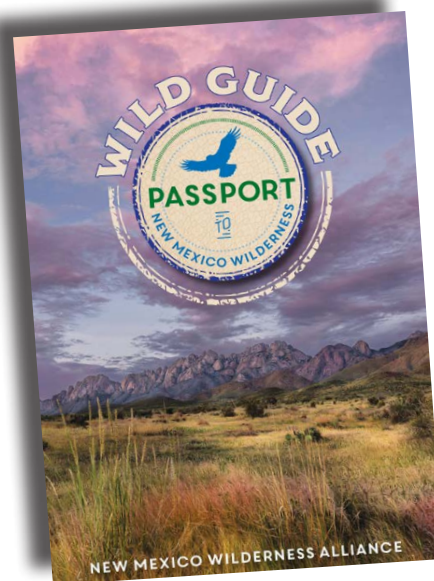
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This comprehensive guide to New Mexico's protected wildlands is the only book that features each of the state's designated Wilderness areas and Wilderness Study Areas as well as other treasures, such as the new Rio Grande del Norte National Monument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

Stephanie Garcia Richard, continued from page 11.

that has a monetary value that's being wasted. So, we wanted to attach some monetary value to it and be able to either charge for it or have it be captured so that it's not emitted. The third example is that, at the behest of advocates who came to us, we put forth what's called a setback rule that no new oil and gas wells could be developed within a mile of any school, childcare or other type of educational facility.

MA: That's a significant setback.

SGR: The State Land Office can lead the way. The person who sits in this chair has a lot of leverage for leadership and showing how things can be done.

MA: I'm curious about the State Land Office's relationship with sovereign Tribes and Pueblos. For many levels of government, there's a formal consultation process. Can you describe what that relationship looks like?

SGR: Absolutely. This administration comes to the table with the premise that the land we manage is stolen ancestral land of New Mexico's Tribes and nations. And not just New Mexico. Those state boundaries don't mean a lot when it comes to peo-



Commissioner Garcia Richard signs an executive order to ban new oil and gas leasing on state lands within one mile of schools and other educational facilities. State Land Office staff photo

to help advocate to have it moved. We really use our weight to make sure that Tribal voice is always considered in every decision. We're also one of the first state land offices in the country to require archeological surveys of cultural sites before any spade of dirt is moved on state land.

MA: I'd like to hear from you about renewable energy development. We talked about your charter

are not tied in lease agreements like they are with oil and gas. Remember that oil and gas leases are set in statute. Renewable energy leases are not. So, there are provisions that go into a renewable energy lease, like "You've got to use best management practices around bird habitats that have been vetted by the federal government in your design and development plans." We can put that kind of term into a renewable energy lease where we can't in an oil and gas lease. We've got a whole clause that has to do with remediation and bonding of the project for when it's deconstructed and taken down and decommissioned. All of those pieces that protect wildlife and protect the resource can be built into the lease itself and become contractual terms.

MA: I can see that as a powerful tool. New Mexico Wild is thinking about how we might help counties that are considering transmission lines with community benefit agreements, especially rural counties and Tribes and Pueblos, which might negotiate and partner with industry so that it's a benefit for them as well.

SGR: We would love to help with that in any way we can. We agree that these communities that play host to this infrastructure absolutely should have either quality-of-life benefit or monetary benefit.



"We really use our weight to make sure that Tribal voice is always considered in every decision. We're also one of the first state land offices in the country to require archeological surveys of cultural sites before any spade of dirt is moved on state land."

ple who have lived here since time immemorial. We are managing land that is ancestral, that is sacred to our Tribes and Pueblos and nations. We feel as though we should be in partnership on land management. We feel like we should do everything we can to repatriate that land back. My hands are tied in terms of giving all the land back—we need to work within the confines of the statutes—but we are able to repatriate through Tribal exchanges. Two Tribes have gotten ancestral land back so far, and we're working on a third. We have implemented Tribal consultation into every area of decision making that we do here at the Land Office. And I can give some real-world examples about how that has played out. The large SunZia transmission line was set to go right through a site that was important to some Tribes, and we were able

and generating revenue for beneficiaries. SunZia is a good example of the tremendous economic development potential for energy generation siting and transmission, including on state trust lands, and for combating climate change. But it also has a potential for adversely impacting cultural and ecological resources. I wonder how you are thinking about that and of that balance that you've spoken of between conservation values and energy development. What are your thoughts about how you approach those projects?

SGR: Renewable energy, for all of the great things that it brings us—we can lessen our reliance on fossil fuels, and it's a renewable resource that we don't have to worry about being finite—it still has an impact on the land and has an impact on the resource. So that's the first step in determining what's going to move forward and what's not going to move forward, and where. We've spent a long time and lots of resources, and we have specialists here at the Land Office, like a wildlife biologist who works on state land. We have a rangeland ecologist who works here. We have experts in forestry who work here. They all play a part in designing the policy under which any land impact occurs, including renewable energy. The nice thing about renewable energy is that our hands

READ THE FULL INTERVIEW ON OUR WEBSITE.



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

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LET'S GET SOCIAL! SCAN ME [Instagram, Twitter, Facebook icons]



New Mexico Wild joins the America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge, a national initiative to protect 8 million acres of wetlands and restore 100,000 miles of rivers and streams by 2030. This effort addresses New Mexico's water challenges, from drought to flooding, ensuring long-term resource preservation. We're excited to collaborate on innovative solutions for our state's vital waters. Stay tuned for updates on our efforts and ways you can support this crucial work to protect New Mexico's waters!

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"...what do you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

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 A MAJOR FOCUS OF MY PRECIOUS LIFE IS TO EXPLORE, ENJOY, AND
 PROTECT WILD PLACES AND ALL THEIR INHABITANTS.
 LEAVING BEHIND A LEGACY GIFT FOR NEW MEXICO WILD
 IS A WAY OF KNOWING MY EFFORTS WILL CARRY ON
 AFTER I'M GONE, FOR NATURE AND ALL OF US WHO LOVE HER.
 —WENDY M. BROWN, NEW MEXICO WILD BOARD CHAIR



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.

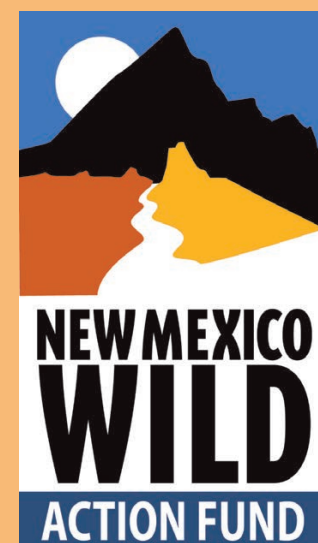
The Legacy Fund is ideal for unrestricted gifts because the future needs of the organization may change, and unrestricted gifts offer the greatest flexibility. However, restricted gifts for a specific purpose may also be accepted for the Fund with approval from the New Mexico Wild Executive Director.

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 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.



GET OUT!

New Mexico Wild
Online Hiking Guide Featured Area
hike.nmwild.org

NORTH SECO CREEK

Aldo Leopold Wilderness

TRAIL INFO

Trailhead: 33.1243° N 107.728° W

Length: 10.6 miles round trip

Trail Type: Out and back

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

Route Type: Day Hike

Water: Year-round water - Water sources can be found year round along trail or in general area. Recommended to bring water purification tools if planning on replenishing supply along the way.

Solitude: Lightly Used

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

USGS 7.5" Topographic maps: Victorio Park-33107-A7, Apache Peak-33107-A6

Low and High Elevations: 6,391 and 7,009 feet above sea level

DESCRIPTION

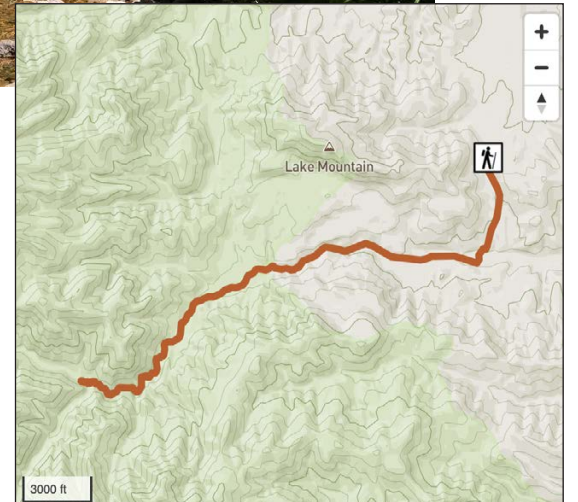
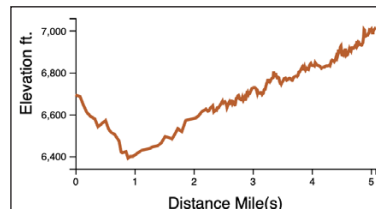
Hike south down the closed section of Forest Road 157. At around 1 mile you will reach Davis Well. Head west (right) and follow old Forest Road 893 through the piñon, juniper and the occasional stand of mature ponderosas. The creek is usually dry here except in the spring or after a good monsoon season. There are no blazes and the road will at times become a single track. There are also livestock/wildlife trails to confuse things in these lower few miles as well. It's really no problem, though, because you will just be sticking pretty close to the creek the entire way. The canyon narrows after about a mile and the creek, shaded over by cottonwoods and huge alders, comes to life, trickling through the boulders and over the gravel bed. Box elders, oaks, sumac, and a few walnut trees provide color in October. At a second windmill (Sawmill Well) is the beginning FT 110. Soon, several low posts mark the wilderness boundary right around 3 miles from the start. The trail crosses the stream and soon heads up onto a bench above the creek on the south side. Stick with the trail for as long as you can because the downfall along the creek itself will slow things down through this section. Further on, you may catch a glimpse of Falls Gulch to the northwest, in the springtime it will have several waterfalls you can investigate. Closer to the box you will begin crossing the creek numerous times with most of the crossings obscured by the thick growth of alders along the banks. In the box itself, about a mile from the wilderness boundary, fragments of the trail are to be found in the few places where there is room for more than the willows and the stream. You will be wading (the water will be at least knee deep and potentially much higher at times) and gently pushing through the branches, unless you want to deal with going high on the treacherous hillsides, which I don't recommend. After a half mile in the box you will come to the mouth of Long Canyon, where the canyon opens up into an uninviting burnt over section. This would be the logical turnaround for a day hike.

GETTING THERE

From the south I -25 to Exit 83, proceed north on NM 52 (181) towards Cuchillo/Winston and be sure to turn left at around 2.4 miles to stay on 52. Drive approximately 29 miles to Winston. Turn left at the store and drive .5 miles through town. At the stop sign turn left. In another .5 miles turn left off of the paved road onto gravel FR 157. At around 5.5 miles from the turn, go left to stay on FR 157. Stay on FR 157



North Seco Creek in the Aldo Leopold Wilderness.
Photo by Devon Fletcher



for approximately 18.5 miles to where it dead-ends at a locked gate. The last 2.5-3.0 miles of this road past Hermosa are not maintained and require high clearance and when wet, four wheel drive.

ECOSYSTEMS

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

Chihuahuan Desert Scrub - Some of the dominant plant species in Chihuahuan Desert Scrub in our region include the ever-present creosote bush, tarbush, viscid acacia, little-leaf sumac, ocotillo, and various grass species.

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

Oak: The main type of Oak that occurs most commonly in New Mexico is the Emory oak, mainly common in the southern reaches of the state. Emory oak is a 30-60 ft. oak with a round crown, very roughly furrowed black bark and nearly evergreen leaves.

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

Cottonwood - A deciduous poplar of the willow family with broad, flattened, open crown of large, widely spreading branches & trunk diameter of 2 to 5 feet, known for their yellow leaves during the fall season, and are frequent along the Rio Grande.

ABOUT THE ALDO LEOPOLD WILDERNESS

One of the largest Wilderness areas in New Mexico, the Aldo Leopold is seldom visited and relatively little known, compared to its neighbor, the Gila. Centered on the extremely rugged Black Range, the Aldo Leopold has few developed trails and is mostly visited by hunters. Due to the challenging terrain, this is a backpacker's Wilderness. ▲▲



WILDERNESS FAQs



WHAT IS A WILDERNESS AREA?

The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as “an area where the earth and community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” and “an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.” There are currently 765 designated Wilderness areas, totaling 109,129,657 acres, or about 4.5 percent of the area of the United States.



WHAT QUALIFIES A PLACE TO BECOME WILDERNESS?

The following conditions must generally be present for an area to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System:

1. the land is under federal ownership and management, 2. the area consists of at least 5,000 acres of land, 3. human influence is “substantially unnoticeable,” 4. there are opportunities for solitude and recreation, and 5. the area possesses “ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”



WHO DECIDES WHAT PLACES ARE WILDERNESS?

Designated Wilderness is the highest level of conservation protection for federal lands. Only Congress may designate Wilderness or change the status of Wilderness areas. Wilderness areas are designated within existing federal public land. Congress has directed four federal land management agencies—the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service—to manage Wilderness areas to preserve and, where possible, to enhance their Wilderness character.



HOW MUCH WILDERNESS EXISTS IN NEW MEXICO?

Approximately 1,972,507 acres are protected as Wilderness in the state. Though this seems like a lot, New Mexico actually ranks next to last among Western states in the percentage of its land designated as Wilderness, at roughly 2.5 percent. On average, Western states (not including Alaska) have 5 percent of their land designated as Wilderness.



WHERE WAS THE FIRST WILDERNESS AREA ESTABLISHED?

The Gila Wilderness in southwestern New Mexico was the world’s first designated Wilderness area, created on June 3, 1924. It’s ironic that the state where Wilderness got its start now is lagging behind in total acres of Wilderness created.



WHY IS WILDERNESS IMPORTANT?

Through the Wilderness Act, Congress recognized the intrinsic value of wildlands. Some of the tangible and intangible values mentioned in the Wilderness Act include “solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of

recreation,” as well as “ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.” Wilderness areas provide habitat for wildlife and plants, including endangered and threatened species.



CAN I HUNT AND FISH IN A WILDERNESS AREA?

Hunting and fishing are allowed in Wilderness areas, subject to applicable state and federal laws.



IS GRAZING ALLOWED IN WILDERNESS?

Livestock grazing is permitted where it occurred prior to an area’s designation as Wilderness. On rare occasions, Congress prohibits grazing in Wilderness at the time of designation.



CAN I DRIVE IN A WILDERNESS AREA?

The Wilderness Act generally prohibits the use of motor vehicles in Wilderness. The law contains special provisions for motor vehicle use when required in emergencies or as necessary for the administration of the area. Motor vehicles may also be permitted for special uses such as to access a private inholding, to support grazing or to exercise valid existing rights.



CAN I BIKE IN A WILDERNESS AREA?

The 1964 Wilderness Act prohibits motorized or mechanized forms of recreation, and this includes bicycles. Instead, visitors are required to walk or ride horseback.



HOW DOES WILDERNESS HELP WILDLIFE?

Habitat fragmentation caused by roads, power lines, fences, dams and other structures seriously affects the ability of animals to move through their ranges. The roadless quality of Wilderness preserves large tracts of habitat needed for healthy populations of animals that need space to roam, like large predators, migratory species, and herd animals.



DOES A WILDERNESS AREA INCREASE THE RISK OF FIRE?

Wilderness areas are to be primarily affected by the forces of nature, though the Wilderness Act does acknowledge the need to provide for human health and safety, protect private property, control insect infestations and fight fires within the area. Wilderness areas are managed under the direction of the Wilderness Act, subsequent legislation (such as the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act), and agency policy.



I LIVE IN THE CITY... WHY DOES WILDERNESS MATTER?

Wilderness protects open space, watersheds, natural soundscapes, diverse ecosystems and biodiversity. The literature of Wilderness experience frequently cites the inspirational and spiritual values of Wilderness, including opportunities to reflect on the community of life and the human place on Earth. Most Wildernesses are also carbon sinks that help combat climate change. Wilderness provides a sense of wildness, which can be valuable to people whether or not those individuals actually visit Wilderness. Just knowing that Wilderness exists can produce a sense of curiosity, inspiration, renewal and hope.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT WILDERNESS?

Join New Mexico Wild! We are your most complete resource for information about wildlands and Wilderness areas in the state. As a member you’ll get our newsletters, Dispatch emails, action alerts and notices about hikes, service projects and special events. You can help us Keep it Wild! Join on our website at www.nmwild.org or use the convenient mail-in form on page 23.

*Celebrating the 60th Anniversary
of The Wilderness Act*

WELCOME NEW STAFF!

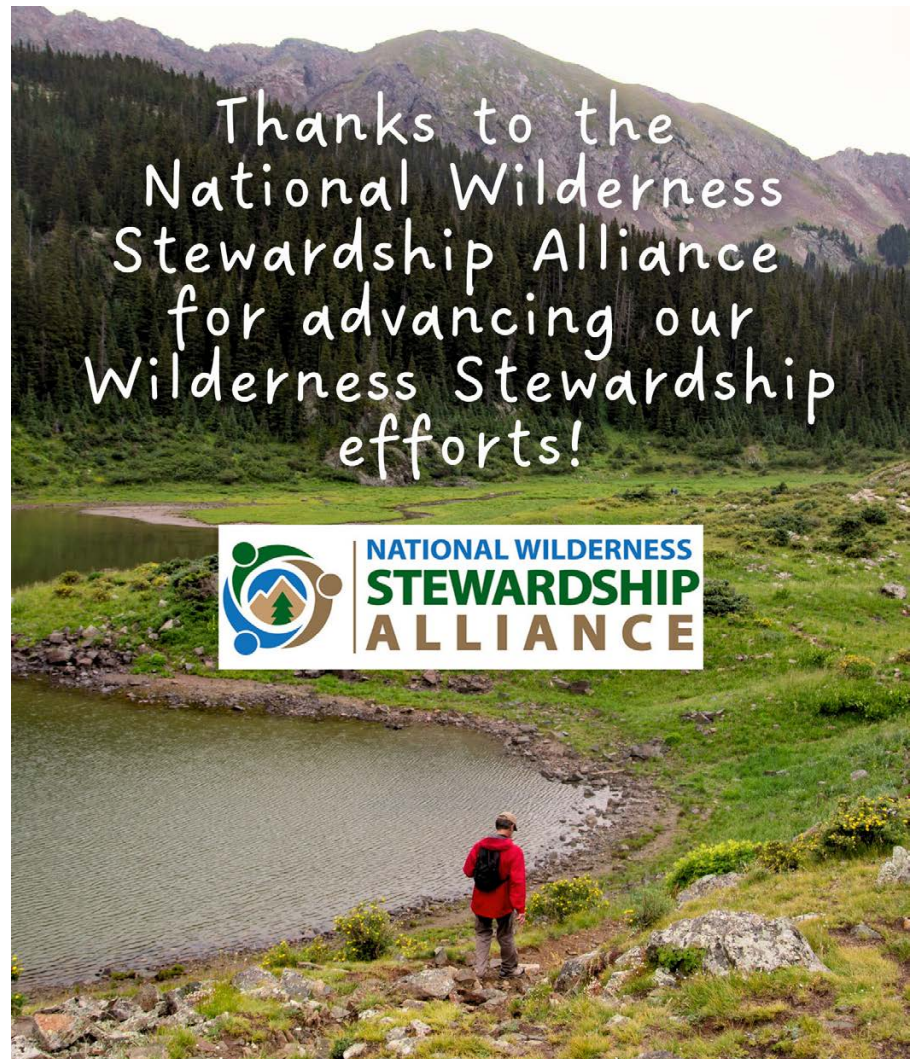
Keila Gutiérrez | Stewardship and Outreach Manager

Growing up in the southern Argentinian Andes surrounded by a family of scientists and mountaineers, Keila has always had a deep sense of wonder for the ecology of the temperate rainforest and steppe landscapes around her hometown. After immigrating to New Mexico when she was eight, she came to fall just as in love with the diverse lands and wildlife around this second home. She obtained her bachelor's degree in biology with a minor in sustainability studies from the University of New Mexico. After working in field ecology, museum research collections and molecular biology labs, she spent several years as an ecologist and educator with the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program, contributing to data collection, outdoor education and outreach efforts across the Middle Rio Grande Valley and surrounding communities. Keila is responsible for managing our Wilderness Ranger program and coordinating community outreach.



Dillon Zehnder | Community Science Coordinator

After spending last season with us as a Wilderness Ranger, Dillon is thrilled to take over as the Community Science Coordinator, managing the ongoing citizen science project taking place on the Rio Chama. Dillon grew up in Culver City, California, and has been fascinated by the natural world from a young age. He earned a bachelor's degree in ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz and is proud to use the knowledge from his education as part of the New Mexico Wild team. He is thrilled to take over as the Rio Chama Bug Coordinator.



THE ALDO LEOPOLD CIRCLE
SUPPORTING NEW MEXICO WILD

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

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

[For more information: nmwild.org/aldo-leopold-circle/](https://nmwild.org/aldo-leopold-circle/)

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

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\$25 (Student/Senior)

\$35

\$50

\$100

Other amount \$ _____

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NEW MEXICO WILD

Other payment options:

1) Enclose your check payable to: New Mexico Wild

2) Donate online at nmwild.org/donate



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

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



New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
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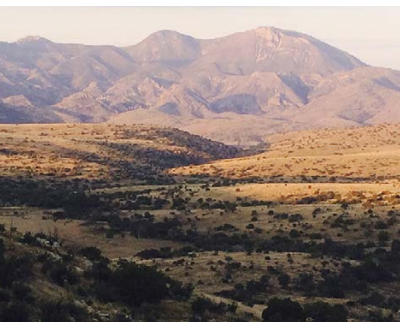
An Exclusive Interview With Stephanie Garcia Richard,
State Land Commissioner

Stewardship Through Community and Conservation

A Conversation With New Mexico Wild Board Member
Ernie Atencio

Wandering Wolf Demonstrates Need For New Approach
to Wildlife Stewardship

Friends of Rio Grande del Norte Steward Youth and Landscape



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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