



PHOTO: DAN WILLIAMS

Spring turkeys

New Mexico's wiley gobblers are always a challenge for hunters in springtime.

Please see Page 8.

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Reel simple

Learning to fish has never been so easy.

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Wall-eyes on new hatchery



Big walleye like this one from Conchas Reservoir grow up from eggs hatched Rock Lake Hatchery in Santa Rosa, then stocked as fry into lakes statewide. Beginning this summer, the hatchery will expand its production of walleye, bass, catfish and other warmwater fish with the opening of the state's first warmwater hatchery.

Photo: Dan Williams

\$8 million complex will include education center

By Dan Williams

Sometime this spring, Roddy Gallegos plans to take a stroll around his neighborhood of trout runways and hatchery buildings to pay a visit to a couple million new residents of Santa Rosa. If all goes well, he'll find them swimming and eating in the 11 brand-new one-acre ponds that were built this winter in the first phase of New Mexico's first warmwater fish hatchery.

"It looks like it's finally starting to come

together," Gallegos said as he surveyed the construction work at Rock Lake Hatchery in February. "It's bigger than I imagined it would be."

The \$4 million first phase of the \$8 million hatchery is scheduled to be completed in May, with the first fish expected to occupy the ponds in June or July. Phase 2, which will include another seven one-acre ponds, four smaller ponds, a hatchery building and an educational center, is scheduled to be completed sometime in 2008. Plans also call for construction of covers

Continued on Page 14



Phase 1 of the new warmwater fish hatchery at Rock Lake Hatchery in Santa Rosa began taking shape last winter with the construction of 11 one-acre ponds. When it's up and running, the hatchery will produce more than 2 million fish a year.

Photo: Brian Novosak

Shoot, fish, learn at 2007 New Mexico Outdoor Expo

Did you ever want to try your hand at archery, shoot a muzzleloader, cast a fly rod, or catch a big catfish? You'll have your chance at the annual New Mexico Outdoor Expo, a free family event May 5-6 at the City of Albuquerque Shooting Range Park.

The Department of Game and Fish and the City of Albuquerque are sponsoring the event for people of all ages. Participants will have opportunities to learn about and participate in activities involving firearms, archery, fishing, and other outdoor skills under the watchful guidance of certified Hunter Education Instructors. Ranges will be set up to instruct in the proper and safe use of .22-caliber rifles, shotguns, archery equipment and muzzleloaders. All activities are open to everyone, whether they are trying it for the first time or polishing their skills.

In addition to shooting and fishing, participants can try their hand at rock climbing or fly tying, talk to exhibitors such as Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, or learn about Cowboy Action Shooting from the Single Action Shooters Society.

The New Mexico Outdoor EXPO will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 5



Archery is one of the most popular activities at the annual New Mexico Outdoor Expo at the City of Albuquerque Shooting Range Park.

Photo: Mark Birkhauser

and 6. It is free to the public and no registration is required. All ranges will be overseen by Certified Hunter Education Instructors using Department firearms and bows. The shooting range can be found by driving west on I-40 to the top of

nine-mile hill and exiting on Paseo Del Vulcan. Go north on Paseo Del Vulcan 4.2 miles to the park sign, then west at park sign 2.6 miles to the range. For more information, call the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish at (505) 222-4731.

State Game Commission welcomes new member, elects new chairman

Alfredo Montoya of Alcalde was elected chairman of the New Mexico Game Commission for 2007 and Albuquerque developer Jim McClintic was welcomed as the commission's newest member appointed by Governor Bill Richardson.

Montoya, a commission member since 2003, succeeds Leo Sims of Hobbs as chairman. Tom Arvas of Albuquerque was re-elected as vice-chairman. Other Commission members are David Henderson of Santa Fe, M.H. "Dutch" Salmon of Silver City, and Terry Riley of Tijeras.

McClintic, 56, was appointed to a four-year term confirmed by the New Mexico Senate. He succeeds Peter Pino of Zia Pueblo, whose term expired in December 2006.

"I'm looking forward to serving on the Commission and working to create more quality hunting opportunities in the state," McClintic said. "I also plan to work to stop illegal hunting and do what I can to conserve the state's natural resources."

McClintic is a New Mexico native, an avid hunter and angler, and a lifetime member of New Mexico Trout. He is a licensed building contractor and developer, and served on the Economic Development Commission during Governor Garry Carruthers' administration. He also was on Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez's transition team and served as chairman of the Albuquerque Municipal Development Sustainable Enhancement Team.



Jim McClintic

For more information about the State Game Commission, please visit the Department of Game and Fish website, www.wildlife.state.nm.us, or call (505) 476-8008.

Auction raises \$210,000 for bighorn sheep program

An authorization to hunt bighorn sheep generated a record \$210,000 for New Mexico's bighorn restoration program during this year's national convention of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep in Salt Lake City.

The bighorn authorization actually sold twice at the foundation's January auction. The first winning bidder bought the authorization for \$105,000, and then donated it back to the Department of Game and Fish. The authorization then went back on the auction block and sold again – to a different bidder – for another \$105,000.

"This donation and the subsequent auction sale show how much value big-game trophy hunters place on New Mexico's bighorn sheep," said Eric Rominger,



Russ Young paid \$185,000 at auction in 2006 for his chance to harvest this trophy desert bighorn ram.

Photo courtesy of Russ Young

the Department's bighorn biologist. "This auction has raised almost \$1.9 million since it began in 1990, with 90 percent of that money going to the

state for bighorn research, management and habitat improvement."

Last year's winning bidder paid \$185,000 for the auction authorization, which allows the hunter to choose among five available hunting opportunities for either desert or Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep on public lands in New Mexico, or on private land with a landowner's permission.

The auction authorization is one of two "enhancement" authorizations the Department sells each year to raise funds for bighorn management. The second authorization is sold through a raffle. Tickets are \$20 each, available through the New Mexico Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep. Call (505) 299-4426 for information.

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Poaching awareness



The Department of Game and Fish's new Poaching Awareness Trailer is on a roll to communities throughout the state. Conservation officers take the trailer to county fairs, outdoor shows and other events to spread the word about the impact poaching has on our wildlife and economy, and how the public can help stop it by calling the toll-free wildlife-crimes hotline, (800) 432-4263. The request the trailer at your event, please contact your local conservation officer or a Department office in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Raton, Roswell or Las Cruces.

Photo: Dan Williams

Woman sentenced to nine years in jail in illegal hunt scheme

In one of the harshest sentences ever handed down in New Mexico for a wildlife crime, a former Catron County outfitter was sentenced to serve nine years in jail after she pleaded guilty to racketeering and fraud in connection with an illegal hunting operation.

Rita Floyd, 54, pleaded guilty in October to one count of racketeering, a second-degree felony; one count of fraud over \$2,500, a third-degree felony; and two misdemeanor counts of outfitting without a license. She originally was charged with 101 counts, including 60 felonies, for her role in an illegal scheme to sell hunts to out-of-state hunters.

Seventh Judicial District Court Judge Matthew Reynolds sentenced Floyd to 18 years in jail, with 9 suspended, followed by five years probation to be served concurrently with two years of parole.

The criminal complaint alleged that Floyd, along with her partner, Celeste Core, forged licenses and sold hunts for deer, elk, bear, mountain lions, bobcats and turkeys to numerous out-of-state hunters on eBay, over the telephone and by e-mail. The fraud charges included allegations that after receiving money for the hunts, Floyd and Core did not provide a hunt at all, did not provide the services advertised, or did not provide the type of hunt that was promised.

Floyd and Core, formerly of Pleasanton, N.M., operated Get Gold Adventures and Outfitters. Floyd was arrested in February 2006 in Sonora, Calif., where she was on probation for previous felony convictions, and returned to New Mexico. Core, 55, was arrested in Pleasanton and was sentenced to five years probation under a plea agreement. The arrests followed an investigation by the Department of Game and Fish that began in October 2004 when two Minnesota hunters noticed something wrong with their licenses and called a conservation officer.

The Catron County Sheriff's Office, District Attorney's Office, New Mexico State Police, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assisted the Department of Game and Fish in the case.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish encourages citizens to report poaching and other wildlife-related crimes by calling the Department's toll-free Operation Game Thief, (800) 432-4263. Callers can remain anonymous and receive rewards if charges are filed.

Stage set for stocking of 1 millionth silvery minnow

By Liz Sloane

Efforts to restore the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow will reach a major milestone sometime this fall with the release of the millionth minnow into its native waters.

The release will be a major accomplishment for the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act Collaborative Program, a consortium of federal, state and local agencies, tribes and private organizations formed in 2000 to balance endangered species needs while simultaneously protecting existing and future water uses. The Collaborative Program's entities have helped minnows to be raised in captivity from wild-born eggs. The three-inch fish are then released back into the river to boost natural



populations.

Declared endangered in 1994, it inhabits 170 miles of the Rio Grande's 1,885 miles. Outside the middle Rio Grande, the fish hasn't been seen in the rest of the river for decades.

The release of the millionth minnow follows the groundbreaking for the newest structure designed for breeding and rearing the fish in captivity, a planned \$1.2 million facility in Las

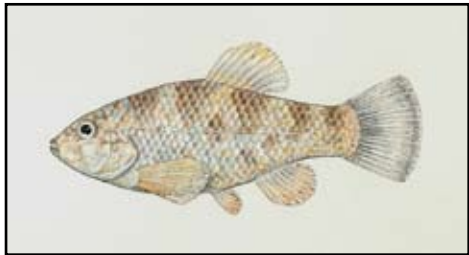
Lunas. It incorporates the different types of microhabitats that are needed for various components of the Rio Grande silvery minnow's life cycle. The groundbreaking ceremony for the unique, cutting-edge design that mimics the Rio Grande was scheduled for April 12.

Liz Sloane is a public information specialist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque.

Agreement will protect threatened White Sands pupfish

The White Sands pupfish, a species found only in the Tularosa Basin on White Sands Missile Range, Holloman Air Force Base and White Sands National Monument, will continue to be protected under a recent agreement among state and federal government agencies.

The U.S. Army, White Sands Missile Range, Holloman Air Force Base and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish signed an updated version of the Cooperative Agreement for



Protection and Maintenance of White Sands Pupfish. The pupfish, *Cyprinodon tularosa*, is listed as threatened under the state Wildlife Conservation Act.

The original agreement, signed in 1994, has been instrumental in preserving White Sands pupfish populations and protecting and enhancing habitat on the federally managed lands. The updated agreement will continue that protection and maintenance of the unique species.

For more information about the White Sands pupfish or the agreement, please contact Stephanie Carman, Department of Game and Fish, (505) 476-8092 or stephanie.carman@state.nm.us.

New solar circulators will improve water quality, fishing at Lake Roberts

Algae blooms that have contributed to poor fishing at Lake Roberts soon may be eliminated with the installation of two solar-powered water and air circulators called SolarBees.

The \$38,000 SolarBees were funded by the Department of Game and Fish and the U.S. Forest Service, with support from the Gila Fish and Gun Club and its president, Brub Stone.

Art Telles, the Gila National Forest wildlife biologist, said the SolarBees were installed to improve water quality in the lake, which in turn will enhance the fishing opportunities. Excessive nitrogen and phosphorous inputs in the lake promote blue-green algae blooms and cause a decrease in oxygen

levels. Telles said the solar-powered reservoir circulators will work to eliminate algae blooms by improving water clarity and oxygen levels. Better circulation also causes nutrients to be taken by "good" planktonic organisms that are then eaten by zooplankton, which then are eaten by fish.

One of the SolarBees was purchased with Habitat Stamp money as a Department of Game and Fish habitat improvement project. The U.S. Forest Service paid for the second SolarBee.

Forest Service hydrologist Carolyn Koury said the Lake Roberts SolarBees were the first to be installed in New Mexico. She encourages anglers to report any changes they observe in



Photo: LuAnn Tafoya

the quality of the lake. Information gathered from the public as well as from biologists will determine the effectiveness of the SolarBees and their impact on fishing.

For more information about the SolarBees or to report conditions at Lake Roberts, please call the Wilderness Ranger District in Mimbres at (505) 536-2250.

Behold the (not-so) lowly carp



Hard-fighting 'trash fish' gains anglers' respect

By M.H. Salmon

I was fishing the Rio Grande down along the levee near San Marcial, back when Elephant Butte was filled to the brim. I had my fun catching a nice channel catfish, but it couldn't compare to the half-hour battle the guy downstream was having with the biggest bass of his life. Or so he thought.

The fish finally broke the line, but by then he was exhausted in the shallows and this ol' boy and his kid were able to splash in from the bank and beach him. When it turned out to be a carp rather than a bass, the man's verbiage was unprintable in this magazine, and embarrassed his young son. With the parting shot – “trash fish” – he tossed a 10-pounder into the bushes.

An “exotic” imported from Europe, the lowly carp doesn't have many friends. Maybe it's the inelegant bugle mouth, or the debatable reputation as a bottom feeder. Regardless, few fish in New Mexico are more wide-ranging, or get bigger, and while they seldom jump, no fish fights harder pound-for-pound.

We make curious mistakes sometimes. The largest American carp on record (74 pounds) is bigger than the largest muskellunge (69 pounds). Yet the muskie is a piscatorial icon that only an elite handful have caught within its restricted range. The carp is a ubiquitous commoner and, ironically, is often derided for being so successful.

By my experience a 5-pound carp will easily outlast a 5-pound largemouth bass, and often a smallmouth bass, on similar tackle. Only the propensity of the smallmouth to jump gives it the nod as “the gamest fish that swims.”

"Gamest fish that swims"

The carp makes bait fishing fun again precisely because it is so sensitive to baits improperly placed, or heavy line or big hooks, or the sight or sound or smell of the angler. There is a dilemma in carp fishing. Light gear is more likely to fool them, but that makes them hard to land. The carp is bull-strong and will break you off or run your spool if not worn down by deft play of rod, reel, and line. Yet use heavy tackle and you may not get a bite.

When fly-fishing for carp (more on this later), you will find the carp spookier to a bad cast than a wily old brown trout.

I began to specifically direct myself to carp a few years back on the Gila River. My son Bud and I planned to fly-fish that day for smallmouth bass, but when we got to the stream we found it high and muddy. A purist fly-fisher would have



Eight-year-old Bud Salmon used a crawfish to catch this 30-inch common carp in the Gila River.

Photo: Dutch Salmon

gone home, but we turned some rocks in the shallows, caught hellgrammites with a fine mesh net, and switched to split shot and No. 8 hooks. Both carp and catfish can find bait in any sort of water, and we were now fly-fishing with real flies. I tightened up on something big at the first deep pool.

With a 5-weight rod and 6-pound tippet, he played me more than I played him. If he had chosen to head downstream the fish easily would have run my line and all the backing. But he chose to circle the big pool. Still, it took me 90 minutes with my old fiberglass rod bent like a hoop to beach him. I let him go with a new respect for carp.

A week later, using a crawfish and modern

graphite spinning rod, my son Bud, age 8, landed what looked like the same 30-inch fish in the same pool in 20 minutes! Showed the old man up and this time we took the prize, and a kid's memory for a lifetime, home for supper.

Easy chumming

The surest way to catch carp is by chumming, not permitted in designated trout waters but otherwise OK. Here's how:

Buy two cans of corn and soak half of one can the night before in liquid raspberry Jell-O. At the water, chum out a couple of handfuls of the yellow corn, then thread two kernels of that raspberry corn on a No. 8 hook. Use light line (about 8-pound test) and a small sliding sinker;



a carp is wary and if he feels weight he'll likely drop the bait. Use a rod with a soft tip (a fly rod is the most fun) for easy casting and to lessen the chance he'll break you off. That yellow corn will draw a school of carp, but they'll zero in on those two kernels that smell like raspberries. You can only hope the biggest one in the pod gets there first.

Carp on the fly

The latest thing in carp angling is straight fly-fishing. Where you find them in clear water, you can sight-cast to feeding carp. Far more wary than a trout, you must get the fly in the water well ahead of the approaching fish. A beadhead nymph gets to the bottom quicker and the bead acts as an attractor. A 1X to 3X tippet (roughly 6- to 8-pound test) is about right.

Carp that are cruising slowly, nosing the bottom from time to time, are the ones you look for. These are feeding fish and the carp, with its relatively small stomach, is feeding much of the time. So you spot a feeding carp and cast not to where he is, but to where you think he will soon be. The cast must be delicate or you'll spook him and the whole pod. Then, as he approaches your sinking fly, "crab" that nymph along the bottom with a hand-over-hand strip to give it life; when his nose goes down and tail goes up it's tight lines and you better have a good drag on your reel. I lost one on a fly last summer that would go a dozen pounds when he ran me into a backlash and broke me off. Yet the next week I caught another better than 2 feet long on a prince nymph and 4-weight rod and felt like a hero.

What's for dinner?

It is true that carp can live in polluted lakes and rivers where other fish can't, but remember it is us not the carp that fouled the waters. Carp don't prefer pollution or silt; they are just more adaptable than their brethren. From good water, carp meat is savory. Here's how you get around the bones:

Skin and filet the carp as you would a big catfish or bass. Cut out the dark meat along the lateral line. Put the remaining white meat through a hamburger grinder or mixer; this renders the fine, floating "Y" bones unnoticeable. Add a good mix of seasoned bread crumbs, like making a meat loaf, then bake as a fish loaf or fry as fish patties.



Texas angler Chad Edwards shows off the 20.75-pound carp he landed after a tough battle. Edwards is among a growing number of anglers who are hooked on carp fishing. For more information about the sport, visit the American Carp Society website, www.americancarpsociety.com or the Carp Anglers Group at www.carpanglersgroup.com.

Photo courtesy of Chad Edwards



Common carp are not considered game fish in New Mexico, so there is no limit on how many you can catch and keep. Fishing licenses are still required, however, for all anglers age 12 and older.
Photo: Dutch Salmon

Common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*)

History

Generally considered a nuisance in North America, but highly prized as sport fish in Europe because they are hardy fighters. An important food fish in some areas, although flavor varies with water quality.

Description

A heavy-bodied fish with barbells on either side of the upper jaw. Typically, color varies from brassy green or yellow, to golden brown or even silvery. The belly is usually

yellowish-white. Carp commonly grow to 12 to 25 inches in length, and often much larger. They may live as long as 47 years and grow to more than 75 pounds.

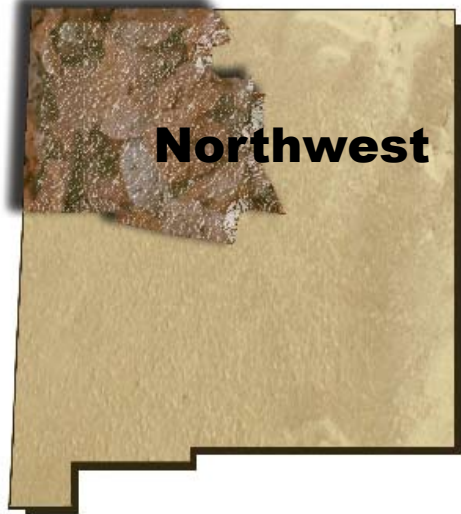
Distribution

Native to portions of Europe and Asia. First introduced into North America in 1877 and has intentionally and unintentionally expanded to become one of the most widely distributed fish species in North America, ranging from central Canada to central Mexico, and from coast to coast.

"Exotic," unloved, this is a powerful fish that will test your skills on bait or flies and can grow as long as your leg. They are here to stay and may be found in most of New Mexico's lakes and rivers.

M.H. "Dutch" Salmon of Silver City is an accomplished outdoor writer, book author and editor, and a member of the State Game Commission.





Northwest

Angling options abound in NW

River,” said area Fisheries Manager Rick Castell said. “It really is a fun and exciting place to fish.”

Fisheries biologist Marc Wethington advises anglers to check the water flow from Navajo Dam before scheduling a trip to the San Juan. Fishing usually is best, and the holes most accessible when the water is flowing between 250 and 1,000 cubic feet per second. “However, the river can flow at rates above 1,500 cfs in May and June, making fishing a little more difficult,” Wethington said.

If you live near Albuquerque, Conservancy Park, formerly called Tingley Beach, could be just what the doctor ordered. Located downtown behind the zoo, Tingley Beach was recently renovated by the city of Albuquerque and now has three different fishing ponds. There is a pond for kids ages 12 and under, a catch-and-release-only pond, and a pond that is designated for everyone. Depending on the weather, these ponds are stocked with trout from November through March, and then stocked with catfish from May through September.

For someone more interested in hiking the high mountains and camping out for a day or two, the San Pedro Parks Wilderness offers some excellent stream fishing. The Rito de las Perchas and the Rio de las Vacas offer opportunities to catch some Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Anyone hiking into remote wilderness areas should always be prepared for anything from inclement weather to coming face-to-face with a bear on the trail. “Weather can change instantly in wilderness areas,” said



Four-year-old Isaiah Alvarado and his dad had a good day fishing at Conservancy Park, formerly Tingley Beach, in Albuquerque.

Photo: Ross Morgan

Mike Martinez, district wildlife officer in the Jemez Mountains. “I have seen the temperature drop 40 degrees in a matter of hours.”

If you're looking for an interesting day fishing trip in the Jemez Mountains, try the Rio Cebolla and the San Antonio River.

There also are many good lake fishing opportunities in northwestern New Mexico. Navajo lake for instance has some of the largest smallmouth bass in the state. If you are looking for something a little bit larger that will put up a pretty good fight, fishing for tiger muskies in Bluewater Lake

could be the challenge you're looking for. And don't forget El Vado and Heron lakes near Chama. They not only offer good trout fishing, but you can also snag a kokanee salmon during the special snagging seasons.

One helpful hint: Be sure to check the Department website, www.wildlife.state.nm.us, or with your local sporting goods store for the latest fishing and stocking reports. It will take a lot of guessing out of where to go and what to use as bait.

Ross Morgan is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Northwest Area. He can be reached at (505) 222-4707 or ross.morgan@state.nm.us.

Time to dust off the fishing gear; springtime is here

By Ross Morgan

Spring is the time to dust off the old fishing gear and head to your favorite fishing hole. Whether you are a novice or an advanced angler, the northwest part of the state offers something for everyone. With lots of late-season moisture in some areas, lakes and streams could see rising water levels, which usually means good fishing.

The most popular fishery in the state is in the northwest. The San Juan River, known for its remarkable trout fishing, has been featured in many popular outdoor magazines as world-class trout water. Whether you are an avid fly fisherman or prefer the “hook, line, and sinker method,” the San Juan River offers something for you.

“It's not uncommon for anglers to catch 22-inch rainbow trout from the quality water section of the San Juan

Butte fishing should improve with higher water

By LuAnn Tafoya

It's no secret that New Mexico has been in a drought for several years, and one of the best places to see the impact has been Elephant Butte Lake. The last time the lake was full and the water reaching the parking lot at the main marina was in 2000. Since then, the lake has dropped significantly and boating has been hazardous for those unfamiliar with the new depths or without depth finders on their boats. That scenario began to change for the better last year, when New Mexico received good rains, followed by this winter's expected average runoff. Things are looking up at the Butte, but it most likely will take a number of years for it to fill up again.

According to the Bureau of

Reclamation, Elephant Butte Lake rose approximately 34 feet from July of 2006 through January 2007. Projections indicate that the Butte will remain at the same level it had in January through July 4. After that, the lake is expected to drop about 14 feet by Labor Day. The runoff from up north is helping the lake remain at a good level, but projected levels may change depending on spring weather, runoff intensity and flow.

More water at the Butte this year should mean better fishing according to the Department of Game and Fish warm-water fisheries specialist Casey Harthorn.

“The condition of the fish will be great, but it will be more of a challenge to catch the fish because the fish will be more spread out,” Harthorn said. The higher water conditions also will help the fish spawn more successfully, he said, which will pay off for anglers in the future. Elephant Butte Lake has one of the largest populations, and largest varieties of fish species in New Mexico. There are a vast array of warm water fish available, including largemouth bass, white bass, striped bass, crappie, walleye, catfish, perch, sunfish, bluegill and carp. Five state angling records have come from the Butte. They are green sunfish (1 pound, 6 ounces), striped bass (54 pounds, 8 ounces), longear sunfish



Water has been rising since last summer at Elephant Butte Lake.

Photo: LuAnn Tafoya

(1 pound, 12 ounces), blue catfish (52 pounds, ¼ ounce), and flathead catfish (78 pounds, 0 ounces).

Largemouth bass fishing should be better this year, but the fish will be smaller, Harthorn said. Largemouth, or black bass, had good recruitment and lengths of fish being caught this year will range from 10 to 12 inches. The striper population has not been as good the last couple of years, but this year it will improve and the quality of fish being caught will increase, he said.

White bass fishing should be average. White bass generally run on a 3-year cycle and this year isn't the best year.

Walleye fishing should be good this year because the walleye population

almost tripled, according to recent surveys.

The catfish population has been stable. Channel cats can be found toward the southern end of the lake and flathead catfish can be found near rocky bluffs. If you're looking to catch blue catfish, try fishing the water at the north end of the lake.

Harthorn's advice for Butte anglers this year: “Come on down, stop at the local bait shops and buy some minnows, and test your skill. Happy fishing!”

LuAnn Tafoya is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Southwest Region. She can be reached at (505) 532-2106 or luann.tafoya@state.nm.us.



Southwest

Eagle Nest survey encouraging

By Clint Henson

If a successful fishing trip is defined by lots of fish and plenty of water, northeast New Mexico should be in good shape for spring and summer 2007. With the Sangre de Cristo watersheds recording 120 percent of average precipitation through January, it promises to be a needed relief from recent drought conditions. And with the New Mexico hatcheries again up and running, full stocking schedules are expected.

Eagle Nest Lake

May 8 and 9, 2006, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish conducted a fisheries survey of Eagle Nest Lake. Standard survey protocol was used to collect fish via electrofishing and experimental gill nets. A total of 757 fish were captured representing seven different species including: rainbow trout, kokanee salmon, yellow perch, white sucker, Rio Grande chub, common carp and brook trout. The biggest populations in the lake were white suckers, yellow perch and rainbow trout.

The rainbow trout ranged in size from 3 to 17 ½ inches with an average size of 12 inches. Rainbow trout condition, measured as relative weight or “how fat a fish is compared to its length,” was 110 percentage of average. The high condition factor is a sign that the lake has an abundance of food and space for the trout. The proportional stock density or percentage of fish larger than stock size (8 inches) is 70 percent



Eagle Nest Lake always has been regarded as one of New Mexico's best trout fishing waters.

Photo: Dan Williams

for the rainbow trout in Eagle Nest Lake. When compared to the 2004 fish survey, the proportional stock density has decreased, but this can be attributed to the increased stocking of fingerling trout. Fifty-six percent of the rainbow trout population is larger than 13 inches, and about 7 percent of the population is larger than 16 inches.

When comparing the electrofishing data from 2004 to 2006, there was an increase in trout captured. In 2004, 17 fish per hour were caught during the survey. That increased to 19 per hour in 2006. One of the most significant changes from 2004 to 2006 was the increase of trout biomass. The rainbow trout biomass percentage

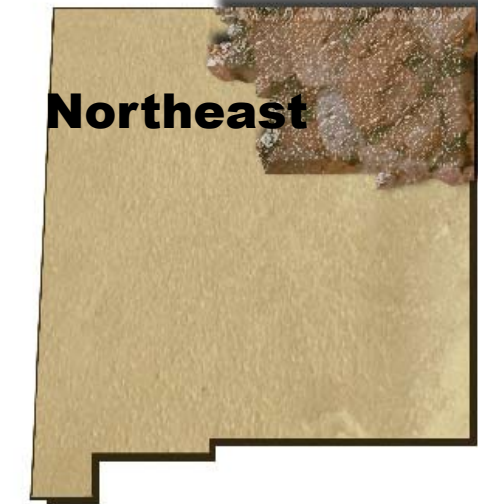
increased from 8 percent in 2004 to 21 percent in 2006.

Kokanee salmon were under-represented in the fish survey. The kokanee made up only about 1 percent of the total catch. Stocking of kokanee salmon has been increased this year.

The yellow perch ranged in size from 2 ½ to 11 ½ inches with an average size of 8 inches. The average yellow perch condition was slightly below average, calculating as 93 percent. Although the condition is below average, it has increased from 85 percent in 2004.

Currently the Department stocks

Northeast



Eagle Nest Lake with 600,000 rainbow trout fingerlings and about 400,000 kokanee salmon fry each year. The Department will closely monitor the kokanee stocking success to increase the number of salmon, and also monitor effects of the increase harvest limit on the yellow perch population.

Northeastern New Mexico is brimming with fishing opportunities, and many streams are considered underutilized by anglers. Two options that won't disappoint you:

- Mora Creek from its confluence with the Pecos River at the Mora Creek Campground, northeast toward Mora Flats.
- The Gallinas River. From Gallinas, northwest of Las Vegas, fish west toward Elk Mountain.

Clint Henson is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Northeast Area. He can be reached at the Department office in Raton, (505) 445-2311 or clint.henson@state.nm.us.

Monsoon, runoff bring better fishing to southeast

By Mark Madsen

A bountiful runoff combined with a generous monsoon season last fall should bring good fishing to the lakes and streams of southeastern New Mexico this spring. Anglers can expect ample opportunities for warm- and cold-water species well into the summer.

Stocking of winter trout waters ended in March, but early spring anglers will find some trout remaining in Bottomless Lakes, Green Meadows Lake, Oasis State Park and Lake Van. The old standbys of Power Bait, garlic cheese and salmon eggs continue to be the baits of choice. The “hot” color of Power Bait changes weekly, and sometimes daily, so anglers should carry an assortment. Check with the old-timers at your local fishing hole to find out the color of the day.

For those anglers with too much energy to sit still and bait fish, stocker rainbows also can be caught using a variety of spinners or small lures.

Opening day at Bonito Lake was April 1. The lake is full from spring runoff and heavy monsoon rains of last year, and plenty of fish were stocked before opening day.

Grindstone Reservoir near Ruidoso also offers opportunities to catch rainbow trout with the added possibility of catching some browns. Anglers wanting to catch brown trout should use Panther Martin or Mepps



Try your luck for rainbow and brown trout at Grindstone Lake.

Photo: Marty Frentzel

spinners or small crank baits with rainbow trout patterns and/or colors.

The best bets for warm-water anglers in southeastern New Mexico will be at Santa Rosa and Sumner Lakes. Both have plenty of water and fishing conditions will improve as water temperatures increase. Fishing should be good for walleye at both lakes, with trolling being the most productive technique. Anglers probably won't find any monster walleyes in Sumner Lake, but should be able to catch lots of keepers. Sumner Lake also has a healthy population of white bass, and sight-fishing for feeding schools

can be very exciting. Both lakes also offer bank fisherman and boaters opportunities for channel catfish, bluegills, sunfish, and largemouth bass. Anglers looking for some smallmouth bass action should give Sumner Lake a try; some good-sized smallmouth can be found, according to Area Fisheries Manager Shawn Denny.

The lower Pecos River drainage from Brantley Reservoir south to the Texas state line is still being affected by golden algae blooms. Fish kills, mostly non-game fish, have been reported at several locations along the Pecos River,

including Brantley Reservoir. Because of high concentrations of pesticide by-products in the lake and subsequently in the fish, fishing at Brantley Reservoir is restricted to catch-and-release only.

Anglers who prefer smaller lakes might find some big fish in New Mexico's special catfish waters this summer. Ten of the state's 14 special catfish waters are in the southeastern part of the state. They are close to urban centers and regularly stocked with channel catfish averaging 16 to 18 inches in length and 1¼ pounds – along with a few real lunkers. Initial stocking usually happens in late May, with subsequent stockings in June and August.

Mark Madsen is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Southeast Area. He is based in Roswell and can be reached at (505) 624-6135 or mark.madsen@state.nm.us.

Southeast



Let's talk turkey



Photo: Don MacCarter

By Chad S. Nelson

Once you’ve heard the unique sound of a lovesick gobbler responding to your calls, you’ll be hooked. Turkeys are one of the most exciting, and sometimes frustrating, game species New Mexico offers. Harvesting one is a heart-pounding, challenging and rewarding experience you won’t soon forget.

On opening day several years ago, I was calling from a ridge-top and was pleasantly surprised when three gobblers responded to my calls. The first one came toward me up the spine of the ridge and veered to my right, just far enough away that I never saw him. The second one faded away fast the opposite direction down the valley. The third one came straight up the ridge toward me. I remember thinking: “I’ll just call one more time and then I’ll get ready to shoot.”

Just as I was about to call, there he was. Twenty yards away, poking his big blue head over the ridge was my gobbler, and there I sat with my call in my hands.

Timing is just one of many things that can go wrong turkey hunting. I’ve heard stories of hunters who tried to get a bit closer to a gobbler, only to return frustrated to their previous spot and find a fresh track right where they’d been sitting. Sometimes that’s the way it goes. One day you can set up and call once or twice and a gobbler will fly right in to your set-up from the roost. The next day you could call all day and never hear a gobble. Or a gobbler will answer but he’ll get “hung up” waiting for the hen to come to him and won’t come any closer.

The only thing you can be sure of is that a gobbler likely won’t do exactly what you expect.

Turkeys are some of the wariest creatures in the woods, and they have unbelievably good vision and hearing, which can make things difficult even if you’re able to get a tom into range. Their keen eyesight will bust you if you make the slightest movement, and that tom will be gone in a flash. They also see in color, so it’s important to blend in with your surroundings as much as possible.

Like most things in life, the difficulty of getting everything to fall into place is part of what makes turkey hunting so much fun. If it was easy, it wouldn’t be nearly as rewarding.

Back from the brink

Turkeys were once in serious trouble in New Mexico, and were nearly extinct nationwide in the early 1900s. Thanks to the efforts of sportsmen and women, conservationists and state and federal wildlife agencies, turkeys have rebounded and today populations are stable or increasing across most of the country.

The same is true in New Mexico, where the Department of Game and Fish has worked with the



There's nothing like a strutting gobbler -- or two -- to get a turkey hunter's blood boiling in the springtime.

Photo: Don MacCarter

National Wild Turkey Federation and other groups to improve habitat and transplant wild turkeys from areas with large, healthy populations to areas with suitable habitat, but few or no turkeys.

“New Mexico has a good huntable population of Merriam’s wild turkeys, but there are many areas that can sustain a larger population,” NWTF Regional Biologist Stan Baker said. “The NWTF and the New Mexico Game and Fish Department have partnered for years to enhance wild turkey populations and improve turkey habitat.”

Trapping and transplanting operations have been a big key to expanding the turkey’s range throughout New Mexico. Merriam’s turkeys recently have been moved into the Guadalupe Mountains in southeastern New Mexico, as well as the Magdalena Mountains in central New Mexico. Today, Merriam’s turkeys can be found in almost all mountainous areas of New Mexico.

Providing water sources is an important part of improving habitat for turkeys. Steel water tanks, known as drinkers, have provided constant water supplies for turkeys and other wildlife in several of New Mexico’s National Forests. “Water is very important to the survival of wild turkeys because they need about a quarter-gallon of water each day,” Baker said. “Eastern wild turkeys get a lot of this moisture from insects or grasses they eat, but Merriam’s and Rio Grande wild turkeys eat much drier food and need free-standing water to survive.”

Habitat improvements and transplanting efforts have brought New Mexico’s turkeys back from the brink of extinction. Today, turkey populations are estimated at around 35,000 total birds, providing plenty of excitement during spring and fall hunting seasons.

Hunting considerations

It’s important to keep an open mind when you’re turkey hunting because they rarely behave exactly the way



Dressing in full camouflage and choosing a good calling spot will increase your chances of bagging a wary wild turkey.

Photo: Don MacCarter

you expect. The hunter who constantly evaluates the situation and adjusts tactics accordingly will have more consistent success than the hunter who fails to adapt.

Conventional wisdom for spring turkey hunting is to locate a roosting tree and set up within 100 yards or so before sunrise to try to call a gobbler in. Another common strategy is to move as quietly as possible through the woods and call periodically. If you get a response, it's a good idea to stay put and try to get him to come to you. Trying to stalk a gobbler is almost always an exercise in futility.

If a gobbler does come in, ideally you'll be ready to shoot before you see him. If he comes in from a different direction than expected, or if you misjudged how far away he was, you want to watch his head and only move to get into shooting position when you can't see his eyes. Ideally, you'll get into position when he moves behind a tree or other obstruction.

It's crucial to select a good spot to set up. Turkeys often feed along the edges of fields where they meet the forest. Setting up just inside the line of trees with a clear line of site is a good option. Make sure you select a tree that's wider than your body to sit against. Sometimes finding a good spot with a clear line of sight is difficult in New Mexico's dense Ponderosa forests, but it doesn't take a huge clearing to be able to get a clear shot.

Decoys are another possibility to consider, but you want to be sure not to overdo it. A realistic decoy gives a wary tom a turkey to see and may reassure him that the calling he's heard is for real. It can also act as a visual call to gobblers that see them at a distance. Turkeys, however, aren't necessarily looking for a flock. A single hen decoy can be effective, but probably think about a pair of hens and a jake at most.

Remember to try to mimic not only the sounds the real hens are making, but the frequency of their calls. If you call too often, a wary tom is likely to think that you're an anxious hen, in which case he'll just wait for you to come to him. Or if you're calling a lot more than the other hens in the area, he might realize something isn't right.

Calling sounds

There are lots of choices when it comes to turkey calls these days. The most common types are diaphragm or mouth calls, box calls, push-pin calls, and slate or pot-and-peg calls. No matter what kind of call you use, it's important to be able to mimic the sounds a hen makes. Following are the basic sounds, but it's a good idea to listen to the hens in the woods.

Yelp: probably the most common call turkey hunters use. It is usually a series of anywhere from four to 10 single-note vocalizations. It can have various meanings, but is a common hen sound, and therefore a very effective call.

Cluck: a short staccato note, usually used by one bird to get another's attention. Generally you want to cluck two or three times in close succession. Clucks are good to reassure an approaching gobbler that a hen is waiting for him.

Putt: usually a single note, generally used as an alarm. It can also be two or three sharp, rapid notes. Putting usually means the hen has seen something she doesn't like. It's not a call to use in the field. If you hear a hen putting, chances are you've been busted.

Cutt: a series of fast, loud, erratic single notes. This is generally just a louder, faster, more erratic version of yelping. It's a good locator call, often used by a single hen looking for companionship.

Purr: a soft, rolling call generally associated with contentment. It's often heard from feeding birds, and can be a good call to reassure an approaching tom.

Other calls can be used as locators, including calls that mimic owls, crows, woodpeckers, and even coyotes. These calls tend to be used at sunrise and sunset to locate roosted birds, and provoke "shock" gobbles from toms.

Continued on Page 10

Turkeys of New Mexico



Photo: Don MacCarter

Merriam's turkey

Distinguished by an ashy-white tail band and by the whitish feathers on its lower back, Merriam's turkeys are New Mexico's most numerous subspecies. Like all turkeys, the male has darker feathers with iridescent reflections and grows a hair-beard from its chest. They are found in mountain and coniferous forest habitats throughout the state. Look for Ponderosa pine forest interspersed with scrub oak near water sources and you're likely to find them. Some areas with good populations include the Gila National Forest, the Lincoln National Forest in the Sacramento Mountains, the Zuni Mountains in western New Mexico, as well as the Santa Fe and Carson National Forests in northern New Mexico.

Rio Grande turkey

Rio Grande turkeys are found primarily along water courses in northeastern and southeastern New Mexico. They are distinguished by a darker tail band, usually tan or even brownish in color, and disproportionately long legs. Rio Grande toms often appear paler or more copper-colored than other subspecies. Hens average eight to 12 pounds and mature toms can weight up to 20 pounds. Rios are generally found in the river bottoms amid mesquite, brush, pine or scrub oak. They are seldom found over 6,000 feet in elevation. Some good possibilities include the Pecos River and tributaries, the Fort Stanton area, as well as the Canadian River drainage east to the Texas border.



Photo: Don MacCarter



Photo: George Andrejko

Gould's turkey

Gould's turkeys are distinguished from the Merriam's subspecies by their pure white tail band, and are the largest of New Mexico's three subspecies with males weighing up to 22 pounds. Although larger populations exist in Mexico, Gould's turkeys are considered threatened in New Mexico. These turkeys are only found in the boot heel region in the southwestern corner of the state. Like Merriam's, Gould's turkeys are mountain birds. No hunting is currently allowed for the species, but populations are on the rise, leading the State Game Commission to consider allowing limited hunting opportunities for Gould's turkeys during the 2008-2009 season.

Preparing for the season

Scouting

No matter what you’re hunting, scouting is essential. Turkey hunting is no different. If you don’t know where turkeys live, you’ll have a hard time finding them when the season starts. Look for the distinctive three-toed tracks, usually four to five inches in length. Droppings are also a sure sign of turkeys in the area. A hen’s droppings are generally a small circular pile, while the tom’s is usually J-shaped.

Look for the wingtip marks of a strutting tom: two parallel lines in the dirt where the wingtips have dragged. Also look for dusting areas: small, round depressions in the ground where turkeys have bathed in dust to rid themselves of mites and other parasites. Try to locate roosting sites, usually mature Ponderosa pines with feathers and droppings around the base.

In addition to knowing where the birds roost and feed, it’s a good idea to prepare yourself for the season. Some preseason conditioning never hurt any hunter, and it’s distinctly possible that you may have to walk significant distances to find birds or to get away from other hunters. Preseason scouting is the perfect time to make sure your boots are broken in and fit comfortably.

Calls

Whether you use a box, slate, or mouth call or something else, it’s a good idea to be familiar with your call. Be sure to store and maintain your calls properly. Before the season, make sure your call is in good shape. Practicing can ensure that you’re making the sounds you want to make when you get out in the field.

When you’re out there, listen for the hens and try to mimic the sounds they’re making. Try also to mimic the frequency of calling you hear from the hens. Often hunters get so caught up in trying to call in a tom that they call too much. A wary tom will often figure out something’s wrong if you’re calling more frequently than the other hens in the area, or he’ll think you’re an eager hen and wait for her to come to him.



Christine Gonzales harvested this impressive Merriam's turkey gobbler during a spring hunt in the Sacramento Mountains near Cloudcroft.

Photo: Christine Gonzales

Shotgun

First, make sure your gun is in proper working condition. Inspect it for rust or dirt, and clean it if you find any. It’s important to pattern your shotgun before the season. Try different turkey loads at various distances and choose the load that offers the best pattern when fired from your gun. You’re looking for a nice even pattern to cover the bird’s head and neck at 40 yards, but you should also pattern the gun from 10, 20 and 30 yards so you know how your gun performs at those distances. You never know how far away a gobbler will be when the shot presents itself. You’ll also likely be surprised how tight the pattern is at shorter distances. I know hunters who’ve missed from 10 yards away because they figured the shot pattern would be wider than it was.

Clothing

Camouflage clothing is absolutely essential. Whatever you do, don’t wear red, white or blue clothing — you could be mistaken for game because a mature gobbler’s head turns those colors during the mating season. Make sure your camo isn’t too faded, because faded camo can appear whitish at a distance.

You’ll need camo pants, shirt, hat, a mask, gloves and a jacket. Wear dark socks, especially if your boots are low enough that your socks show when you’re sitting. Dress in layers, so you can dress down as the day gets warmer.

Chad S. Nelson is an avid turkey hunter and public information specialist with the Department of Game and Fish. He can be reached at (505) 476-6008 or chad.nelson@state.nm.us.

Wild about turkeys? Join the club

Whether you are new to turkey hunting or a grizzled old longbeard, the National Wild Turkey Federation is one of the best places to look for advice, companionship or a conservation partner.

Since it was founded in 1973, the nonprofit group has grown to more than 545,000 members and raised and spent more than \$230 million upholding hunting traditions and conserving more than 11.3 million acres of wildlife habitat. Those efforts contributed to an increase in the North American wild turkey population from 1.3 million birds in 1973 to more than 7 million today.

In New Mexico, 1,359 members in 17 chapters work hand-in-hand with the Department of Game and Fish on projects such as turkey trapping and transplanting, building water stations, population surveys and other conservation activities. Since 1985, the New Mexico chapters raised and spent more than \$198,000 on wild turkey conservation projects, including more than \$88,000 on habitat improvement, \$21,000 on education, and \$8,000 on women and youth programs. Recently, the state group raised \$5,000 to help buy a special trailer that the Department of Game and Fish



Habitat improvement and other conservation measures have helped increase the wild turkey population in North America from 1.3 million birds in 1973 to more than 7 million today.

uses for turkey transplants.

“We work very closely with the Department, along with the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management on a variety of projects,” said Scott Lerich, Southwest Regional Biologist with the Wild Turkey Federation. “We have a very cooperative relationship.”

The Wild Turkey Federation is one of the most

active of nonprofit wildlife groups, perhaps because turkey hunters are so passionate about their sport and wild turkeys in general. Members regularly volunteer for projects such as planting trees, developing water sources, controlling invasive species, prescribed burns and restoring riparian habitats. Education and outreach are important to the federation, which has awarded 26 scholarships in New Mexico and sponsors interactive programs for women and youths.

“One of the most important things we do is provide enthusiasm for turkeys and turkey hunting,” Lerich said. “Just the presence of the organization gets support all the way to the legislature and to the governor. They know the Turkey Federation is here, that we’re passionate and serious about turkeys.”

People interested in learning more about the National Wild Turkey Federation can find it at the organization’s website, www.nwtf.org. There, you’ll find everything you can think of about wild turkeys and turkey hunting, and where to find chapters in your area. The site includes links to state and local chapters. New Mexicans also can get more information by calling (505) 869-3837.



Kids Fishing Day at Seven Springs Hatchery in the Jemez Mountains is always popular with families. Don't miss it this year from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. July 21. It's sponsored by the Santa Fe National Forest and the Department of Game and Fish. Information: (505) 829-3535.

Photos: Marty Frentzel

Hook 'em up

Free clinics, fishing days lure youngsters back outside

By Kevin Holladay

For native Santa Fean Rudy Rios, fishing was part of growing up. Like many of his friends, he started fishing with his dad, his uncle and his grandfather on the Pecos River and the Rio Grande. Eventually, he honed his skills by learning to “read the river” and select and cast flies. The experience, he says, made him a better person.

“Fishing gets me in touch with who I am as a person. It teaches patience, respect for the outdoors and to look around at where you are,” Rios says. “Now, when I go outdoors I take a plastic bag and collect trash. Most of all I think fishing teaches a conservation ethic.”

Rios is not alone, but he may be among the last generation that can say fishing and outdoors activities played big roles in their childhood. According to Richard Louv, author of “Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder,” the current generation of children may be the first to grow up without the benefit from spending time outdoors. Average 8-year-olds today are better able to identify cartoon characters than native species such as trout, beetles and oak trees.

It is a disturbing trend, especially in light of research that links our mental, physical and spiritual health directly to our positive associations with nature. Fortunately, like most trends, it is reversible. For Louv and others like



Catch a clinic June 2 on Free Fishing Day

June 2, 2007, is Free Fishing Day in New Mexico – no licenses or stamps required at public waters statewide. To help celebrate, the Department of Game and Fish will conduct free fishing clinics at several waters around the state. Here's where to find them:

All clinics will be from 8 a.m. to noon.

- **Questa** - Eagle Rock Lake
- **Pecos Canyon** - Cowles Pond
- **Ruidoso** - Grindstone Reservoir
- **Roswell** - Wal-Mart (catfish tank)
- **Santa Rosa** - Blue Hole Park Kids Pond
- **Quemado** - Quemado Lake
- **Las Cruces** - Alumni Pond (catfish)
- **Albuquerque** - Tingley Beach
- **Grants** - Riverwalk Front/McGee Park

him, “No Child Left Inside” is a mission.

We are lucky here in New Mexico to have easy access to a wide variety of outdoor recreation

opportunities – fishing being one of the most popular. According to the most recent survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, there are about 215,000 anglers in the state – and they spend almost \$200 million each year on fishing.

Part of the mission of the Department of Game and Fish is to help young people learn how to fish, and at the same time inspire them to conserve our aquatic resources. To help with this, the Department offers free fishing clinics throughout the state. At these clinics, families can bring their children to learn how to fish, have fun and become ethical anglers.

All you need to participate in a clinic is some basic fishing equipment – good combination outfits can be purchased for \$20, sometimes less -- and a desire to try fishing. No experience required. At clinics, young anglers learn the basics: how to bait hooks, tie knots, cast and catch fish. They learn what fish eat, the correct way to release fish, and they are encouraged to be responsible anglers and good stewards of our aquatic resources.

To make learning to fish even easier – for kids and parents -- the Department offers two Free Fishing Days, June 2 and September 29 this year. On these special days, no one needs a license or special habitat stamps, although all other fishing rules apply. To encourage families to participate, on June 2 the Department and its partners will offer free Kids Fishing Clinics at several locations across the state.

You'll likely find Rios at one of those clinics. He's among the more than 690 volunteers who contributed 3,800 hours last year teaching kids how to fish through the Department's Aquatic Education Volunteer Instructor program.

If you are interested in getting your child involved in fishing, or if you enjoy sharing your fishing knowledge with youngsters, contact Kevin Holladay, kevin.holladay@state.nm.us or (505) 476-8095.

Best bets for kids



Trout

Spring runoff is an excellent time to take kids trout fishing in mountain lakes. If there is an inlet stream, trout will often congregate there. Fish might be trying to spawn or see if some tasty bugs are washed their way. To increase your chances of catching trout, try fishing when the water is cool – in early spring or late fall, during cool weather, or early in the morning.



Bluegill

These fish are tailor-made for getting kids interested in fishing. The tasty, pan-sized fish are found in warm-water ponds and reservoirs. They don't get very big, but they are easy to catch. The trick is to use small, brightly colored lures, or better yet, live grasshoppers,, worms and crickets make great bait.



Bass

Smallmouth and largemouth bass are fine choices for beginning anglers. They are aggressive predators and while the aren't as easy to catch as bluegill, they can be lots of fun. Fish for them around underwater vegetation and rocks, and use small hooks and lures, or live minnows and worms.

Now that the Gila trout is no longer ‘endangered,’ anglers soon will be able to . . .

Cast away

By Mark Gruber

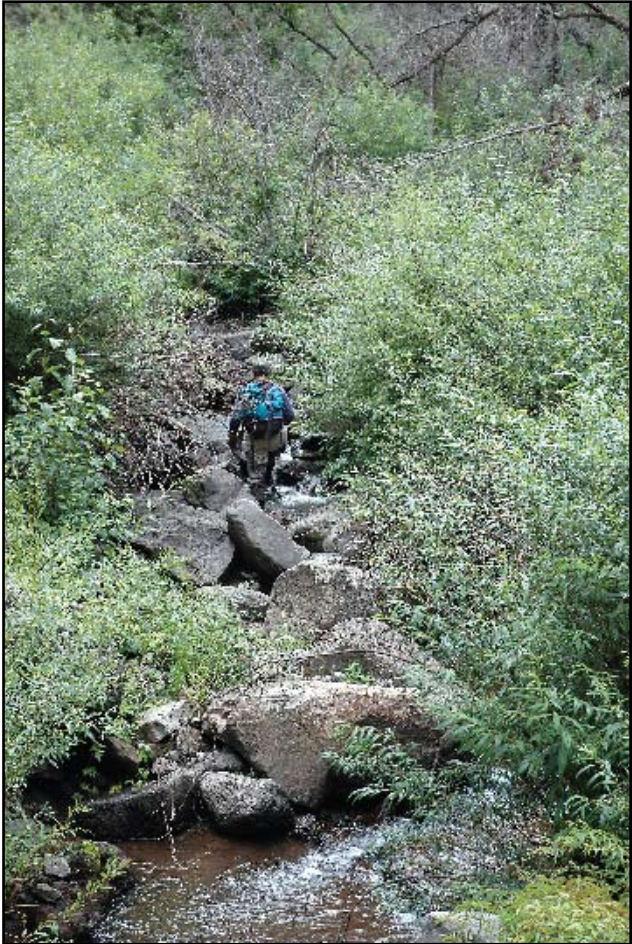
Once on the brink of extinction, the Gila trout became one of New Mexico’s biggest success stories last July when it became the first state fish and one of a very few wildlife species nationwide to be downlisted from endangered to threatened. Hailed by conservationists, wildlife biologists and anglers, the downlisting will allow limited angling for the species for the first time since the 1930s.

“It has been a very long and rough road to get to where we are today,” said Dave Propst, endangered fish biologist and leader of the Gila Trout Recovery Team for the Department of Game and Fish. “The Gila trout has persisted through introductions of non-native trout, poor land management, and a lack of understanding and appreciation of its needs. With a little help, it also has survived a sequence of natural calamities that included dewatering, forest fires and other events.

“Now, we have sufficiently recovered the species, and we can allow anglers to have the opportunity to fish for this unique species of trout,” Propst said.

Gila trout downlisted

The Gila trout has been considered an endangered species since 1966, when it was listed under the Federal Endangered Species Preservation Act. That listing was continued in 1973 under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Species classified as endangered are those in imminent danger of extinction. In July 2006, the Gila trout was downlisted to threatened, thanks to the efforts of the game and fish departments in New Mexico and Arizona, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service,



White Creek, deep in the Gila Wilderness, is typical Gila trout habitat.

Photo: Dan Williams

New Mexico State University, University of New Mexico, and the support of numerous conservation organizations. Threatened species are considered less imminently imperiled. They retain their status as federally-protected species, but have greater latitude in their management.

A special provision in the federal downlisting rule enables limited sport fishing for the first time in three-fourths a century.

“There is a distinct possibility that there may be no one alive today that has legally angled for a pure strain Gila trout in its native waters,” said Craig Springer, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In 1973, Gila trout were found in less than 20 miles of only four small streams. In the 1890s, it inhabited perhaps 600 hundred miles of streams of the Gila, Verde, and Aqua Fria rivers of New Mexico and Arizona. That was probably reduced from their historical range in New Mexico and Arizona before the arrival of European settlers.

Gila trout recovery efforts

Gila trout recovery efforts began in earnest in 1923 when the Jenks Cabin Fish Hatchery was built near the confluence of White Creek and the West Fork of the Gila River. Limited success caused its closure in 1939. A second hatchery was attempted in Glenwood, N.M. but failed in 1947. In 1950, the Gila trout was described as a distinct species of trout, now recognized as *Oncorhynchus gilae*, by R.R. Miller, a pre-eminent ichthyologist from the University of Michigan.

“Over the next 20 years, little was done to improve the status of Gila trout, but following its listing by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered in 1973, efforts to save the species increased,” Propst said. “These efforts focused on replicating each existing and genetically pure Gila trout population.”

Early efforts to protect and expand Gila trout range were implemented in the 1970s and 80s. The first effort to secure and expand Gila trout populations began in 1970 when McKnight Creek was converted to Gila trout habitat. In 1972, Gila trout were stocked into Sheep Corral Canyon in New Mexico and Gap Creek in Arizona.

During the 1980s, studies were conducted to describe Gila trout biology, characterize genetic relationships of extant populations, determine habitat requirements for Gila trout as well as locate possible streams to establish additional populations. The Spruce Creek population was replicated into the headwaters of Big Dry Creek, thereby protecting the only pure strain Gila trout from the San Francisco drainage. Trail Canyon and upper-most Mogollon Creek received Gila trout from South Diamond Creek in 1987. By 1987, all populations were believed to be secure, the first major milestone for downlisting Gila trout from endangered to threatened. Then nature dealt the fish a major setback.

In the late 1980s, scouring floods nearly



Waterfalls like this one on the upper West Fork of the Gila River are natural barriers that help keep non-native fish away from native trout.

Photo: Dan Williams

eliminated Gila trout from McKnight Creek, and wildfire and associated ash flows eliminated the species from Main Diamond Creek and all of South Diamond Creek except a small tributary, Burnt Canyon. Drought caused the complete loss of the Gap Creek population in Arizona. Concurrently, it was discovered that the McKenna Creek population and its replicate

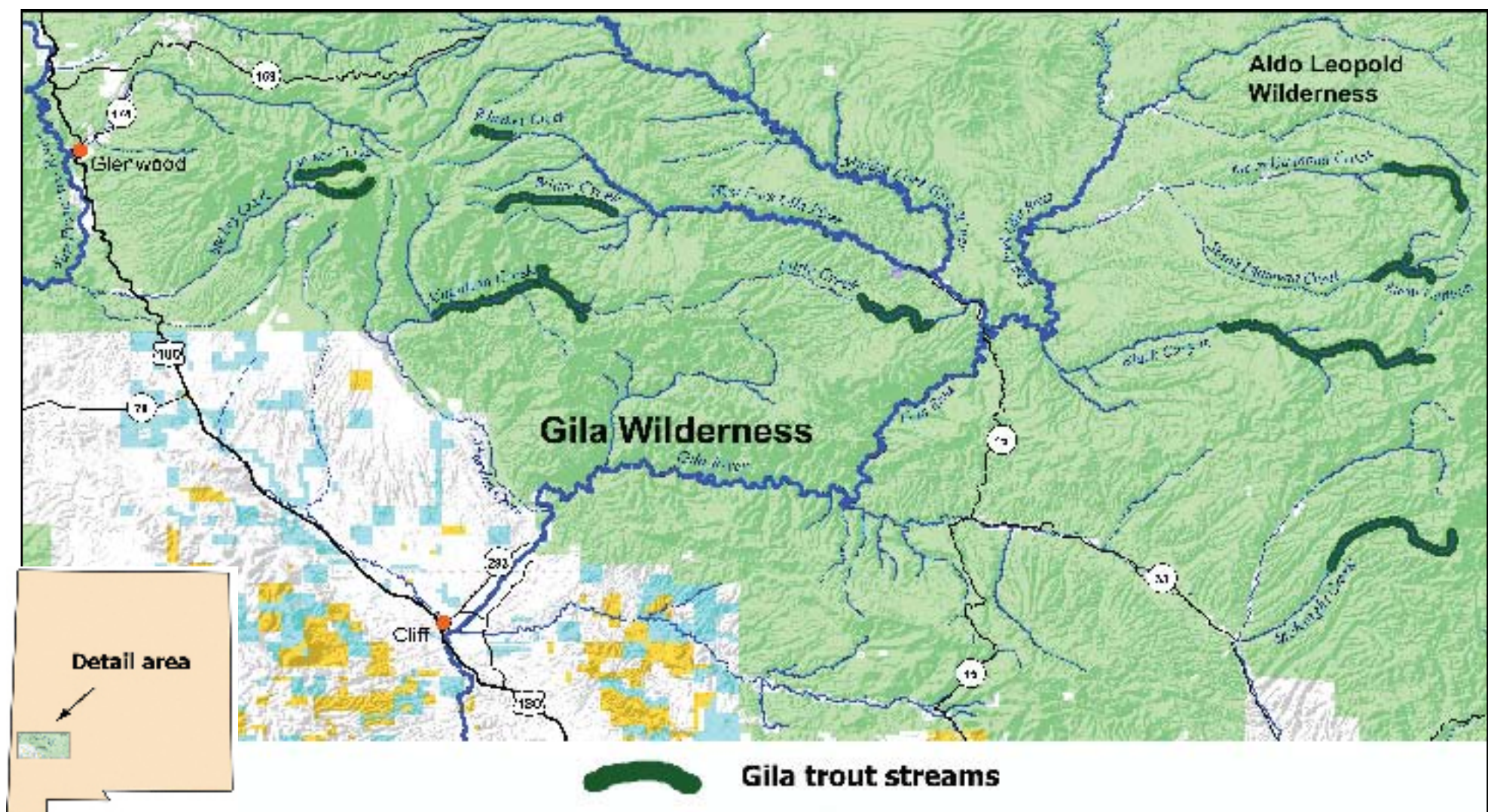
Possible Gila trout fishing regulations

Before attempting to fish for Gila trout in New Mexico, anglers must know the most current fishing information. This may be found on the Department’s website, www.wildlife@state.nm.us. Anglers also may call any Department office listed on the masthead of this publication.

Final regulations pertaining to fishing for Gila trout will be considered March 28, 2007, at the State Game Commission meeting in Las Cruces. Information in the New Mexico Fishing Rules and Information booklet may be outdated because it was published before the Commission meeting.

Gila trout fishing regulations may include:

- A special stamp or validation to pursue Gila trout.
- Only selected streams and specific reaches will be open to angling.
- There will be terminal tackle restrictions, such as flies and lures only, having a single barbless hook.
- Only “catch-and-release” angling will be permitted.
- Taking any Gila trout will be illegal.



Map: Lance Tyson

in Little Creek were hybridized with rainbow trout. Downlisting was postponed and recovery strategies were redirected.

Beginning in the early 1990s, biologists focused their efforts on restoring Gila trout to larger, more hydrologically complex drainages. In systems composed of several streams, the likelihood of a single natural or human-caused catastrophe eliminating a population was greatly reduced. Mogollon Creek, and its tributaries, was the first large drainage to be renovated for Gila trout. Over the next 15 years, Gila trout also were restored to Black Canyon, Little Creek and White Creek in New Mexico, and Raspberry and Dude creeks in Arizona. Although two populations (McKenna and Iron creeks) previously believed to be Gila trout were found to be hybridized with rainbow trout, a previously unknown Gila trout population was discovered in Whiskey Creek.

The elimination by wildfire in 2002 of non-native trout from substantial portions of the upper West Fork of the Gila River presented an opportunity to restore that drainage to Gila trout. However, controversy over use of antimycin to chemically remove all non-native trout delayed completion of the project until 2007. By the time of its downlisting, 12 populations of Gila trout inhabited almost 70 miles of stream in Arizona and New Mexico.

Fishing for Gila trout in the near future will be a unique experience, rather than the experience of catching a trophy fish. The rewards of fishing for Gila trout lies in the experience of catching one of the United States' rarest trout species.

"Downlisting the Gila trout from endangered to threatened is a huge success story, one that validates all the effort that has been extended on its behalf," said Ron Loehman, conservation chairman of New Mexico Trout. "Now we may have the opportunity to fish for the Gila trout and I look forward to the opportunity. Hiking into the Gila Wilderness and fishing for a species that evolved there over millions of years will be a very special experience. Everyone who treasures wilderness and its wild creatures should be pleased."

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Gila trout (*Oncorhynchus gilae*)



Description

A member of the salmon and trout family (Salmonidae). Readily identified by its iridescent gold sides that blend to a darker shade of copper on the gill covers. Spots on the body are small and profuse, generally occurring above the lateral line and extending onto the head, dorsal fin and tail fin. A faint, salmon-pink band is present on adults, particularly during spawning season when normally white belly may be streaked yellow or reddish orange. A yellow cutthroat mark is present on most adults. Commonly grow to 6 to 8 inches in most habitats, although a few grow as large as 14 inches.

Origin

The Gila trout is one of three native trout in New Mexico; the others are Rio Grande and Colorado River cutthroat trouts. Formally described in 1950 using fish collected in Main Diamond Creek, N.M. Believed to be descended from rainbow trout; most closely related to the Apache trout (*Oncorhynchus apache*). After the last Ice Age, as coastal and inland rivers

shrank and warmed, both Gila and Apache trouts were isolated from the ancestral trout stock and they diverged into distinct forms.

Habitat

Particularly adapted to harsh environmental conditions of southwestern streams. Water temperatures vary considerably over a year, ranging from near freezing in winter to over 70°F in summer, when flows in many streams may diminish to a trickle, and storm induced floods may occur at almost any time. Now, the species is limited mainly to small, isolated headwater streams.

Life cycle

Most Gila trout live five to six years. Females do not spawn until their third or fourth year, but males may reach maturity at two years. They spawn in early spring when waters warm to about 50°F. Eggs laid in well-oxygenated water hatch in 6 to 8 weeks. After absorption of their yolk sacs, young fish feed on insects. Adults continue to feed on insects, but also the occasional small trout, minnow, or sucker.

over the existing trout raceways to protect the fish from predators such as great blue herons and cormorants.

Phase 1 funding sources included \$2.5 million from the state Game Protection Fund, which comes from hunting and fishing license sales; \$900,000 in federal grants; and \$300,000 from the state’s General Fund, authorized by the 2004 Legislature.

Construction crews put the finishing touches on the first 11 ponds this month. Ponds were made to be about six feet deep at one end and three feet at the other to allow access and to give the fish cover from predators. They also were fitted with special liners to keep the water from seeping into the ground.

Initially, each pond will hold 100,000 fingerling walleye, bass or catfish for eventual stocking in the state’s lakes and reservoirs. Eventually, as hatchery crews get the hang of raising warmwater fish, more species will be added to the neighborhood.

“One of the nice things about warmwater hatcheries is they are flexible enough to adapt to several species of fish,” said Mike Sloane, Fisheries Chief for the Department of Game and Fish. “As we get started, we’ll be raising mostly walleye and bass to about 2 inches before we stock them. Over the long term we may raise largemouth bass to 4 or 5 inches, and as our needs change, we’ll likely be raising smallmouth bass, striped bass and crappie.”

That’s good news for warmwater anglers like Ron Gilworth, past president of the New Mexico B.A.S.S. Federation and a longtime promoter of a state warmwater hatchery. He said a warmwater hatchery is long overdue in New Mexico, where studies have indicated that more than half of state anglers pursue warmwater fish.

“Drought and the decline of our lakes has taken a toll on our sport,” said Gilworth, who regularly fishes in bass tournaments. “My dream was for New Mexico to have the best lakes in the West instead of the worst lakes in the west.

“The new hatchery will be a win-win situation



Mike Sloane, Chief of Fisheries for the Department of Game and Fish, and Rock Lake Hatchery Manager Roddy Gallegos inspect forms for concrete water gates (right) that will allow hatchery crews to capture warmwater fish raised in one-acre ponds (above). Construction of the first phase of the \$8 million hatchery was expected to be completed this spring.



for New Mexico,” Gilworth said. “We’ll see an economic impact from tourism, and possible growth in the stae by young anglers if they have successful trips. It can be an awesome payback to our state if we get a national reputation.”

New Mexico Sen. Pete Campos helped push legislation that helped pay for the first phase of the project. He said the hatchery will benefit anglers statewide while also helping the community of Santa Rosa.

“When this project is completed and fish are raised and can then be distributed, our state will enjoy competitive and recreational fishing

at its best,” Sen. Campos said. “This will be a strong economic development initiative that will benefit state and local economies.”

The new hatchery also had strong support from State Reps. Jose Campos and Don Tripp; and Gov. Bill Richardson, who tossed some dirt and autographed shovels and hardhats at the July 19, 2006 groundbreaking ceremonies.

“This hatchery is an example of how we can make the most of New Mexico’s water resources,” Gov. Richardson said. “It will bring more dollars to the economy in Santa Rosa and it will provide more fishing opportunities statewide. And in times of drought, our hatcheries help struggling lakes by rebuilding their fish populations.”

While most anglers won’t notice an immediate impact from the new hatchery, the future looks bright in warmwater lakes across the state. Sloane said anglers will notice a difference first in small urban lakes where the hatchery fish will supplement already small populations of fish. Over time, impacts also will be seen in larger reservoirs as the fingerlings mature.

Long-term options at the hatchery also include raising threatened or endangered fish such as the silvery minnow. “And one thing I would like to see is for us to get into raising tiger muskies,” Sloane said. “They are in demand and that would be one way we could give something back to states like Illinois, Kansas and Texas that generously donate bass fry to us.”

The Department has stocked tiger muskies in Bluewater and Quemado lakes as a way to keep suckers and goldfish under control. The tiger muskies are voracious predators that don’t reproduce and grow very large, which appeals to anglers.

Gallegos said the new hatchery’s biggest



Rock Lake Hatchery Manager Roddy Gallegos checks a batch of walleye eggs and fry that were harvested from fish in Conchas Reservoir. Last year the hatchery stocked 21 million walleye fry in lakes and reservoirs statewide.

Photo: Dan Williams

challenge may be how to keep the ponds and the existing trout runways going on a single water source. The Rock Lake Hatchery currently raises 120,000 pounds of catchable-sized rainbow trout a year in 18 raceways. Last year, the hatchery also raised 21 million walleye, including 11 million from eggs collected from fish in Conchas and Ute reservoirs. Those fish now will have to share the water the hatchery receives from Rock Lake, a large artesian spring that constantly pushes 3,500 to 4,000 gallons of cool, clear water to the hatchery every minute.

The 52 to 58-degree water is ideal for raising trout, and should be fine for warmwater fish when it warms up in the ponds, Gallegos said. The ponds will contain mostly static water that is replaced only when needed to make up for evaporation and to add oxygen. It will be a new fish production method for Gallegos and his crew, but he’s not worried about it.

“Raising fish is an acquired art,” Gallegos said. “Once you’re exposed to it a year or two, you get a handle on it. And it seems like raising warmwater fish will be a lot easier than coldwater fish. They seem to tolerate the elements better.” He said his staff also has received more formal training on warmwater hatcheries from experts in Texas and at the National Fish Hatchery in Dexter, N.M.

The new hatchery also will include a Watershed Education and Training Center, scheduled for construction in phase 2 of the project. The center will include exhibits, educational materials and learning spaces to teach students, tourists and other visitors about the importance of New Mexico’s watersheds and aquatic resources.

“The educational center will excite sports enthusiasts and students,” Sen. Campos said. “Ultimately, the next generation will be given an opportunity to learn from this project and possibly choose to become a biologist or work for the state Game and Fish Department.”

David Costas, the Department’s assistant fisheries chief in charge of six hatcheries, said the new warmwater hatchery will be a breath of fresh air for a state hatchery system that has been challenged with disease and other problems the past few years. Despite four hatcheries testing positive for whirling disease since 2000, the Department was able to shift priorities and keep up with the stocking program for catchable rainbow trout. While raceways and other facilities were being disinfected, the Department stocked nearly 1.6 million catchable-sized trout in 2006. All hatcheries are expected to be back at full production by 2008.

“We’ve been whirling disease-free for two years now, and we’d like to keep it that way,” Costas said. “Our goal is to establish each hatchery’s optimum production level – the number of pounds of fish that can be reached annually, with acceptable levels of stress and losses.”

For Gallegos, 44, a veteran hatchery manager with seven years at Rock Lake and 12 years at Lisboa Springs in Pecos, the warmwater hatchery is an exciting challenge toward the end of a long fisheries career. He is eligible to retire, but decided to stay on to see the new hatchery take shape.

“I’m still young and I really like my job,” he said. “And with something coming along like this, how could I pass it up?”

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New Mexico fish hatcheries



Department of Game and Fish employees Billy Sands, right, and Roberto Mercure seine trout from a runway at Los Ojos Fish Hatchery, formerly named Parkview Hatchery, before the raceways were disinfected for whirling disease. The hatchery is expected to be fully operational again in the summer of 2008.

Photo: Dan Williams

The Department of Game and Fish operates six fish hatcheries in locations around the state. Some recently have undergone renovations to address whirling disease and to upgrade facilities. All welcome visitors.

Los Ojos Hatchery

- **Location:** Village of Los Ojos, about 15 miles south of Chama.
- **History:** Formerly called Parkview Hatchery, it was built in 1932.
- **Production:** Catchable-sized rainbow trout, but may be converted to a fingerling-rearing facility. Optimum trout production is being evaluated, with annual target production of 2.2 million fingerlings.
- **Current status:** Shut down for cleaning and disinfecting after discovery of whirling disease in 2003 and 2005. Expected to be back in full production by the summer of 2008.
- **Information:** (505) 588-7307, losojos.hatchery@state.nm.us. Manager, Greg Friday.

Lisboa Springs Hatchery

- **Location:** About 25 miles east of Santa Fe and 1 mile north of Pecos.
- **History:** Built in 1921, it is the state’s oldest hatchery.
- **Production:** About 120,000 catchable-sized rainbow trout a year.
- **Current status.** Cleaning and disinfecting after discovery of whirling disease in 2003 and 2005. Expected to be back in full production in February 2008.
- **Information:** (505) 757-6360, lisboasprings.hatchery@state.nm.us. Manager, Eloy Trujillo.

Rock Lake Hatchery

- **Location:** About 2 miles south of Santa Rosa.
- **History:** Built in 1964.
- **Production:** The state’s primary catchable trout rearing station, produces 300,000 rainbow trout catchables a year from fingerling transfers for stocking statewide. It currently is being expanded to include rearing ponds and more facilities for warmwater fish, including catfish, bass and walleye. The hatchery currently raises walleye fry for stocking in state waters.
- **Current status:** Full production for trout and walleye fry.

Information: (505) 472-3690, rocklake.hatchery@state.nm.us. Manager, Roddy Gallegos.

Seven Springs Hatchery

- **Location:** About 22 miles north of Jemez Springs and 4 miles north of Fenton Lake in the Jemez Mountains.
- **History:** Built in the 1930s.
- **Production:** Responsible for establishment and management of captive Rio Grande cutthroat trout broodstocks. Annually stocks 100,000 rainbow trout.
- **Current status:** Operating at full capacity following treatment for whirling disease.
- **Information:** (505) 829-3740, sevensprings.hatchery@state.nm.us. Manager, Tony Jacobson.

Glenwood Hatchery

- **Location:** About 45 miles north of Silver City and 35 miles south of Reserve.
- **History:** Built in 1938.
- **Production:** About 170,000 catchable rainbow trout a year for stocking statewide. Possible future rearing station for Gila trout.
- **Current status:** Operating at full capacity.
- **Information:** (505) 539-2461, glenwood.hatchery@state.nm.us. Manager, Stan Long.

Red River Hatchery

- **Location:** About 20 miles north of Taos.
- **History:** Built in 1941.
- **Production:** About 371,000 rainbow trout, ranging in size from catchables to fingerlings for stocking statewide. It is the state’s largest-production hatchery.
- **Current status:** Recently renovated and disinfected following discovery of whirling disease in 2005. Now at full production.
- **Information:** (505) 586-0222, redriver.hatchery@state.nm.us. Acting manager, Stephen Hooper.

Reel simple

Kids and fishing go together like cheese and crackers

By Colleen Welch

It's fun to catch fish and fishing is easy when you start with the basics and know a few simple things. Many children in New Mexico fish with their family and friends. Here are some beginner's tips that these experienced kids might share with friends who are newcomers to fishing.



Know your fish

It is helpful to know what types of fish you might catch in a stream, pond or lake. You will need to be able to measure fish and understand the different rules for different kinds of fish – how big is a “keeper,” and how many you can keep. A fishing rule book and a ruler need to be in your tackle box. Ask your parents, grandparents or older friends to help you read the rule book before you go fishing. This book is called the New Mexico Fishing Rules & Information, and you can find it in most fishing shops or ask the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to send you a copy.

You can also learn more about New Mexico fish at www.wildlife.state.nm.us. Click on “Fishing” and see the “Weekly Fishing and Stocking Reports” and the “Public Fishing Waters Map.”

Let's get started

You could use a simple pole with fishing line



Seven-year-old Sophia Tellez shows off the big rainbow trout she caught in the Rio Cebolla behind Seven-Springs Fish Hatchery.

Photo: Dan Williams

attached to the end to catch a fish. Your line will need a bobber and a hook or lure. This type of pole is best in shallow water or when you stand on a pier or dock to fish. You can drop your hook into the water and sometimes you can see the fish

just waiting for the tasty worm on your hook.

A spin-cast rod and reel are the best for beginners. The fishing line comes out of a hole in the reel cover. You use your thumb to push the button that will then release the line or stop the line from going too far.

Fishing line

Fishing line is rated according to “test.” For example, a “6-pound-test” means the line has been tested to handle fish up to 6 pounds without breaking. Beginners will find that 4- to 6-pound-test line responds quickly to a fish's strike or bite and is unlikely to break. If you are fishing in water full of rocks or stumps, or when you are fishing for bigger fish, you might want a 10-pound-test line. When you fish in mountain streams you might want a 2- to 4-pound-test line. This line allows your lures to travel along with the current or flow of the stream.

Hooks

Hooks come in many sizes and shapes. You want a hook that is small enough to slip into a fish's mouth, yet large enough to hold its lip securely. Hooks come in numbered sizes from 20 to 0. The bigger

the number, the smaller the hook. You can learn to recognize the sizes with a little practice. Take a look at the picture of some hooks.

A bait hook has a single barb. You can use a pair of pliers to flatten the barb. This will make it easier to get the hook out of the fish's lip. Some hooks have a short piece of nylon line attached and these are called snelled hooks.

Those weighty things

The weighty things are known as sinkers and they are used to carry your bait to the fish -- across the surface and down toward the bottom of the water. Be careful not to put too many sinkers on your line because it may snag in the weeds or get buried in the mud. Non-lead sinkers because they are not harmful to other wildlife such as ducks and geese that might accidentally eat a sinker lost in the muddy bottom.

Lures and wiggly, stinky stuff

Many kinds of things can be used for bait -- even hot dogs work for some fish. Baits are used to lure or attract the fish to take a bite. Night crawlers and worms work for most fish. Some people like to use tiny fish called minnows as bait. You can also buy waxy, wiggly worms and grubs to lure fish. You can buy stinky bait for whiskered catfish, but many people find that the catfish will bite on night crawlers and spoiled shrimp. The New Mexico Fishing Rules & Information booklet has important rules about bait and baitfish.

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Honey holes for kids



Where to fish

Here are some good places to take kids fishing in New Mexico:

- **Southwest region:** Alumni Pond, Las Cruces; and Caballo Lake State Park, south of Truth or Consequences.
- **Central, region:** Tingley Beach, Albuquerque; and Monastery Lake, Pecos.
- **Northwest region:** Aztec Pond, Aztec.
- **Northeast region:** Sugarite State Park, Lakes Maloya and Alice, east of Raton.
- **North-central region:** Shuree Ponds, Valle Vidal, northeast of Questa. One pond is reserved for anglers ages 11 and under.
- **Southeast region:** Oasis State Park Lake, near Portales.

Department hatchery ponds

- Laguna del Campo -- near Chama.
- Red River Hatchery Pond -- near Questa.
- Glenwood Hatchery Pond -- Glenwood.
- Seven Springs Hatchery, kids pond -- Santa Fe National Forest, Jemez Ranger District.



Fishing can be hard work.

Photo: Dan Williams

Need a license?

Everyone age 12 and up is required to have a fishing license. Anglers ages 12-69 who fish on U.S. Forest Service and BLM lands also must have a Habitat Improvement Stamp, and anglers ages 18-69 must have a Habitat Management and Access Validation.



Recreation that lasts a lifetime.

Photo: Marty Frentzel