



Fall/Winter 2026
The Semiannual Publication
of the New Mexico
Wilderness Alliance

NEW MEXICO WILD!



**EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW
WITH SENATOR
PETER WIRTH**



New Mexico WILD!

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New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

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ON THE COVER

The Chama River Canyon Wilderness and
Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River.
Photo by Tisha Broska

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Mark Allison

WHAT'S NEXT?

In a report issued June 25, the Center for American Progress (CAP) documented that since President Trump's election, his administration has removed public lands protections for places such as the Upper Pecos Watershed in New Mexico and the Boundary Waters in Minnesota and is actively in the process of removing protections for places like Greater Chaco and 45 million acres of roadless areas across the country—totaling a combined *86 million acres*. Authors Sophie Conroy and Sam Zeno note that this is “an area equivalent to more than 70 Grand Canyons or 38 Yellowstone National Parks.”



All of this is being done in a fevered closeout fire sale for the benefit of oil and gas production and mining (oops, almost forgot coal), with not just disregard but an obvious contempt for all other values and uses of national public lands. Balance? No, ma'am. Multiple use? Not so much.

Before the ink was even dry on the CAP report, President Trump signed executive orders in July that gutted the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears national monuments, reducing their size by nearly 3 million acres. Sure, we think it was illegal, but these superlative national treasures are once again vulnerable until lawsuits work their way through the courts or a future administration puts the protections back in place—hopefully before it is too late.

In a recent Gallup survey of Americans, a record low 35% of respondents rated the quality of the country's environment positively, and 60% of those surveyed said the government is doing too little to protect the environment. At this point, I'd say let's stop the bleeding—or maybe adopt a Hippocratic pledge to do no harm, particularly in the most ecologically sensitive and culturally important places, if you please.

Given that the administration has so weakened the National Environmental Policy Act and curtailed the public's opportunity to meaningfully engage and provide input into decisions about how our public lands are managed—indeed limiting our ability to even be aware of changes, proposals and projects—I suppose they could say they aren't aware of the public sentiment. But we know it's really because they couldn't care less.

Also in July, in the midst of the ongoing global mass species extinction crisis, the administration found time to fundamentally weaken the Endangered Species Act so that the destruction of habitat—i.e., literally the places species need to eat, procreate, you know, survive—is now okey dokey.

Most recently, the Department of the Interior announced a review of both wildlands policies and administratively protected de facto wilderness areas, while the Forest Service is rumored to be targeting agency recommended wilderness. We remain in an all-hands-on deck posture, which honestly is feeling like a very long time to be on deck.



Unprecedented threats necessitate new thinking and bold responses. They require a proportionate reaction, one that recognizes the urgency of the moment and that appreciates the overwhelming community support for protecting our most special places, one that respects local input and a community process, and one that also offers a counter at scale.

If Sen. Mike Lee of Utah wants to privatize public lands totalling hundreds of millions of acres to benefit a few at the expense of everyone else, then why can't we propose permanent protections for the quickly disappearing roadless areas before they are lost to us?

If the Trump administration wants to eviscerate the ESA, removing protections for threatened and endangered species under the preposterous notion that habitat isn't essential for species survival, why can't we propose legislation to safeguard certain areas from industrial despoliation?

If the United States Supreme Court can continue to erode the Clean Water Act (see Sackett v. EPA, 2023, and San Francisco v. EPA, 2025), then why can't we enact state level protections (oh wait—we did that!). OK, but why not also enact a state law that protects the free flow of special segments of New Mexico's rivers and their remarkable cultural, recreational or ecological values? Let's do it!

If the current land management structure has been bloodied through sustained attacks characterized by a rather impressive mix of incompetence and malice, let's reimagine what we'd like public lands and public lands management to look like. Instead of trying to restore a system that was already under-resourced and composed of bureaucracies that too often favored commercial interests over cultural and ecological ones...why can't we dream big?

This too shall pass. Looking beyond, looking to what comes next, what is *your* vision? What would *you* like the future to look like? Let's talk.

As the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the United States comes to a close, I'm reminded of how public lands connect us and how essential they are to our well-being and our very identity as Americans. And how very, very lucky we are.

Thanks to all of you for everything you do for New Mexico's public lands, wilderness, wildlife and water.

With gratitude,

Mark



The breathtaking Bears Ears National Monument in Utah.
Photo by Judith Zimmerman/Danita Delimont



Woody Guthrie, This Land is Your Land

Excerpts from Original 1940 Version:

I roamed and rambled and followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts,
And all around me, a voice was sounding:
God blessed America for me.
[This land was made for you and me.]

Was a high wall there that tried to stop me
A sign was painted said: Private Property,
But on the back side it didn't say nothing —
God blessed America for me.
[This land was made for you and me.]

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WILDERNESS DISPATCHES

Updates on New Mexico Wild Projects Across the State

OTERO MESA UPDATE



Bikepacking in Otero Mesa.
Photo courtesy of Matt Mason

It is well known in the conservation community that a broad-based constituency of people must stand up for our special places if we are to protect them. We were therefore delighted to partner recently with Matt Mason, a Las Cruces-based advocate and board member of the non-profit organization Bikepacking Roots, to support the development of “Wayfaring Stranger,” a 245-mile bikepacking route traversing Otero Mesa and surrounding lands. We hope this route encourages people to get out and fall in love with Otero Mesa’s stunning vistas, exceptional solitude, native wildlife populations and abundant evidence of this landscape’s rich human history. And while one would do well to explore these values slowly and at the pace of a bike, Wayfaring Stranger also offers opportunities for scenic drives and could serve as a jumping off point for hikes. Learn more at bikepackingroots.org. ▲▲



Cultural sites within Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Photo by Robert Sterry

OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR CHACO

The Trump administration has proposed revoking the 10-mile protection zone around Chaco Culture National Historical Park, a buffer that prevents new oil and gas leasing and mining claims on public lands. The Department of the Interior (DOI) is rushing to overturn these protections and gave the public only 21 days to weigh in. The response was overwhelming — hundreds of thousands of people spoke up, including almost 30,000 New Mexico Wild members and supporters. If DOI moves forward with its proposal, lawsuits may be the last resort to prevent unchecked extractive development.

By speaking out, you showed decision-makers that Chaco’s enduring cultural significance deserves respect and lasting protection. We are deeply grateful for your action, solidarity and dedication to protecting this irreplaceable cultural landscape for current and future generations. Thank you! ▲▲

CAJA DEL RIO PROTECTION UPDATE

The Caja del Rio near Santa Fe is a significant Indigenous and Hispano cultural landscape, and includes routes tied to El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, long traveled as part of networks connecting communities across what is now the U.S.-Mexico border. The plateau carries deep layers of Pueblo and Hispano history and land use that predate New Mexico statehood.

The area is also ecologically important, serving as a wildlife corridor for migratory birds along the Rio Grande and as habitat for bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, black bear, cougar and many other native species.



The Caja del Rio. Photo by Sara Berghold

On April 30, Sen. Martín Heinrich and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández introduced the Caja del Rio Protection Act—SB 4458 and HB 8616—with co-sponsorship from the rest of New Mexico’s congressional delegation. The legislation has the unanimous support of the All Pueblo Council of Governors, as well as the Santa Fe County Commission and key local Hispano stakeholders. In short, the bill would protect traditional Pueblo and Hispano cultural heritage and land uses, and would prohibit mineral extraction and future utility and road infrastructure projects. The bill received its first committee hearing on July 16 to review testimony on the bill, though it has not yet advanced further.

We are still a long way from passing the bill, and the current make-up of Congress does not favor its chances soon. But the stakeholder community remains unified and committed to seeing it through. When the political balance shifts, New Mexico Wild hopes the Caja will be well-positioned among the priorities for permanent protection. ▲▲



The Upper Pecos River. Photo by Hunter Ten Broek

UPPER PECOS WATERSHED IS ONCE AGAIN VULNERABLE TO MINING

On April 7, the Trump administration rescinded the administrative Pecos mineral withdrawal. If finalized, the withdrawal would have protected approximately 165,000 acres of the Upper Pecos watershed from mineral development and, most importantly, prevented the Australian mining company Comexico LLC (a subsidiary of New World Resources Limited) from expanding its proposed mining play in the Upper Pecos watershed. Because of this action, this area that is critical to the vitality of the Upper Pecos watershed and its communities is again vulnerable and unprotected.

The Pecos Watershed Protection Act, introduced by Sen. Martín Heinrich in April 2025 and co-sponsored by Sen. Ben Ray Luján and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández, would permanently withdraw the area from mining development. Under the General Mining Act of 1872, existing mining claims would be exempt from this legislation. Like the administrative mineral withdrawal, the legislation would prevent Comexico LLC from expanding its mining play. The current congressional stalemate has prevented the legislation from moving forward, but that could change significantly after the midterm elections in Novem-

ber. Permanent protection through legislation, administrative action and even litigation are all paths still worth pursuing. Regardless, New Mexico Wild is committed to tirelessly working with local communities and elected officials on a solution that will permanently protect this irreplaceable watershed. We will not quit until we see this through! ▲▲



Antelope Pass. Photo by Tony Donaldson

BOOTHEEL COMMUNITIES UNITE AGAINST ANTELOPE PASS MINING PROPOSAL

Some places are just too remarkable to mine. When Canadian company Almadex Minerals recently targeted Antelope Pass in the Peloncillo Mountains, an unlikely alliance of ranchers, conservationists, astronomers and businesses quickly rallied. The cause? This landscape simply is too vital to lose. It provides a critical linkage in one of America’s most important wildlife corridors, is home to more mammal species than Yellowstone, and is the only place on Earth where a genetically distinct population of Dixon’s whiptail lizard lives. Just as Grant County residents scared off mining company Ivanhoe Electric from its plans to initiate an exploration project surrounding Pinos Altos earlier in 2026, Almadex cancelled its plans as soon as Bootheel communities came together to fight against mining Antelope Pass. As the unprecedented boom in mining claims statewide accelerates (see centerfold story in this newsletter for more on this), these cases offer an important lesson: Broad-based community pushback is essential in saving our special places. ▲▲

PUSHING BACK TO PROTECT DARK SKIES

Dark Sky New Mexico (DSNM), a woman- and Hispana-owned small business in rural Hidalgo County, was among local businesses that influenced a large international mining conglomerate’s decision to cease exploration in the protected Antelope Pass area.



Diana Casas-Hensley

“We will not let some international mining conglomerate bully us into giving up our way of life,” said Diana Casas-Hensley, DSNM owner. “Along with our neighbors, we used every available tool to make it clear that we intended to keep our ranching, farming and rural heritage intact. Ranchers, farmers, environmentalists, small business owners and individual citizens stood together to communicate that we value the dark, quiet and peaceful environment we already have more than what the mining company could bring to the area.

“Let’s be frank: We want economic growth, more jobs and a more prosperous environment that keeps our community intact. But we don’t want that growth to ruin our environment or destroy the community culture that we’re all working hard to develop and maintain.”

Casas-Hensley has coffee available on her front porch at about 8 a.m. every morning. Visitors are welcome, particularly if they will stick around to help her pour concrete for DSNM’s new observatories. ▲▲

2026 Wilderness Ranger Season Overview

STAFF ARTICLE



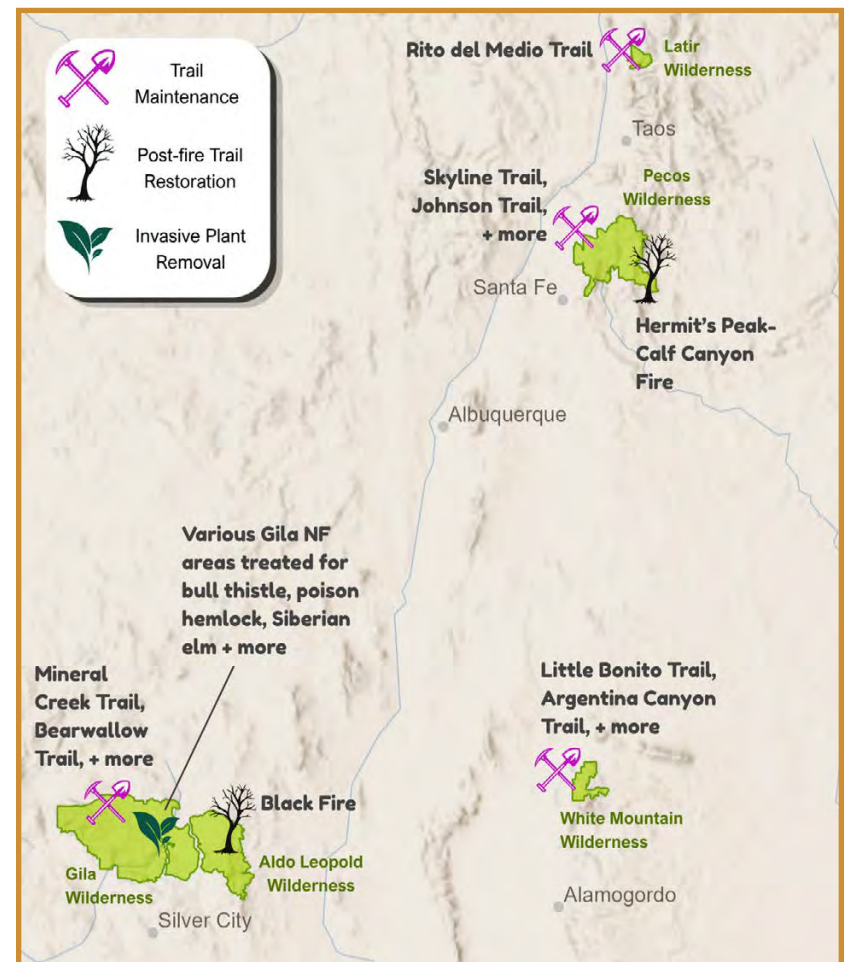
Our intrepid Wilderness Rangers. Back row, left to right: Maud van der Beek, Evan Hobbes, Nico Lis, Jonathan Bodycombe, Matias Coronado, Vicente Ordoñez. Front row, left to right: Victor Perez, Eric Nussbickel, Raven Vix, Atticus Olivet, Kat McCarver, Morgan McFeeley. Staff photo

This season marks the 10th anniversary of our Wilderness Ranger Program, which we are celebrating with a bigger than ever crew and a diverse array of projects. We have 12 seasonal ranger staff statewide improving trail access, working on post-fire recovery efforts and treating invasive plants across many of our beloved wildernesses.

SANTA FE NATIONAL FOREST

Our rangers have been hard at work under our ongoing agreement with the Forest Service for rehabilitating the trail system impacted by the 2022 Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon (HPCC) fire in the Pecos Wilderness. This can be grueling work in a landscape that doesn't invite the ample recreation it once did. However, the trails through the burn scar remain crucial thoroughways for public access, and keeping them passable and maintained also lays the foundation for a functional trail system as the burned habitat recovers over the long term. This season's efforts focused on clearing trails out of Iron Gate Campground, including segments of the Bob Grounds, Bordo del Medio, Gascon, Hamilton Mesa, Pecos, Rociada and Valdez trails, as well as the Chavez and Hermit's Peak trails out of the Rito Chavez Trailhead.

Our crews have also taken on some projects to improve access to the Pecos outside the HPCC burn scar this year. If you have tried to go from the Santa Barbara drainage to Ski Santa Fe, you'll know that the Skyline Trail from Pecos Baldy Lake to Horsethief Meadows has long needed clearing. The three-mile section of trail that passes through the 2013 Jaroso Fire burn scar has been a thorn in the side of hikers, runners and equestrians. We partnered with Runners for Public Lands to clear this segment of trail and also cleared the out-and-back trail spur that connects Skyline to Johnson Lake.



New Mexico Wild Wilderness Rangers tackle diverse projects statewide.



CARSON NATIONAL FOREST

Our presence on the Carson this season was a bit more limited, but we are glad to have had the opportunity to get up north! New Mexico Wild rangers worked on reopening the unmaintained Rito del Medio Trail in the Latir Peak Wilderness. We hope to add more capacity in the Carson in the near future to continue our work in this area and beyond!

GILA NATIONAL FOREST

This season we've continued working in partnership with Heart of the Gila to mechanically remove noxious weeds, including bull thistle, poison hemlock and others across the Gila—in



Left to right, Nico Lis, Raven Vix, Maud van der Beek. Staff photo



BEFORE



AFTER



Before-and-after photos showcasing impressive trail-clearing skills by Wilderness Rangers in the Pecos Wilderness. Staff photos

the Black Canyon, along the East Fork and mainstem of the Gila, and beyond. This work has been funded by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture and marks our second season in this partnership.

We’ve also received New Mexico Division of Outdoor Recreation and National Forest Foundation support for various trail work projects around the Gila, including retreading of the Mineral Creek Trail, clearing segments of the Black Canyon Trail and rerouting the Aspen Canyon Trail following damage from the 2022 Black Fire.

LINCOLN NATIONAL FOREST

The Lincoln can often be forgotten as our smallest national forest in a more remote, southern area of our state. A small but mighty crew of rangers kicked off the 2026 season early by clearing about 25 miles of trail, including sections of the Big Bonito, Argentina Canyon, Little Bonito, Cut Across, Turkey Canyon, Aspen Canyon and Phantom trails, plus the segment of the Crest Trail from the junction with Barber Ridge to Argentina Canyon and the first 1.5 miles of the Three Rivers Trail. ▲▲

GROWING OUR OUTREACH PROGRAM



Photo courtesy of Downtown Growers Market

We are proud to share that we are expanding our outreach team to strengthen our presence across the state. This growth allows us to bridge the gap between local concerns and statewide conservation efforts, ensuring that our work continues to reflect the diverse communities we serve. It also allows us to have a presence at more local events and to form new relationships with communities throughout the state. This increase in capacity started in the winter with a few of our Wilderness Rangers, who did an exceptional job and expanded our reach greatly. Since then, we’ve brought on Nate Bannister in Albuquerque and are looking to expand our work in Las Cruces and Santa Fe.

New Mexico Wild’s community outreach activities supported by the Legal+Outreach Fund in 2026:

The Fund’s outreach goals are to expand our communications and broaden and diversify our base of public lands supporters, recruit volunteers, and drive grassroots activism to protect New Mexico’s wilderness, wildlife and water.

2026 OUTREACH (JAN 1 - AUG 31)			
IN PERSON TABLING CONTACTS MADE	PARTICIPANTS TO DATE	VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION & STEWARDSHIP HOURS	NEW MEMBERS ADDED
839	3603 ADULTS 329 YOUTH	14,628	1,225
TABLING AND OUTREACH EVENTS COMPLETED	OUTINGS/EVENTS HOSTED	ADVOCACY & PETITION ACTIONS TAKEN	TOTAL NEW CONTACTS ADDED
68	93	49,390	30K+

**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

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.



Wilderness Defenders/Wildland Monitors Update

We call the many wonderful volunteers who help us with all facets of our mission “Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders” to acknowledge their critical contributions to the success of New Mexico Wild’s work to defend and protect our wildlands, wildlife and water. This title honors 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.

One way that volunteers support our mission is through wildland monitoring. Wildland monitors get out onto our public lands to document places with a high degree of wilderness quality, other unique values and impacts affecting treasured landscapes. Wildland monitoring highlights this year include:

- the continuation of a project—now nearly complete—to systematically document roads and vehicle incursions across the vast grasslands of the Continental Divide Wilderness Study Area (WSA) to help us craft a plan with federal land managers to address motor vehicle impacts;
- numerous visits to the Cabelon area WSAs, the Rio Chama WSA and the geological wonderland of the San Juan Basin badlands area to record wilderness qualities and outstanding geologic values; and
- ongoing trespass cattle monitoring in Valles Caldera National Preserve.

Thanks to our wildland monitors on the last project—now in its fourth year—as well as court challenges by other organizations and ongoing communication with the National Park Service on the trespass cattle issue has yielded progress. So far, we have seen an effort to reconstruct the Valles Caldera’s boundary fence, rapid dispatch of wranglers to round up wayward bovine, and, based on trespass cattle data collected this summer, a dramatic decrease in the presence of cows in the preserve and an associated significant reduction in impacts from cattle congregating in sensitive headwaters streams and meadows as compared to when we initiated this project in 2023. Visit nmwild.org/get-involved to find an opportunity to volunteer. ▲▲

Below: After a day of training at the Valles Caldera National Preserve, our volunteers are ready to monitor for trespass cattle. Staff photo

Bottom: Silke Bletzer and Michael Abbate give a thumbs up to a posted road closure within the Continental Divide Wilderness Study Area. Staff photo



New Mexico Wild’s 2026 Fall Recreation Map

As temperatures cool, New Mexico’s trails, canyons and wildlife refuges come alive with fall color. From leaf-peeping along Little Bonito-Argentina Canyon and Frijoles Canyon to birdwatching at Bitter Lake and Rio Mora to hiking Vega Redonda Trail or bikepacking the Wayfaring Stranger route — this map highlights some of the best spots across the state to soak in the beauty of fall before winter sets in. Grab your boots, binoculars or bike and get out to explore our amazing public lands!



Volunteers get sampling instructions from Community Science Coordinator Tayo Basquiat before launching on the Rio Chama. Staff photo

Rio Chama Season Overview

Despite challenges, 2026 marked another successful season of community science on the Chama River, led by our Community Science Coordinator, Tayo Basquiat. We collected 124 samples by early August, safely past our minimum goal of 100 and with some time left in the season. Very low spring flows led to low launch numbers and concerns about meeting our sampling goals. We expanded our efforts to include campers along Forest Road 151, which provides river access between Chavez Canyon and Big Eddy. This allowed us to engage around 200 volunteers and capture more samples for the project. ▲▲

2027 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

TRICIA SNYDER

The 2027 legislative session is around the corner, and as always, New Mexico Wild has big plans for moving forward priorities to protect and support the wilderness, wildlife and waters of the Land of Enchantment.

POLICY PRIORITIES

The energy that comes with a new gubernatorial administration makes for a good time to move big ideas, and we will not let that opportunity go to waste. In 2027, New Mexico Wild, working with many of our partners, including American Rivers, Western Resource Advocates and American Whitewater, will work to advance a bill to protect some of our state's most important rivers. This bill would focus on state-level protections to ensure our iconic rivers and the values they support are sustained for future generations. The bill would limit activities that would adversely impact rivers and river-related values in designated segments, including limitations around

new dams and diversions, and would maintain water quality that exists at the time of designation. It would also create a fund to incentivize work that supports rivers and river-related values in designated river segments on private and Tribal lands. We are actively reaching out to stakeholders and Sovereign Nations to further develop the idea.

To address the impacts of uranium mining, staff are working with our partners to evaluate the need for supplemental state law or regulation, in addition to the existing legal framework. We have seen an increased interest in uranium operations in the past year or so. Although uranium extraction has largely been inactive across the state, the legacy from past efforts, particularly contaminated groundwater, underscores the need to ensure sufficient regulation is in place to protect the health of communities and our environment. Stay tuned for more details as we work through the opportunities!

BUDGET PRIORITIES

On the budget side, we are working with our partners to put forward the idea of a statewide

environmental flows program. A number of water agencies have water-related mandates, but none are tasked with the job of thinking about our rivers holistically. This program would work to identify multi-benefit solutions to New Mexico's water crisis that would address the needs of rivers and the communities they support, human and non-human. Such activities might include incorporating the needs of rivers into regional water planning or serving as matchmaker for water rights holders and the various tools the state currently has at its disposal to keep water in New Mexico's streams. Doing so can provide cultural benefits by ensuring water is available at critical times for cultural practices of Tribes, Pueblos and Nations; move agricultural water farther downstream; and support recreation and many other water uses and users.

We will also continue to advocate for budget priorities such as regional water planning, the Water Data Initiative, the state-led surface water quality permitting program, wetlands restoration and management, and more. Make sure you're signed up for our email list for up-to-date information on the 2027 legislative session and how you can help! ▲▲



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GET OUT!

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

nmwild.org/shop

RIO GRANDE: RACECOURSE



Photo by Jim O'Donnell

Location: North-central New Mexico in Taos County, about 15 miles southwest of Taos and 40 miles north of Santa Fe

Segment description: From the Quartzite Recreation Site to the County Line Day Use Area

Segment length: 4.5 miles

Elevation range: 6,013 to 5,884 feet

Land ownership/management: Bureau of Land Management, private

Featured recreational uses: Kayaking, rafting, fishing, bird-watching

Boating info: The Racecourse is the most popular whitewater run in New Mexico, beloved by private boaters and guided groups alike. Rapids are up to Class III+, increasing to Class IV at high water. Optimal flows are between 1,000 and 3,000 cfs, though kayakers can float this segment at flows as low as 250 cfs, making for a technical, rocky run. Conversely, at flows above 2,000 cfs parts of this run become a raging whitewater torrent. Hazards depend on water level and can include challenging whitewater, deep holes, and a bridge with limited clearance. No river permit is required.

Best seasons: May through October for boating, year-round for fishing and bird-watching

River access: Quartzite Recreation Site is the primary put-in for rafting and kayaking the Racecourse, and it's a popular fishing spot. This site is easily accessible via Highway 68 south of Taos, near the village of Pilar. The take-out for boating is at the County Line Day Use Area. From Taos, travel 15 miles south to the well-marked recreation site.

THERE ARE TWO MUST-RAFT SECTIONS OF THE RIO GRANDE NEAR TAOS: THE BOX AND THE RACECOURSE.

The Box is famous for its difficult Class IV rapids, but the Racecourse is slightly calmer, offering a balance of exciting whitewater but mellower rapids that afford boaters moments to enjoy the scenery. This makes it ideal for intermediate paddlers and families. The Racecourse is a 4.5-mile stretch of the Rio Grande just south of the village of Pilar.

Here, the river rushes past steep canyon walls of exposed ancient volcanic basalt thought to be 3 to 5 million years old. Celebrated for its rollicking Class III to IV rapids, the Racecourse is a top destination for kayakers and whitewater rafters. Put-in is at the Quartzite Recreation Site, so named for the pink and red quartzite of the Pilar Cliffs. Within a mile after launching, rafters and kayakers enter a maze of rapids that make the Racecourse a renowned paddling attraction.

The names of many of these rapids are well known. They include the Narrows, Eye of the Needle, Sleeping Beauty, Big Rock Rapid, and Souse Hole, the last large rapid on the Racecourse before the County Line take-out near Rinconada.



Those looking for a sportier experience on the river can find it on The Racecourse. Photo courtesy of Far Flung Adventures

The Racecourse is named for the Mother's Day Rio Grande Whitewater Races, an event that dates to the early 1960s, making it one of the oldest organized river races in the country.



Northern pike can be found in deeper portions of the river. Photo by Jik jik, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

The Racecourse is named for the Mother's Day Rio Grande Whitewater Races, an event that dates to the early 1960s, making it one of the oldest organized river races in the country.

Spring runoff can be the most dangerous time on this segment of the Rio Grande. High flows increase the difficulty of otherwise moderate rapids, while the speed of peak flows reduces the time a boater has to react. The Glenwoody Bridge, a 120-year-old wooden footbridge—easily navigable at low water—can be hazardous at high water conditions due to limited clearance below the bridge. Spring is also a time when the Rio Grande's waters are exceedingly frigid.

It's not uncommon to see spectators pulled off the side of the highway, particularly above Souse Hole. The challenge of this rapid, especially at high water, makes flips a frequent occurrence. These onlookers wait with bated breath to watch the fate of boaters as they navigate this challenge.

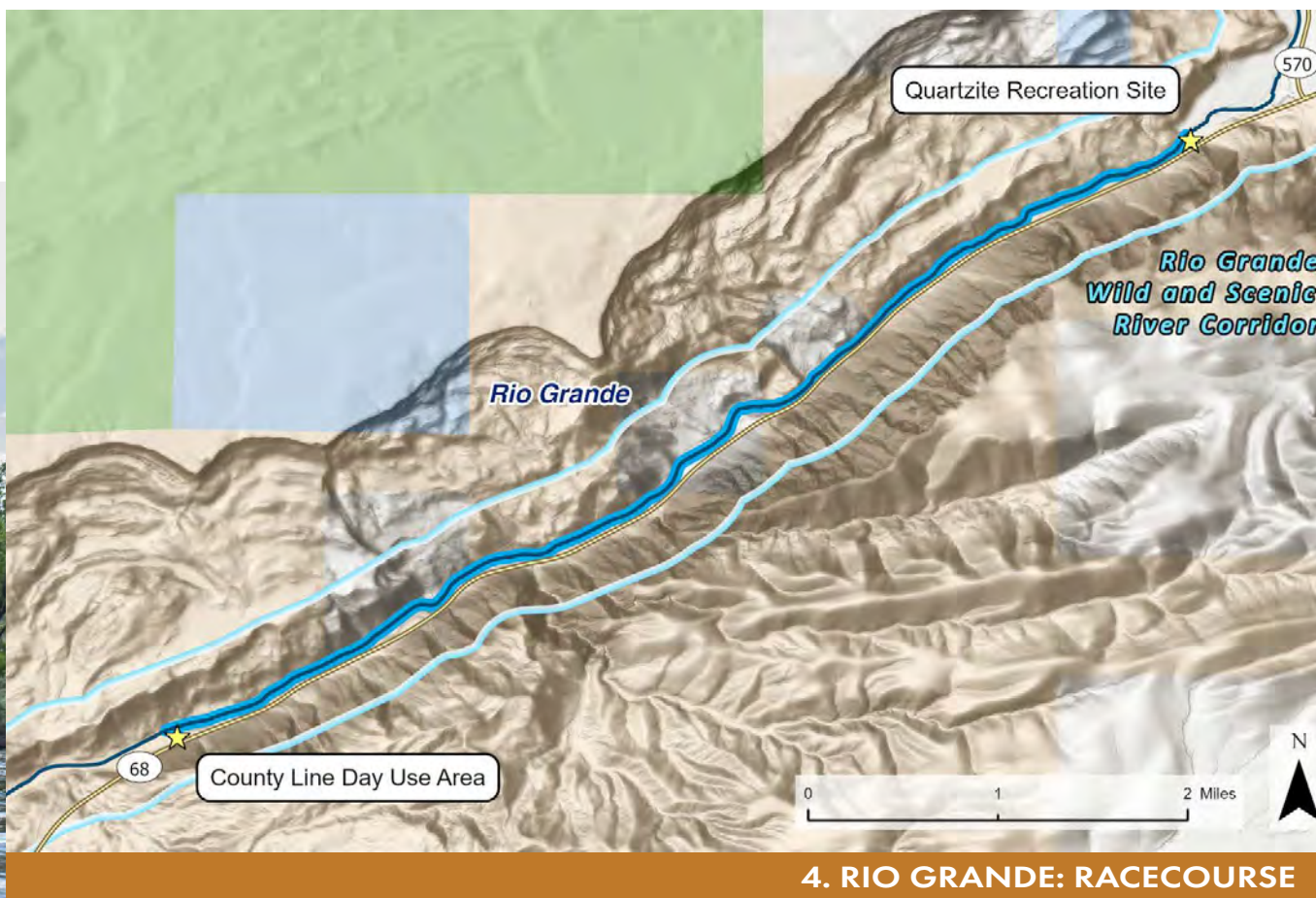
Multiple local outfitters offer guided trips catering to a wide range of skill levels. Parking areas and river access points are well-marked, and the outfitters provide shuttles for their guided trips.

The Racecourse is also famous for fly fishing. Rainbow trout and brown trout both ply these waters, as do impressive northern pike where the roiling waters scour deeper holes.

Birders, too, are attracted to the Racecourse. Hawks and eagles soar above the waters of the Rio Grande, while heron, mergansers, falcons, owls, ducks, and geese frequent the riverbanks and riparian forest. ▲▲



A mellower experience can also be had along certain sections of the river. Photo by Jim O'Donnell



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SILENT AUCTION

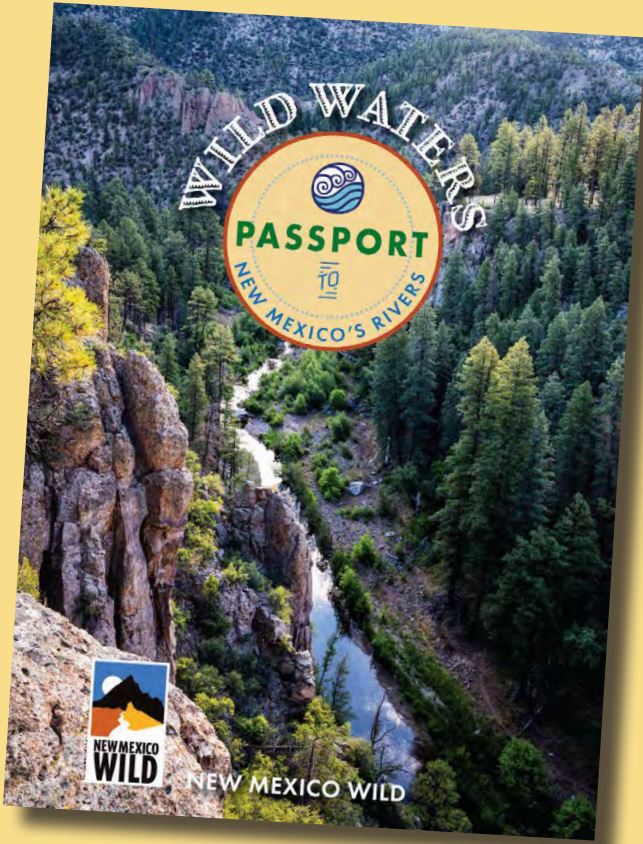
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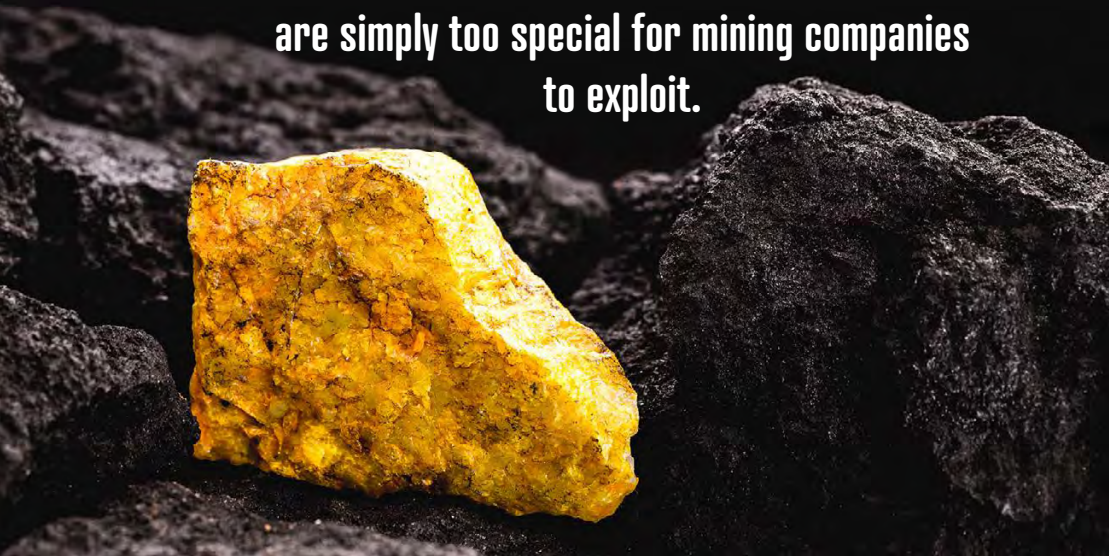


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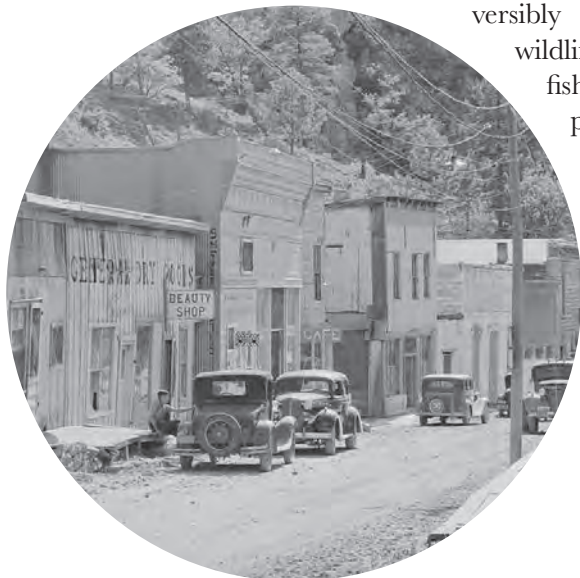
Price: \$20 + \$5 shipping

While mining is a necessary part of today's modern economy, numerous communities across New Mexico struggle with mining's toxic legacy and some places are simply too special for mining companies to exploit.



BJORN FREDRICKSON AND TRICIA SNYDER

While mining is a necessary part of today's modern economy, numerous communities across New Mexico struggle with mining's toxic legacy and some places are simply too special for mining companies to exploit. It is for these reasons that we've seen notable community pushback this year in Catron, Grant, Hidalgo and Rio Arriba counties (and perhaps more places by year's end) against mining proposals that could irreversibly harm wildlife and fish, rare plants,



Top left: Uranium ore. Although uranium extraction has been largely inactive in New Mexico for decades, interest in new operations has grown in the past year. Photo by RHI -stock.adobe.com

Top right: A gold prospector pouring water through his "rocker," Pinos Altos, NM, circa 1940. Photo by Lee Russell. Library of Congress

Above: Main street of Mogollon, NM, second largest gold mining town in the state. Circa 1940, photo by Lee Russell. Library of Congress

Right: The Tererro Mine remediation site. Staff photo

Center right: Pie Town Community meeting regarding the Datil uranium mining. Photo by Kathy Knapp

Far right: The massive Molycorp molybdenum mine near Questa in northern NM. Public domain photo

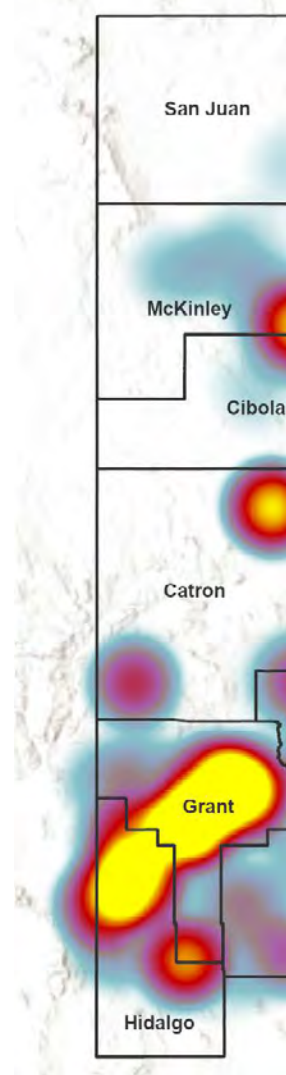
cultural resources, scenery, dark skies, recreation opportunities, traditional cultural uses of our lands and waters, multigenerational family ties to place, rural economies and lifeways, intact and wild landscapes, and, notably, our water.

Extraction of federal minerals is complicated and governed by various laws and authorities that depend on the mineral sought and, at times, the method of extraction. Hardrock mining—use of open pits and mine shafts to extract hardrock minerals, including metals like gold, silver, copper, zinc and lead among many others as well as other commercially valuable minerals like uranium—is managed under the General Mining Act of 1872. This is a highly antiquated statute that leveraged generous incentives to encourage mining interests to explore, develop and settle the American West during



the frontier era. Perversely, these incentives remain in place more than 150 years after the passage of this law and grant mining companies—often foreign conglomerates—the right to mine above all other values.

This legal right to mine means that while federal agencies can seek to mitigate impacts, they cannot deny a hardrock mining proposal associated with a valid mining claim no matter the biological, cultural, social or economic costs to surrounding communities, lands and water. To add insult to injury, mining companies exploiting hardrock minerals pay no royalties to the federal government irrespective of profits (and impacts), and the taxpayer is often left on the hook for the cost of cleaning up toxic mining waste long after mines close and mining companies disappear.



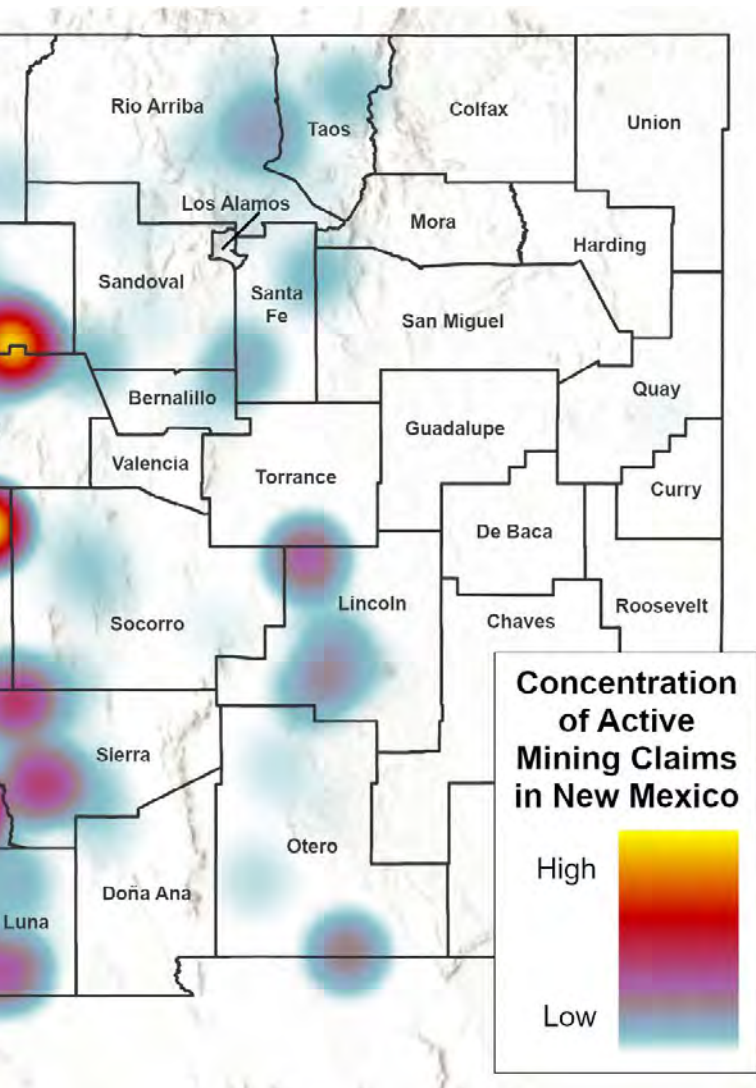
A community play

The General Mining Act of 1872 gives the best strategy is to make it as incon

- 1 Engage early**
Don't wait for a development p
hear rumors of a company con
- 3 Bring in elected officials**
Mayors, city and town council
state lawmakers and the cong
them to join the community in
- 5 Demand a rigorous review**
Push agencies toward real pub
transparent analysis. Oppose t
Impact Permits by the New Mex
Division and Categorical Excl
Ask for an Environmental impa
- 7 Push for mineral withdraw**
Ask the congressional delegati
administrative and legislative



THREATS IN NEW MEXICO



Mining and water in New Mexico

Where the water goes, how much of it, and what it leaves behind



99%

of water used by mining in New Mexico is groundwater

18.5B

gallons withdrawn by mining operations in 2020

1.5%

of all water withdrawn statewide that year

How each type of mining uses water

	Processing	Transport	Dust control	Waste management	Injection wells and groundwater pumping
Open pit Copper and gold, mostly in southwest NM	●	○	●	●	○
Strip mining Coal, ongoing in the Four Corners	●	○	●	●	○
Underground Historic uranium and zinc, potash active	○	●	●	●	○
In-situ Uranium, proposed and not yet active	○	○	○	●	●
Lithium extraction Lithium, proposed and not yet active	●	○	○	●	●

Processing: using water to separate desired materials from non-desired materials.

Transport: moving ore from the place of extraction to another facility.

Dust control: spraying water on the ground and in tunnels in below-ground mining operations to maintain visibility and air quality.

Waste management: transporting and diluting waste (tailings) from mining activities.

Injection wells and groundwater pumping: in-situ mining injects water in the ground to bring up uranium. One method of lithium extraction involves pumping salty groundwater to the surface and allowing the water to evaporate in large ponds, leaving behind the desired materials.

How mining puts water at risk

Acid mine drainage

Open pit, strip and underground

Excavation exposes buried rock to oxygen. When water is added, the resulting chemical reaction turns runoff acidic and mobilizes heavy metals into streams and groundwater.

A falling water table

All types

Groundwater pumping for mining operations draws down aquifers and can dewater streams and dry domestic wells.

Injected solutions

In-situ

In-situ mining pumps an acidic or basic solution into subsurface rock to dissolve the target mineral. The chemistry happens inside the aquifer itself. Where groundwater is present, dissolved minerals can profoundly contaminate the aquifer with heavy metals and radioactive elements.

Spills, seepage and failures

All types

Leaking pipelines, seepage from waste rock and tailings pond failures can pollute surface water and groundwater.

Book for fighting mining proposals

Mining companies have a legal right to develop their hardrock claims. Until Congress changes that, the most convenient as possible to exploit places that are simply too special to mine, so companies go elsewhere.

1. Get involved early. Start as soon as you are considering exploratory activity.

2. Build a broad coalition

Conservationists, sportsmen, businesses, Tribes, acequia parientes, ranchers, land grants and other community interests. Unity among groups that don't always agree is powerful.

4. Study the impacts

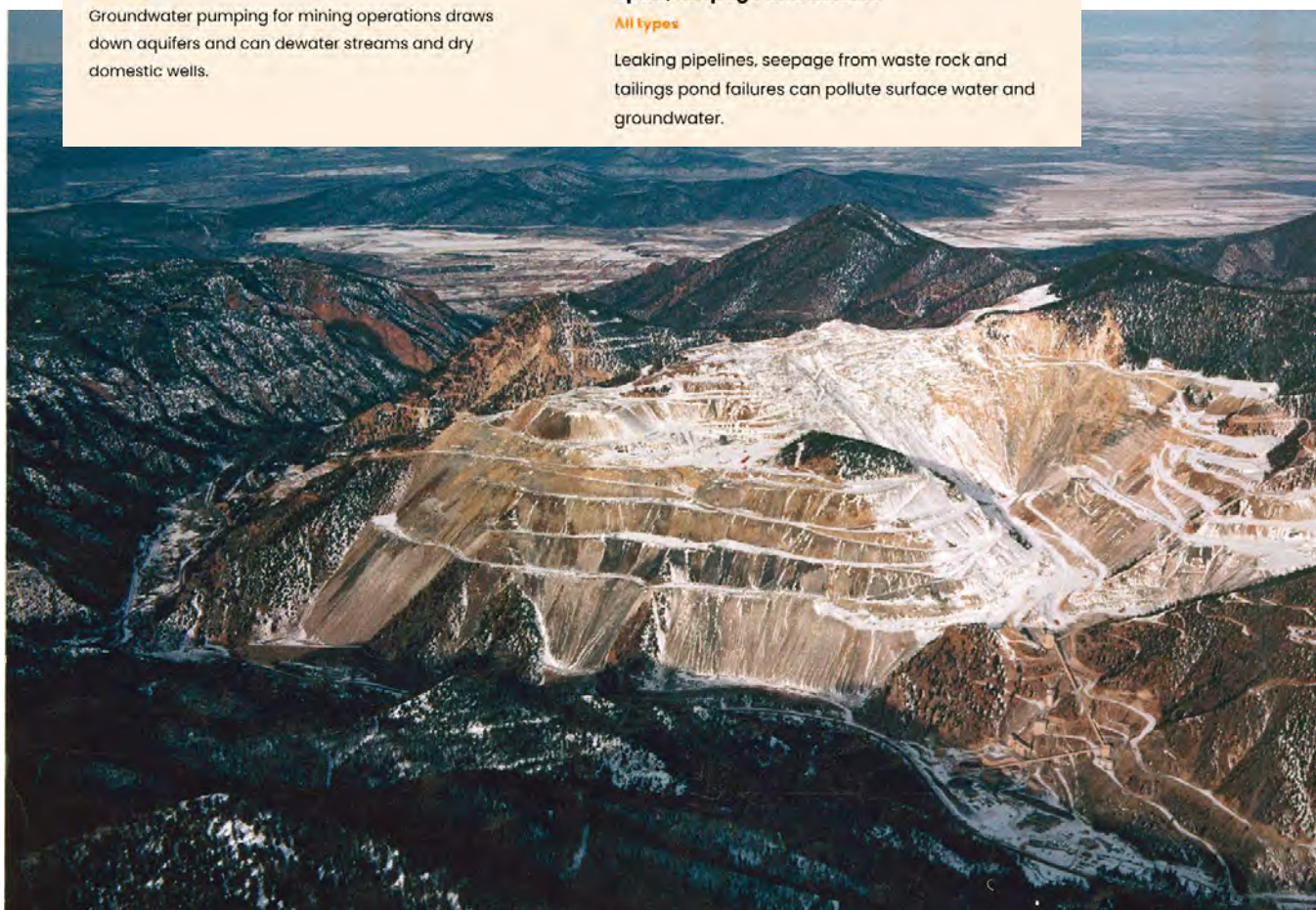
Look at ecological values, cultural resources, water, local economic drivers, community health and recreation.

6. Pass local resolutions

Work with county commissions and other local bodies on resolutions opposing the proposal, plus dust, noise and dark sky ordinances.

8. Stay in it for the long haul

These fights take years and can require a mix of organizing, litigation and legislative advocacy. Adapt the strategy as things change.



One way to forecast potential future mining threats is to track active mining claims, as claims must be staked to develop a mine. Unfortunately, mining companies are busy staking claims statewide, with new entries in federal mining claim data cropping up seemingly daily. Southwestern New Mexico—particularly Grant, Hidalgo and Catron counties—is ground zero for mining interests, with roughly two-thirds of the active mining claims statewide located in these three counties. See the map in this centerfold for a visual representation of the distribution of active mining claims across New Mexico.



Exacerbating the numerous and complex issues related to mining is New Mexico's water crisis. The entire American Southwest is in the midst of a multidecade megadrought, which by some accounts is the most severe in at least 1,200 years. Climate change is a significant contributor to this drought, and many experts agree we have transitioned into a process of aridification—

the permanent drying of our landscapes. This will have increasingly grave impacts on our surface and groundwater resources statewide and highlights that while mining may have a relatively small role in overall water withdrawals statewide, water use by mining operations can have significant localized impacts on water supplies. See the infographic in this centerfold to better understand how mining operations use water and how much water is used by mines across New Mexico.

Every drop of water is precious when facing such severe water quantity challenges, and so we also must not overlook the many examples across New Mexico of mines profoundly polluting local waters. While by no means an exhaustive list, a few examples include the Terro Mine near Pecos, the Homestake Mine near Grants, the Jackpile Uranium Mine on Laguna Pueblo and the Molycorp Mine in



Above: "At Madrid Coal Mine, New Mexico." Original painting by Carl Redin, 1934. Public domain image.

Left: Warning sign at a uranium mine near Mount Taylor in western NM. Photo by Eve Andree Laramee, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Questa. Collectively, these mines have contaminated surface and groundwater with heavy metals like lead, uranium and other radioactive elements as well as with high levels of acidity. Cleanup and remediation of these mines and many others statewide is ongoing and often takes decades and millions of dollars. Given that water is central to all facets of our well-being—ecological, cultural, social and economic—communities facing new mining threats are right to consider organizing in opposition. ▲▲

State Mining Protections in New Mexico

Hardrock mining in America is governed by the General Mining Act of 1872, a statute written over 150 years ago to encourage mineral development. It allows mining companies to extract valuable minerals from public lands without paying a federal royalty. The law lacks modern environmental standards and has



An abandoned mining shack on Baldy Mountain in Colfax County, NM. Photo by Sea Cow courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

allowed abandoned mines to proliferate, resulting in polluted water, hazardous sites, public health impacts and taxpayer-funded cleanup.

New Mexico's Mining Act of 1993 provides an important backstop. It requires permits for mining and exploration projects, reclamation and closeout planning, and financial assurance sufficient for the state or a third-party contractor to complete cleanup work if necessary. The state Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) evaluates mining applications and coordinates with other state agencies before issuing permits. The law also provides for public participation, inspections and enforcement.

While existing state protections are meaningful, additional safeguards may be needed. The federal government has been working to further weaken federal mining laws and regulations. The number of mining claims in New Mexico is skyrocketing amid federal efforts to fast-track permits. Additionally, some mining projects are not regulated by MMD, including in situ leach (ISL) uranium extraction, which is licensed by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission. ISL mining is a process that injects a solution underground to dissolve uranium, then pumps the uranium-bearing fluid to the surface for processing. This process poses a significant risk of groundwater pollution.

New Mexico Wild is working with partners to determine what reforms may be needed to reduce the risks of hardrock mining. It is essential to identify and close regulatory gaps and to ensure that MMD has the resources it needs to fully implement the 1993 Mining Act. Together, strong state safeguards and federal reform can better protect land, water, health, communities and taxpayers. ▲▲

CALL FOR ARTISTS: ENTER THE 2027 WOLF STAMP CONTEST!

Help Save the Lobo by Tapping into Your Creative Side!

New Mexico Wild invites artists of all ages and skill levels to submit original artwork for our 2027 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 from the adult category will be printed on the 2027 stamp. Proceeds from stamp sales will directly support Mexican gray wolf conservation and education programs. The winner of the youth category will receive a special prize pack!

Grand Prize: \$500

Submit your art by February 26, 2027.

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

Your creativity can make a difference
in wolf conservation!



GET THE ICONIC "WOLVES
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MEXICAN GRAY WOLF UPDATES

STAFF ARTICLE

Lobo population continues to increase despite recovery headwinds

The good news—the count of wild Mexican gray wolves conducted annually by federal and state wildlife agencies found a minimum of 317 lobos roaming free across southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona at the end of 2025. Compared with a census of 286 wild wolves at the end of 2024, this represents an increase of 31 wild lobos year-over-year. More strikingly, with a 2016 count of 113 wild Mexican gray wolves, the population in the United States has almost tripled over the last decade.

And yet, substantial challenges remain for the lobo. Notably, at least several dozen Mexican gray wolves are killed in the wild each year. Based on the latest publicly released federal data, 30 wolves were confirmed killed in 2024, with 12 of these mortalities (40%) from poaching or illegal trapping, five mortalities (16.5%) from vehicle collisions, and six mortalities (20%) from undetermined causes. This count represents a bare minimum of lobo mortalities, as these statistics rely heavily on collared wolves. As a result, numerous uncollared wolves likely die or are killed in the wild each year without any documentation.

Data obtained from the state of New Mexico via an open records request in 2026 show

that in the first six months of the year, 24 wolves were confirmed killed, with 10 mortalities (41.7%) attributed to poaching or illegal trapping, five (20.8%) attributed to vehicle collisions, and six (25%) attributed to undetermined causes. Confirmed wild lobo mortalities are therefore on track to increase by more than 50% in 2026 as compared to 2024 statistics, with a majority due to poaching, illegal trapping and vehicle collisions.

Political challenges are also hampering lobo recovery. The Trump administration has delayed recovery actions such as releasing captive wolves into the wild and sharing recovery data and is quick to jump to lethal removal (authorized killing) of lobos in instances of wolf-livestock conflict. Trapping also remains legal on private land in both New Mexico and Arizona, as well as on public land in Arizona with some regulation, and every year results in both the grave injury and killing of wolves that is often determined to be legal. Perhaps most concerning, rumor recently leaked out that counter to specific Mexican gray wolf recovery plan targets, the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Department of Wildlife and Arizona Game and Fish Department are preparing a petition to have the lobo downlisted from endangered to threatened under the Endangered Species Act. This would reduce protections for this species while it is in the midst of an encouraging yet delicate recovery process.

Stay tuned for more on efforts by New Mexico Wild and our coalition partners to ensure that wild lobos retain adequate protections and continue to progress toward recovery. ▲

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This summer, a group of New Mexico Wild volunteers worked to remove invasive thistle plants from the Gila National Forest. Photo by Vicente Ordoñez

A CONVERSATION WITH NEW MEXICO SENATOR PETER WIRTH

MARK ALLISON AND TRICIA SNYDER

Executive Director Mark Allison and Rivers and Waters Program Director Tricia Snyder sat down with Senator Peter Wirth to talk about history, public service, leadership, policy, and backpacking.

Peter Wirth is a Democratic state senator representing District 25 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he has served since 2009. He currently holds the position of Senate Majority Leader, a role he's held since 2017. In June 2026, Wirth announced he will not seek reelection in 2028 and will also step down from his majority leader post ahead of the 2027 legislative session, capping 22 impactful years in the New Mexico Legislature.

Mark Allison: Thank you very much Peter, for making time to talk with us today. We're looking forward to the conversation and so I will just jump in. You come from an illustrious family on both sides dating back generations—can you tell our readers a bit about your background?

Peter Wirth: So, interesting New Mexico history—my grandfather on my mom's side came to Santa Fe in 1920 with tuberculosis and this is one of the places you came to dry out. Where the Carmelites are up off of Camino Monte Sol was the sanitarium, where he came and was cured of tuberculosis and went on to become a very prominent architect. John Gaw Meem, who did the whole Southwestern style.

Then, on my dad's side—my dad was born in Dawson, New Mexico, which is now a ghost town and my grandfather, his dad, was up at the Los Alamos Ranch School as a camp counselor and math teacher before the war. Oppenheimer went to that school, which is where he found that beautiful place and that's why the whole Manhattan Project came there.

My Uncle Tim went on and ran for Congress from Colorado. He was one of the Watergate babies in 1974 and defeated a five-term Republican Congressman. He ended up serving six terms in the U.S. Congress. He then ran for U.S. Senate. I actually met my wife, Carol, working on his campaign.

Allison: What got you thinking about public service and running for elected office? Was your uncle Tim serving in Congress an inspiration?

Wirth: Certainly—as a young person growing up and having somebody serving in a federal congressional seat—that was something you kind of were eyes wide open about. So, I did have kind of a sense of what he did and then worked in politics right out of undergrad at Stanford. I worked on his Senate campaign and organized college students in Colorado back in 1986. Deciding to run was really about kind of a continuation of public service. And to be totally honest, I probably didn't fully think it through. I certainly didn't fully understand what I was getting myself into, back in 2004. Without a whole bunch of thought, I was, all of a sudden, in a five-way Democratic primary and went out on my bike every day after work at the law office and met a ton of people and won, and that's how it all started.

Allison: That's great. And your wife, Carol, has a history of public service.

Wirth: Carol just finished two terms on the Santa Fe City Council and did a lot of really good work there, including on water issues. Santa Fe's really been a leader on water conservation and Carol was instrumental in chairing the Water Conservation Committee. We had an eight-year period when I was a majority leader and she was sitting on the city council, so it was complete and total insanity.

Allison: She's been a real leader, and it's been great to work with her, too. Speaking of getting yourself out of something, you've announced recently that

you're not going to run for leadership again and that you're not going to run for re-election in 2028. You've done such great work, you're at the top of your game—can you walk us through your thinking process about that decision?

Wirth: I've been in the legislature for 22 years. I served two terms and six months in the House and I'm in my fifth term in the Senate. So, in two years, I would have had to run again for a sixth term. And I just came to the point and decided that it was a good time to transition. And we need to do a better job of lifting up the new leaders. I've been the majority leader for 10 years. My Chief of Staff calls them “dog years,” which I think is an interesting way to think about it. Because it's a tough job and it's an incredibly stressful one. You've got to make spot decisions and sometimes you're right on the edge of things completely going off the cliff.

I feel like I've done it well, but you want to depart at the right time. I'd much rather go out on the top than stay too long. I just felt it was better for me to step aside and then be here to help the new leader navigate and figure it out, something I did not have 10 years ago when I was elected.

Allison: “Here you go.”

Wirth: That's right, it was “here you go,” and that was the year [2017] the Governor vetoed the whole legislative branch of government. We were out of money. We were writing bad checks. It was absolute chaos, and very different than where we've been more recently. So, the eight years under Governor Lujan Grisham have been extraordinary.

And when you're here as long as I've been here, you realize that there are windows when you can do things. I felt that for me being leader is not just about keeping the train on the tracks. It also was an opportunity to push agenda items that carry bills. But I did feel it was important to continue to push and get some big things through, and thank goodness we did, especially with the current federal administration and environmental rollbacks. On clean air, hazardous waste, and water, we've been able to do things to allow New Mexico to set the direction we're going and moving forward instead of being stuck to a federal standard as it gets rolled back. Those are bills I'm super proud of and happy that we got through, and it really was the little window we had.

Tricia Snyder: That's a great segue—you've been such a champion for New Mexico's lands and water and wildlife over your entire career. Would say a little bit more about some of your notable successes; what you learned from them? What was most exciting for you?

Wirth: I think the interesting thing has been to watch the evolution of how the conservation and environmental advocacy has changed in the time I've been here. When I first showed up, I can distinctly remember advocates for the Farm and Ranch, just kind of, “oh God here's the environmentalists, you know, we're all going to sit at our own table” and over the time I've been here, I think we have done a much better job of being willing to sit around the same table and have the kind of conversations that are needed that result in the legislation we've gotten passed.

The water bill we did last year, Senate Bill 21, I don't think we had a single Republican vote at the end of the day. But we had Republican senators carrying amendments to the bill that we had negotiated on the floor. So actually, our



Peter Wirth backpacking in the Cruces Basin Wilderness. Photo courtesy of Peter Wirth

expert from NMED was sitting on our side, then switched sides to be able to answer questions on the other side. So it was an example of not trying to sledgehammer something through but rather sitting down and shaping and modifying and ending up with something that's not perfect, but it is an incredibly important step forward with respect to water quality, primacy, and, of course, after the Sackett decision, we had the narrowest window. And so, again, that's an example where we didn't get Republican votes, but we had Republicans who negotiated amendments that helped keep the temperature down and allowed us to get it through.

And thanks to you guys. I mean, this is one where, again, advocacy on the outside, advocacy on the inside, understanding when to push, understanding who should be pushing when, it all kind of came together and played out in a way that got it through. So that was a big, big lift and one I'm super proud of.

Snyder: Yeah, it was amazing to work with you on that. I learned a lot.

Allison: You talked about cultivating the next generation of elected officials—but as you said, serving can be hard, it's extra work, we have a citizen legislature and it's stressful—can you talk about why somebody might consider going into public service and the good parts of it?

Wirth: It's an incredible honor to be able to serve, to be the voice for, in the Senate case, 50,000 individuals who are trusting you to be up there and making these hard decisions. When it's good, it's amazing. We just talked about an example of something that needed to happen that was complicated, that was a big lift. And that, I think, was kind of the culmination of all those years of understanding the process, relationships that got us where we are. And when you walk out the door and realize “okay, that's going to really make a difference.”

Snyder: I'd like to ask about the citizen legislature. New Mexico is just an interesting, unique place in the access that we have to our legislators. But it can still be daunting for folks to know how to reach their legislators and how to have an impact. Do you have thoughts for our readers about the ways that they can reach their legislators and have an impact on advocacy?

Wirth: I'll be the first to say, before I was over here, I can remember as the president of the Children's Museum Board trying to come over and find some money in 2004, right before I ran, and walking out of here going, “I don't have a clue,” and didn't get the money. And so, it can be hard.

Having said that, it is incredibly accessible, and I always like to say you can walk right down on the Senate floor before we gavel in and come see me. Certainly, the lobbyists have all figured that out. And so, those relationships are important, both for those that are here advocating, whether you're doing it as a citizen or part of a group, just getting to know who your legislator is. Understanding the strategic power of testimony and how to do it so that it's targeted. One of the things that's really easy to do is you come over here and think you've got to convince every single person on a committee about a certain bill and get completely wrapped up and not understanding that you just need enough votes to move the bill to the next step. And your targeting advocacy for someone's vote who you don't really need may mean that you're not making the exact right argument to the person that does need to hear it.

Allison: Could talk a little bit more about what New Mexico Wild and groups like ours are doing well and things that we could be doing better? We want to be good partners and effective. And our job is also to hold elected officials to account at times. So, there's an inherent tension there.

Senate Bill 21 was introduced in the New Mexico state legislature in 2025. Rollbacks to federal clean water protections have resulted in 95% of New Mexico's waterways and 88% of wetlands losing protections under the Clean Water Act. SB 21 provided a state framework for protecting these waters and a path to take over federal permitting for those few remaining waterways still federally protected, something 47 states already do.

SB21 was sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Wirth and Representative Ortiz and Senator Gonzales and was signed into law by Governor Lujan Grisham on April 8, 2025. New Mexico Wild was proud to help lead this effort.



Peter Wirth backpacking with his wife Carol. Photo courtesy of Peter Wirth

Wirth: I think that the role of the NGO is incredibly important when you have a citizen legislature. Go back to Senate Bill 2—an incredibly complex bill. We have a state agency certainly providing information but just having the capacity and support from different NGOs able to answer questions and to help build support. There's just no way that I as the sponsor was able to be in every meeting and covering those was critical. I think working in partnership, that's really the message, is that when you can figure out how to work in partnership to strategically move legislation when it's the right time to do it, that's the key.

And realizing that when you've got the window, you've got to go. And if it's not there, you have to recognize that's the process, and chalk it up to moving on to the next session. What lessons did we learn, and what boxes did we check as we move forward?

Things normally take time. That's the other message. We've been on an incredible roll for the last eight years, looking at some of the different land and water, conservation bills that have passed. We had this window, so we did it. I think it was through the collaboration where it wasn't the outside groups trying to tell us what we needed to do. It was kind of the outside groups educating so that we're in a position to advocate together.

Accountability is certainly a piece of it. I think that it's harder and harder to have legislators who are more in the middle and pragmatic and looking at both sides. And so, for groups that obviously have their focus and their issue, they're going to be looking at one thing, but understand that there may be times when a legislator has taken a vote that's done for some different reason that's part of a bigger picture.

Snyder: You've talked about the political landscape, and we see so many challenges at the federal level with moving policy, especially around lands, water, and wildlife. What are areas that you think the state can continue in that role? And what do you think or most hope that a new administration would prioritize in this next session?

Wirth: I think we have to continue to be proactive. And unfortunately, we're reacting constantly to the changes that are coming at us.

I think you're going to see bills to ban data centers, and moratoriums. That may be a direction we need to go. I still think there may be room to have the renewable energy focus like Facebook down in Los Lunas, where the energy is 100% solar. Certainly, figuring out ways to reuse water or using brackish water to do the cooling part of it; closed loop has to be part of it. So, there could be a way to make it work. The challenge is the economic development component of this is huge. But you can't just kind of throw down everything and let it happen. I think that Project Jupiter is an example of things that have gotten out of control. I'm also concerned because when you've got next-door neighbors where they can just roll up a portable gas plant right along the state line of Texas and New Mexico, there's nothing we can do about that.

Continued on page 22.

Green Infrastructure Can Save Our Dwindling Rivers

BY DR. AIDAN MANNING

2026 is shaping up to be one of the worst years on the books for rivers in the Southwest.

Last winter's broken records speak for themselves: lowest snowpacks, warmest temperatures and the earliest recorded date of the Rio Grande going dry in Albuquerque. This year's dismal conditions have compounded upon the preceding 25 years of drought and a larger pattern of aridification across the Southwest, reminding us that a good winter or three won't dispel this larger drying trend.

Global climate change is a primary driver of our local aridification, making the problem feel immense and intimidating. We cannot force the skies to open (cloud seeding is not a silver iodide bullet) or independently bring global carbon emissions into equilibrium. We can, however, address some substantial problems with how we use the water we do have.

The natural and human-made systems that provide clean, reliable water to our communities are at their breaking points. Note the recent failures among state and federal leaders to agree upon a system for sharing the Colorado River's dwindling flows. Negotiations have focused almost exclusively on management of water rights and the river's "gray infrastructure"—the large dams, diversions and canals

constructed over the past century to store and move enormous volumes of water across our dry landscapes.

Meanwhile, we have underinvested in a vast network of older, more complex hydrologic systems, including wetlands, aquifers, floodplains and traditional irrigation. These "green infrastructure" systems have acted as the true backbone of Southwestern watersheds for far longer than their concrete counterparts. They have persisted in and adapted to dramatic changes and demonstrated a capacity for resilience that gray infrastructure alone cannot match.

Green infrastructure's resilience relies on connectivity between waterways and their surrounding landscapes. During high flow events, like spring snowmelt or monsoonal storms, runoff spreads over wetlands and floodplains and soaks into soils and aquifers. Acequias and similar traditional earthen ditch networks mimic this process by spreading water over floodplain agricultural fields, to much the same effect.

Shallow aquifers store water and gradually release it back to the river or allow us to draw water from wells when we need it most. This process is harder to monitor and control compared to reservoir operations, but the aquifers under floodplains and wetlands have other compelling benefits over surface reservoirs, like lower evaporative losses, higher water quality and greater ecological benefit. Most of the Southwest's large dams and diversions were built for rivers that no longer exist, and

adapting them to today's lower water levels, higher salinity and increased sediment build-up can be prohibitively expensive. In contrast, green infrastructure consists of living and dynamic ecosystems that can more easily adjust and meet new challenges, if only we give them the opportunity to do so.

One particularly promising tool for restoring green infrastructure is improving environmental flows (or eflows) in rivers. Eflows are seasonal or multiannual patterns of higher and lower river flows, like large spring snowmelt pulses and winter low flows. They help rivers restore themselves by redistributing built-up sediment and reconnecting them to floodplains and aquifers. Alongside wetland and watershed restoration, eflows support rivers as living systems.

Eflows are already showing promise in some sections of New Mexico's rivers, but we need investment, research and implementation at larger scales. We need to push our state legislators to support and invest in green infrastructure and eflows, while identifying opportunities to implement these solutions at the local level, through processes like regional water planning. In preparing for a hotter, drier future, New Mexico cannot afford to ignore the resilient benefits of restoring our rivers' green infrastructure systems. ▲▲

To read the original *Albuquerque Journal* article: <https://www.abqjournal.com/opinion/opinion-green-infrastructure-can-save-our-dwindling-rivers/3082500>

A partially dry riverbed.
Photo by Allen Penton



The dry bed of the Rio Grande.
Photo by Mitchell Tillison





Electing Public Lands Champions



State House District 39 candidate Raul Turritea, gubernatorial candidate Deb Haaland and New Mexico Wild Action Fund Executive Director Mark Allison on the trail in the Gila. Staff photo



Rep. Vasquez speaks to community members on Black Peak in the Gila. Staff photo

Trout Fire Hike with Rep. Gabe Vasquez

In July, New Mexico Wild partnered with Rep. Gabe Vasquez for an educational hike through the Trout Fire burn scar in the Gila, bringing community members together to discuss forest management practices and the on-the-ground impacts of federal budget cuts. Hikes like this one help ground conversations about our public lands in direct, firsthand experience, connecting elected officials with the people and landscapes their policy decisions affect. ▲▲

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.

New Mexico Wild Action Fund is Proud to Endorse



Juan de Jesus Sanchez
as New Mexico's next
Land Commissioner

New Mexico Wild Action Fund is Proud to Endorse



Deb Haaland as the Next
Governor of New Mexico

NEW STAFF BIOS

Regina Sung | Development Manager

An El Paso native, Regina has long been dedicated to regional advocacy; she interned for U.S. Congresswoman Veronica Escobar and was trained by Al Gore to found the West Texas Chapter of the Climate Reality Project, delivering climate education to public schools across West Texas and southern New Mexico. This passion led her to obtain a B.S. in Environmental Studies from Yale University, where she earned a Certificate in Energy Studies and conducted her senior thesis on the impacts of xeriscaping and water conservation in Southern Nevada.



In her previous role, Regina specialized in stakeholder management within the climate innovation sector and developed corporate sponsorships and database architecture strategy. She is excited to bring her background in fundraising and community outreach to advance state-wide public lands defense and keep New Mexico wild.

Sara Bergthold | Content and Digital Growth Manager

A native New Mexican, Sara brings a background in psychology and experience in healthcare communications to her work advocating for the conservation and stewardship of New Mexico’s public lands. Her passion for the state’s wild places is rooted in a childhood spent playing and learning outside, a sense of wonder she keeps alive today as an avid hiker and nature enthusiast. Sara combines her communications expertise with a deep love for New Mexico’s communities, landscapes, creatures, and waters. She’s driven by the desire to help more people fall for the places that make New Mexico so special, and fight to keep them wild.



Welcome back, Sara!



Looking Ahead - 2027 Volunteer Projects

The 2026 season is behind us, and we are already planning for 2027. Our crews will return to the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon burn scar in the Pecos, continue invasive plant work in the Gila, and look to grow our capacity in the Carson and Lincoln. Volunteer projects run spring through fall. Subscribe to our email newsletter and watch nmwild.org/events to be the first to hear how to join us.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Leigh Sellari

A resident of Corrales, Leigh is a retired federal senior executive with experience in organizational leadership and natural resource law and policy. Originally from Pittsburgh, Leigh and her husband, Victor, moved to New Mexico in 2018, drawn by the state’s unique landscapes and natural wonders. Throughout her federal career, including her tenure as a Regional Attorney for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Leigh specialized in building consensus among diverse stakeholders to support sustainable land use and provided strategic legal guidance on complex environmental issues across the Mountain West.



Leigh holds a J.D. from Case Western Reserve University and a Master of Natural Resources from Virginia Tech. She also serves as a board officer for New Mexico Horse Rescue at Walkin-N-Circles Ranch. Leigh is honored to be a part of the NM Wild team and apply her passion for conservation to protecting the Land of Enchantment’s wild places.

Edward Tabet-Cubero

Edward Tabet-Cubero, M.A.Ed. is a cross-sector leader with nearly 30 years of experience across education, nonprofit organizations, and government. He has served as a teacher, principal, district administrator, nonprofit executive, university instructor, consultant and senior staffer to U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich, where he oversaw statewide operations, community engagement and state and local policy priorities for the senator throughout New Mexico, helping to translate policy and funding into practical solutions for communities. He previously served in executive leadership for a variety of nonprofits, including as executive director of the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty during the successful Yazzie/Martinez education equity case and has long worked to expand opportunity for multilingual and underserved students. A frequent speaker and author on leadership and equity, Edward is grounded by time spent on our public lands with his family pedaling bikes or casting a line.



Michael Abbate

Michael moved to Silver City in January 2025 and very quickly became involved in volunteer events with New Mexico Wild and shortly after joined the Finance Committee. His 35-year career spans numerous nonprofit organizations, mainly in finance roles. It is his intention to bring his experience to the board and assist the Board Treasurer as needed and continue to serve on the Finance and Investment Committees. He is an avid hiker and backpacker and has enjoyed exploring the Gila Wilderness as well as travel statewide to take in the beauty and challenges of New Mexico’s wild landscapes.



He has joined the board to represent the Southwest corner of the state as well as bring his expertise and experience to oversee the organization’s investment portfolio and assist with modernizing internal control procedures and policies (as needed). ▲▲

Peter Wirth, continued from page 18.

Allison: What has most surprised you about serving as majority leader and do you have any advice for whomever is next?

Wirth: Yeah, it's a very lonely position. You've got to make lots of decisions on the fly. The Speaker, the Leader, and the Governor, also the Leader in the House and the Pro Tem but looking at trying to set the direction for the whole session. So, it's multiple levels of strategy. And of course, you don't really know what you're getting into until you're in it. I think it was helpful to me to have the two years under Republican administration to kind of figure things out when it wasn't the green light moment. Because the thing about this position is that the decisions you make about committees that a bill goes to, the decisions you make about what gets on the floor, can make or break legislation. And if you make a mistake, something really bad can pass.

It's very important as the leader to understand where your caucus is. And it's figuring out how to push, when to push. And then make sure you don't walk off the cliff. If you get out in a place where your caucus is not there, you know, that's not where you ever want to be as the leader. It's a very diverse group of members. You've got to listen to all those different needs and figure out the balance. Lots of relationships, and strategy, but exciting to be right in the middle of what's happening for our state.

Snyder: You're well known amongst your colleagues and amongst advocates, certainly, for your statesmanship. I think that's definitely becoming less the norm in our current political climate. Can you just talk a little bit about how you learned that and also why it's so important for good governance and leadership?

Wirth: In my law practice, I do a lot of mediation work. It's a lot of sitting, listening, giving people and groups a forum to be heard and feel like they've been treated fairly. When I first got here, one of the lessons that my predecessor, Max Coll, told me is take every bill as its own bill and understand that your enemy on one bill is going to be your co-sponsor on the next. So, the relationships are absolutely critical. I have very good relationships with the members on the minority side. I oftentimes will be in their conference room talking to them about

different pieces and bipartisanship, I think is getting harder and harder. It just doesn't happen as much anymore, but there's no better feeling than when you shake things up and you're sponsoring a bill with a member of the other party that just throws everybody off. I always think that's kind of when you've hit the sweet spot. So, I do think the mediation process to solve all these problems in my lawyer life helps. And then I come over here and I beat my head against the wall with 111 other legislators and a grumpy governor. And we're doing the same thing at the end of the day. We're sitting around the table trying to figure out, "hey, can we get this done? What if we do this? What if we move this?"

Allison: I know we share a love of backpacking, and I'm wondering if you'll have more time for that? Talk a little bit about backpacking on public lands.

Wirth: Yeah, I can remember as a kid, backpacking up to Lake Catherine with my dad with a rucksack on and hauling up Vienna sausages and sardines and rolling cigarettes. Not me, but he was rolling back in the day (laughing). We really grew up with that as a key piece. And with our kids, it was always something important for us. And we've done some really exciting backpacks up into the Cruces Wilderness Basin, which is not well known, in the northern part of the state. We were up there last year with some friends, and I don't think we saw anyone the whole time we were there until we were headed out. But those experiences—small stream fishing in the middle of gorgeous country with your kids, waking up in the morning and seeing the bear's head stick over the log in the camp—you know, things you remember forever. Our open space and our public lands are something I cherish and have taught our kids that. We have a new grandson who's two years old so, hopefully we can get him out there and experience that kind of family history that needs to continue. Making this state a place where that's an option for future generations is something I really believe in.

Allison: Thank you again for your time and on behalf of the staff and the board and all our members thank you for your leadership and your public service. We're grateful.

Wirth: Thank you, guys. Super good. ▲

To read this interview in its entirety, visit the website here:



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



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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/

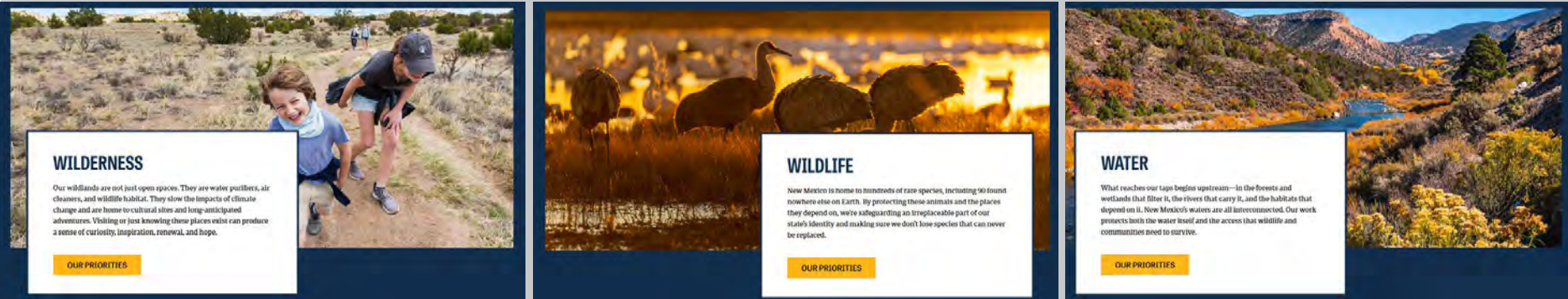
NEW MEXICO WILD HAS A NEW WEBSITE!

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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.



Thank you to Wilburforce Foundation for helping fund the website rebuild

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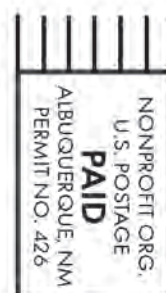
2) Donate online at nmwild.org/donate

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

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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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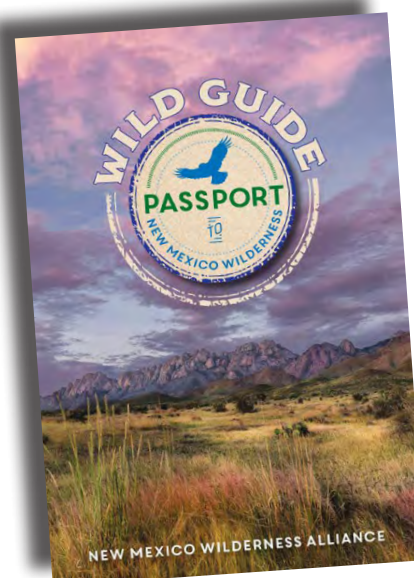
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