



Spring/Summer 2026
The Semiannual Publication
of the New Mexico
Wilderness Alliance

NEW MEXICO WILD!

**HISTORIC WINS
FOR WATER IN
NEW MEXICO
LEGISLATIVE
SESSION**



New Mexico WILD!

The Semiannual Publication of the
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

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ON THE COVER

This stunning image of the Middle Fork Gila River by Jay Hemphill is the cover image of New Mexico Wild's new book, *Wild Waters: Passport to New Mexico's Rivers*.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Mark Allison

LET'S NOT FORGET TO CELEBRATE WHEN WE CAN



Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. I hope your time reading this will be a brief respite of sorts from the seemingly never-ending stream of chaos and divisiveness in our media feeds. Whatever your political stripe, there is much we can agree on when it comes to the value of protecting New Mexico's public lands, waters and wildlife.

And despite the turmoil, the loss and the grief we all seem to be experiencing, I remain grateful for what we have and ever hopeful (determined and confident) that we can make a difference when we come together. In the spirit of gratitude, the following pages offer you details about:

- Our role in helping secure historic investments in New Mexico's waters at the 2026 state legislative session
- The upcoming sixth year of our seasonal Rio Chama citizen science program that enlists recreational boaters to help collect samples to measure water quality. (Anecdote from a dad and his 8-year-old daughter from last season: Dad: "Come back to the fire sweetheart so you can get another s'more." Daughter: "No dad, it's time to do science!!")
- Our latest publication, "Wild Waters: Passport to New Mexico's Rivers," highlighting 42 of our most spectacular river segments and why they deserve protecting
- Another season of wilderness rangers roaming the state to provide essential stewardship services: clearing trails, removing invasive species, installing signs and conducting post fire assessment and recovery work
- Our new website at www.nmwild.org — check it out and let us know what you think
- An important milestone of the Native Land Institute
- Results of our latest annual wolf stamp art contest, where we received hundreds of stellar submissions, including 44 from students
- Ongoing sold out screenings throughout the state (and beyond) of "Journey Down the Gila," a story of tragedy and the resilience of families, community and the wild Gila River

Yes, it falls to all of us at this moment in history to defend our wilderness, waters and wildlife; to save what we can before it is lost; and to minimize the harm when we can't. We are clear-eyed and resolute. And we know the vast majority of the public stands with us and against attempts to privatize public lands or despoil our most culturally important and ecologically sensitive places.

The hard-won mineral withdrawals that prevent new oil and gas development and mining in the Pecos Watershed, Buffalo Tract and Greater Chaco areas are being abolished. To the extent the Trump administration will allow any public involvement before finalizing these moves, it will undoubtedly be short — stay in touch to see how you can help.

We are expecting official notice of the Roadless Rule rollback, eliminating protections for 1.6 million acres of wilderness quality forest lands in New Mexico. Keep an eye out for action alerts for town halls, hearings and field trips we're organizing around the state to provide you an opportunity to make your voice heard.



And in case anyone was confused about how this administration views public lands, former U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce has been selected as director of the Bureau of Land Management to oversee nearly 250 million acres of your public lands. In addition to his blatant conflicts of interest (he decided not even to divest himself of his oil and gas services company while serving), his tenure in Congress was marked by his opposition to creating the beloved Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in Doña Ana County and by his advocacy for selling off our public lands. Pearce has a remarkable biography, and I honor his contributions to our country serving in the Air Force and as an elected official. His positions on public lands, however, should have been disqualifying.



Okay, with apologies for that digression, back to gratitude. These following pages also include:

- The next chapter of a remarkable story of community, unity and resilience in the continuing effort to permanently protect the Caja del Rio
- Persistence and possibility protecting New Mexico's last free flowing river — we won't quit until it's done
- Your humbling support for our ambitious goals to increase our outreach and engagement capacity, build our base of support, involve more youth and grow our volunteer opportunities
- The New Mexico Wild Action Fund, in partnership with Semilla Action Fund, recruiting and supporting over 20 candidates in 10 counties throughout New Mexico to cultivate new leaders, raise up new voices and ensure that conservation values are represented, particularly at the increasingly important county commission level

More work ahead? You bet. Lots.

We will continue to do everything we can to delay, mitigate and stop the relentless onslaught of attacks on our natural world. And we'll continue to press forward to be best positioned to seize the next political opportunity when it arises. We are creating the vision. Laying the groundwork. Building the support.

But let's not forget to celebrate when we can. Let's be kind to each other. And to ourselves.

I'm grateful to have the privilege and opportunity to be in this position where I am engaged, in the fight and able to work for and with all of you.

And finally, when all else fails: "Everybody has to believe in something. I believe I'll go canoeing."

With gratitude, Mark



Left: Deb Spickermann, Board Member. Staff photo

Top: Executive Director Mark Allison and Deputy Director Tisha Broska. Staff photo

Above: Executive Director Mark Allison and public lands advocate. Staff photo

ALBUQUERQUE MAIN OFFICE

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

Tisha Broska, Deputy Director

Akashia Allen, Conservation GIS Specialist

Shelby Bazan, Wyss Fellow Conservation Organizer

Nell Decker, Communications Specialist

Bjorn Fredrickson, Conservation Director

Mollie Fullerton, Grants Manager

Julian Gonzales, Northern New Mexico Grassroots Organizer

Keila Gutiérrez, Wilderness Stewardship & Outreach Manager

Luke Koenig, Gila Grassroots Organizer

Aidan Manning, Rivers & Waters Program Associate

Sally Paez, Staff Attorney

Amber Price, Administrative Assistant

Kerry Renshaw, Administrative Assistant

Terry Richey, Fundraising & Marketing Advisor

Tricia Snyder, Rivers & Waters Program Director

Suzanne Soto, Finance Manager

Shaya Torres, Communications Manager

Janice Varela, Traditional Communities Organizer

Garrett VeneKlasen, Northern Conservation Director

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Evan Hobbes

Nico Lis

Kat McCarver

Vicente Ordoñez

Victor Perez

New Mexico Wild is adding 11 additional ranger positions in 2026.

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NEWSLETTER STAFF

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Amber Price, Production Assistant

Tania Soussan, Editor

WILDERNESS DISPATCHES

Updates on New Mexico Wild Projects Across the State

THE CAJA DEL RIO HAS VALUE AND MUST BE PROTECTED

BY PHILLIP QUINTANA AND CHRISTOPHER A. MOQUINO

Original Article: <https://itl.ink/78087400>

Across this country, far too many important landscapes are treated as if their highest value is what can be built on them. Here in New Mexico, we understand that wide-open spaces have a purpose in and of themselves.

When we forget that, places like the Caja del Rio can be reduced to vacant land on a planning map instead of being protected as the living landscapes they are.

The Caja del Rio is a unique place, cultural crossroads, wildlife corridor, historic landscape and part of our ancestral Pueblo homelands that continue to shape who we are.

For the Pueblos of Cochiti and San Ildefonso, the Caja is part of a larger story of connection. It is tied to our history and our movement across the region and across time. It reminds us of our duty to care for this land. What we protect now helps ensure future generations know this place not as a memory but as their living inheritance.

This is why the conversation about the Caja del Rio must be clear. This is not simply a question of whether land can be developed. It is a question of whether we will recognize a landscape's full value before it is reduced to what can be extracted, subdivided and built.

The Caja also belongs to New Mexico's public identity. It sits between Cochiti Pueblo and San Ildefonso Pueblo and between Los Alamos and Santa Fe, close enough to be loved by many and vulnerable to overuse. Local families, hikers, hunters and ranchers know what places like this mean. They are not blank spots on a map. They are places where people work, play, retreat, remember, pray and where children go to learn.

Across the Caja, petroglyphs hold the living history of the land. Trails atop the escarpment reveal centuries of travel and exchange between Indigenous communities.

Wildlife moves through the region as part of a broader corridor linking ecosystems across northern New Mexico. Taken together, these features



The Caja del Rio Plateau west of Santa Fe, with Tetilla Peak on the horizon. Photo by Sara Bergthold

make the Caja one of the most significant intact cultural and natural landscapes in our state.

And yet illegal dumping, vandalism, reckless off-road vehicle use and increasing pressure to develop are steadily degrading this land. Once new infrastructure goes in, the pattern is familiar: more roads, more fragmented ecosystems and the loss of the very character that made this place worth protecting.

As governors of our respective Pueblos, we are proud to support the permanent protection of the Caja del Rio and will continue to work with Sen. Martin Heinrich and the rest of the delegation to move this effort forward.

We support this work not only because this region is part of our ancestral homelands, but because protecting the Caja serves the broader public good. Permanent protection can help preserve cultural resources, wildlife habitat, working landscapes and public access.

We also want to be clear that tribal leadership is not and should never be an afterthought. Pueblo communities have stewarded these lands across generations. We are not entering this conversation late. We have always been here.

Part of what makes the Caja del Rio so important is not only what is there, but what is not. It is not a sprawling suburb or a six-lane highway corridor. It has not been broken into fragments that erase its inherent value and meaning. In a place like the Caja, that absence is not emptiness. It is integrity.

To our neighbors across Santa Fe County and Northern New Mexico, join us in supporting legislation to permanently protect the Caja del Rio. Wide-open spaces have a purpose in and of themselves. The Caja del Rio does not need to be consumed to be useful or divided to be valuable. The question before us is whether we will protect what it already is.

Phillip Quintana serves as governor of the Pueblo de Cochiti and Christopher A. Moquino serves as governor of the Pueblo de San Ildefonso.

**The All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) announced its endorsement of federal legislation to permanently protect the Caja del Rio on March 27.*

The federal legislation is being drafted by Sen. Martin Heinrich and is intended to conserve and permanently protect the region's cultural, ecological, and spiritual values.

"The Pueblos are working with our neighbors in the Hispano and land grant communities because we all agree the Caja needs to be protected. The proposed legislation represents a significant step toward ensuring the long-term protection of the Caja del Rio while honoring its deep cultural and historical significance to Indigenous and local communities." APCG Chairman, Joey Sanchez

New Mexico Wild greatly appreciates the leadership of the Pueblos and will continue to support them and the coalition of community stakeholders towards the permanent protection of the Caja del Rio Plateau. ▲▲

PECOS WATERSHED FACES AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE DESPITE COMMUNITY EFFORTS

STAFF ARTICLE

United States Forest Service leaders traveled from Washington D.C. to Pecos in the last days of 2025 to sit down with a broad range of community stakeholders who would be adversely affected by the proposed Comexico, LLC hard rock mine in the upper Pecos watershed.

New Mexico Wild helped organize and host the convening, where Acting Associate Chief Christopher French and Deputy Regional Forester Kristin Bail heard from local leaders how a hard rock mine would dev-



The Pecos River. Photo by Jim O'Donnell

astate the cultural and environmental integrity of the Pecos Watershed and the negative impacts to area businesses and the outdoor economy.

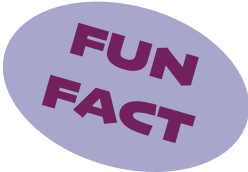
During a lunch meeting, we also educated the Forest Service officials on what has been done on a local and state level to impede Comexico from moving forward on its exploratory process. There was much discussion about how outrageous it was that the process towards a 20-year administrative mineral withdrawal—which would have protected this sensitive watershed—is being reversed by the Trump administration, even though the community remains steadfastly opposed to the rollback.

Now more than ever, our coalition will do whatever we can to advance the proposed Pecos Watershed Protection Act through the congressional process.

Editor's note: The Bureau of Land Management published the cancellation of the Pecos mineral segregation in the Federal Register on April 6. This removes a 2024 order by the Department of Interior that could have led to a 20-year moratorium on new mining claims and development. Federal legislation—the “Pecos Watershed Protection Act”—was reintroduced in both the U.S Senate and House of Representatives by Sen. Heinrich and Sen. Luján and Rep. Leger Fernández and Rep. Stansbury, respectively and is still pending. ▲▲

OTERO MESA HOME TO UNIQUE PRONGHORN POPULATION

STAFF ARTICLE



Otero Mesa—the largest and wildest Chihuahuan Desert grassland habitat remaining on public lands in the United States—is renowned for its pronghorn antelope among many other unique values. It is thought that pronghorn once numbered in the tens of millions across the West. However, due to widespread barbed wire fence construction, competition with cattle and sheep, and hunting, their population crashed by the early 1900s to an estimated 20,000 nationwide and just 1,700 individuals in New Mexico. While state wildlife agencies have spent many years reintroducing pronghorn across the West, Otero Mesa's pronghorn are hypothesized to be the only “genetically pure” and legacy herd in the state that was not reintroduced. ▲▲



A galloping pronghorn herd needs room to roam.

PINOS ALTOS MINE PROPOSAL WITHDRAWN

STAFF ARTICLE

Local advocates discovered in late 2025 that mining exploration company Ivanhoe Electric obtained more than 13,000 acres of mining claims surrounding the small community of Pinos Altos, a primary gateway to the Gila Wilderness and Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. Mining in this area would profoundly impact public safety and quality of life in Pinos Altos, not to mention wildlife, water quality and quantity, rare plants, cultural resources, designated protected areas, and more. Fortunately, elected leaders and community members stood up together to loudly oppose Ivanhoe, forcing the company to withdraw its proposed plan. While we bask in this win for community and for the land, we recently learned that global mining giant Rio Tinto also staked 5,000 acres of mining claims nearby. We remain ready to stand up to oppose ongoing mining threats in the Gila. ▲▲



Looking out across the Gila Wilderness.

Protect Otero Mesa:
THE SOUTHWEST'S LAST GREAT CHIHUAHUAN GRASSLAND

LEARN HOW AT
OTEROMESA.ORG





The Importance of Roadless Areas to Wildlife

STAFF ARTICLE

Roadless areas are important for watershed protection, clean air, recreation, scenic beauty, preservation of our cultural heritage and traditions, and the human spirit itself. They provide a baseline for scientific research, and are, of course, critical because they are home to wildlife.⁽¹⁾

Habitat fragmentation is now widely recognized as one of the leading causes of species extinction. The 4 million-mile network of roads we have constructed in America, and the developments associated with them, have negatively affected the mobility and survival of wildlife by creating “fracture zones” between suitable habitats.

Animals following their instinctual movement patterns often encounter human infrastructure as they seek food, water, mates and territory. The environmental impact of roadways extends far beyond the edge of the pavement. This “road-effect zone” is estimated to be 15 to 20 times as large as the actual right of way itself. Habitat fragmentation creates smaller, more isolated habitat patches and wildlife populations. Isolated populations are demographically vulnerable and less resilient to natural disturbances and, thus, have a higher probability of local extinction. Species with large home ranges, seasonal migration requirements or sensitivities to human disturbance as well as those with small population sizes and limited distribution are particularly vulnerable to habitat conversion and fragmentation.⁽²⁾



A mule deer. Staff photo

For example, it has been documented that deer and elk not only avoid roads but also reduce their use of adjacent habitat. The presence of nearby roads disrupts historic winter ranges, changes feeding patterns and can reduce the number of offspring produced. Proximity to roads leads to increased disturbance and harassment of big game populations, leading to changes in behavior, increased predation, reduced access to resources and increased energy expenditures necessary for survival. Higher road densities can cause a reduction in the length and quality of the hunting season, overharvesting and population decline.⁽³⁾

Perhaps the most obvious way that roads hurt wildlife is mortality due to collisions with automobiles. Roads are also responsible for wildlife mortality in other ways, including opportunistic poaching. For example, since 1998, there have been at least 284 Mexican gray wolf mortalities in Arizona and New Mexico. One hundred and forty-nine of those have been due to illegal poaching. Many were near roads when killed. (Another 39 died from vehicle collisions, and 20 deaths were categorized as “other,” which includes trapping.)⁽⁴⁾

Dave Foreman has written that “the army of wilderness destruction travels by road and motorized vehicle.” The U.S. Forest Service is the largest road-managing agency in the world, with 386,000 miles in the national forest system, enough to circle the equator 15 times. The road density of national forests averages 1.6 miles of road for every square mile of land. This does not include the hundreds of thousands of miles of roads on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management or the thousands of miles of unofficial roads and vehicle routes on national public lands.⁽⁵⁾

In “Why Keep Areas Road-Free? The Importance of Roadless Areas,” the authors outline their concept of the “contagious” development effect “where roads provide access to previously remote areas, thus opening them up for more roads and developments and triggering land use changes, resource extraction and human disturbance. In this context, the importance of keeping the remaining large unfragmented lands road-free becomes an urgent task. This paper notes that only 3% of the conterminous U.S. is more than 5 kilometers away from a road.⁽⁶⁾

“Experience...has shown that only in strictly protected areas are the full fauna and flora of a region likely to persist for a long period of time. What are these strictly protected areas? A distinguishing characteristic is...low road density or, ideally, roadlessness,” the authors wrote.



1. New Mexico Highlands Wildlands Network Vision, 2003, Wildlands Project
2. Locating Potential Cougar Corridors in New Mexico Using a Least-Cost Path Corridor GIS Analysis, Kurt Menke, 2008
3. Habitat Fragmentation and the Effects of Roads on Wildlife and Habitats, Background and Literature Review, Mark L. Watson, N.M. Department of Game and Fish, 2005
4. Mexican Wolf Recovery Program PROGRESS REPORT # 26 PREPARED BY: U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
5. Rewilding North America, A Vision for Conservation in the 21st Century, Dave Foreman, 2003
6. “Why Keep Areas Road-Free? The Importance of Roadless Areas” (N. Selva et. al.)

Excerpted from an article originally published in *New Mexico Wild!* newsletter edition Spring/Summer 2015. ▲▲

Thank You Stone Age!

STONE AGE NORTH
6200 Alameda Blvd. NE
Albuquerque
505.209.2081

STONE AGE MIDTOWN
4130 Cutler Ave. NE
Albuquerque
505.341.2016



THE GILA



THE TRUE COST OF THE "ROAD EFFECT" WHAT WE STAND TO LOSE

Original photos by Irene Owsley.
"After" images created by New Mexico Wild staff

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

From The southern Gila Wilderness to the Pecos Wilderness in the north, these side-by-side views sound an urgent alarm. We stand at a critical tipping point. These aren't just scenic vistas—they're irreplaceable cultural landscapes, deeply connected to Tribal and Hispano communities who have stewarded them for thousands of years. Right now, these places face unprecedented threats that could erase this heritage forever. Once lost, these landscapes cannot be restored. The time to act in their defense is not tomorrow—it's today.



THE PECOS



STATE LEGISLATIVE RECAP

TRICIA SNYDER

This year's legislative session saw the best overall investment in water programs our staff has ever seen. While recurring budgets for many of the state's water agencies remained stagnant or saw limited growth, critical investments in some of our highest priorities on the non-recurring side indicated that the legislature has recognized water can't wait. Some of the highlights include:

\$22 million to the New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources for aquifer mapping, monitoring and the Water Data Act

\$15 million to complete Indian water rights settlements and **\$22.5 million** to meet our compact obligations in relation to the Lower Rio Grande compact settlement

\$10 million for the River Stewardship Program, which funds projects to improve the

health of New Mexico's rivers, streams and wetlands

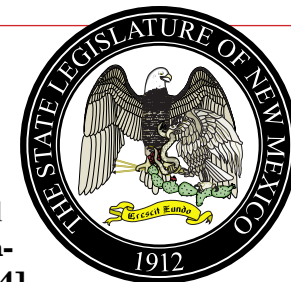
\$13 million for the Strategic Water Reserve, which keeps more water in New Mexico's rivers through voluntary water rights transactions

\$1.5 million for the Environment Department's Surface Water Quality Permitting Program, critical to filling the gap left from federal rollbacks to clean water protections (see our article on wetlands in this issue for more!)

\$2.5 million for regional water planning, creating water plans locally with those who know their waters best

\$5 million for the Neglected and Contaminated Site Fund, to support the cleanup of hundreds of contaminated groundwater sites where the polluters are now long gone

\$2 million for the Interstate Stream Commission's Acequia Bureau for acequia infrastructure projects and disaster recovery



New Mexico Wild also supported **Senate Bill 104 [SB104]**, to create a fairer and more transparent process of removal for NM State Wildlife Commissioners. We were gratified to see this bill pass unanimously, which depoliticizes the commission by limiting a governor to initiating removals to instances of neglect of duty, malfeasance or negligence, as well as providing a commissioner the right to appeal to the NM Supreme Court for a final decision.

New Mexico Wild and key partners also worked to secure a non-recurring \$70 million appropriation from the general fund to the Office of the Natural Resources Trustee for land or interests in land for the creation, expansion or restoration of state public land, including up to \$30 million for state matching dollars to communities that have been approved for federal assistance funding due to disaster recovery. ▲▲

2026 CONSERVATION IN THE WEST POLL

NEW MEXICO



CLIMATE CHANGE

72% believe climate change is a serious problem.

77% believe climate change is a serious threat.

PROTECTED AREAS

92% believe existing national monument designations for some public lands protected over the last decade should be kept in place.

59% believe rollbacks of laws that protect our land, water, and wildlife are an extremely or very serious problem.

WATER SUPPLY

66% believe inadequate water supply is a serious problem.

74% believe removing Clean Water Act protections from smaller streams and seasonal wetlands will have a negative impact.



CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE

60% believe loss of habitat for fish and wildlife is an extremely or very serious problem.

67% believe rolling back Endangered Species Act protections for plants and wildlife at danger of becoming extinct will have a negative impact.

88% believe issues involving public lands, waters, and wildlife are important in deciding whether to support an elected public official.

ENERGY ON PUBLIC LANDS

74% prefer that leaders place more emphasis on protecting water, air, wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities over maximizing the amount of land available for drilling and mining.

72% oppose fast-tracking oil, gas and mining projects on national public lands by reducing environmental reviews and local public input.

87% support keeping the requirement that oil and gas companies, rather than taxpayers, pay for all of the clean-up and land restoration costs after drilling is finished

New Mexico Wild Legal+Outreach Fund

New Mexico Wild launched our Legal+Outreach Fund to fight back against threats to our public lands on two fronts: filing lawsuits to stop, delay, or mitigate the worst of these threats using the courts and mobilizing public support to protect the lands we all treasure.

We need your help. Every dollar you give helps us:

- Fund legal action to delay or stop harmful policies
- Educate the public about these threats
- Protect the places you love for future generations

The threats are real. The time is now.
Your support makes the difference.



Give Today

Wetlands may not be the first thing that come to mind when you think of iconic New Mexico landscapes, but the state is home to a wide variety of these critical ecosystems. The majority of wetlands are found in the northern and eastern portions of New Mexico, but there are wetlands throughout the state. These spongy, wet areas are often found near rivers and lakes and provide important habitat—in New Mexico 80% of all vertebrate species utilize riparian habitats, many of which are wetlands, for at least half of their life cycle. Isolated wetlands, such as playas and cienegas, play an outsized role in supporting life in an arid landscape. Fed by groundwater and precipitation, they may be the only water source for a variety of plant and wildlife species.

These incredible places also provide a wide range of benefits for human communities

such as flood control. (Did you know 1 acre of wetlands can hold 1 million to 1.5 million gallons of water? It's true!) They also are natural filters, improving water quality which benefits drinking water, agriculture and recreation. By slowing water down, they can also help increase groundwater recharge, often critical sources of water in times when streamflow runs low.

Despite all these benefits, New Mexico's wetlands are under threat like never before. It's estimated the state has lost over 50% of its wetland acres, with just under 500,000 acres remaining. Federal rollbacks of clean water protections mean the majority of our wetlands no longer have any protections under the Clean Water Act, leaving them even more vulnerable to destruction and degradation. New rules put forth by the Trump administration disregard Southwest hydrology by ignoring the

importance of ephemeral wetlands, which are no less critical despite their temporary nature. Thankfully, the state has stepped up to fill this gap.

Last year, led by Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth and Representative Kristina Ortez, the legislature passed SB 21, which creates a new surface water quality permitting program to ensure New Mexico's precious wetlands are protected for future generations. New Mexico Wild is working hard to ensure the rules that the Environment Department puts in place to implement this program will be strong enough to meet that goal. The rulemaking will take place in June and establish the day-to-day details of running the program that are too granular to be put into the statute itself. There will be opportunities for the public to weigh in, so stay tuned for more information on how you can speak up for New Mexico's wetlands! ▲▲

WONDERFUL WETLANDS



GET OUT!

An Excerpt From Our New Book! Wild Waters: Passport to New Mexico's Rivers

nmwild.org/shop

BLACK RIVER

Location: The extreme southeastern corner of New Mexico in Eddy County, about 25 miles southwest of Carlsbad near the New Mexico–Texas state line

Segment description: The full length of the river, from its headwaters in the Guadalupe Escarpment Wilderness Study Area to its confluence with the Pecos River

Segment length: 59.1 miles

Elevation range: 7,010 to 2,917 feet

Land ownership/management: Private, Bureau of Land Management, Lincoln National Forest, State Land Office

Featured recreational uses: Swimming, bird-watching, wildlife watching, picnicking

Boating info: The Black River is not typically considered a float river, but it does offer a unique paddling experience with its location in the southeastern New Mexican desert and, under some conditions, its crystal-clear, turquoise-blue waters. Boaters who park at the Black River Recreation Area can carry or cart their watercraft approximately 1 mile south on a dirt road from the parking area and explore this slow-moving river, paddling upstream or downstream before returning to their starting point. No river permit is required.

Best seasons: Year-round, although summers can be brutally hot

River access: The Black River Recreation Area offers the easiest access to the Black River. Travel 25 miles south of Carlsbad on US 62/180. At Washington Ranch Road turn right and travel west for 2 more miles, then bear left at the fork. To access the Black River's headwaters, travel north on US 285 from Carlsbad, turn west on Queen Highway/Highway 137 and travel 40 miles. Turn east at Cougar Road and south onto Guadalupe Ridge/Scenic Drive/Klondike Gap Road. Travel south for 11 miles to an informal parking area where the road ends. Hike along Forest Road 201 for approximately 3 more miles.

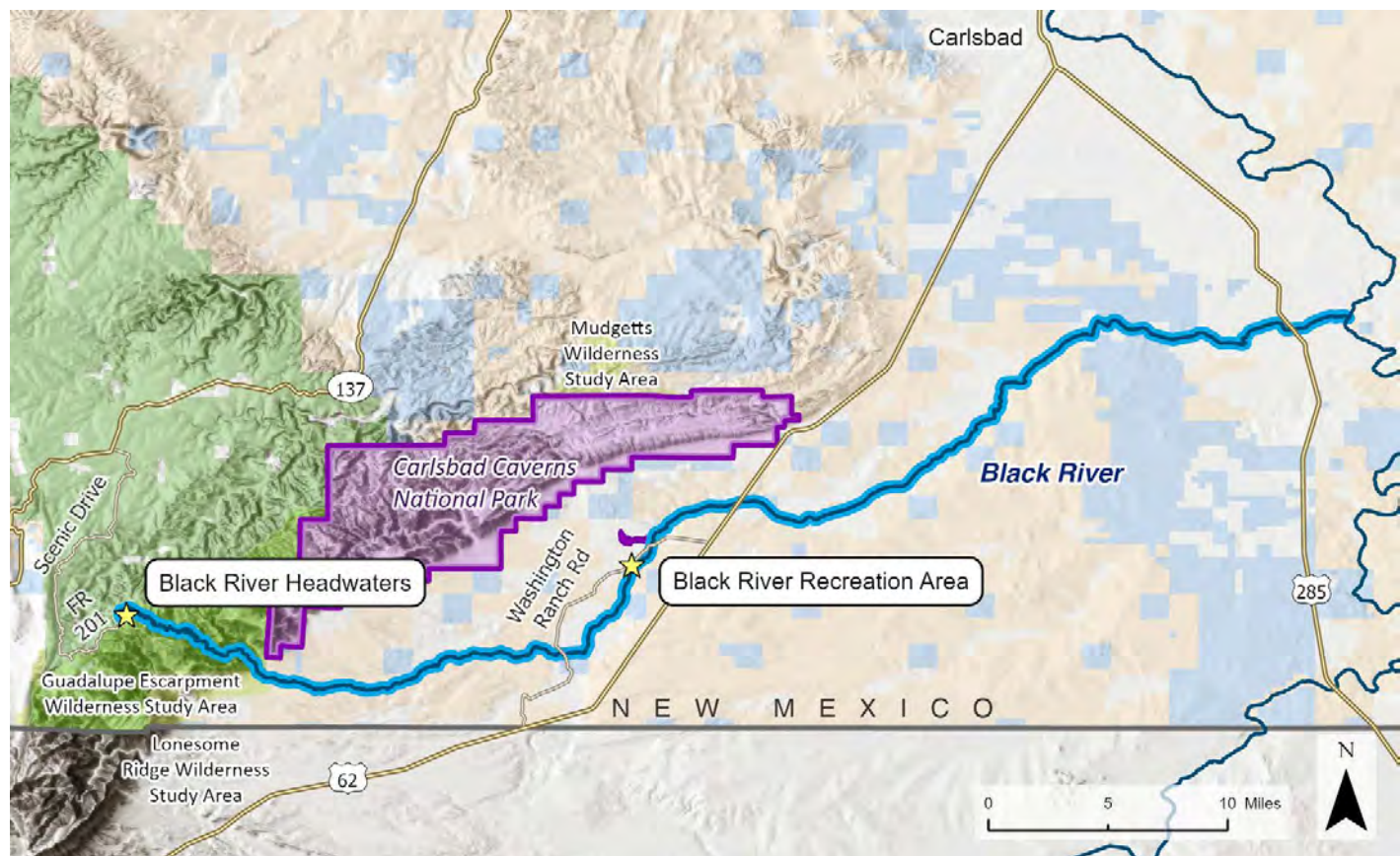


Photo by Sally Paez

NEW MEXICO'S BLACK RIVER, LOCATED IN THE EXTREME SOUTHEAST CORNER OF THE STATE NEAR THE NEW MEXICO–TEXAS STATE LINE, is a relatively short waterway, flowing for about 60 miles through Eddy County to its confluence with the Pecos River. The Black is perhaps best known for its series of deep and elongated spring-fed pools found within the BLM-managed Black River Recreation Area.

This 1,200-acre day-use area offers low-impact recreation opportunities such as fishing, hiking, bird-watching, picnicking, swimming, and paddling, as well as environmental education opportunities. Amenities include picnic tables and a restroom. Drinking water, however, is not available; visitors are urged to take plenty of water, as heat and dry desert air can quickly dehydrate the body.

The Black River travels from its headwaters in the rugged limestone massif of the Guadalupe Escarpment to the gypsum-heavy soils to the east. Buoyed by occasional floods fed by spring runoff and desert springs, the Black is a dependable waterway in the midst of the vast Chihuahuan Desert. It is a magnet for wildlife and a critical stopover for migrating birds. Lined with golden cottonwoods, chest-high sacaton grasses, willows, and bulrushes, the banks of the Black are a lush environment where one can find deer, javelina, green-backed herons, orioles, yellow-billed cuckoos, hawks, turkey vultures, owls, and the iconic roadrunner. Bats from nearby Carlsbad Caverns also regularly feed along the river, gorging on healthy insect populations. ▲▲



Progress in Regional Water Security Planning

AIDAN MANNING

This spring, New Mexico took a critical step in planning for an inevitably drier, hotter future. Over the next several decades, dwindling stream runoff and aquifer recharge will cause our water supply to shrink by about 25% to 30%.

New Mexico already uses more water than nature provides, resulting in over-pumped aquifers, more dry riverbeds and falling reservoir levels, and the situation is only growing more dire. If we don't find ways to thoughtfully prioritize and curb our water usage, the blunt instruments of nature and interstate compacts will do it for us, with very little regard for our values and priorities.

Protecting vulnerable water supplies for communities, ecosystems, traditions and wildlife will require taking agency and planning for the changes to come. However, our values and priorities around water vary widely across the state, as do our water sources and uses. A single statewide plan cannot effectively address



all these different needs and priorities. Enter regional water planning.

Regional water planning is a state-coordinated process recognizing that local water challenges are often best solved using local knowledge and solutions. It isn't a new idea. The Interstate Stream Commission (ISC), an agency overseeing many aspects of New Mexico's water, has coordinated regional water planning before, but with mixed success and many lessons learned. In 2024, the ISC began rebuilding the regional water planning process from the ground up, drawing upon those past lessons and extensive public input. The goal is to establish a water security planning council in each of nine regions around the state, and to help each council develop a plan to improve water security in its region. These plans won't change water rights or any other existing law, but they can help guide state resources toward water projects, programs and policies that regions deem high priorities.

Over the past year, the ISC has been developing a set of rules and guidelines that will shape

each step in the planning process. New Mexico Wild and our partners worked with ISC staff and provided multiple rounds of feedback. We pushed for a process that centers on sustainability—one in which ecosystems, wildlife, recreation and traditional water uses have real and substantial seats at the planning table. Our involvement helped solidify requirements that regional water plans consider water needs for habitats, watersheds, groundwater systems, and food security.

In February, the rules for regional water planning were finalized, paving the way for planning work to begin. The first round of regional councils is expected to start meeting later this year. The best way to stay involved will be through the numerous public input opportunities required by the rules. We will continue to track the process and inform members of these engagement opportunities when possible, but the best source of information remains the ISC's online home for all things regional water planning: MainstreamNM.org.▲▲

“Journey Down the Gila” Screenings Broaden Awareness for Gila River Protection

STAFF ARTICLE

We hosted eight film screenings of “Journey Down the Gila,” a full-length documentary to visually capture the beauty and spirit of the Gila River; this past winter in communities throughout New Mexico. The 90-minute documentary tells a powerful story of grief, loss and hope.

“Journey Down the Gila” honors three New Mexico teens who died tragically in a 2014 airplane accident while conducting ecological monitoring work in the Gila National Forest. The film follows their mothers on a trip down the river that their children had advocated to protect. Directed by Albuquerque filmmaker David Garcia, the documentary also captures a visit all three mothers took in 2019 to Washington D.C., to meet with Sen. Tom Udall and advocate for Wild and Scenic Rivers Act protection for the Gila.

Support for a Wild and Scenic designation has grown across the state with the help of these film screenings. Many showings were sold out, and the largest at the South Broadway Cultural Center in Albuquerque drew 300 attendees. This series of screenings crossed state lines for the first time and was shown to a crowd of more than 100 at the Durango Arts Center in Colorado.

Various representatives and community leaders joined the screenings to share their experiences and connections to the Gila River. New



“Journey Down the Gila” image courtesy of Heart of the Gila.

Mexico Sen. Peter Wirth and Rep. Matthew McQueen attended the first screening held in Santa Fe and graciously spoke about the importance of the film and why we need a Wild and Scenic Gila River. Wirth shared his per-
Continued on page 20.

STATE RIVER PROTECTION

Q&A

BJORN FREDRICKSON

What kinds of protections exist for rivers in New Mexico?



Outside of federal Wild and Scenic River designations—which include portions of the Rio Grande, Pecos, Rio Chama and East Fork Jemez rivers and total 124.3 miles or just 1/10 of 1% of river miles statewide—river protections in New Mexico are primarily focused on water quality and water quantity. Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRW) designations under the federal Clean

Water Act establish a water quality baseline

and prohibit water quality degradation and have been used mostly in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the Pecos, the Jemez Mountains and the Gila. The state also employs water quality standards to establish goals and appropriate uses for surface waters, setting criteria to ensure water quality is not diminished. In addition, New Mexico is developing a surface water permitting program to replace Clean Water Act protections that were lost due to the 2023 Supreme Court ruling in *Sackett v. EPA*. Water quantity protections focused on environmental flows, which aim to retain adequate water in rivers to meet the needs of nature and species, are limited in their implementation in New Mexico to date but can be established under several state programs.

While robust water quality and water quantity protections are critical, the limited use of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to protect natural river processes and outstanding in-stream and river-related values in New Mexico leaves many of our deserving rivers without more holistic river protections. At least 33 other states nationwide have addressed the need for broader river protections by developing state river protection programs, but New Mexico has yet to follow this lead.

Why is it important to protect rivers?



It is difficult to overstate the importance of rivers to people, communities and species. Rivers are critical in providing us with clean, reliable drinking water. They sustain traditional cultural and agricultural practices by indigenous, Hispano and other land-based communities. Rivers provide the water needed for major economic drivers across the state, including agriculture, industry and our burgeoning outdoor recreation economy.

They provide scenic beauty and a wide array of recreation opportunities. Rivers and adjacent river-based ecosystems are by far the most biodiverse ecosystems in New Mexico, with more than 80% of invertebrate species statewide relying on them for all or part of their lifecycles. They provide critical ecosystem services such as filtering water pollutants, reducing the impacts of disasters like fires and floods, and helping species and communities adapt to climate change. And yet, our rivers are under pressure like never before from over-allocation of water rights, overuse of water, climate change, pollution and habitat destruction. An absence of holistic river protections in New Mexico therefore puts the many benefits that rivers provide to people, communities and species at risk.



How would a state river protection program in New Mexico work?

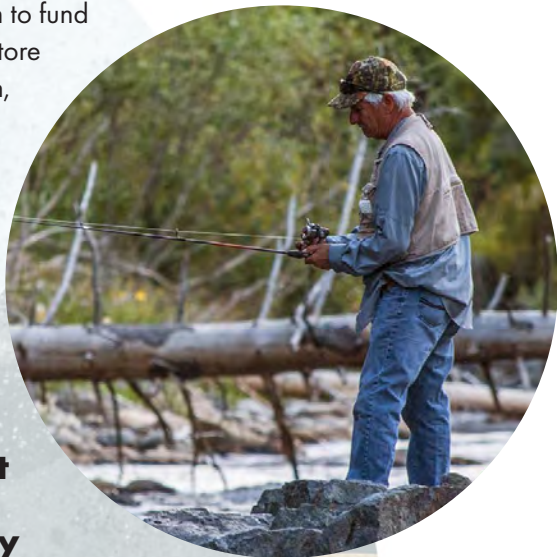
An effective state river protection program in New Mexico would include the legislative designation of specific, free flowing and outstanding river segments—as well as the creation of new state authorities and coordination among various state agencies—to protect designated river channels; adjacent river-related ecosystems; unique river and river-related natural, social and cultural values; and water quality. This might take the form of prohibiting state agencies from undertaking projects on state land that would degrade or harm any of these features or values.

With respect to non-state lands, such a program would need to respect the rights of sovereign tribal nations and private property owners as well as the U.S. Constitution's Supremacy Clause related to the management of federal land. This might mean that an effective state river protection program would prohibit state agencies from providing technical or financial assistance or permits to any project on non-state land that would degrade or harm the features or values of designated rivers. Additionally, a state river protection program might



ON

include a grant program to fund projects that protect, restore or improve river function, riparian habitat, recreation access, water quality and other natural, cultural and social values.



Would a state river protection program impact water rights, private property rights or traditional uses?

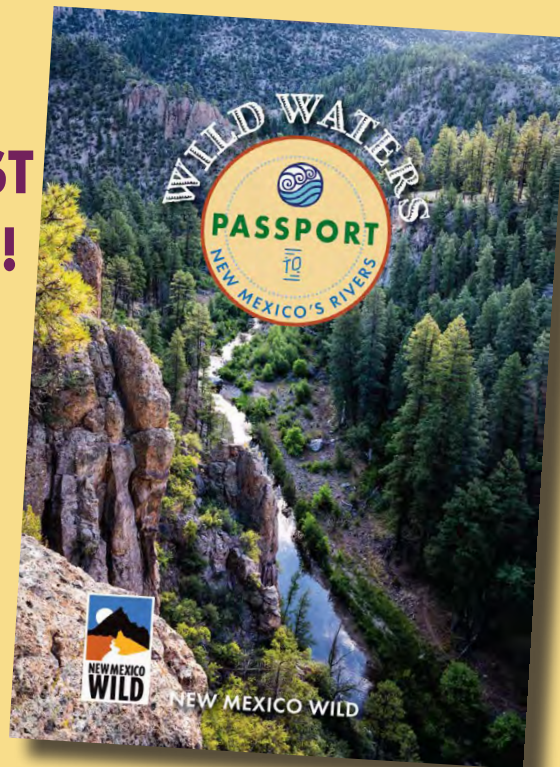
No. A state river protection program would need to be designed to have no effect on existing water rights, Tribal lands, private property rights, existing diversions and other instream developments, the maintenance or replacement of existing diversions and other instream developments, or acequia operations. Acequia practices and other traditional uses like hunting and fishing could even be recognized as key river-related values to be protected under a state river protection program.

How can I stay up to date on the opportunity to develop a state river protection program in New Mexico?

New Mexico Wild has developed a blueprint for a state river protection program and we have recently begun initial outreach with community leaders and partner organizations to discuss this concept. If you are not already a member of New Mexico Wild or have not signed up for our email updates, please consider doing so! We keep our members and email subscribers up to date on our major initiatives, including our work moving forward to establish a state river protection program.



OUR NEWEST BOOK!



Introducing our new **Wild Waters Guidebook**, your passport to the remarkable waters of the Land of Enchantment. This is an essential guide to 42 of New Mexico's most spectacular river segments—from the superlative beauty of the Rio Chama to the wild Gila River. This book contains detailed maps, access information, and safety tips for paddlers, anglers, and river enthusiasts of all types. Each segment highlights the natural history, cultural heritage, and remarkable values that make these waters worth exploring and protecting.

ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY! nmwild.org/shop

Price: \$20 + \$5 shipping



Rio Chama Boaters

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

SPRING 2026

Do you have plans to run the Wild and Scenic section of the Rio Chama in 2026?

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



PURCHASE A WOLF STAMP TO SUPPORT LOBO PROTECTION!
www.nmwild.org/shop



ADULT HONORABLE MENTION:
Karen Ahlgren
 "Silent Sentinel"

ADULT PEOPLE'S CHOICE
Kristy Lynn Harbour
 "Zia Howl"



CONGRATULATIONS 2026 NEW MEXICO WILD WOLF STAMP ART WINNERS!

ADULT WINNER: Gay Marks "A Wolf's Tale"

"Gay Marks has called Silver City home for almost 50 years. Growing up on Army bases across the U.S. and abroad, she moved almost every year before finally settling in the mountains of the Gila to work as a Speech-Language Pathologist and Educational Diagnostician. Gay feels fortunate to not only call Silver City home, but to have the opportunity at this point in her life to explore her early interest in painting, a life-long journey of discovery. Gay paints in oils and is interested in a wide variety of subjects - faces and places and all things in between. As Winston Churchill once wrote, "We may content ourselves with a joy ride in a paint box." A joy ride indeed!"

Some of Gay's work can be seen online at Sterling Fine Art: www.sterlingnm.com

We had a two-way tie for Adult Second Place!



ADULT 2ND PLACE:
Kimberly de Jesus Alfonso "Sombra de Plata"



ADULT 2ND PLACE:
Tim Razo "Asha & Arcadia"

YOUTH CATEGORY

YOUTH PEOPLE'S CHOICE:
Bridget Brown
 "The Land of Enchantment"



YOUTH WINNER:
Hazel Reading
 "Lone"



YOUTH HONORABLE MENTION:
Maya Parra "Lobos Land"

MEXICAN GRAY WOLF UPDATES

SALLY PAEZ

Mexican Wolf Population Continues to Climb

There were 319 Mexican gray wolves in the wild in 2025, according to the annual count released by the New Mexico and Arizona wildlife agencies in February. That's 33 more than in 2024, marking a decade of steady population growth. As the population grows, the risk decreases that a single event, like natural disaster or disease, could wipe out these wild wolves.

Despite the increasing numbers, lobos remain vulnerable to genetic and political threats. The entire population shares the genetic heritage of just seven founding wolves, and the wild gene pool retains less than a third of the genetic diversity passed down from these seven animals. Lobos continue to face high rates of human-caused mortality, including lethal removal by wildlife managers who have killed genetically valuable wolves to placate the livestock industry. And lobos continue to be confined to a limited geographic area, preventing natural dispersal.

Under the Mexican gray wolf recovery plan, the lobos' status under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) could be downgraded from "endangered" to "threatened" if an average of 320 wolves are documented each year over a four-year period. Wolves could lose ESA protection altogether if the population averages at least 320 wolves for an eight-year

period and 22 captive-born wolves survive to breeding age after being released.

Stripping lobos of ESA protection without addressing the ongoing threats would derail the recovery of the species. We continue to advocate for wolf management based on science and for policies that prioritize a true, lasting recovery.

Ranchers Authorized to Kill Endangered Mexican Wolf

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently issued a permit authorizing Catron County ranchers to kill an endangered Mexican gray wolf in the area of two grazing allotments near Quemado, New Mexico. Specifically, the permit allows ranchers to shoot "one Mexican wolf on private land or one Mexican wolf in the act of biting, killing, or wounding livestock on federal land." The permit does not identify any particular wolf or wolves, and it fails to detail or require the use of proactive, non-lethal conflict reduction measures prior to resorting to lethal means.

The permit's stated aim is to address livestock depredation in the area, but the science indicates that this approach could backfire. Peer-reviewed

research has consistently found that killing wolves does not reliably reduce livestock depredations and can destabilize wolf pack structure in ways that actually increase conflict. Removing breeding adults or disrupting social cohesion can fragment packs, leading inexperienced wolves to target easier prey, such as livestock. Moreover, indiscriminate kill permits could result in the loss of pregnant wolves and individual wolves essential to genetic diversity.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service needs to hear from wolf lovers all across the country that killing Mexican wolves is not an appropriate tool for "managing" these iconic native carnivores. ▲▲



HELP US SAVE LOBOS!
REPORT MEXICAN WOLF KILLERS.
1-844-397-8477
UP TO \$105,000 REWARD FOR INFORMATION

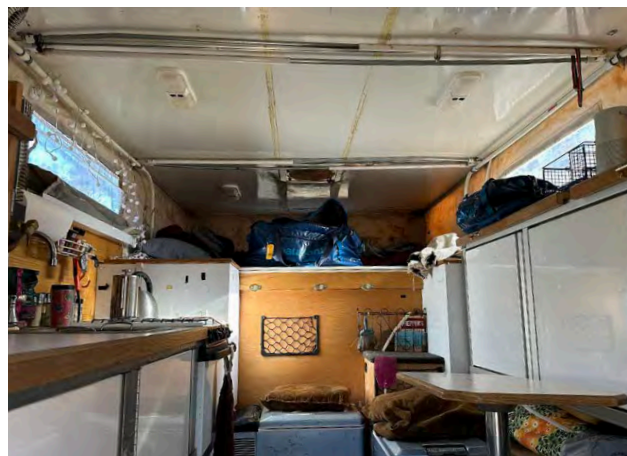
NEW MEXICO WILD IS SELLING **THE BEAST**

A rugged self-contained truck with camper that has everything you need for your outdoor adventures!

1998 3/4 ton Dodge regular cab 4x4 with a 5 speed manual transmission.

Completely custom camper built with comfort and efficiency in mind.

Reach out to info@nmwild.org or call (505) 843-8696 for more information and to inquire about pricing.





Above: New Mexico Wild's Volunteer Appreciation event hosted on February 12, 2026 at Sawmill Market. Right: Silke Beltzer receiving her volunteer awards. Photos by Nell Decker

2025 Volunteer Awards for Outstanding Service
Top Wildland Monitoring Volunteers: Tina & Steve Ehrman, Jarrad Davis, Jon Holtzman, and Chizuko Heyer
Top Tabling Volunteer: Sheryl Russell
Top Admin Support Volunteer: Lawrence Clayton
Top Stewardship Volunteers: Clara Senior, John Bergeleen, and Eric Beck
Cross-program Champions: Eric Nussbickel and Michael Abbate



2025 Ranger Data

Number of logouts completed: 1755	Trail signage installations: 4
Miles of trail cleared of downfall: 90.7	Acres of invasive plants treated: 420
Total miles of trail walked: 110.7	Hours contributed by stewardship volunteers: 617
Illegal campsites dismantled: 15	Ranger-led volunteer projects: 9

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

The Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders Program

Through this program established in the name of one of our most visionary activists, these dedicated volunteers work in designated natural areas in New Mexico, helping to monitor Wilderness values and conditions.

Volunteers are critical to the success of New Mexico Wild's work to defend and protect our wildlands, wildlife, and water. It is for this reason that we refer to our community of volunteers as the Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders. This title honors both volunteers and the late, great conservation champion who was instrumental in the formation of New Mexico Wild as a grassroots nonprofit organization and in establishing a vision for how we do business—with deep ties in community and to the land.

There are four primary ways that volunteers support our mission: wildland monitoring, outreach, stewardship and office support. Wildland monitoring volunteers document conditions and impacts affecting treasured landscapes, such as the presence of trespass cattle, thereby providing key information to support our partnerships and watchdog efforts with land management agencies. Outreach volunteers represent New Mexico Wild at events statewide to raise awareness about our work. Stewardship volunteers support projects like trail maintenance, native plant plantings, river cleanups, citizen science initiatives and more. Volunteers in our Albuquerque office play a crucial behind-the-scenes role in the operations of the organization at large. We also welcome volunteer contributions to our advocacy efforts and in other contexts where a volunteer has a unique skillset or a creative idea to apply to an ongoing campaign or project.



So, come out and volunteer with us! Not only is volunteer support of all kinds instrumental in protecting New Mexico's wildlands, wildlife and water, it might satisfy your itch to explore wild places far beyond the beaten path, introduce you to new people, and help you to forge lifelong memories. ▲



Wildland Monitor volunteers at Big Hatchets Wilderness Study Area recording a vehicle incursion into the area boundary, photo by Akashia Allen



ATTEND AN EVENT

Looking Ahead - Upcoming Volunteer Projects in 2026

During the 2026 field season, we will continue our work restoring the Santa Fe National Forest's trail systems impacted by the Hermit's Peak-Calf Canyon fire, do more invasive plants removal work in the Gila, and more. We need YOUR support! Subscribe to our email newsletter and keep an eye out for postings on nmwild.org/events to be the first to hear about ways to get involved with our Ranger crews this year! ▲▲

2025 Chama River Project Overview & Thank You

This was another successful season on the Chama for New Mexico Wild Community Science Coordinator Tayo Basquiat, who made 15 trips to El Vado dam to recruit boating permittees to participate in our ongoing effort in collaboration with the Bureau of Reclamation. The project goal is to better understand how changes in water quality characteristics impact the Rio Chama's riparian macroinvertebrate population. Over the course of the season, we engaged 89 volunteers who collectively contributed 661.5 hours and collected 112 water/macroinvertebrate sample pairs.

A huge thank you to the Monastery of Christ in the Desert for supporting our work in the Chama this season and helping us better understand and care for our wild waterways. ▲▲



Volunteers getting ready to launch on a rafting trip equipped with supplies for water and macroinvertebrate sample collection as part of New Mexico Wild's ongoing community science efforts to monitor the Rio Chama's water quality and ecology, photo by Tayo Basquiat

KAIROS

By Linda Malm

What am I but autumn passing. I face late sun, enjoy the warmth. Know my long shadow

drops behind. A troubadour twangs: Leaving you was easier— I lower the volume. In the pond-side chair my posture shifts.

Few find passion in the crowded years of toiling.

Daylight slants and stars veer according to the season. Old age comes with force

and fascination. It asks me to give meaning to where I am. I hear parting wingbeats

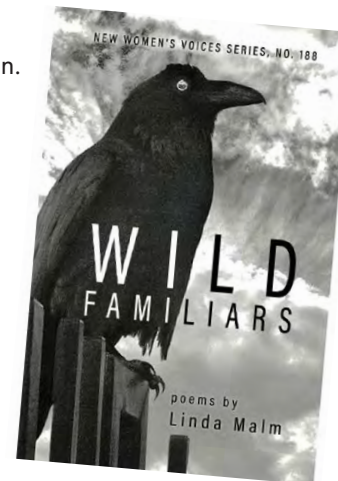
across the pond. I see others join above the river, woods, and fields.

If you ask me for the cost of life I've given to be with this land

I'll tell you I lived long enough.

The price of stewardship was fair.

Poetry from **Wild Familiars**, a chapbook exploring an appreciation for the nature of birds. The book was a finalist in the Finishing Line Press 2025 chapbook competition. Linda and her husband, Donn Young, are long time supporters of New Mexico Wild.



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

A NEW CHAPTER FOR NATIVE LAND INSTITUTE

KEEGAN KING

Some places ask something of us.

In New Mexico, the landscapes we fight to protect are more than scenic backdrops or parcels on a map. They carry memory, meaning and the collective inheritance of generations past. They are places where culture is practiced, not read about in a book. For Indigenous communities, these places serve as the original classroom, teaching each successive generation how to live in relationship with the land, with its wildlife and with one another. What these places ask of us is responsibility: to protect them, to learn from them and to pass them on.

At a time when so many vital landscapes face growing pressure and new threats, Indigenous leadership is not optional. It is essential. Protecting our public lands is not only about resisting harm in the present. It is also about carrying forward the knowledge, values and lessons handed down through generations that are required to care for these places over the long term. Native Land Institute (NLI) was created to help meet that need.

From my home in Acoma Pueblo, I have learned that the struggle to protect land is never just about land itself. It is about whether a people can remain connected to the places that nurtured them. It is also about whether future generations will have access to the landscapes that shaped their identity, their responsibilities and their way of life. At its deepest level, this

work asks whether the bonds between community, culture and place will be respected in the decisions that shape New Mexico's future.

Native Land Institute is an Indigenous-led nonprofit dedicated to protecting ancestral lands and supporting the people who remain connected to them. Our work is grounded in a simple premise: Conservation is wiser, stronger and more durable when Indigenous communities are recognized as central to it. That means supporting Indigenous leadership, helping communities build capacity, strength-



NATIVE LAND
INSTITUTE

ening coalitions and advancing public policy rooted in Native values, lived knowledge and long memory.

There is a profound need for Indigenous leadership in conservation. Too often, tribes and tribal communities are left to respond to major threats to public lands without the staff, policy support or long-term institutional resources needed to do so fully. At the same time, there is growing recognition that Indigenous communities should have a stronger role in protecting land, shaping stewardship and helping guide public lands decisions. Native Land Institute helps close that gap by offering strategic support shaped by the people most connected to these places.

In our first years, that work has taken shape across some of New Mexico's most important landscapes. We have supported efforts to protect the Greater Chaco landscape, where tribes continue to lead resistance to oil and gas development in one of the most sacred and threatened regions in the Southwest. We have also helped build a broader and more durable campaign for the Caja del Rio, a landscape of deep importance to Pueblo communities and a place that holds meaning for many New Mexicans. In southern New Mexico, we have worked alongside partners to advance protection for Otero Mesa and other culturally and ecologically significant lands.

What connects this work is not only geography, but purpose. Our role is to help create the conditions for traditional ecological wisdom

to be shared, sustained and put into practice. That means bringing Indigenous voices forward, supporting community-driven strategy and helping build the civic and institutional framework needed for lasting conservation work. We are working not only to respond to threats, but to build a structure that makes long-term protection possible.

That is especially true in our support of the Sacred Lands Tribal Association, a collective effort rooted in Pueblo leadership and unity. The association brings together Pueblos, their cultural experts and partner organizations, including the Native Lands and Pueblo Action Alliance, to move protection of the Caja del Rio forward through shared strategy and grounded policy development. Work like this matters because it builds more than a campaign. It builds capacity. It helps ensure that Indigenous communities are shaping the path from the beginning.

This past year also marked an important transition for Native Land Institute itself. NLI began as a fiscally sponsored project of New Mexico Wild, and we are deeply grateful for the support and incubation provided by New Mexico Wild's staff and board. The partnership helped turn an important idea into an emerging institution. Now, with our federal nonprofit status formally in place, NLI has begun fully standing up as an independent organization. That transition allows us to directly receive support, build our own systems and continue growing into the kind of institution this work requires.

Becoming standalone gives this work a stronger foundation. Our vision is a future in which ancestral lands are protected, Indigenous narratives are central to the story of public lands, and Indigenous stewardship is reflected in policy, governance and practice.

As Native Land Institute enters this new chapter, support from the broader community matters more than ever. Investing in NLI means investing in long-term Indigenous-led stewardship, stronger protection for sacred places and the capacity needed to ensure that the people most connected to these landscapes can help lead their future. We are proud of what has been built so far and we invite others to join us by following our work, supporting our mission and making a contribution to help grow this effort for the generations ahead. ▲▲



Keegan King with Former Governor Pete Herrera of Cochiti Pueblo. Photo courtesy of Native Land Institute

2025 Ranger Season Overview

STAFF ARTICLE

Now in its ninth year running, New Mexico Wild's Wilderness Ranger Program had its beginnings in 2017 in the form of a direct partnership with Region 3 of the USDA Forest Service. This regional agreement laid the foundation for direct cooperation between New Mexico Wild and the Forest Service and secured Forest Service funding to add stewardship capacity across Wilderness Areas in New Mexico's five National Forests through staffing hired and coordinated by New Mexico Wild. The program has since expanded its scope and incorporated a broader ecosystem of partnerships.

Over the course of the 2025 field season, eleven New Mexico Wild Rangers were hard at work clearing trails, restoring highly impacted recreation sites, removing invasive plants from delicate ecosystems, and more! We continued working in collaboration with the Forest Service and were also supported by funding from several other partners. Our ongoing agreement with Region 3 of the Forest Service funded some work in the Carson National Forest, including fully clearing Trampas and Hidden Lakes Trails of fallen logs. We worked extensively to clear trails and improve access to recreation across the Hermit's Peak-Calf Canyon burn scar thanks to an ongoing agreement with the Santa Fe National Forest and funding the NM Outdoor Rec Division, we cleared and maintained trails across the San Pedro Parks Wilderness also with support from NM Outdoor Rec, we worked under NM Department of Agriculture funding on invasive plant surveying and removal across the Gila NF as well as adjacent State Park land, and we continued our efforts in partnership with the Gila National Forest and Heart of the Gila to restore impacted habitat and improve visitor education around Jordan Hot Springs. ▲▲

2025 Ranger Season Highlights

Our crosscut saw certified ranger crews cleared **1,815** fallen logs off trails.

90+ miles of trail were cleared of fallen logs and overgrown vegetation.

1,890 acres of National Forest and State Park lands in the Gila were mechanically treated for invasive plants including poison hemlock, bull thistle, Siberian elm, and others.

Rangers hosted 9 projects open to the community where our amazing volunteers contributed more than **600** hours of work to our wilderness stewardship efforts!



2025 Ranger Crew, pictured left to right: Nico Lis, Ben Billand, Anne Dios, Kat McCarver, Evan Hobbes, Jax Gaglianese-Woody, Eric Nussbickel, Victor Perez. Photo by Vicente Ordoñez

Ranger Feature: Lead Ranger Kat McCarver

How long have you been a Ranger with New Mexico Wild?
2026 will be my fourth season on the crew and my second season as a Lead.

Tell us a little bit about your background and what drew you to this work.

My degree is in Plant and Environmental Science, and I've had a number of jobs from botanical gardens to small scale agriculture. I wanted to pivot to conservation but didn't know of a clear path. Personally, I have backpacked and recreated in the backcountry since my early 20's. Wilderness Ranger work is the perfect fit, because it involves having backcountry skills allowing for very physical work, camping for consecutive days, and an understanding of plant communities. I think having this foundation has made the transition to conservation work incredibly fun and thought provoking.

What do Public Lands mean to you?

Public Lands are a place that we all own and can enjoy. They're not meant for one group of people, therefore creating opportunities for inclusion. I think of it as a living museum, where cultural preservation can educate, parts of it offer opportunity for fun through recreation, and it's a place for landscapes and wildlife to thrive.

What do you find most rewarding about this work?

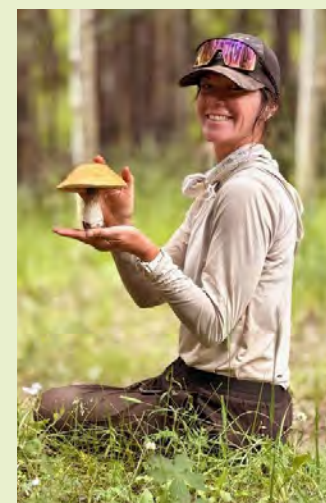
All projects are rewarding, but I particularly enjoy trail work. Trails are an access point for visitors to enjoy these incredible landscapes, while protecting fragile ecosystems. We receive the most "thank yous" from Ranchers to backpackers for doing this work, and that feels really good.

What's your favorite part of the job?

The schedule. As someone who thrives on movement in nature, being out in the wilderness for 8 days in a row fulfills a desire a regular 9-5 never could. I can observe things on a different timeline, like bugling elk at 4am during the rut or the discovery of a small pool in the Middle Fork Canyon of the Gila Wilderness.

What do you wish more people knew about what you do?

I wish more people knew that Wilderness Rangers work primarily in wilderness on foot. We backpack for several miles to predesignated worksites. We are certified sawyers dealing with complex removal of fallen trees. Logs move in unpredictable ways, and it's our job to try and predict how a log will move with a particular cut so that we can move it off trail safely. We don't carry guns; we carry crosscut saws. ▲▲



C3s and C4s Explained: Our Dual Approach to Conservation

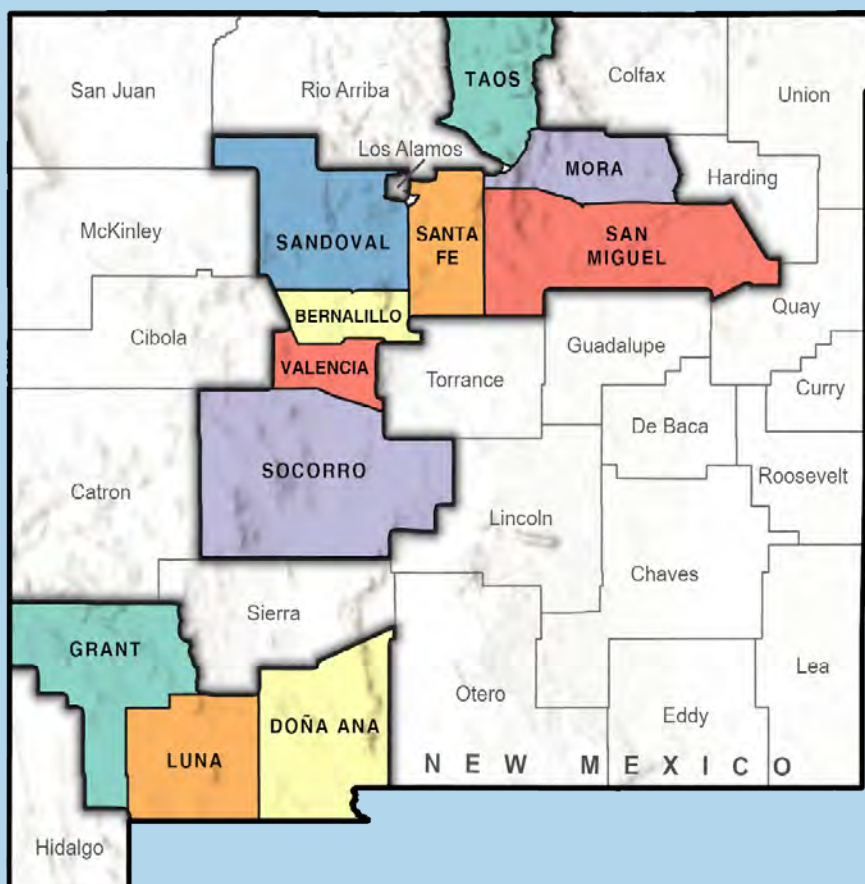
New Mexico Wild is a 501(c)(3) organization—a nonprofit focused on education, advocacy, stewardship, and building coalitions to protect public lands, waters, and wildlife. We get a lot done through this grassroots work, but C3s have strict limits on political activities. That’s why in 2019 we created the New Mexico Wild Action Fund, a 501(c)(4) organization. The Action Fund can directly support pro-conservation candidates in local and statewide elections, recruit candidates, and engage in campaign activities that the C3 cannot. Both organizations work toward the same crucial conservation goals, but with different tools and capabilities.

Why should I support New Mexico Wild Action Fund?

Local elections decide the future of our vital conservation campaigns. When our federal delegation asks “Do you have local support?” for wilderness protection, we need pro-conservation county commissioners in campaign areas to say yes. Your donation to the New Mexico Wild Action Fund supports relationships with candidates who share our values and fights anti-conservation forces that can influence rural politics. Small donations make huge impacts in these overlooked races—we’ve already flipped commissions and stopped projects like the Gila river diversion. Help us build the local leadership that our conservation campaigns need to succeed by donating to the Action Fund today. ▲▲

Contributions to 501c4 organizations are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.

NMWAF is supporting 20 county commission candidates throughout the state in 2026



“Journey Down the Gila” continued from page 11.

sonal experience hearing the late Ella Jaz Kirk, one of the teens who advocated for the Gila, testify. She collected over 6,000 petition signatures in support of halting a diversion project that was proposed for the Gila River, hand delivered the petition to the office of Gov. Susanna Martinez and spoke in front of state legislators. Her testimony is shown in the film.

Overall, these film screenings were a smashing success and reached audiences far and wide, gaining more support for a Wild and Scenic Gila River and sharing the touching story of Kirk, Ella Myers and Michael Mahl. We’d like to thank all the theaters that hosted the screening and everyone who showed up to support us, the mothers and their incredibly inspiring children. A special thanks to Heart of the Gila, a nonprofit that advocates for protections in the Gila, for sharing its story and for its support with these screenings. ▲▲



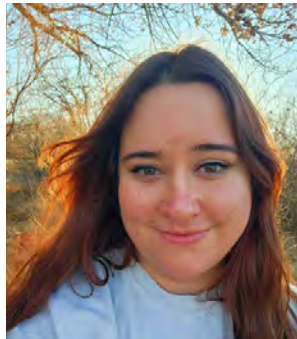
New Mexico Wild Action Fund is a 501 (C)4 not for profit organization dedicated to advancing policies, increasing civic participation in the democratic process, and cultivating and electing candidates for local offices that support policies and positions that protect New Mexico’s wilderness, wildlife,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



WELCOME NEW STAFF!

Amber Price | Administrative Assistant

As a child, Amber wandered onto New Mexico's public lands, absorbing all she could about ecology, botany, biology, and geology. She began to notice the threads that tie people and nature together. Eager to explore those threads, she attended the University of New Mexico. She graduated with a B.A. in Anthropology, concentrating on Archaeology, and gained a new perspective for how humans connect with their environments.



After college, she joined the Public Lands Interpretive Association, where she learned the intricacies of public lands management throughout the Southwest. She discovered the importance of community in protecting our natural resources and honed her aptitude for outreach. She enthusiastically joins New Mexico Wild to offer her voice and passion in advocating for the spaces, resources, and animals she has loved her entire life.

Shaya Torres | Communications Manager

Shaya Torres (she/her) has over a decade of experience leading strategic communications for advocacy organizations, legislative bodies, and social justice nonprofits. Beginning her career in the reproductive justice movement in 2013, she has since led advocacy campaigns, managed crisis communications, and harnessed the power of storytelling—always centering the voices of those most impacted. She is excited to bring her experience to New Mexico Wild to join the fight to protect the land, wildlife, and water in the state she is proud to call home. ▲▲



BOARD UPDATES

Farewell to Holley and Todd

After years of dedicated service on the New Mexico Wild board, we bid a heartfelt farewell to Holley Hudgins and Todd Schulke, two true champions of the wild places we all love.

Holley Hudgins

A Silver City resident for 30 years, Holley brought an invaluable first-hand perspective to the board—one shaped by decades of witnessing the deep connections between our natural environment, local economy, and quality of life. Her passions for travel, fishing, birding, and time spent in the Gila weren't just hobbies; they were the lived experience that grounded her advocacy and gave it authenticity.

Thank you, Holley. The Gila is better for your fight, and New Mexico Wild is better for your service.

Todd Schulke

After an extraordinary run of service of over 28 years, we say a profound and grateful farewell to Todd Schulke as a member of the New Mexico Wild board of directors.

Todd brought to this board a depth of experience and a breadth of conservation leadership that is simply unmatched. As a co-founder and senior staff member of the Center for Biological Diversity, he has been a pillar of the conservation movement in the Southwest and beyond. He has served on the board of New Mexico Wild since its very inception — making him not just a board member, but a foundational part of who we are and what we have become. New Mexico Wild has been immeasurably strengthened by Todd's vision, his tenacity, and his decades of dedication. ▲▲



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

—ERIC VAN HORN, LEGACY SUPPORTER

Create Your Wild Legacy

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

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

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

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



WILDERNESS LEGACY FUND
SUPPORTING NEW MEXICO WILD

Special thanks to Jay Hemphill for donating the cover photo for *Wild Waters: Passport to New Mexico's Rivers*. jayhemphill.com



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THANK YOU
FOR SUPPORTING
OUR WORK!

Stone, Water, & the Fight to Protect New Mexico's Rivers

A CONVERSATION WITH
MICHAEL ZIMBER, FOUNDER
OF STONE FOREST, SANTA FE

TISHA BROSKA

There's a throughline connecting the stone fountains of Santa Fe's Stone Forest studio to the wild rivers of New Mexico—and it runs straight through the life of the man who built it.

Zimber, founder of Stone Forest, spent six formative years as an outdoor guide and river outfitter before channeling that passion into craft. Now in its 37th year, Stone Forest creates handmade stone fountains and basins inspired by a Japanese gardening philosophy: distilling the essence of nature and bringing it into people's homes. "It really came out of who I am," he says simply.

Zimber's connection to rivers never faded. For decades, he and his family have floated the Chama River, run the Taos Box and built a lifetime of memories on New Mexico's waterways—starting when all three of his kids were still in diapers. "More than anything, I think our family memories stand out," he says. "Lucky for me, we're still at it."

That personal history is exactly why the urgency of today's water crisis hits close to home for Zimber. New Mexico is deep in a prolonged drought, and he doesn't mince words about



"River guiding rule #1: keep passengers in the boat." Michael Zimber, guiding through Sunset Rapid in his 20s. Photo courtesy of Southwest Wilderness Center.

what's at stake. "With climate change and us being in the Southwest, how critical our river systems are to the general health of the environment—this is when the rubber meets the road," he says. He recently read about the entire Colorado watershed facing a pivotal year and worries the same reckoning is coming for New Mexico. "Are we even going to have a river season this year? Our peak (flows) might be coming in the next couple of weeks, for all I know."

It's that sense of urgency—paired with deep love—that drew Zimber to support New Mexico Wild's "Wild Waters: Passport to New Mexico's Rivers" book, a stunning photographic guide to the state's rivers and waterways. Stone Forest and Michael and Julie Zimber made a significant contribution to help underwrite the cost of producing the book. Flipping through it, he says, reminded him just how many remarkable rivers New Mexico has. "Some I haven't been on in years or rarely think about. It really shows how many cool rivers we have and how critical they are to biodiversity and the overall health of our communities."

He sees the book as doing triple duty. "I'm going to go with all three," he laughs, when asked whether it's a tool for advocacy, education or inspiration. "It gets people excited about rivers without beating them over the head. And it talks about what a critical time this is for protection — how lacking in protection our rivers actually are."

That protection gap is something New Mexico Wild is actively working to close. New surface water permitting rules are being drafted at the state level, and the organization is building toward a statewide river protection plan. "Wild Waters," with 2,000 copies in print and events already held from Silver City to Las Cruces, is helping lay the groundwork by building the community of people who care enough to act.

For Zimber, it all comes back to the same place it started: moving water, open sky and the belief that what we love, we protect.

Editor's note: Thank you to Michael and Julie Zimber and Stone Forest for helping to underwrite the Wild Waters publication. ▲▲

Special thanks to the
sponsors of Wild Waters:
Passport to New Mexico's
Rivers

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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/

NEW MEXICO WILD HAS A NEW WEBSITE!

STAY INFORMED LIKE NEVER BEFORE.

The new site is fully mobile-ready and designed to elevate the powerful human stories behind our campaigns. Stories that connect wilderness, wildlife and water issues to communities across New Mexico and to decision makers in Washington, D.C.

Most importantly, we've made it easier than ever to take action.

Whether you're contacting elected officials, learning about a campaign, or sharing your voice, the new website helps turn concern into engagement—and engagement into impact.



WILDERNESS

Our wildlands are not just open spaces. They are water purifiers, air cleaners, and wildlife habitat. They slow the impacts of climate change and are home to cultural sites and long-anticipated adventures. Visiting or just knowing these places exist can produce a sense of curiosity, inspiration, renewal, and hope.

OUR PRIORITIES

WILDLIFE

New Mexico is home to hundreds of rare species, including 90 found nowhere else on Earth. By protecting these animals and the places they depend on, we're safeguarding an irreplaceable part of our state's identity and making sure we don't lose species that can never be replaced.

OUR PRIORITIES

WATER

What reaches our taps begins upstream—in the forests and wetlands that filter it, the rivers that carry it, and the habitats that depend on it. New Mexico's waters are all interconnected. Our work protects both the water itself and the access that wildlife and communities need to survive.

OUR PRIORITIES

Thank you to Wilburforce Foundation for helping fund the website rebuild

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

HIKES • MEMBER EVENTS • PUBLIC LAND CELEBRATIONS • FILM SCREENINGS

- WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS
- CONSERVATION COMMUNITY EVENTS

Get Involved!
nmwild.org/get-involved/events

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

I want to make a one-time donation

\$25 (Student/Senior)

\$35

\$50

\$100

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*I want to become a monthly sustaining donor**

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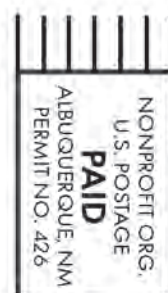
★★★★

*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
P.O. Box 25464
Albuquerque, NM 87125
Not a member yet? Go to nmwild.org.



What is Wilderness?

The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the National Wilderness Preservation System to preserve the last remaining wildlands in America. The Wilderness Act, as federal policy, secures an enduring resource of Wilderness for the people. Wilderness is defined as an area that has primarily been affected by the forces of nature with the imprint of humans substantially unnoticeable. It is an area that offers outstanding opportunity for solitude or a primitive or unconfined type of recreation, and an area that contains ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

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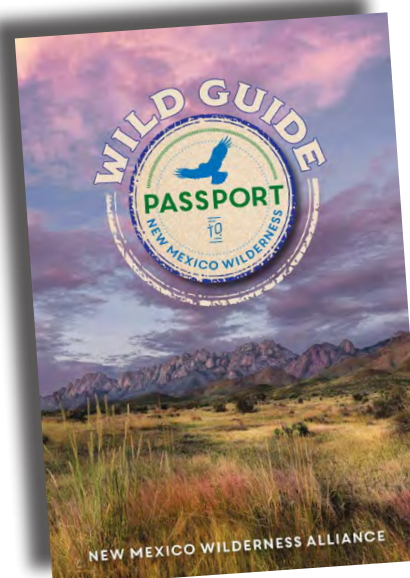
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