

New Mexico

WINTER 2020 | VOLUME 62, NUMBER 2 |



Wildlife

Where to go

Plan your next outdoor adventure in New Mexico

Inside:

Department conducts largest capture and monitors calves in the Gila

A day in the life of a conservation officer

Travel back to 1962 with Game and Fish

Department reports desert bighorn survey numbers

The Department of Game and Fish conducted the 22nd annual census of the Red Rock Wildlife Management Area (WMA) earlier this year. The Red Rock WMA has served as a propagation facility for desert bighorn sheep since 1972. The facility includes five pastures and an overall area of two square miles. Desert bighorn translocated from Red Rock into the wild have been vital to their recovery and restoration in New Mexico. Thirty-four sheep were translocated from Red Rock as recently as autumn 2018.

The census crew included Department biologists, officers and dedicated volunteers. The effort requires hours of walking for most of the team, as they attempt to “drive” sheep to one end of the pasture where observers count and classify them by age and sex.

“Maintaining a cohesive front while hiking through precipitous terrain is no easy task, but is necessary to keep sheep moving in the same direction and facilitate the best viewing conditions for the census observers,” said Department bighorn sheep biologist Caitlin Ruhl.

The total number of observed bighorn for this census was 72. The lamb:ewe ratio was good at 45 lambs per 100 ewes. One highlight of the survey was observing a newborn lamb that had only been born the night before the census. This ewe and lamb tried to stay hidden instead of running away from the advancing line.

No removal from Red Rock will occur in 2019, but there may be enough sheep for a translocation effort in 2020 or 2021.



Department photo by Mark Watson.



Department photo by Max Tenorio, Jr.

Department completes bass spawn at Rock Lake Hatchery

For the 2019 bass spawn season, the Department’s goal was to identify the most effective bass culture techniques that would yield the highest possible fry production at Rock Lake, according to Max Tenorio, Rock Lake Hatchery manager.

“We decided it was time to improve upon our oldest form of largemouth bass culturing which is known as the spawn and rear method, where you pair up bass in a pond, provide spawning habitat and cross your fingers,” he continued. “We were able to produce fry this way, but we wanted more fish.”

In order to facilitate and identify the most effective bass culture techniques at Rock Lake Hatchery, the team reached out to other successful bass hatcheries and professionals around the country. “Not only did we acquire some trade secrets, but we developed good working relationships with folks from Wisconsin, North Dakota, Texas, Kansas, Colorado and Montana that contributed greatly to our success this year,” Tenorio said.

The team utilized a practice known as egg transfer, increasing production tenfold, with approximately 574,375 fry produced with more unaccounted for that hatched unchecked. Fry are expected to grow at a rate of 1-1.5 millimeters per day and are stocked out as fingerlings at 38-40 millimeters, or about 1.5

inches, in length. These fingerlings were then stocked beginning in mid-July into Elephant Butte, Conchas, Ute and Santa Rosa Lakes. Some bass were also held at the hatchery until they reached 5–7 inches in length.

“With our success this year and the amount we learned, we expect our production of largemouth bass to increase every year, ultimately leading to increased angler satisfaction,” Tenorio explained. “Eventually, over time, we expect our production at Rock Lake to reach a level that allows us to produce more bass to be stocked into more waters around New Mexico. I am excited to see how we do next year.”

Four additional black-footed ferrets released at Wagon Mound Ranch

The Department of Game and Fish released four additional black-footed ferrets at a ranch in Wagon Mound in late September in an effort to augment a small population reintroduced at the site a year earlier.

The ferrets were transported to the site from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Black-Footed Ferret Conservation Center near Fort Collins, Colo. where the animals are raised in captivity and prepared for release at sites throughout the interior western United States.

Eight ferrets were released in Sep 2018; however, Department surveys suggested only three of those survived the winter, according to Jim Stuart, endangered nongame mammal biologist with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

Black-footed ferrets existed in New Mexico up until the mid-20th century; the species was believed to be extinct until one last colony was discovered in northwestern Wyoming in 1981.

“One individual captured in August 2019 was a young ferret that was born on the site this past spring, so there was successful reproduction this year,” Stuart said. “The population that can be supported on this prairie dog town will likely remain small although we don’t know for sure what that number should be.”



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
Conserving New Mexico's Wildlife for Future Generations

It is the mission of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to conserve, regulate, propagate and protect the wildlife and fish within the State of New Mexico, using a flexible management system that ensures sustainable use for public food supply, recreation and safety—and to provide for off-highway motor vehicle recreation that recognizes cultural, historic and resource values while ensuring public safety.

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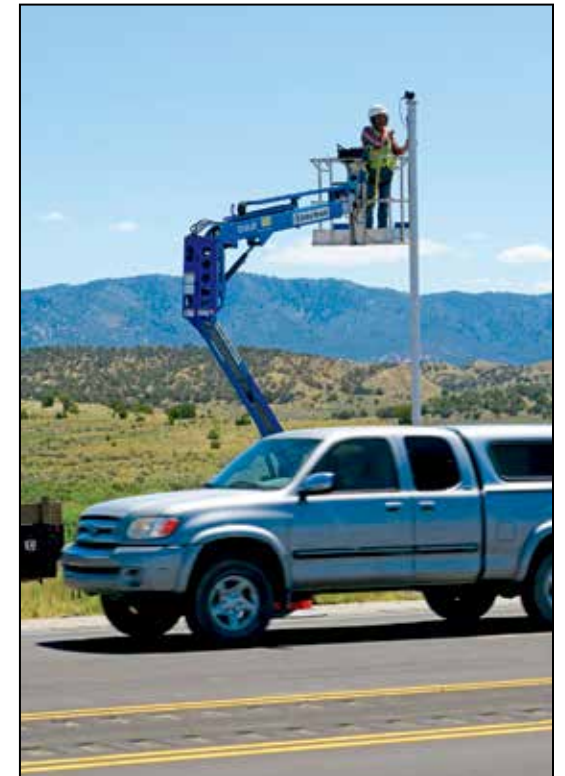
Cover: Wildlife watchers may view mule deer at many of the Department's Wildlife Management Areas throughout the fall and winter. Department photo by Martin Perea.

Legislature Passes State Wildlife Corridors Act

By Mark Watson



A Request for Proposals (RFP) has been published by NMDOT. The Ecological and Environmental Planning Division of the Department was actively involved in the development of the scope of work for the RFP, and will be active members of the proposal selection committee and project implementation oversight committee.



In February 2019, the New Mexico Legislature passed Senate Bill 228, the New Mexico Wildlife Corridors Act, sponsored by Senator Mimi Stewart and Representatives Joanne Ferrary and Georgene Louis. The Act was signed into law by Governor Lujan-Grisham March 28.

The Act directs the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) to develop a wildlife corridors action plan that identifies large game animal travel and migration corridors and wildlife-vehicle collision hotspots, and to create a wildlife corridors project list that prioritizes areas for implementation of wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation projects.

A preliminary report is due January 1, 2020; however, there is no official deadline for finalization of the plan and list.

The Act marks the transition from an ad hoc to a systematic approach to wildlife-vehicle collision avoidance in New Mexico, said Matt Wunder, Ph.D., chief of the ecological and environmental planning division at the Department of Game and Fish.

The Act also provides for consultation with tribal governments and incorporation of public comment in the development of the action plan. A preliminary plan is required to be submitted to the governor and legislature before Jan. 15, 2020, and it is anticipated that a finalized plan and list will take two years to complete.

“This legislation should help raise awareness in NMDOT of the importance of road design that lets wild animals, of all sizes, move across the landscape,” Wunder said. “The statewide assessment will show how many, and where, big game animals are killed on the highways each year so the Department can determine how populations might be impacted.”

Left: NMDOT employees inspect one of two large bridges over the Rio Puerco on U.S. Highway 550 south of Cuba, a high wildlife-vehicle collision hotspot. Eight-foot tall woven wire fencing constructed along the highway right-of-way will force wildlife to move under the highway at these two bridge locations. Department photo by Mark Watson.

Right: A worker aims a thermal imaging camera at the north end of the game fence along U.S. Highway 550 south of Cuba. Two animal detection systems, each using four thermal imaging cameras, are being installed at the north and south ends of the game fence. These detection systems will warn motorists of the presence of deer and elk that have not yet learned to use the two underpasses. Department photo by Mark Watson.

Although nine wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation projects have been completed in New Mexico since the early 2000s, no clear process for how these types of projects could be proposed and implemented existed. Most projects were the result of legislative memorials or opportunistically conceived. Although providing no funding for project implementation, the

Act provides a clear indication of the intent of the Governor and New Mexico state legislature that wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation projects be implemented. These mitigation projects enhance motorist safety, reduce unnecessary wildlife mortality and increase habitat connectivity where they are implemented.



Above: Jim Hirsch of NMDOT Environmental Bureau inspects a newly constructed wildlife escape ramp on U.S. Highway 550 south of Cuba. Department photo by Mark Watson.



Mark Watson is a biologist and habitat specialist with the Ecological and Environmental Planning Division of the Department of Game and Fish.

New E-Tag app now available

The Department of Game and Fish now offers an e-tag mobile app option for hunters to tag big game and turkey in the field using their smartphone. Upon submitting the date and time of kill for their license, the hunter will receive a tag number to hand-write on durable material to be attached to the animal. The free app, NM E-Tag, is available for iOS and Android devices.

NM E-Tag enables hunters to easily access e-tag eligible licenses and harvests with the simple click of a button in addition to receiving tagging instructions and confirmation of harvests.

For more information, visit:
www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/mobile-app/.



Department Conducts Largest Elk Capture in New Mexico

By James W. Pitman

Conservation officer Clovis Rivera scans the landscape below for cows and calves. Department photo by Martin Perea.

A helicopter rises slowly over the snow-covered trees in the predawn light. Below, a procession of trucks, loaded with nets, netguns and other capture gear make their way up into the mountains, headlights glistening across the snowy landscape below.

A hundred miles away, a small group of elk walk hesitantly toward the door of a corral trap, hungrily eyeing the feed inside. A camera on the trap catches their movement near the corral door and sends a picture to a monitoring crew huddled around a laptop nearby.

These were common sights throughout the Gila region this past winter, as the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish staff and collaborators conducted the largest elk capture effort over the largest study area in Department history.

Captures were conducted simultaneously over the entirety of the Gila region, from the Magdalena Mountains west to the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in Arizona and are an important part of a study initiated by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Arizona Game and Fish Department and the U.S. Geological Survey New Mexico Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at New Mexico State University.

The overall purpose of the project is to learn more about elk survival, causes of mortality, predator prey relationships, habitat use and movements throughout the Gila region. In addition to being home to one of the largest elk herds in the state, this region also has the highest diversity of predator species, including coyotes, black bears, mountain lions and the Mexican gray wolf. The data collected from this study will provide valuable information to biologists in making future management decisions for the elk herds in this region. To gather the data needed for the study, over four hundred cow elk needed to be captured and radio collared for tracking and monitoring, an immense task for everyone involved.

The helicopter capture crew intensely searches the snow-covered landscape for winter herds of elk. The capture crew is made up of a gunner, who shoots a net from a netgun over a targeted elk, a mugger, who runs out to secure the netted elk as soon as the helicopter lands and an experienced pilot, who keeps everyone safe throughout the process.



A small group of elk are spotted and the helicopter begins its decent. The gunner double checks his harness attachment and eases out onto the skid. He loads a blank .308 cartridge in the net gun, leans out to lead the elk and fires. Four small metal weights shoot through the air, each attached to the corner of a large net. The open net hovers above the elk for a split second and then promptly closes over the front of the elk—a clean capture.

The helicopter quickly lands and the mugger runs out and jumps on the captured elk. Together with the gunner they hobble and blindfold the elk while the helicopter brings the processing crew from the trucks to the capture site. As the processing crew starts attaching the collar and recording data, the helicopter takes back off with the capture crew to catch another elk.

Meanwhile, back at the corral trap, the capture crew huddles patiently around the laptop watching and waiting for the elk to enter the trap. The entire corral is controlled via radio waves sent out by the computer and can be located up to two miles away. A camera on the trap sends pictures and video back to the laptop at the push of a button or whenever movement is detected in or near the trap. A remote door trigger is also controlled by the laptop; one of the crew member's finger hovers over the button waiting for the last of the elk to enter the trap.

Once the button is pushed, the door shuts and the small group of elk is trapped inside. The crew then makes the short drive to the corral, immobilizes the elk with dart guns and then attaches collars and collects the necessary data. The elk are carried out of the corral on stretchers, the drugs are reversed and the elk walk off sporting new radio collars.

These capture efforts continue over the next few weeks until finally the captures are completed. Although a little beat up, sore and tired, the capture crews are rightfully proud of their efforts and head home with the winter captures behind them. When the dust settled, there were 420 radio-collared cow elk throughout the Gila in both New Mexico and Arizona, easily the largest number of collars deployed at one time in the region.

Top: Conservation officers and biologists collect data on elk while pilot Earl Waters waits with the helicopter. Photo by Earl Watters.



James W. Pitman is the assistant chief of information at the Department of Game and Fish.

Department monitors Gila elk calf population

By Alexa J. Henry



On an early June morning in the Gila National Forest, Department of Game and Fish conservation officers and biologists stop their pickup trucks along a winding dirt road. It's a quiet, sunny morning; the only faint sound is the whirling of a distant, lone helicopter scanning the landscape below for elk.

The team hikes through a forest of juniper, piñon and ponderosa pine; a cow elk has been spotted nearby and most likely not far away, her calf would be bedded down, it's only defense against potential danger. The group is searching for that calf.

They practically stumble upon it—a calf bedded down, pressing itself flat, as close to the ground as possible. Elk calves are not always so easy to spot; this one blends well into the dried grass.

The calf remains still as the team moves in to hold it in place. It's quickly blindfolded to help it stay calm. The team gathers data on the calf, taking its weight, measuring its length and assessing its behavior. A biologist examines the umbilical cord and teeth to determine its age. This one is about three to four days old.

After a VHF (very high frequency) tag is clipped to its left ear, the animal dashes off with the wobbly gait of a newborn to rejoin its mother. The group spots the helicopter in the sky and returns to the trucks. There's a chance the helicopter has located some cows and with them, more calves to tag.

This single capture was part of a large scale, multi-year project studying elk in southwestern New Mexico and eastern Arizona to better assess the potential influence of Mexican gray wolf recovery on the elk population, said Nicole Tatman, big game manager with the Department of Game and Fish. Each calf is ear-tagged with a radio-transmitter designed to notify biologists when a mortality occurs.

Elk are the primary prey species for Mexican gray wolves and elk populations elsewhere have declined following wolf reintroductions, explained Tatman. "Monitoring elk survival in the Gila will help us understand how [various] factors impact the elk herd," she said. For the Department, she added, these findings will ultimately assist in determining the number of elk that can be harvested without causing a population decline.

The captures are conducted in collaboration with Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Geological Survey at New Mexico State University (NMSU) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Funding for the captures comes from the sale of hunting licenses as well as through a \$2 million grant from the Federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Act.

Thus far, the Department has captured around 420 adult female elk and 225 elk calves across Arizona and New Mexico, said Tatman. The next stage of the project will be to capture adult female elk this year and capture elk calves again when they are born in May and June 2020.

Once top-of-the-food chain predators throughout the American southwest, Mexican grey wolves were reintroduced to eastern Arizona and western New Mexico in 1998. Elk are a key portion of the wolf's diet and also one of the region's most hunted big-game animals; hunters throughout New Mexico and the United States apply annually for an opportunity to draw an elk tag.

Today, there are approximately 131 Mexican gray wolves in Arizona and New Mexico.

Last November, the State Game Commission approved the release of up to 12 wolf puppies into the wild in New Mexico.

Due to unregulated hunting, trapping and poisoning that began in the late 1800s, few Mexican gray wolves remained by 1950, and by 1970 the last wild Mexican gray wolf in the United States was killed. In 1977, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiated efforts to conserve the species.

In 2018, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the Arizona Department of Game and Fish signed a memorandum of agreement to further collaboration between the agencies and to work on the recovery of Mexican gray wolves.

To better determine the impact of wolves on the region's elk, study areas were divided into high wolf density and low wolf density areas. Additional data from adult cow and calf survival from two reference areas in the Jemez Mountains and Mt. Taylor, that currently lack wolves but share similar habitat conditions with the Gila areas, will also be used to compare survival and cause-specific mortality rates, according to the project proposal.

Later that day, around sundown Tatman heads out to another spot in search of more calves. She scans the forest with binoculars, looking for lone cows acting "calfy"—meaning they are more vigilant and actively looking out for danger because they are with their calves and isolated from other elk.

Spotting calves is not so easy. Bedding down may not seem like the best way to avoid falling victim to a larger predator; however, noted Tatman, calves have no scent.

"At this point, field crews led by NMSU are regularly monitoring elk calves for survival and investigating causes of mortality when detected," she explained noting that in a few years, the data will be compiled and the Department will begin analyzing and summarizing the findings. "This will lead to better-informed management recommendations for the Gila elk herd in an area where Mexican wolves exist on the landscape."



Opposite: Conservation officer Kasey Gehrt prepares to take biological samples from an elk calf. Department photo by Alexa J. Henry.

Alexa J. Henry is the editor of New Mexico Wildlife magazine.

Wildlife Captures

A Q&A with the Department's big game program manager

Captures are conducted to accomplish a variety of specific goals, said Nicole Tatman, big game program manager with the Department.

“Biologists are looking for some piece of information from the species or herd.” For example, a capture could help biologists investigate why a population of elk is declining in certain areas.

“Recently, a lot of projects in the western United States have focused on migratory corridors so animals may be captured and fitted with GPS collars to track their movements and see when and where they migrate,” Tatman continued. As a result, “we can better manage wildlife crossings on highways or minimize disturbance along their winter range or migratory corridors.”

In an interview with *New Mexico Wildlife*, Tatman answers questions about how captures are conducted, how the animals are impacted by this activity and what to do if a capture is conducted in your area.

Are elk very aggressive? What about other species you capture?

Most species I've captured (elk, deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn) are not aggressive to capture teams. The primary defense strategy for these species is to flee from a threat, and they generally see people as a threat. However, on occasion I've seen them become aggressive and charge at the capture teams. When an animal feels threatened it can be unpredictable, but capture teams are trained on how to handle these situations. Because of this unpredictability, it's always best to keep your distance from wild animals.

Top: Big game program manager Nicole Tatman and conservation officer Jared Burns examine a captured calf. Department photo by Martin Perea.



During calf captures, the calves are separated from their mothers. How does the baby find its way back to its mother?

The defense strategy for elk calves is to remain motionless and hide for their first few weeks of life. In this way, they avoid being detected by predators and the mother moves a short distance away to forage. She will come back to the calf every several hours to let it nurse, but it largely spends its first few weeks of life hiding. During our captures we quickly tag the calf, take some measurements and then return it to its hiding location. Since the mother is always in the general area and vigilant of her calf, she knows this

is occurring but will return to her calf as quickly as possible. The female elk and her calf have a strong bond and desire to stay together so even when calves are separated from their mother, they almost always find their way back to one another.

By handling the calves, aren't you transferring the scent of humans to the animal? Won't the mother reject the calf then?

Young elk are scentless so we are very careful about scent transfer when we capture them. Because of this, we wear gloves and work quickly to minimize scent transfer.

Wildlife Management

Don't all captures result in a few mortalities?

Any type of wildlife capture is risky to the animal and mortalities can occur. However, we gain invaluable information from placing transmitters on animals that benefits the herd and the species as a whole. With better information we can make more informed management recommendations for herds that we wouldn't otherwise be able to. Mortality rates for our captures are below five percent so while captures can result in some mortality, the information gained helps the herd overall.

It seems like captures are dangerous for the wildlife. Aren't the animals stressed out by the loud helicopters and physical handling?

There is some risk associated whenever biologists handle wildlife, to both the animal and the person handling it. But biologists undergo extensive training to minimize the stress and risk to the animal including processing the animal as quickly as possible, talking in hushed voices, after blindfolding the animal which causes them to be calmer and monitoring vital signs. Additionally, the information gathered by doing these captures benefits the herd as a whole. Collaring allows us an opportunity to ask important questions about the herd like how many are surviving, or if they are dying, then what is the cause? How are they using the landscape? When are they giving birth to young and where? Are those juveniles healthy at birth or small and malnourished? Are the animals able to acquire enough forage resources or are they stressed and thin? Answers to these questions allow us to manage the herd at a healthy level where individuals are able to acquire enough resources and move throughout the landscape effectively. Ultimately, these healthy herds are present for the public to appreciate and are also utilized as a recreation and food source for families.

Do you conduct captures during hunts?

We do not conduct captures during scheduled hunts for that particular species.



What should I do if a capture is being conducted in my area or near my home?

Capture teams avoid homes and structures so there's no need to be concerned. If folks are interested and can see what is going on, it's best to watch the capture team work from a distance so you don't disturb the team or the animal. The capture team will be working quickly and quietly to minimize the stress on the captured animal. If you have questions about the capture you can always contact one of the Department's offices to inquire.

What other species does the Department capture for scientific purposes?

We capture a variety of species from mammals to birds to reptiles for data collection. If there is a scientific or wildlife management need to collect data on a species, there will generally be a project working to answer that question. We also collaborate with other entities to implement projects across the state.

Top: Tatman communicates with the capture team searching for elk from a helicopter at the recent elk calf capture in the Gila National Forest. Department photos by Martin Perea.



Nicole Tatman

Department unveils

River Ranch

Wildlife Management Area

By *Jeremy Lane*

Have you ever visited an outdoor spot where you could sense the importance of the area? No historical marker telling you so. No fanfare. You just simply felt the gravitas?

That is the case for me with River Ranch, a new Department wildlife management area near Faywood, north of Deming.

River Ranch is located directly on the Mimbres River, a lifeline in the desert today the same as it was 1,000 years ago. The Mimbres has allowed for a concentration of wildlife that wouldn't convene together just miles away from its waters.

Deer, turkey, javelina? Absolutely, but other, less-common species, too. A Gila monster was photographed there about four years ago. Draw a line south from Silver City to Animas and that is about as far east as that iconic lizard is naturally found.

Slightly over a thousand acres in both Grant and Luna Counties, the property is home to large mottes of cottonwood and velvet ash. "Motte" isn't a word you get to toss around very often in the desert southwest. "The state record-sized velvet ash tree, measuring 224 inches in circumference and 95 feet tall, resides on the property in Tigner Grove, which was named after early owners of the property," Ryan Darr, lands program manager with the Department explained.

The grove is a 6.8-acre mature, deciduous stand of species like Arizona walnut, soapberry and box elder, Darr continued, noting that as one might suspect, wildlife greatly benefit from Tigner Grove as well. The southernmost known population of Arizona gray squirrel resides there, too.

Zone-tailed hawk and black hawk are known to nest there. Ours is one of only a handful of states in the country that regularly sees those species, let alone nesting activity. Now that the birders are salivating, I'll also mention yellow-billed cuckoo, southwest willow flycatcher and thick-billed kingbird.

The property was purchased in July 2014 and was operated as a cattle ranch prior to that. The most-recent owners, Gene and Elisabeth Simon, wished for the property to stay undeveloped and for a wildlife management agency to purchase, manage and conserve River Ranch for the people of New Mexico, Darr noted.

There are also large swathes of grassland dominated by big sacaton, which definitely lives up to its name, growing well over six-feet tall typically.

"Before thinning the sacaton, there was little room for wildlife movement. The thick bunch grass posed a fire-carrying risk to Tigner Grove and was so dense that we were seeing fewer young trees than we would like," explained Darr.

Along with the unique offerings of plants and wildlife, the property boasts a pretty impressive historical presence as well. Ancient humans thrived on this property and the Mimbres River, constructing multi-story dwellings that were once surveyed by the Smithsonian Institution. Those houses and their occupants are long gone, but their importance remains and is protected.

There have been many improvements to the property since the Department took ownership. "Just this year, three miles of internal fences were taken down to allow for better wildlife movement, as well as the removal of exotic or invasive species, adding signage and starting trail work," Darr said. "The area was opened to the public in April 2019 and is a great destination for hiking, bird-watching and photography."



If You Visit

To find River Ranch, first find the entrance to City of Rocks State Park and then continue northeast on Highway 61 for about three miles and look for New Mexico Game and Fish signage at what appears to be a residence. You can visit seven days a week, accessible 30 minutes before dawn and closing 30 minutes after sunset.

For each group of four adult visitors to the property, at least one of them needs a New Mexico hunting or fishing license, or a Habitat Management and Access Validation (HMAV) stamp. Visitors under 18 years of age are exempt from these access requirements. There is no hunting, fishing, camping or motorized vehicle use currently allowed at River Ranch.

Go and see the wildlife, stand in awe of the massive trees in Tigner Grove, listen to the Mimbres River and feel the importance of this space for yourself.

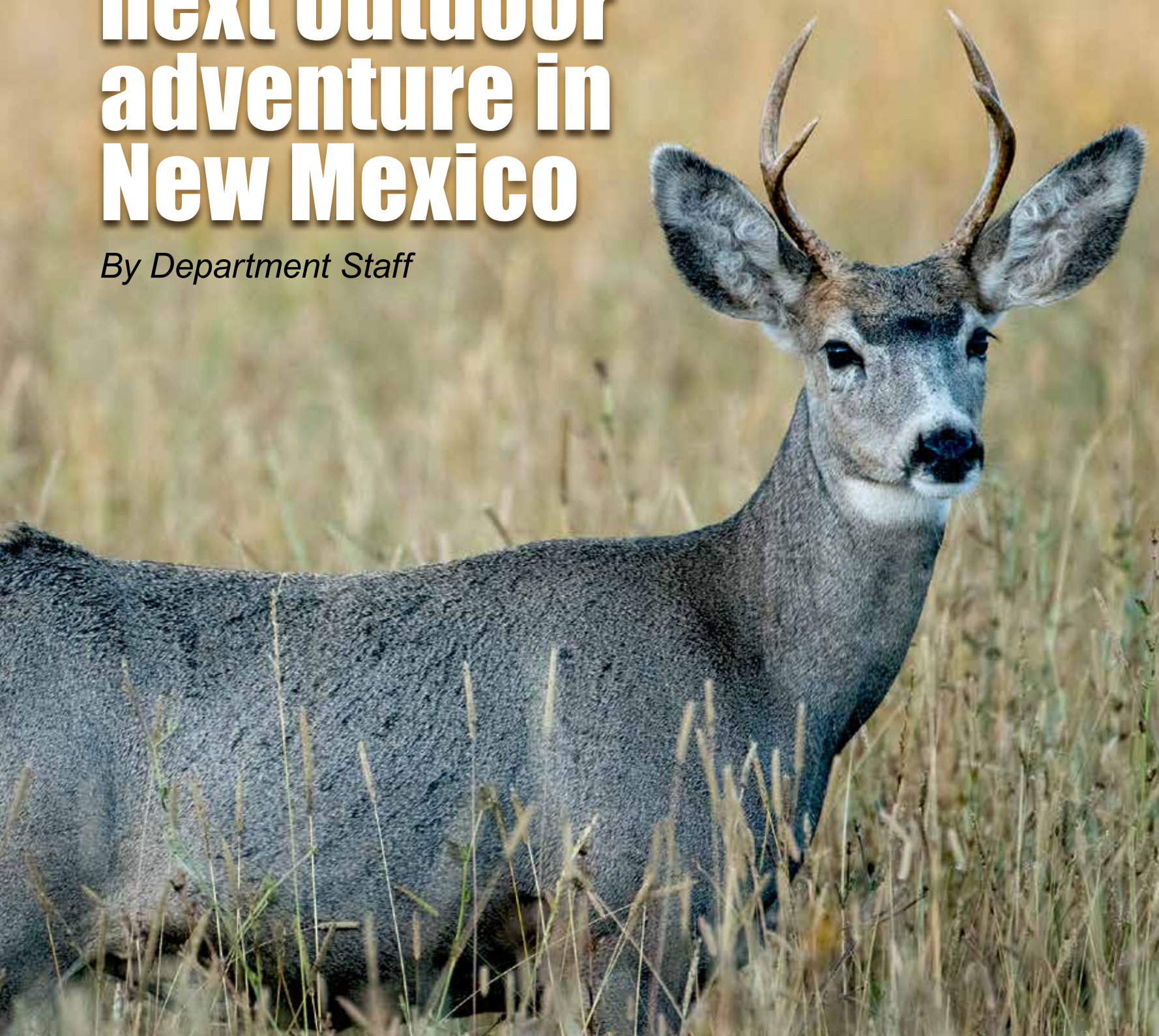


Top: River Ranch WMA is a great place to photograph and watch wildlife. Department photo by Jeremy Lane.

Jeremy Lane is the public information officer for the Southwest region.

Plan your next outdoor adventure in New Mexico

By Department Staff



Even if you're not a hunter or angler, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish properties, as well as state and federal public lands, offer countless opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and take in the beauty of New Mexico's diverse landscapes.

"New Mexico has great opportunities for outdoor recreation throughout the year," said John Martsh, R-3 program manager with the Information and Education Division at the Department of Game and Fish. Martsh is in charge of recruitment, retention and reactivation of anglers, hunters, boaters and shooting sports enthusiasts.

"Our Department is committed to developing the next generation of outdoorsmen and women and to introduce as many people as possible to the wonders of being outside," Martsh said. Children, and adults, need to see there is an entire world to explore outside the great indoors.

Wildlife Management Areas

Before visiting a Wildlife Management Area (WMA), remember to purchase a \$4.00 a Habitat Management & Access Validation (HMAV). The State Game Commission owns approximately 185,000 acres with around 153,000 acres open to the public.

Each WMA provides a distinct habitat for our state's wildlife. While these areas are utilized by hunters and anglers, hikers and birdwatchers are also welcome to enjoy the natural surroundings and learn more about New Mexico's ecosystems.

Where to fish

In the northeast, **Colin Neblett WMA** is the largest property owned by the Department and provides access to the Cimarron River where anglers can catch brown and stocked rainbow trout. The area is located east of Eagle Nest Lake, in Colfax County, and straddles both the north and south sides of US 64.

South of the village of Chama and bordering El Vado Reservoir off NM 112, **Rio Chama WMA** offers an opportunity to fish the Chama River, one of the state's best trout streams. The river, which reaches down from southern Colorado where it originates, contains both hatchery-stocked and stream-reared rainbow trout.

Located 35 miles north of Silver City, and 22 miles from Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, **Lake Roberts WMA** offers year-round trout fishing. This 71-acre lake located in Grant County sits at an elevation of 6,000 feet.

Where to hunt waterfowl

Head south one hour on I-25 from Albuquerque to find one of the state's best waterfowl hunting areas. **Bernardo** and **La Joya WMAs** are not only great for hunting, but these areas also provide habitat for wintering waterfowl including sandhill cranes.

South of Raton, **Wagon Mound Lake WMA** is home to a variety of waterfowl including teal and shoveler, as well as shore birds that migrate to the area. Waterfowl hunting is permitted on the WMA during the designated season.

Not far from Wagon Mound is **Charette Lakes WMA**, also a prime spot in the northeast for waterfowl hunting. The property is home to mallards and buffleheads.

Where to hike

Already mentioned as a fishing spot, Colin Neblett also offers hiking opportunities on established trails that offer opportunities to spot wildlife including elk and deer. Other northern New Mexico WMAs are also worth a visits. In addition to Colin Neblett, **Edward Sargent WMA** in Chama is a popular hiking destination, also with established trails. Hikers can find a unique outdoor experience here with breathtaking views of Navajo and Chama Peaks. The WMA's northern boundary extends to the Colorado state line.

Urraca WMA sits off the western slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It rises up from dry sagebrush flats to aspen and pine groves found at more than 11,000 feet in elevation. The area is located 12 miles north of Questa.

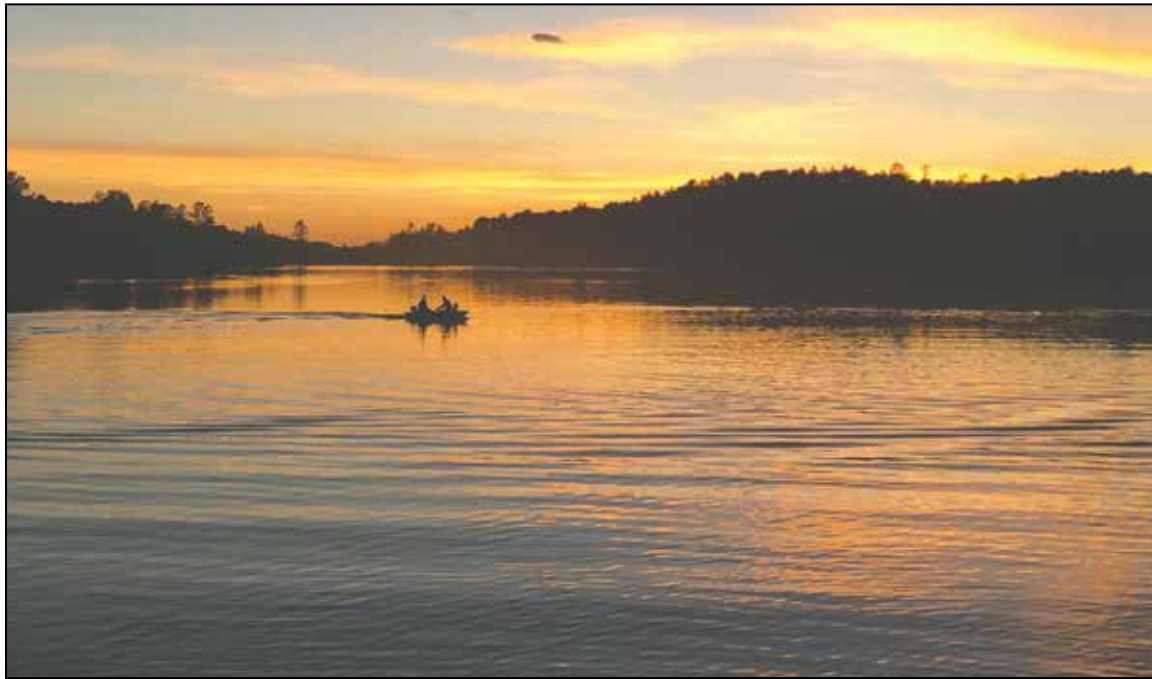
Be aware that most WMA trails are primitive and require some hiking experience. In addition, please note that hiking is restricted during hunting season.



Opposite: Wildlife watchers can frequently find deer at Edward Sargent WMA. Department photo by Martin Perea.

Top: Rio Chama. Department photo by Martin Perea.

Bottom: Sandhill cranes at Bernardo WMA. Department photo by Martin Perea.



Top: Sargent WMA. Department photo by Martin Perea.

Center: Lake Roberts. Department photo.

Bottom: Abert's towhee found near Red Rock WMA. Department photo by Mark Watson.

For more information and directions to visit these WMAs

<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/conservation/state-game-commission-lands/>



Where to birdwatch

For birdwatchers and photographers, New Mexico WMAs offer chances for bird enthusiasts to view rare birds that call our state home. While Bernardo and La Joya WMAs are well-known to bird enthusiasts, other WMAs in our state offer one-of-a-kind opportunities to see rare birds that spend time in our state.

Near the bootheel of the state, **Red Rock WMA** is the perfect place to view songbirds. Also, in the bootheel area, **Mimbres Tract WMA** is popular with bird enthusiasts. Also, in the southwest, Glenwood Fish Hatchery, 35 miles south of Reserve, is a very popular birding area with an onsite bird trail.

In the southeastern section of the state, **W.S. Huey WMA** also offers opportunities to view sandhill cranes, songbirds, ducks and quail.

Open Gate properties

In addition to Wildlife Management Areas, the Department's Open Gate program provides hunters and anglers public access to private lands. Landowners voluntarily allow public access to their private parcel for specific outdoor activities. The following two areas are just a sample of Open Gate properties for recreationists to visit.

Nestled in a scenic valley southeast of the small town of Amalia in northern New Mexico, Costilla Creek winds its way down from the high country in Colorado, past the towns of Amalia and Costilla and ultimately empties into the Rio Grande.

On its journey through New Mexico, Costilla Creek runs through a portion of the Rio Costilla Cooperative Livestock Association (RCCLA) property. In a cooperative agreement through the Open Gate program, that portion of the river is now open to public fishing. This 4.8-mile stretch of the Rio Costilla is one of 29 current Open Gate properties scattered across the state. **OG.152 – Rio Costilla** is the longest single stretch of river/stream in the program, making it a unique fishing opportunity.

About halfway through the Open Gate portion of the stream, Latir Creek joins the Rio Costilla at the property headquarters. This junction not only is a beautiful high country meadow setting, it is the dividing point in fishing regulations on the Rio Costilla.

In the southern half of the state in the town of Mayhill in southeastern New Mexico, **OG.145 – Rio Penasco** offers access to a 1.2 mile stretch of the river. Located off Hwy 82, the stretch of river running through the property is a high elevation, spring-fed, cold-water fishery that holds water year-round and provides habitat for trout. Fishing is only permitted on the property during the seasons and dates specified in the Open Gate lease agreement between the Department and the landowner.

For more information on these and other Open Gate properties visit: <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/maps/open-gate-program/>

For more information

Visit <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/fishing/licenses-permits/> and <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/hunting/licenses-and-permits/license-requirements-fees/> to learn more about buying the required licenses for using State Game Commission properties.

Top: Rio Costilla, an Open Gate property located in Taos County near the Colorado border. Department photo.

Bottom: Zone-tailed hawk at Red Rock WMA. Department photo by Mark Watson.



Conservation officers take hunter education grads on Barbary sheep hunt

By Cody Johnston



There was a steady wind whipping through the canyons of southeast New Mexico, kicking dust in the air, the bushes looked like they would fly away at any second. The temperatures did not want to budge. There was no sign of letting up.

It was no matter, though; only 20 minutes earlier the hunting guide had spotted a distant herd of Barbary sheep, and the weather went out of everyone's mind.

A slow stalk commenced over a barbwire fence, down a small gully and up the side of a hill, with the guide stopping every few hundred yards to assess where the herd had moved so he could direct his hunter. Each slow step put them closer, and then it happened.

There, just ahead, a sheep had stopped in range, the guide slowly pulled out the shooting sticks and quietly set them up. His hunter prepared to take his shot, finally resting his rifle down on the sticks as he peered down the scope trying to line up the crosshairs.

At this point you may be thinking this sounds like one of those expensive guided trips for the biggest animal, or the start of that T.V. hunting show everyone is talking about in camp. But for this hunter, it would be his first big game hunt. At only 11, Isaac Chaney was getting ready to create a memory that would last a lifetime.

Isaac had arrived only the day before with his dad from La Luz after being one of 10 youth invited by Department of Game and Fish conservation officers to participate in a youth Barbary sheep ewe hunt.

For those who may not know, Barbary sheep are not native to New Mexico but were released to provide a unique hunting opportunity. Originally brought into the state privately in the 1940s, Department releases began in 1950 after finding that these sheep, native to North Africa, took well to the desert of southeast New Mexico.

The year before the hunt, district conservation officer Travis Nygren had seen an opportunity to give new hunter education graduates who had never purchased a license a chance to go out for Barbary sheep. Nygren worked closely with the owners of the Blackwater Ranch and Westall Ranch who agreed to allow youth hunters to come hunt on their property. He had the place and a list of kids; all he needed were guides to help take out the kids. It didn't take much convincing to get other conservation officers to offer their time.

The kids arrived at the ranch, situated near Arabella, on a Friday afternoon. They met up with the officers who would be their guides. After getting situated, the kids prepared for their hunt at the shooting range set up by the officers so they could sight in their rifles. It didn't take long for the kids to start shooting with accuracy and their guides to feel they were ready to hop in the truck and find some sheep.

Isaac was now in position, with his gun resting on the shooting sticks. The wind was still blowing strong so he had to work on steadying himself and the gun before he took a shot. His guide, conservation officer Kurt Felix, was by his side giving him pointers, reminding him to take a breath and take into account where he aimed due to the steady wind.



After a few dozen seconds of watching, a loud boom reverberated off the canyon walls. Isaac and Kurt both stood still as we waited downhill to see if Isaac had hit his mark. It didn't take long for Kurt to look proudly at Isaac and declare, "You got it!"

The immediate smile that lit up Isaac's face and the thumbs up he turned and gave his dad was the sure sign that this was not something that Isaac was going to forget.

Within the first few hours, other young hunters were already filling their tags and preparing their ice chests to take home their harvests. By Saturday morning, only a few remained who were trying to get close enough to get a Barbary sheep within their range.

The opportunity to have a hunt fully guided by officers who get to spend the days outdoors and know the area is already quite lucky, but to be able to do it on a private ranch where there are lots of chances to come across a Barbary sheep is the icing on the cake.

These youth came away from this experience with not only memories but something to put in their freezers, and it was thanks to a group of conservation officers who saw an opportunity. For each of these kids their first hunt was something special, and hopefully began a lifetime of hunting traditions.



Cody Johnston is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the southeast area.




Opposite: Isaac with Officer Felix. Department photo by Cody Johnston.

Left: Barbary thru binos. Department photo by Ross Morgan.

Top right: Isaac stalks sheep with Officer Felix, trying to get close to a herd. Department photo by Cody Johnston.



More about this hunt

-  Ten lucky youth hunters were randomly selected from a list of Hunter Education graduates who had never purchased a hunting license. Officer Nygren called those selected and a majority accepted the invitation immediately.
-  On February 22, 2019, ten conservation officers and a BLM Ranger gathered on the Blackwater Ranch in anticipation for the hunt. The officers set up a shooting range with two steel targets. As the youth hunters arrived they were asked to check their rifles on the range. Once adjustments were made the hunters were assigned to an officer. They loaded their gear in the officers' trucks and began hunting.
-  The outcome of this hunt is credited to all of those who participated. Bryan's Taxidermy in Carlsbad donated free European mounts to all the hunters. Lunch was provided by Walmart in Ruidoso Downs. A special thanks goes out to the Westall and Blackwater Ranches and all the officer's involved.

GAME AND FISH NEWS

FOR RELEASE December 6, 1962

COMMISSION TO MEET

The State Game Commission will meet on Thursday, December 13 at 9:00 a.m. in the office of the Department of Game and Fish in Santa Fe.

A major item on the agenda is setting of the new fishing regulations. Commission meetings are open to the public.

SEASON DATES

Ducks may be hunted east of the Continental Divide December 6-30. West of the Divide the season is open to December 19. Season on geese is open to January 6 west of the Divide, and to January 13 east of the Divide. Quail season continues to December 16.

Ringtail, mink and marten may be taken until December 31. Season on beaver and muskrat continues through next March.

Deer may be hunted December 8 and 9 in two areas--Luna-Escudilla, and Mule Creek. Special tags are required.

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Fred A. Thompson, Director *State Capitol - Santa Fe* Anabel Haas, Editor

News blasts from the past

A stack of old press releases highlights the big topics of 1962

By *Jeremy Lane*

You just never know what might walk into an area Game and Fish office. A piece of scat for identification or part of a road-squished snake in a plastic baggie, for example.

Recently, a stack of old Department press releases from 1962 found its way to my desk. It is very interesting to read through them and see what the big issues were decades ago, and to see just how much has changed since then.

Let's take a closer look at these announcements. Travel back with me to '62 when Kennedy is president and will ask Congress to put a man on the moon, the Beach Boys just started a new musical sound sweeping the nation and the Sandia TramWay in Albuquerque won't open for several more years.

A milestone for anyone who has enjoyed the taste of New Mexico walleye was reached that year: The first evidence of natural walleye spawning in Elephant Butte was observed when 10- to 12-inchers were found in gillnet surveys downstream in Caballo Lake, where walleye had not been stocked. Our fisheries biologists continue these surveys today and conduct artificial walleye spawnings where eggs are collected, stirred with a crane or turkey feather with sperm from the males, raised in our hatcheries and then released into appropriate New Mexico waters.

Our state offers a variety of exotic big game hunting that one would have to travel far abroad to find in their native ranges. In November 1962, our then Game Commission was investigating the possibility of adding another species. Two male and six female

greater kudu, an African antelope species, would arrive at the Rio Grande Zoo in Albuquerque "next spring." The hope was that their offspring would be introduced to the wild on an experimental basis. Interestingly enough, an old skull believed to be kudu was found not too long ago at one of our fenced properties we use for bighorn sheep breeding. Kudu offspring from this endeavor made the first step to being introduced to a fenced area, but never established further.

Prior to 1976, hunters under the age of 18 were not required to pass a hunter safety course. The need for that mandate is clear back in 1962. "Forty-seven firearm casualties connected with hunting are known to the Game Department as of mid-December," a release reads, with most seeming to be tied to rabbit hunting. "The Department continues to urge sportsmen organizations to provide hunter safety instruction," it continues.

At that time, such instruction was available from the National Rifle Association (NRA). Today, you can attend a free hunter education class in person or online, with the NRA course still being a free option.

The director "points out that the greatest danger is not in big game hunting, but in the 21 rabbit-hunting related incidents." Injury and death from hunting accidents in 1962 exceeded the previous year's numbers and totaled 35. One possible aid to the hunting accident problem back then was to consider making rabbits a game animal so they would fall under Department purview. Can you imagine the time consumed if conservation officers were responding to rabbit calls?

Later that year, a press release announced the addition of the golden eagle to protections under the "Bald Eagle Act." The Bald Eagle Protection Act gave that species legal protection in 1940. Juvenile bald eagles lack the namesake white head and can resemble golden eagles, so protecting both because of their similarities makes sense. But eagles in 1962 had a lot more to worry about than mistaken identity.

Another page in the stack discusses a study's findings of detrimental, chemical residue in eagle tissue in various parts of the country. That chemical, found in all 25 eagles examined, was DDT, and wasn't banned in the U.S. until a decade later by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). DDT is an insecticide that bio-accumulated (amounts and effects magnified up the food chain) and caused reproductive failure in eagles and many raptors by making egg walls too thin for parents to incubate.

Incidentally, Rachel Carson's seminal work, "Silent Spring," was also published in 1962 and spoke against the indiscriminate use of pesticides and its harm to wildlife. Her book is considered by many to be a wake-up call for the nation that set much-needed change in motion.

Some good, some cringe-worthy, but it's all history we've learned from and used to reach where we are today. I like these kind of office walk-ins... ones I don't have to don surgical gloves to examine.

Opposite: In 1962, the Department published weekly press releases. To read more of these original announcements, visit <http://magazine.wildlife.state.nm.us/news-blasts-from-the-past/>.

Jeremy Lane is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Southwest Area.

Out of Range

Javelina are making appearances in some of the most unlikely places

By Ross Morgan



Collared peccary, better known as javelina, have been a part of southern New Mexico's landscape since before biologists such as Stokely Ligon and Vernon Bailey started discovering things about them in the early 1900s. The name javelina is derived from jabalina which, in Spanish, means "wild sow."

These medium-sized omnivorous mammals have a musky-smelling scent gland on their back, salt-and-pepper gray colored hair, short legs, a pig-like nose and a distinct hair line around the neck and shoulder that is lighter in color, creating the appearance of a collar. Although these small animals were thought to be pigs by early settlers, biologists now believe they are only distantly related.

A publication from Arizona Game and Fish references the heavy exploitation and decline of javelina in Arizona and Texas in the early 1900s before the species was designated as a game animal in these states. The hides were of value for gloves and jackets and the bristles were used for brushes. One account said that javelina were killed in the state of New Mexico by ranchers who didn't like them; there was also a market for their bristly fur. According to the *Journal of Mammalogy*, javelina have been increasing their range in New Mexico following population declines early in the 1970s.

Historically, javelina have occupied a variety of habitats in southern New Mexico from Lea to Hidalgo County. "For the most part they are found in the southern part of the state in the warmer climates, not really in higher elevations of the south," said Nicole Tatman, big game program manager with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. "Lately over the last few years we've been getting reports of them observed further north where we wouldn't expect to see them."

Publications from the 1960s mapped two different javelina populations in the state that were considered two different subspecies. These two different populations were in the Bootheel-Gila region and near Carlsbad Caverns. "The ones in the southwest are doing most of moving and can now be found in the Las Cruces area, in the Organ mountains and the Deming area as well," said Jim Stuart, endangered non-game animal biologist for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

Fast forward to 2004, a research paper published in the Southwestern Association of Naturalists by Steven Albert, Cynthia A. Ramotnik and C. Gregory Schmitt, documented the presence of javelina on the Zuni reservation, in McKinley County, said Stuart. Now, present day, we are having sightings as far east as Bitter Lake and the Roswell areas, and moving up the east side of the state, Bosque Del Apache, Clines Corners and even as far north as Santa Fe.

In July 2018, someone photographed a javelina in the Eldorado neighborhood southeast of downtown Santa Fe. Later in the year, one was spotted in the Santa Fe area running through the juniper in the snow. Most of these far north sightings, with the exception of the one in Bosque Del Apache, have been one at a time, not multiple.

“As Game and Fish officers, we get a lot of sightings that are unfounded, but in this case, the person who reported the sighting had pictures to validate it,” said Sergeant Ben Otero, sergeant for the Chama Supervisory District. “I have been a wildlife officer for many years, and wildlife never cease to amaze me.”

“Whenever you see a range change, they say it’s an expansion,” said Dr. Jennifer Frey, professor with the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Conservation at New Mexico State University. However, Dr. Frey thinks that javelina are rebounding and moving back into areas where they historically existed.

The next time you are out having some fun in the great outdoors, keep your eyes open. You may just run across one of these even-toed ungulates that occupy a range of diverse habitats from central South America to the southwestern United States. Javelina sightings outside of what is considered their home range provide important information that the Department of Game and Fish would like to have. The public is always encouraged to take pictures, document the occurrence and the location and send it in. Send documentation to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, One Wildlife Way, Santa Fe, NM 87507 in C/O Wildlife Management Division.

Ross Morgan is a wildlife biologist and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the northwest area.

What to do if you encounter a javelina

- Move slowly away in the opposite direction.
- If you have pets, keep them leashed.
- Make sure the javelina has an escape route.
- Make loud noises, clap your hands and stomp your feet to alert the javelina of your presence.

Feral Hogs vs. Javelina

What’s the difference?

Javelina

- No discernible tail
- Small ears
- Whitish collar
- No color variation
- Gray with whitish collar
- Hind feet have fused dewclaw
- Game animal with seasons and bag limits

Feral Hog

- Clearly visible tail
- Large ears
- Larger body size
- Dramatic color variation
 - Black
 - Red
 - White
 - Spotted
 - Belted
- Hind feet have two dewclaws
- Exotic free-ranging livestock with no seasons or bag limits



Top: Javelina are known for the white collar at the base of their neck. Department photo.

Bottom: Feral hogs have large ears and a clearly visible tail. Department photo.



Ross Morgan is the Department’s public information officer for the northwest region.

Ice fishing in New Mexico

Family fun with or without the sun

By Ross Morgan



Ice fishing at Eagle Nest Lake. Department photo by Martin Perea.

Although sometimes the weather

isn't the most hospitable for ice fishing when the temperature drops to freezing and the wind picks up, with the right planning, preparation and gear, a day of ice fishing can be quite rewarding and fun for the whole family.

One wouldn't think that ice fishing is a thing in the desert of New Mexico, but believe it or not, it has become quite popular and continues to gain attraction among the fishing public. Although Mother Nature may not manufacture the right conditions for all lakes in northern New Mexico year-after-year, when she does, you can find hundreds to thousands of anglers racing to their favorite spots with augers in hand.

Some of the most popular ice fishing spots in New Mexico include Fenton Lake, Cabresto Lake, Sugarite Canyon State Park and Eagle Nest Lake. Lakes that are not open to taking fish from or through the ice include Santa Cruz Lake, Bonito Lake and Springer Lake. Ice fishing is legal on all other waters unless otherwise prohibited. The weather can change quickly in New Mexico so make sure you do some research on whether the lake you are going to is open or closed prior to heading out.

"Eagle Nest Lake is probably the most popular ice fishing lake in New Mexico," said Eric Frey, sportfish program manager for the Department of Game and Fish. "This 2,200-acre lake sits at 8,300 feet in elevation, has stunning mountain views and usually freezes hard enough every year to entertain ice fishermen." Although the lake is stocked regularly with rainbow trout, one can also catch northern pike, yellow perch and kokanee salmon. Anglers have reported over the years that PowerBait, corn and jigs work best.

There are many different types of bait and tackle when it comes to ice fishing. Bait can range anywhere from a basic ice jig tipped with wax worms and salmon eggs to moonshine shiver minnows that glow in the dark. The variety of names for ice fishing jigging baits are enough to get one's curiosity. Enough curiosity, I hope, for you to jump on the Internet and do some research.

Like all fishing tackle, ice fishing rods come in basic models. There's the Shakespeare Ugly Stik GX2, which is very popular and costs just under \$20, to

the more expensive St. Croix Custom Ice Spinning rod that costs just over \$120. The same goes for reels. My favorite is the Shimano ultra-light spinning rod for just over \$20. Manufacturers do make reels that are priced over \$100, but if you aren't doing any more than catching trout and yellow perch, the \$20 reels do just fine.

If you aren't quite as warm-blooded as some folks, you will definitely want to wear plenty of clothing. For this type of fishing, I recommend layers. If you have been in New Mexico for any period of time, you have heard the saying, "if you don't like the weather in New Mexico, wait five minutes." This has been true for me on many occasions. It may be cold one minute and 70 degrees the next or vice versa. It just depends on how the weather in New Mexico is feeling that day. Dressing in layers of clothing allows one to take off and put on clothing as the weather changes, keeping you comfortable on your fishing trip.

If you are looking to pick a new hobby or would just like to try something new this winter, pick up a few of the ice fishing essentials, your fishing license, some warm clothes and head out to a frozen lake near you that is open to ice fishing. You never know: ice fishing might turn out to be the next big family or friend outing that you have been searching for.



Elsa Frey, age 10, fishing at Eagle Nest Lake. Photo by Eric Frey.

Ice Fishing Essentials

Ice rods and reels:

- 24–36 inch or 40–48 inches depending on species you are targeting
- Ultralight reels
- Combo rod and reels are the way to go

Auger and accessories

- Hand auger

Ice scoop:

- This is essential for removing slushy ice that forms in the hole after you drill the hole.

Bait and Tackle

- Size 10 bait hooks
- Split shots
- Ice fishing jigs
- Variety of baits:
 - PowerBait
 - Corn
 - Worms

Seat or bucket

A five-gallon bucket with a pad on the lid is a great seat. It can also be used to carry more gear to your fishing hole and store fish if needed.

Rod holders

Rod holders work great, especially when it's a cold and windy day and you want to keep your hands warm in your pocket. Some of them even have flags to alert the angler when a fish is biting.

Pliers or hook removers

These are both great tools to have when ice fishing, they both work great for baiting, fish removal, and repairs without having to take your gloves off.

Sled to transport your gear

Whether it's a long flat bottom sled or a round plastic sled, they come in really handy when transporting all of your gear to your fishing hole.

Ice fishing shelter

These shelters can range from \$150 to \$500 depending on size and accessories. These can make the family a little more comfortable and get you out of the elements if it begins to snow or the wind picks up. Remember to pick up some threaded peg ice fishing shelter stake nails to secure your shelter.

A Day in the Life of a Conservation Officer

Meet Corporal Jacob Lobato,
Roswell Supervisory District

By Cody Johnston



The morning was just beginning and the heat was setting in as I climbed into the front seat of Corporal Jacob Lobato's truck. The dispatchers' calls were already coming across the radio.

Spring had recently started in southeast New Mexico. It was time to put away the hunting gear, dust off the fishing poles, get out the tents and gather up the kids to head to a lake. Warm weather also means a change for Game and Fish conservation officers, who spent the winter patrolling back roads, checking hunting licenses and ensuring wildlife stays out of the hands of poachers.

As we left the Roswell Game and Fish office and headed north, it became obvious that this was not going to be a short day. With almost an entire county to cover that included multiple fishing areas, off-highway vehicle areas and lots of public and private land, the corporal would be staying busy.

Lobato first took me to a stretch of the river that was popular with fishermen due to the opportunity to catch some nice catfish and bass and get out of town. As we drove along the river, the truck kicking up dust, he pointed out some of the good spots I should come back and try to fish. Along the road you could see evidence of illegal target shooting, something Lobato said he also looks for when he drives this area.

"With the variety of the things there are to do on any given day, you experience something new every day," he said. "It keeps the job really interesting that way." For example, he explained, today we were checking fishermen and OHV areas, but we could just as easily be in Unit 38 checking for over-the-counter Barbary sheep hunters.

Originally from Las Cruces, Lobato attended Texas Tech University where he was a member of the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). While at school, he also participated in a student group for fire ecology and in the student chapter of The Wildlife Society. He graduated in 2014 with a degree in range management and started applying to become a conservation officer.

He started his career with New Mexico Game and Fish as a recruit officer in 2015. He graduated from the academy and was assigned to the Roswell Supervisory District. After a short time, he was promoted to the rank of corporal of the Roswell district.

"I grew up hunting and fishing, more heavily fishing when I was little [because] my dad enjoys fishing a lot," he said. "I kind of just ran into game wardens that way, initially."

We arrived at Mescalero Sands North Dune Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) area. It was time for Lobato to switch back to officer mode. It was clear why this was such a popular place to ride OHVs; with large banked sand dunes flanking both sides of the road, and miles of riding fun to be had, a person could ride for days out here.

For Lobato, though, today was about safety. One of the best parts about doing this particular job is getting on the four-wheeler and riding the dunes himself, talking with people while he checks for OHV violations, he said.

It was a Saturday and the warm weather of spring had begun. However, there weren't many people out riding yet. Without anyone to check we made our way back towards Roswell to check on some local lakes.

I took this chance to ask Lobato to share some of the other things that he finds himself doing during the spring and summer. Night patrols for fishermen are among his favorite activities as an officer. Investigations are another big part of his season such as fraudulent residency claims and checking on reports of poached animals.

At Bottomless Lakes State Park, we didn't find anyone fishing but he recalled to me the story of how he helped assist an injured man who fell into the canyon-lined sinkhole after climbing to the top. The man was unable to climb out, but Lobato worked with local fire and paramedics to rescue the man.

A trip to Lake Van near Dexter showed some promise for interactions with the handful of fishermen around the lake. When we arrived, Lobato stopped at a common spot he uses, braced himself against a tree and took out his binoculars. I asked him if he spotted anyone who might not be following the law and he only noticed one person on the opposite side of the lake who appeared to be packing up quickly.

Lobato decided to start there first; he reminded me to hang back a little before approaching.

As Lobato approached the man and began to speak it was clear this would only result in a simple license check. The two struck up a conversation about

when the lake would be stocked again and what the fish were biting on. It did go to show the type of personality you would have to have to go into a fishing or hunting camp, likely alone, and possibly diffuse a tense situation.

We would make our way around the lake with most people asking Lobato the same questions: What were the fish biting on? When would the lake be stocked again? With a smile, Jacob would say "garlic PowerBait" and "the catfish would start being stocked around Memorial Day."

Lobato mentioned how he was hoping he might get home in time tonight to see Texas Tech in the Final Four for college basketball; it was, after all, his alma mater.

Dusk was upon us as we drove away from Sumner Lake and headed back to Roswell. There would be one detour on the way back to check on an older gentleman who was pulled over on the side of the road. Luckily, the man and his car were ok but Lobato said he always likes to check, just in case.

The Texas Tech game had already started about 30 minutes before so Lobato would have to settle for listening on the radio. Getting to see what an officer does, on his schedule, showed me the dedication these men and women put in to protecting the wildlife of New Mexico. I look forward to getting back out there with an officer during the hunting season this fall. Until then, get out your fishing gear and hit up that favorite lake or river, and if you see your local conservation officer, say hello and maybe a thanks.

And, if you ask, I bet they will give you some advice on how to catch that big fish.

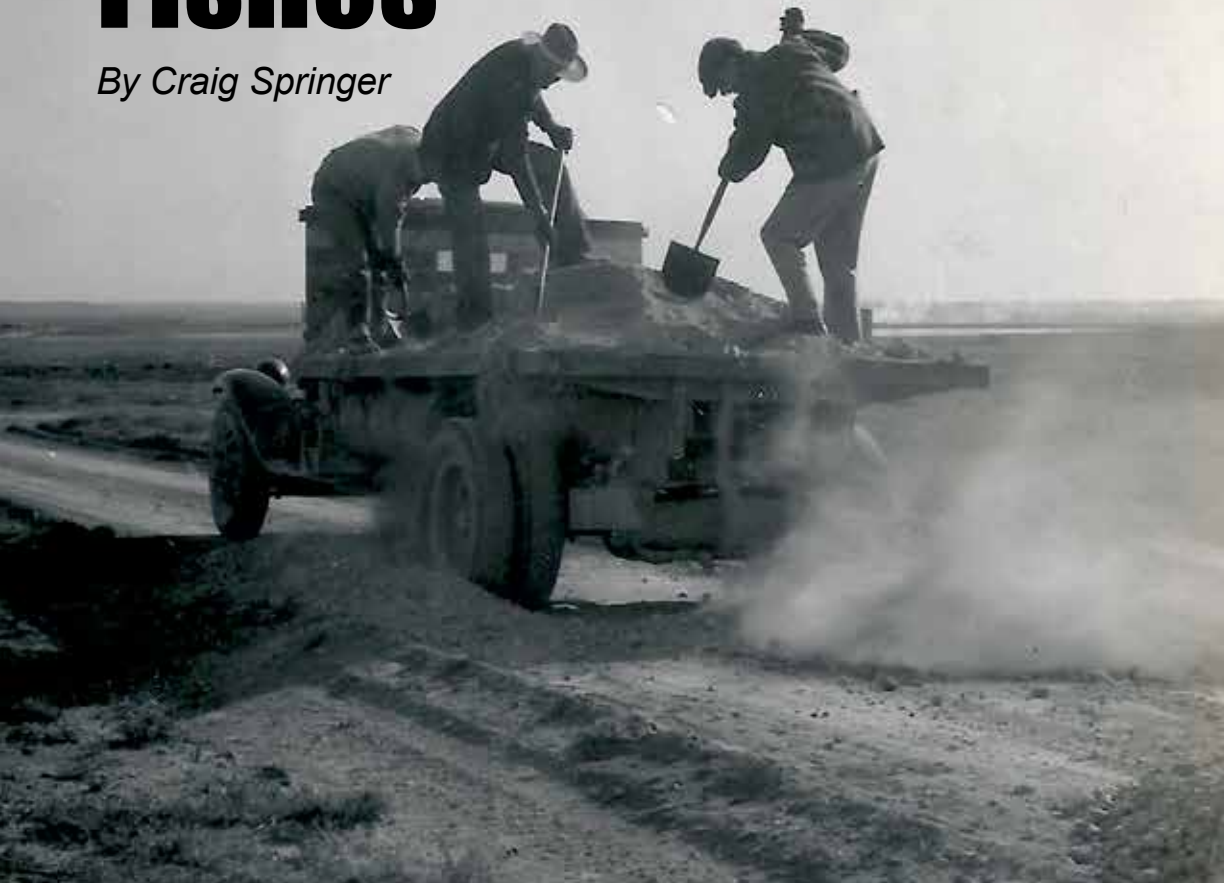
Opposite: Lobato guides hunter education graduates on a youth pheasant hunt he organized. Department photo by Cody Johnston.



Cody Johnston is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Southeast Area.

Conserving Rare Southwestern Fishes

By Craig Springer



Top: WPA worker lay road gravel at Dexter Fish Cultural Station ca. 1936 from a GMC truck. USFWS National Fish and Aquatic Conservation Archives.

Right: WPA workers pose at Dexter Fish Cultural Station ca. 1936. USFWS National Fish and Aquatic Conservation Archives.



Certain places in our collective consciousness seem to exist because they have been the subject of books. The Four Corners belong to Tony Hillerman; the Gila River to Rev. Ross Calvin; and the Pecos Wilderness to the legendary conservationist and former director of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Dr. Elliot Barker.

But no one ever wrote a book about Dexter, New Mexico.

You may have never heard of the little village that exists primarily to service dairy farms and ranches. Dexter sits in the shortgrass prairie in Chaves County, overshadowed by its taller sibling, Roswell, a mere 15 miles distant. State Route 2 bisects Dexter, lying pike-straight on a section line like a yellow-striped gray-black ribbon. Pivot-irrigation sprinklers spin slowly over the rich alfalfa fields that feed local dairy cows. Velvet-green crop circles dot the flat countryside and tilt gently toward the Pecos River that bends within walking distance.

* * *

Dexter's obscurity belies its significance in conservation. It is home to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwestern Native Aquatic Resources and Recovery Center, situated on the east edge of town. It is there because of the water. The federal fisheries facility lies on a rise barely perceptible. On a topo map, the contour lines spread widely. The same map shows a good number of rectangular ponds packed in a small space. The facility sits on a square-mile of land where artesian water was the natural defining character. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service (USFWS) acquired the property in 1931 from the New Mexico Game Commission for the express purpose of raising fish.

For nearly 90 years it has done that, growing fish for stocking waters from west Texas to southern California and points in between. Fish species such as largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, channel catfish, bullhead catfish, bluegill, redear sunfish

and black crappie were long the mainstay.



Through the years, the facility has gone through a few name changes that in true essence reflected its changing mission: “fish-cultural station” became “national fish hatchery” which gave way to “fish technology center.” Today, the facility’s scientists fully immerse themselves in conserving some of the rarest fish species found in the American Southwest, says station director, Manuel Ulibarri.

Ulibarri, a native of Santa Rosa, got his start in conservation with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. He learned trout and walleye culture at Rock Lake Fish Hatchery while still in high school. He studied at Western New Mexico University and New Mexico State University, and then worked at several national fish hatcheries before landing in Dexter nearly 19 years ago. Rare, native southwestern fish species were on station when he arrived.

“This facility started a transition to endangered species dating back to before the Endangered Species Act became law in 1973,” said Ulibarri. “It was quite evident back then that some native fishes were in trouble. Today, we hold 14 species that are imperiled to some degree—fishes found in nature in remote desert *ciénegas* to those in the fast, heavy flows of the Colorado River.”

These native fishes range from tiny desert-dwelling fish to the world’s largest minnow.

“Desert pupfish turn a stunning electric blue when they get ready to spawn—they’re thumb-sized and they look playful, almost cartoonish,” said Ulibarri. “Then there’s Colorado pikeminnow, native to the Colorado River and its larger tributaries, including the Gila and San Juan rivers. They have the capability to grow to six feet long. What the two fish have in common is their rarity in nature; that’s why they’re here.”

The following fact underscores that rarity: the Colorado pikeminnow shared the same habitats and suffered the same peril as three other Colorado River Basin fishes, the bonytail, humpback chub and razorback sucker. Habitat loss from altered stream flows have greatly diminished their numbers in nature.

“The only place left that all four Colorado River species swim together is here,” said Ulibarri. “The adult fish all have amazing body shapes for life in voluminous river flows. Form follows function. Humps on their nape are a built-in keel, and it’s always impressive to see when we spawn the fish.”

* * *

The sound of running water never ceases inside the hatching house. Continual splashing becomes a murmur akin to a large gathering of people engaged in conversations. The sounds fade to the background. Water percolates through stacks of shallow trays where eggs that look like gobs of farina cereal incubate, their tiny eyes visible through the shells. They soon wiggle free and grow rapidly, eventually making their way to the outdoor ponds. Water flows through three-foot-deep rectangular concrete raceways and eight-foot-diameter tanks hosting a variety of fish species awaiting time to spawn.

Razorback sucker is the first fish to ripen to spawn in the spring, soon followed by Chihuahua chub, a minnow found only in the Mimbres River flowing through the Mimbres Wildlife Area. The whole lot of 14 species spawn in captivity in the hands of biologists by the onset of summer.

Geneticists at the station carefully arrange spawning pairs of all species to ensure that parents are not related. That further ensures that offspring are genetically robust, and best suited to face the rigors of the wild where they will eventually go. Health is a principal concern. Fish health pathologists on staff frequently assess the well-being of the stocks on station. These pathologists, in fact, assess fish health in state and federal hatcheries and in wild fish populations throughout the southwest.

The Southwestern Native Aquatic Resources and Recovery Center employs 22 people from a variety of disciplines, folks who keep the water flowing and the fish swimming and breeding. Staff scientists frequently publish their research in rigorous scientific journals that advance knowledge of fish health,

genetics, conservation and culture techniques that apply to imperiled, commercial and sport fish species.

“The fishes we have here are part of our southwestern heritage,” said Ulibarri. “They each have a unique intrinsic value. They possess the imprint of nature from the places from which they arose—and that’s irreplaceable.”

Dexter may not have its Hillerman or its Barker but the nearly 90-year-old fisheries facility has authored an imprint in conservation all its own.



Hunting

Walk-in dove and waterfowl hunting is available at the Southwestern Native Aquatic Resources and Recovery Center. Access through gates on the east side of the facility along Wichita Road. Please notify staff at the administration building. Consult the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish hunting rules and information booklet for regulations.

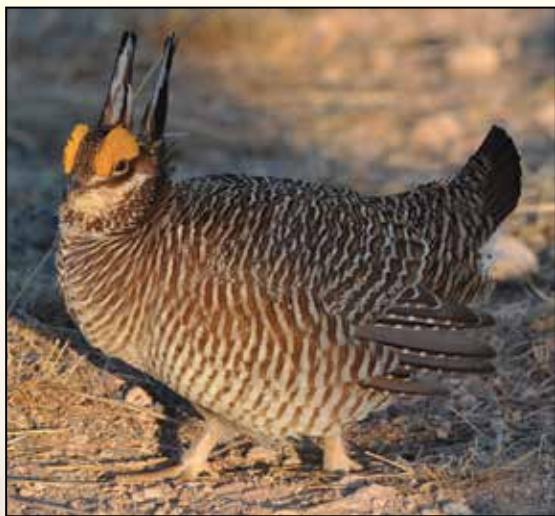


Craig Springer is a fish biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He and his wife have three young hunters and anglers.

Left: Antheitized razorback sucker. Photo by Craig Springer.

Top: Center Director Manuel Ulibarri checks on incubating razorback sucker eggs. Photo by Craig Springer.

Photographing Lesser Prairie Chickens in Southeastern New Mexico



By Grant Beauprez

*Spread: Lone male prairie chicken.
Inset: Lesser prairie chicken.
Department photo by Grant Beauprez.*

Lesser prairie-chickens are a “lekking” species, where the males will congregate on a “lek” to attract females for breeding. Males will inflate the air sacs in their necks to make a sound that can be heard up to one mile away. The males will defend territories on the lek in order to have the best chance of mating with a hen. This will often involve fighting with their neighbors to defend their territory, which can lead to some pretty spectacular photographic opportunities.

The best time to photograph lesser prairie-chickens is during the peak of hen attendance; this usually takes place around the second week of April in New Mexico. The birds will arrive on the lek about 45 minutes prior to the sun rising, so you'll need to be in your blind at least an hour before sunrise in order to beat the birds to the lek. I like to minimize disturbance to the birds by not flushing them from

the lek unless it is absolutely necessary. The birds will display on the lek for around two hours. I always wait for the birds to leave on their own before emerging from the blind. I also never use a flash. The flash could spook the birds and cause them to flush from the lek. I always wait until there is enough natural light to take photos without a flash.

My photography gear is not elaborate. I have an old Nikon D5000 camera outfitted with a 70-300mm zoom. A fast shutter speed (> 1/1000 sec) is essential to stopping the action to get crisp, clear photos. A camera that can take anywhere from five to 10 frames per second is also ideal.

In addition, I have also used my phone camera with an adapter that attaches it to a spotting scope (known as digiscoping). The photo of the chicken with the blanket flowers the same color as its air sac was taken with a digiscoping setup from approximately 40 yards using my truck as a blind.

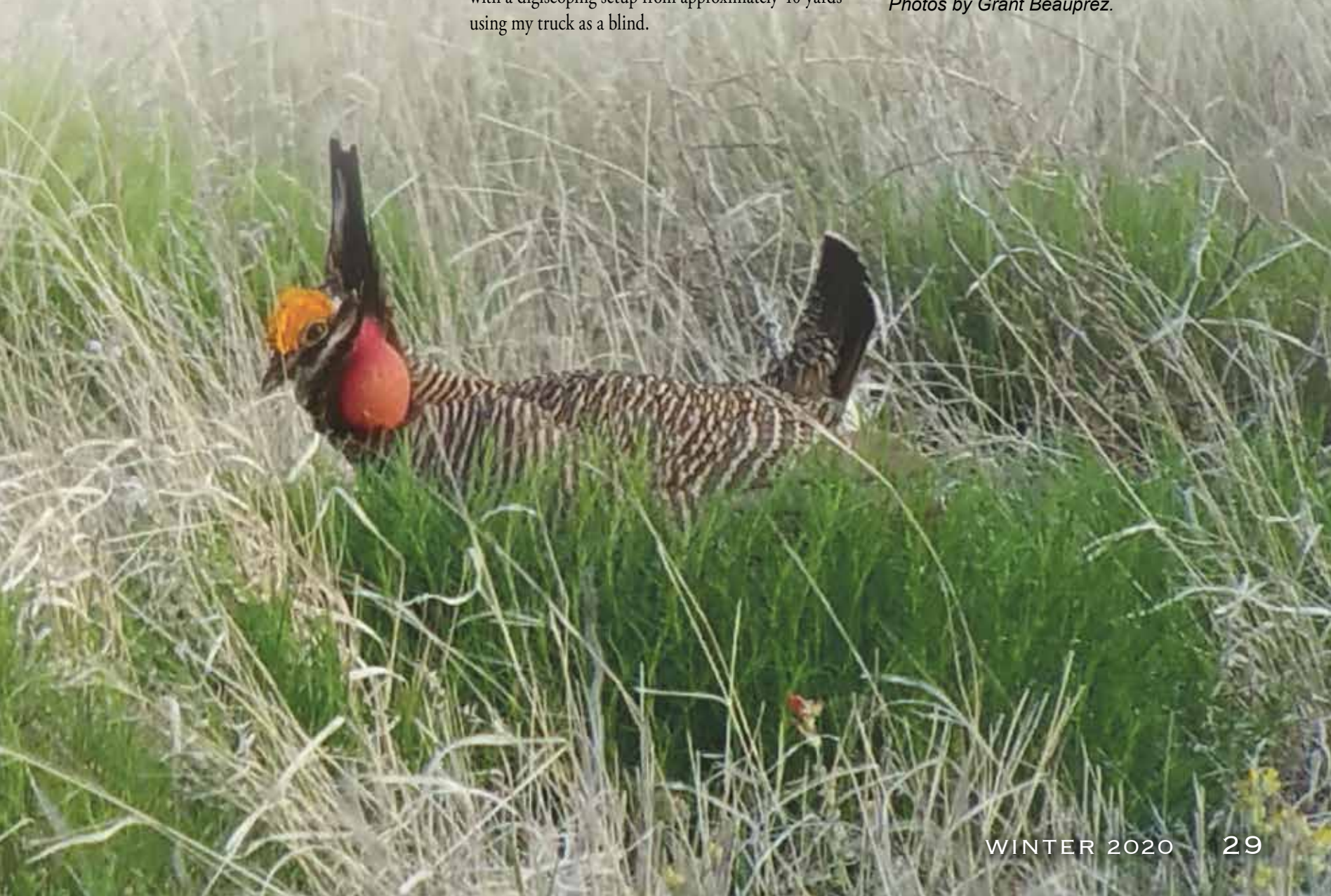
If using a tent blind, I will often set it up a few days in advance to allow the birds to get used to it. You can also use your vehicle as a blind, but you generally can't get as close to the birds.

Lastly, always be mindful of private property rights and ask for permission to view birds on private land in advance. The Department's prairie chicken areas are closed to the public during the breeding and nesting season, from Feb. 15 – June 30. Therefore, the only way a person would be able to photograph prairie chickens on a lek is either to find a lek on Bureau of Land Management property or by permission on private land.

Opposite: Perched male.

Background: Fighting males.

Photos by Grant Beauprez.





*Left to right: Fighting and displaying males;
Fighting males; Two males; Displaying male.*

Spread: Lone male.

Photos by Grant Beauprez.





Grant Beauprez has been the lesser prairie-chicken biologist for the Department since 2007. He completed his master's degree at the University of Northern Colorado conducting research on greater prairie-chickens. He has worked with many threatened and endangered bird species including Guam rails, Mariana crows, palila and puaiohi. He has been an avid birder and photographer for 30 years.

Wildlife pathways: Long-billed curlews

Birds captured in New Mexico migrated to west coast of Mexico

By Erin Duvuvuei



Long-billed curlews (*Numenius americanus*) are a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in New Mexico. This large shorebird breeds in grassland habitat and New Mexico is at the southernmost extent of their breeding range.

The Department of Game and Fish is collaborating with biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Boise State University's Intermountain Bird Observatory, Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge, Denver Zoological Foundation, Playa Lakes Joint Venture and other partners to conduct long-billed curlew research. This project will fill critical information gaps regarding nesting efforts in New Mexico, migration routes and overwintering locations.

Curlews use their long bills to probe, peck and snatch invertebrates. Breeding pairs are territorial and mob potential predators and intruders; they also share incubation duty, with males taking the night-shift and females on day-shift. The pair cares for the brood together, but the female typically leaves chicks with the male and migrates two to three weeks after hatch.

The 2019 pilot year study in New Mexico was very successful. We placed backpack-style satellite transmitters on five curlews (4 females and 1 male) captured near Watrous. Female KX and male KL were a breeding pair in 2019; based on transmitter data from other marked pairs, we expect them to return to the Watrous area and breed together next spring even though they are in different locations for the non-breeding season (see map). This project also contributes to a larger effort to learn more about migratory connectivity of curlews across the west.

Visit <https://ibo.boisestate.edu/curlewtracking/locations/> for more information on marked curlews.



Erin Duvuvuei is the nongame avian biologist with the Department of Game and Fish.

Map: The five long-billed curlews marked near Watrous, N.M. migrated to Mexico in June and early July. Approximate locations based on current satellite transmitter data include the Colorado River Delta (birds EV, HU and KX), Rio Mayo Delta (KL), and Laguna el Caimanero (HC); data was accessed through "Curlew View" 09/11/19, https://schall11.github.io/curlew_vision/#. Inset: Long-billed curlew. Department photo by Erin Duvuvuei.



Grilled rainbow trout with melted herb butter

By Alexa J. Henry

Rainbow trout can be caught year-round throughout the state. Our trout came from Cowles Pond in the Pecos Canyon. Rainbows can be served a variety of ways. We opted to simply grill it outside on our propane grill.

Ingredients

1 or more rainbow trout

Olive oil

Salt and pepper

1 or more sprigs of rosemary

½ teaspoon chopped rosemary

1 or more sprigs of thyme

½ teaspoon chopped thyme

½ teaspoon chopped parsley

¼ cup of unsalted butter, melted

Instructions

Clean and prepare whole trout for the grill. Brush with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Sprinkle the inside of the fish with salt and pepper as well. Place sprigs of thyme and rosemary inside.

Heat grill to medium-high. Place one side flat on the grill for five minutes, then flip and grill the other side of the fish for five minutes.

Serve with roasted red potatoes, corn on the cob or other sides you prefer. Garnish with a slice of lemon.

Photos courtesy of Alexa J. Henry.



Q&A

Meet Francina Martinez-Valencia, Lisboa Springs Hatchery Manager



Francina Martinez-Valencia, Lisboa Springs Hatchery Manager, works as the first-ever woman hatchery manager for the state. A Taos native, she started out as a fish culturist back in November 2007. She has been with the Department for 11 years.

In an interview with *New Mexico Wildlife* magazine, she talks about her work as a hatchery manager. The hatchery, which is home to about 150,000-200,000 fish, raises rainbow trout for the Pecos, Las Vegas and Albuquerque areas.

Top: Francina Martinez-Valencia is the hatchery manager at Lisboa Springs. Department photo by Martin Perea.

What do you like most about your job?

What I like most about the job here at Lisboa Springs is that we are never bored; no day is exactly the same as the other. With the amount of equipment we have here, something new is always going on; something always needs fixing or working on. No two days are alike. Every day is a bit of an adventure.

What do you like to fish for?

Growing up I always fished for rainbow trout and kokanee. I haven't had a lot of opportunity to try warm water fishing but I'm hoping I'll have the chance to go out and do more bass and walleye fishing.

Have you always wanted to work at a hatchery?

As a young girl, I grew up fishing with my dad. One of our favorite things to do was to go fishing at Eagle Nest, and on our way to Taos he'd circle around to the hatchery and we'd stop and look at the fish in the show pond. I grew out of it in my teenage years but while I was in college, I got a job working at a hatchery with native aquatic species. I fell in love with aquaculture and working with different species. I decided that this was something I wanted to do as a career, but back in New Mexico contributing to my home state.

Why are hatcheries so important?

Our hatcheries help provide the best opportunities to our angling men and women in New Mexico. We want to make sure that every chance you have to go out fishing, it is as enjoyable as possible. Whether you are going out for catch and release or to catch and take fish home for dinner, we want to make sure you have your best chance at catching fish and enjoying the outdoors.

Fishing vocabulary

Lunker a trophy-sized fish.

Fry the first stage of a trout's life after hatching. Also known as larval stage.

Fingerling the stage after fry. This name is used since they are about the size of your fingers.

Hatchery a facility where trout are hatched and raised.

Raceway a large water tank, typically made of concrete, with flowing water where adult trout are raised.

Catchable an adult fish that is ready to be stocked in a lake or river and could be caught by anglers.



Take a look inside an old tackle box and you might . . .

Have you seen any of these before? Do you know what they are called, how to use them and what you can typically catch with each of these? Visit the Department of Game and Fish on Facebook to let us know the names of these lures and share photos of some of your old lures on Monday, February 17.

Where do they live?

New Mexico offers many types of habitats or places for animals to live. Some animals prefer living in forests or high up in the mountains while others need a lot of water to survive.

These five animals can be found living in different parts of our state. Do you know what habitats they prefer? Match the animal with its habitat.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. pronghorn _____. | a. grasslands. |
| 2. marmot _____. | b. high-mountain meadows and rocky areas. |
| 3. roadrunner _____. | c. open desert terrain and shrublands. |
| 4. sandhill crane _____. | d. shallow water farm fields and shallow flooded areas. |
| 5. Rocky Mountain bighorn _____. | e. open, mountainous cliffs. |



1. pronghorn: grasslands; 2. marmot: high-mountain meadows and rocky areas; 3. roadrunner: open desert terrain and shrublands; 4. sandhill crane: shallow water farm fields and shallow flooded areas; 5. Rocky Mountain bighorn: open, mountainous cliffs.



find some very interesting old lures.



Helping Wildlife Where It Counts

What is the Habitat Stamp program?

The New Mexico Habitat Stamp Program is a collaborative partnership between sportspersons and federal land management agencies to enhance and conserve wildlife habitat on public lands in New Mexico. Licensed hunters, anglers and trappers on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or U. S. Forest Service (USFS) lands are required to purchase the stamp from the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Each year, Habitat Stamp sales total approximately \$900,000.

Funds are dedicated to habitat improvement projects each year and are supported with funding and staff time from the USFS and BLM. Funding is not available for every proposed project, so a local Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) helps to review and prioritize restoration treatments. Members of the CAC represent hunters, anglers, trappers, conservationists and public land permittees.

The Habitat Stamp Program is a collaborative effort with the public land anglers, hunters and trappers of New Mexico, federal land management agencies and the Department of Game and Fish. The habitat work accomplished through this program is an example of broad collaboration in the conservation community, as it benefits wildlife, watershed health and public land users throughout New Mexico.

Visit <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/conservation/habitat-stamp/> to learn more.

Below: La Joya Wildlife Management Area. Department photo by Martin Perea.

