



Photo: Dan Williams

# New Mexico wildlife

www.wildlife.state.nm.us

VOL. 54, NO. 3 — Fall 2009

## Rules of the <sup>dirt</sup> road

### Captivating Coues

New Mexico's smallest deer also are the most challenging for hunters.

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A publication devoted to the enjoyment and appreciation of New Mexico wildlife.



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Photos: Dan Williams

New Mexico's Off-highway Vehicle Program stresses safety and legal, responsible use of ATVs, dirt bikes and snowmobiles on public lands. Below, Dan Brooks, chief of law enforcement for the Department of Game and Fish, informs an angler that it is illegal to operate an ATV on a paved road.

## New laws stress safety, education

By Dan Williams

Garrett VeneKlasen is a most unlikely proponent of New Mexico's new laws governing the use of off-highway vehicles. As a hunter and 16-year ATV rider, he says he's done just about all the things that have given four-wheelers and dirt bikes such a bad rap.

"I'm as guilty as the next guy when it comes to abusing the resource," VeneKlasen said. "I own two ATVs and I was used to going where I want, forging into new country, opening new roads. It was easy to put the chainsaw across my bike, and if I saw an area I wanted to get into, just cut my way in with my ATV."

"People still do that," he said. "And it has got to stop."

VeneKlasen said he stopped his illegal riding practices after he noticed the effects increased OHV traffic was having on the habitat and wildlife in northern New Mexico, his longtime hunting grounds. He now promotes more responsible OHV use on public lands, and he hopes the Department of Game and Fish can help turn around what he and others see as a disturbing trend.

The Department took control of the state OHV program in July, as directed by the 2009 Legislature. Previously, the state Tourism Department had been charged with overseeing the 3-year-old Off-highway Vehicle Act. The act defined new safety and registration requirements and use restrictions for the state's estimated 50,000 to 80,000 OHVs and riders -- laws that proponents of the act said were long overdue.



"We have come off an era where we basically had an activity that had very little exterior controls on it," said Rick Alcon, an OHV business owner and former member of the state Off-highway Vehicle Advisory Board. "Now we need some order for the activity because it has grown so dramatically." The new laws, he said, reinforce responsible riding habits and

... continued on Page 14



# Poacher gets trophy-sized penalty

A Hobbs magistrate ordered a man convicted of poaching a trophy mule deer to pay the state \$10,000 in civil damages, the maximum penalty under a 3-year-old law that allows the state to seek reimbursement for the loss of a trophy game animal.

Bradley Smith, 26, indicated through his attorney that he will appeal the ruling by Hobbs Magistrate Jack Bailey. In March 2007, Smith pleaded no contest to a charge of illegal possession of a deer with 28-inch wide antlers. He was fined \$467 by Magistrate Lemma White.

The antlers were scored at 202 3/8 inches according to the Safari Club

International system, which qualified the deer as a "trophy" according to standards adopted by the 2006 Legislature and signed into law by Governor Bill Richardson. The law was promoted as a strong deterrent to poachers as the black market for trophy big-game antlers and heads continues to grow.

The maximum \$10,000 penalty was the highest ever awarded by a New Mexico judge in a civil case involving trophy big-game poaching.

Smith's January 2007 arrest followed a citizen's report to the Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief hotline about a trophy-class mule deer

shot out of season. Search warrants served by Department conservation officers, New Mexico State Police, Lea County Sheriff's Office and the Hobbs Police Department led to the seizure of evidence including the 28-inch set of deer antlers.

The Department encourages anyone with information about violations of New Mexico's wildlife laws to call Operation Game Thief toll-free, (800) 432-4263, or to visit [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us). Reporters can remain anonymous and earn rewards if information leads to charges being filed. The citizen who reported the 2007 poaching near Hobbs declined to accept a reward.

## Group names Pecos officer year's best

Phil Howes, the Department of Game and Fish conservation officer stationed in Pecos, was named the New Mexico Wildlife Officer of the Year, a prestigious award sponsored by the conservation organization Shikar-Safari Club International.

Howes, 40, has been a conservation officer in Pecos for nine years, working with the community to promote wildlife management and law enforcement. His day-to-day duties include horseback patrols in the Pecos Wilderness, monitoring the Pecos bighorn sheep herd, and educating the community about coexisting with bears and other wildlife.

"Phil's work with his local community and wildlife biologists has been greatly appreciated by all who have had the pleasure to work with him," said Chris Neary, the Department's Northeast Area Assistant Chief. "He is a great representative for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish."

Howes earned a masters degree in Wildlife Science from New Mexico State University.

Shikar-Safari Club International was founded in 1952 by an international



Photo: Dan Williams

**New Mexico Conservation Officer of the Year Phil Howes put on his "youth archery instructor" hat recently at a clinic in Santa Fe.**

group of hunters interested in exchanging ideas about the sport. Each year, the club sponsors an award for the Wildlife Officer of the Year in all 50 states, 10 Canadian provinces and the territories of both nations. Shikar-Safari is recognized worldwide

for its efforts in the protection, enhancement and preservation of wildlife, and has placed particular emphasis on endangered and threatened species through the promotion of enforcement of conservation laws and regulations.

## Disabled NM vets eligible for discounted license

Service-connected disabled veterans who are New Mexico residents are now eligible to buy an annual combination fishing and small-game hunting license for \$10. The license normally costs \$33.

The special license was approved by the 2009 New Mexico Legislature and endorsed by Gov. Bill Richardson. It is available to any New Mexico resident service-connected disabled veteran who presents a "Veteran Administration awards letter," at a Department of Game and Fish office in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Raton, Las Cruces or Roswell. The letter, available from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, states that a veteran has been

granted a disability and that the disability was service-connected.

"This is a way for the state of New Mexico to show its appreciation for the sacrifice our service-connected disabled veterans have made for their service to our country," said New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Cabinet Secretary John M. Garcia. The NMDVS has 17 offices statewide to assist veterans with filing for their service-connected disability claims.

The special license does not replace the free general hunting and fishing license currently available to resident veterans who are 100 percent

disabled. It also does not replace the one-time free general hunting and fishing license offered to veterans who were deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.

The \$10 fishing and small-game license will allow the licensee to fish for all game fish and hunt for squirrel and game birds, other than wild turkey, during the open season for each species. The license will be available only at Department offices this year, but may be available by regular mail in the future.

For more information about New Mexico's special hunting and fishing licenses, please call (505) 476-8000 or visit the Department Web site, [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us).



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# Comanche Creek restocked with native cutthroat trout

More than 33,000 native Rio Grande cutthroat trout are swimming in Comanche Creek and its tributaries, contributing to a healthy population of New Mexico's state fish and beckoning anglers to enjoy some of northern New Mexico finest fishing opportunities and scenery.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish stocked the cutthroats into the river this summer as part of an ongoing effort to restore pure-strain native trout to more than 150 miles of streams and 25 small lakes in the Rio Costilla watershed. The Comanche Creek portion of the project included about 20 miles of small streams in the Valle Vidal Unit of the Carson National Forest. The project included construction of barriers to prevent non-native fish from traveling upstream, and removal of all non-native fish above the barriers.

"Stocking the native cutthroats back into the streams was the last phase in restoring the pure-strain natives to the Comanche Creek watershed," fisheries biologist and project coordinator Kirk Patten said. "This project will protect New Mexico's state fish and help keep the species off state and federal endangered lists. It also will give anglers an opportunity to catch a species of trout found only in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado."

Fishing season on Comanche Creek and the rest of the Valle Vidal is July 1 through Dec. 1. Regulations for Comanche Creek are catch-and-release only, with tackle restricted to artificial flies and lures with single, barbless hooks. The fish stocked throughout the watershed July 2 and Aug. 3 included 600 12-inchers, 4,500 4-inchers and 28,600 fry.

"While we encourage anglers to take advantage of this fishing opportunity, we also urge them to



Photo: Dan Williams

**Kevin Reilly of Trout Unlimited helped release about 600 12-inch Rio Grande cutthroat trout in Comanche Creek in July.**

handle the native trout with care," Patten said. "We want to give the fish every opportunity to thrive and spawn."

The Comanche Creek project was part of an ongoing effort by the Department, the New Mexico Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Vermejo Park Ranch and the U.S. Forest Service to restore native cutthroats to the Rio Costilla watershed.

For more information about Rio Grande cutthroat trout restoration and angling, please visit [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us).



Photo: Dan Williams

**The San Juan River below Navajo Dam is one of the most heavily fished rivers in the world.**

## San Juan River Special Trout Water now catch-and-release fishing only

The entire 3.75-mile stretch of "Quality Water" on the San Juan River below Navajo Dam is now a catch-and-release trout fishery, following action by the State Game Commission in August. The new rule took effect Sept. 15.

The Commission voted 4-1 to change the regulations, which previously allowed anglers to keep one trout per day, minimum size 20 inches, in the last 3.5 miles of the special section. Tackle restrictions of artificial flies or lures, barbless hooks and a two-fly-per-line limit remain unchanged.

The rule change followed several public meetings, a survey of anglers and hundreds of public comments addressing some anglers' concerns about the quality of fishing and the number and size of trout in the Special Trout Water.

The world-class San Juan fishery receives more angling pressure than any river in the country because of its numbers and size of trout. The Department of Game and Fish has managed it

as a trophy trout fishery since the mid-1960s, reserving the first quarter-mile below the dam for catch-and-release fishing only and designating special bag and size limits for the remaining 3.5 miles. The rules for the lower stretch of the special section has changed several times to accommodate increasing numbers of anglers and their desires for more, bigger trout.

San Juan Special Trout Water (lower 3.5 miles) bag limit and tackle regulation timeline:

- **1966:** Bag limit, 6; size limit, 12 inches; artificial fly or lure.
- **1971:** Bag limit, 4; size limit 15 inches; artificial fly or lure.
- **1980:** Bag limit, 2; size limit 16 inches; artificial fly or lure.
- **1983:** Bag limit, 1; size limit 18 inches; barbless artificial fly or lure.
- **1985:** Bag limit, 1; size limit 20 inches; barbless artificial fly or lure.
- **2008:** Bag limit, 1; size limit 20 inches; barbless artificial fly or lure, 2-fly limit.

## Get involved

Many organizations in New Mexico are dedicated to wildlife conservation, habitat improvement and wildlife-related recreation. Whether you are interested in birding, wildlife watching, hunting, fishing or trapping, chances are there is an outfit you'll deem worth supporting. Here are some of them:

**Quail Unlimited:** The national organization has almost 300 members dedicated to the wise management of America's wild quail and restoring quail populations for future generations. John Moen, (575) 526-3571, [trophy@zianet.com](mailto:trophy@zianet.com).

**New Mexico Chapter, Wild Sheep Foundation:** Formerly the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, the organization's goal is "Putting more sheep on the mountain." Members work with the Department of Game and Fish to increase populations of desert and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in New Mexico. Information: Lanny Rominger, (505) 821-5064.

**Ducks Unlimited, New Mexico:** More than 1,500 members support the organization's mission to restore and manage wetlands and habitats for North American waterfowl. Cindy Wolfe, [cjwolfe@gilanet.com](mailto:cjwolfe@gilanet.com), (575) 854-3365.

**New Mexico Wildlife Federation:** Founded by Aldo Leopold in 1914, the organization is a strong lobbyist in the New Mexico Legislature, "dedicated to protecting New Mexico's wildlife, habitat and outdoor way of life." (505) 299-5404, [www.nmwildlife.org](http://www.nmwildlife.org).

**Audubon New Mexico:** Devoted to the protection, preservation and enjoyment of the environment, with a particular emphasis on birds. The organization has chapters statewide, with headquarters at the Randall Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe. (505) 983-4609, <http://nm.audubon.org>.

**Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation:** A large national organization dedicated to ensuring the future of elk, other wildlife and their habitat. The organization actively supports efforts to protect and enhance elk country, conservation education and to restore elk herds. New Mexico information: (505) 454-9390. National website: [www.rmef.org](http://www.rmef.org).

**Southwest Environmental Center:** Works to reverse the accelerating loss of species worldwide by protecting and restoring native wildlife and their habitats in the Southwestern borderlands, through grassroots advocacy, public education and on-the-ground restoration projects. (575) 522-5552, [www.wildmesquite.org](http://www.wildmesquite.org).

**Southwest Consolidated Sportsmen:** An organization representing at least 15 sporting and conservation groups of diverse interests. The group's three primary objectives are to "disseminate wildlife and habitat information, participate in habitat maintenance projects, and review and comment on proposals involving wildlife habitat." (575) 526-5056.

**Trout Unlimited, New Mexico:** Dedicated to the restoration, protection and conservation of all coldwater fisheries, their tributaries and watersheds and the fish that inhabit them. (505) 470-4878, [www.newmexicotru.org](http://www.newmexicotru.org).

**New Mexico Wild Turkey Federation:** Supports scientific wildlife management on public, private and corporate lands as well as wild turkey hunting as a traditional North American sport. (505) 869-3837, [www.nwtf.org](http://www.nwtf.org).

**New Mexico Trout:** Dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of trout fishing in New Mexico's waters through restoration of riparian habitats and through the education of the public about trout fishing and the value of trout habitats. [newmexicotrout@gmail.com](mailto:newmexicotrout@gmail.com), [www.newmexicotrout.org](http://www.newmexicotrout.org).

**Southwest Muskie Maniacs:** This rapidly growing club was formed as the 59th chapter of Muskies Inc. in 2008 by a group of anglers interested in catching tiger muskies stocked in Bluewater and Quemado lakes, and northern pike in northern New Mexico waters. Information: Michael Bishop, [mb\\_tigers@yahoo.com](mailto:mb_tigers@yahoo.com); or Jared Blaschke at [jbfsn@comcast.net](mailto:jbfsn@comcast.net).

**Safari Club International:** Promotes wildlife conservation worldwide while protecting the hunting heritage and supporting numerous education and humanitarian projects. Southern New Mexico Chapter: LTC R.A. "Pancho" Maples, [pancho1@plateautel.net](mailto:pancho1@plateautel.net). Northern New Mexico Chapter: Brian Payne, [b\\_payne10@msn.com](mailto:b_payne10@msn.com).



Northwest

# Fall is here; where's the deer?

By Ross Morgan



Ross Morgan

Summer has come and gone and another hunting season is upon us. This is the time of the year when we spend much of our time in the great outdoors with friends and family scouting and hunting. Most of the time, we don't care if we harvest an animal. If we are fortunate fill the freezer ... well, that's a bonus.

With the rainfall amounts fluctuating from year to year, we never know what the next year will bring. Will it be dry this year, which will prompt us to hunt the water holes, or will there be plenty of water, forcing us to change our hunting strategy a little bit?

The Northwest part of the state is different from the southern part when it comes to deer and elk hunting in that some of the deer and elk migrate down from Colorado. This means the quality of animals we will see from year to year not only depends on the rainfall we get here in New Mexico, but also what kind of rainfall Colorado receives. The number of animals we see in some parts of the Northwest Area also can change if Colorado gets early snow, forcing some of those animals to migrate down.

The Department of Game and Fish starts flying elk and deer surveys toward the end of September and continues through the end of December. September is the time when the elk are bunched up and we are able to better distinguish calves from yearlings. This is important when determining the fawn crop for each year. This strategy works the

same for deer in December. Surveys play an important role in deer, elk, and antelope management each year.

"It's really hard to say what deer and elk numbers will look like until we conduct the surveys," said Bill Taylor, game manager for the Northwest Area. "We did get some good early rain in June that we typically don't get. That has prompted some good antler growth, according to some landowners I have met this year."

Antelope numbers typically fluctuate from year to year depending on spring moisture and winter snows. The Northwest Area saw a slight decline in antelope numbers this year, which prompted a decrease in the number of antelope licenses. Typically, antelope numbers rebound within a year or two.

For more information on hunting in the Northwest Area, contact Bill Taylor, Game Manager for the area at (505) 222-4700.

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Photo: Dan Williams

# Gila elk herd looks bigger, better than ever

By LuAnn Tafoya

Elk hunting in the Gila should be better than ever this year.

Kevin Rodden, Southwest Area big-game manager for the Department of Game and Fish, says elk numbers are increasing and bull-to-cow ratios are excellent, a perfect combination for hunters. Rodden said a conservative approach to managing the Gila elk herd should give hunters a more quality experience.

This year, there should be lots of large bulls and not as many hunters. The chance of harvesting a 350- to 400-class trophy bull is quite possible if you were fortunate enough to draw a Gila public-land license or acquire a private-land authorization.

Rodden suggests that hunters scout before their hunt and obtain maps to learn the lay of the land. Land-status maps are available at Bureau of Land Management or most Forest Service offices. Learn where the roads are

and find the watering holes. Elk should be more concentrated due to the lack of moisture this past year. If you are willing to get a mile or so away from the roads, you will have a better hunting experience.

The Greater Gila, consisting of Units 15 and 16 A-E, is the state's second-largest elk herd, estimated at 16,000 to 20,000 animals and growing. It is the most consistent area in the state for producing trophy bull elk and has a high hunter-success rate, making licenses very desirable.

Of the Gila units, 16D, 16A, and 16C are the best. That's where bull numbers are highest and hunting pressure will be low.

Unit 16B has seen some wildfires, so elk will be moving into the burned areas, where they will find improved habitat in the new growth. Harvest success rates have been improving in the unit, especially for hunters willing to hike or pack into the more remote areas.

Unit 16E will provide a good hunt if you are willing to get away from the roads at least three or four miles, Rodden says. He recommends glassing and stalking, and then using horses to pack the elk out.

Other areas in the southwest that will be very good this year include Units 13, 15, and 17. These units are muzzleloader and bow units and contain excellent elk habitat.

In Unit 13, hunters have not been harvesting as many cows, so the herd is increasing. Because of the



Photo: Dan Williams

**New Mexico's elk population has grown from zero to 70,000 to 90,000 animals in the last 100 years. That includes about 20,000 in the Gila country, known for its impressive trophy bulls.**

amount of private land, elk hunting is tougher, but if you are willing to get away from the roads you'll have a better chance of harvesting an animal.

With an elk population of about 2,000, Unit 17 is an excellent hunting area to find a big bull. Fewer available cow licenses have helped increase the herd and hunter satisfaction has been excellent, partly because of fewer hunters in the field. The best bet for finding a

nice bull is on the western side of the San Mateo Mountains.

Hunts for youth and mobility impaired hunters should be fantastic again this year as those hunts fall close to the rut.

*LuAnn Tafoya is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Southwest Area. She can be reached in Las Cruces at (575) 532-2106 or luann.tafoya@state.nm.us.*

Southwest



LuAnn Tafoya



# Hunting rules on State-Trust Lands

By Clint Henson

Most of northern New Mexico is private land intermingled with State-Trust Land. This land is owned by the state and managed by the New Mexico State Land Office to generate income for the state school system. The Department of Game and Fish has an easement lease with the State Land Office only for hunter, angler and trapper access to State-Trust Lands.

There is a great amount of wildlife habitat on State-Trust Lands, and hunting is very popular. To have a successful experience hunting on State-Trust Lands, it is best to know a few guidelines.

Many hunters apply for hunts in northern New Mexico not realizing they will not have access to the entire Game Management Unit. For deer hunts, the only "hunnable" land is State-Trust Land, or federal land that is legally accessible by public road. Hunters who have drawn a public permit also can hunt on private land, but only where the hunter has obtained written permission from the landowner. Make sure to thoroughly research your hunt area before you apply, and understand where you can legally hunt.

If you draw a hunt for a unit that is primarily State-Trust Land, you must understand the rules that apply on those properties:

- Your hunting license only allows you to access those properties



Photo: Dan Williams

**The Department of Game and Fish has an easement lease with the State Land Office that allows hunters, anglers and trappers access to State-Trust Lands in season.**

- during your hunt period and seven days before your hunt for scouting.
- You can only camp on State-Trust Land in your hunt area if you have the agricultural lessee's permission to do so. In Unit 48, the Department has worked with several landowners to designate specific areas where camping is allowed without hunters needing to contact the lessee directly. See the Department's Web site, [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us), for specific information regarding Unit 48.
- You may not drive off-road for any reason. This is written in the lease agreement with the State Land Office and also is included in Department regulations. This restriction includes retrieval of downed game. This is a change from years past.
- You may only hunt unprotected species, such as coyotes, rabbits and prairie dogs on State-Trust Land during the period in which your license is valid for protected species on those lands, or with written permission from the agricultural lessee.
- You may only take two guests with you on your hunt.

If you buy an over-the-counter deer license for private property, you must have your license and written permission from the landowner. Hunters with private-land hunting licenses can not hunt on State-Trust Land. Good maps and a good knowledge of the area are critical to understanding where you can legally hunt. Do not depend on fences to delineate property boundaries.

## Northeast



Clint Henson

Much of the State-Trust Lands is not fenced.

Pronghorn antelope hunters who draw public rifle hunts will be assigned a ranch and are then allowed to hunt both the private and State-Trust Land within that ranch. Hunters are reminded, however, that they can not travel off-road on State-Trust Land to retrieve a downed animal.

Hunters are only allowed to scout two days prior to their hunt when assigned to hunt on a ranch.

If you have questions about an area you are interested in hunting, please call any Department office or visit [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us).

The New Mexico State Land Office can be reached at (505) 827-5760, or online at [www.nmstatelands.org](http://www.nmstatelands.org).

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# Feral hogs: fair game in New Mexico year-round

By Mark Madsen

Looking for an opportunity to go hunting after New Mexico's traditional seasons have ended?

Check out the state's pockets of feral hogs. They can provide great sport, decent eating, no license is required to hunt them, and many landowners are happy to get rid of them.

Feral hogs are domesticated hogs that have escaped or been released into the wild. Because they are not classified as a game species, the Department of Game and Fish does not regulate or manage the hunting of these animals. However, the Department receives hundreds of calls every year from individuals wanting to pursue and hunt the feral hogs. Those calls increase during the late winter and early spring after the close of New Mexico's big- and small-game hunting seasons.

Over the last several years, reports of feral hogs have increased throughout the state. The Department is concerned about the presence and potential increase in the number and distribution of feral hogs and the associated risks to wildlife, including disease transmission, habitat degradation and predation on native wildlife. In good conditions, a feral hog population can double in four months.



Photo: Missouri Department of Conservation

## Feral hog

In southeastern New Mexico, feral hogs have been reported from Clovis to the state line south of Jal, throughout the Pecos River Valley and in the Sacramento Mountains.

Feral hogs can be found scattered throughout the Pecos River Valley from Fort Sumner to the state line south of Carlsbad. They are normally found in small groups and can become nocturnal once pressured. Feral hog boars average 130 pounds and sows 110 pounds, although mature adults may weigh more than 400 pounds.

Good areas to start looking for feral hogs include the Pecos River Valley north of Roswell and the old Lake McMillan lake bed south of Artesia. Hunters need to be aware that most of the property found along the Pecos River is private and that they must have written permission from the landowner to hunt hogs. There also have been reports of feral hogs in the Kenna-Elida area, where they have damaged cultivated fields. This area is primarily private property and written permission is required.

Hunters looking for feral hogs on public lands could try the Lincoln National Forest in Game Management Units 34 and 36. Feral hogs have been reported throughout much of the national forest and are causing significant damage, especially to riparian areas and oak brush habitat.

Feral hogs are scattered throughout Unit 34, including Monument, Jim Lewis and Perk canyons in the south-central portion of the unit. Wright Spring off of Forest Road 90 (Westside Road) almost always has signs of feral hogs. They also have been reported in 3-Mile, 8-Mile, Bear and other canyons in the northern portions of the unit.

In Unit 36, feral hogs can be found in oak brush habitat around and above Bonito Lake. They have also been

reported in upper Nogal, Argentine, Turkey and Big Bear canyons. Most hunters in these units wait until late winter to hunt after the leaves have fallen off the oak brush.

Because of the feral hogs' potential risks to livestock and wildlife, the 2009 state Legislature passed and Gov. Bill Richardson signed House Bill 594. The law prohibits the "importation, transport within the state, hold for breeding, release or selling of live feral hogs." The law also makes it unlawful to "operate a commercial feral hog hunting enterprise."

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## Southeast



Mark Madsen



# A passion for pheasants

## Fleet birds test hunters' skill, nerves

By Mark Gruber

I've never really gotten over the electric shock of a pheasant rising from underfoot, especially after trudging for hours, not seeing a single bird. As a kid, I would be so frightened that I'd forget to pull the hammer back on my single-shot H&R Topper, much to the amusement of my father's hunting partners. Perhaps in my later years this fright will induce a myocardial infarction. Come to think of it, maybe not a bad way to go.

The ring-neck pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus torquatus*) was introduced into North America in 1881 from China. Pheasants were first released in New Mexico in 1916. This and subsequent attempts failed to establish resident populations until 1929 when the Department of Game and Fish began stocking in earnest. The first hunting season was in 1935. By 1940, pheasants were thoroughly at home in most of New Mexico's suitable habitats.

Survival was limited and always has been. Lack of quality habitat, conversion of grain fields to cotton and encroaching human population have kept pheasants limited mostly to the middle Rio Grande and southern Pecos River valleys.

The Department stocked both the Chinese ring-neck and a variety from Afghanistan known locally as a white-winged pheasant. The thinking at the time was that the white-wing version might be more adaptable to the hot and dry climate in New Mexico.

Stocking of pen-raised birds continued into the 1960s. Birds were produced at the State Bird Farm outside of Carlsbad. Put-and-take stocking eventually ceased because the cost of raising one bird exceeded the income generated by a small-game license. The cost to raise one bird was 300 percent more than a license in the 1960s.

### Gear

Thankfully, the gear used by pheasant hunters pales in comparison to that "needed" by waterfowl hunters, something I enjoy reminding my duck-hunting buddies. All you require you can carry on your person. First and foremost is a pair of good boots. They should be tall enough to keep out weed seeds and suitable for hiking in all kinds of weather and over a variety of terrain. Don't scrimp on good footwear; remember, your feet need to last you a lifetime.

Other clothing includes a decent pair of field pants capable of going through often wet brush and deep weeds. On top, wear shirts, vests and jackets that you can add or remove in layers. Again, quality matters. With today's range of modern fabrics, you should be able to stay dry from perspiration in hot weather and shed rain and snow. Cotton anything is probably the worst material a hunter can wear.

Blaze orange is ubiquitous in today's modern pheasant fields. Hats and yokes on jackets and

vests are a simple way to be seen by others when the birds start flying and you are neck deep in cover.

Don't forget to carry ample water and energy snacks especially when you've wandered far from your vehicle.

### Dogs

Many books have been written on this subject. I'll never again hunt pheasants without a good dog! Actually, I now hunt solely for the pleasure of watching purpose-bred dogs working a field. There is absolutely no better, harder-working or enthusiastic hunting companion you will ever have.

Remember, your dog will walk four to five times as far as you will. Always carry water for them in the field. Carry energy bars. There are some made just for dogs, but anything you eat will help them maintain their energy, just avoid chocolate.



Photo: Mark Gruber

**A good bird dog always will be your best hunting companion.**

gel that halts bleeding faster and safer than any traditional first aid method.

### Shotguns and shooting

Much has been written on this subject. Most any decent shotgun will do as long as it throws 1 to 1¼ ounces of shot. Cheap, high-speed promotional field loads, available at most big-box stores, are a poor substitute for decent shells. For those areas that require non-toxic shot, there are excellent shells on the market today. Don't scrimp on quality ammunition; it's the least expensive thing you will spend money on for your hunting trip.

I really, really hate to lose a poorly hit and injured bird. Therefore, I spend a lot of time at the shotgun range during the off season. Opening day is a terrible time to practice your shooting skills.

### Pheasant food

Adult pheasants like grain; wild or planted. They also eat berries, early green plants and insects.

### Types of cover

Pheasants like thick cover. You would, too, if you were dressed like a garish mature male bird. However, pheasants move throughout the day. They feed early in the morning in or near crop fields. Then they move into loafing cover. This may be thick grass or weedy patches. Sometimes, they'll feed again in the evening. The worse the weather, the thicker the cover they'll be in. On cold, windy, snowy or rainy days, pheasants can be found in the



Photo: George Gumerman

Get your dog in shape prior to hunting. A lazy floor potato can succumb to heat exhaustion in the field. Long walks, including short runs and perhaps some swimming will help your canine companion enormously. Just be sensible about starting a dog on an exercise program.

Have a good first-aid kit with you at all times. Your furry hunting partner can and will get into tough situations and sometimes your truck may just be too far away. A serious cut from barbed wire or broken glass can end a hunting day or sometimes even a life. I always have in my coat a tube of EMT gel and nowadays ABC Gauze, a revolutionary bandage that converts into a "blood stopping"



Photo: Mark Gruber

**Pheasants love to hang out in fields of thick grass and weeds in the afternoon.**



thickest cover available. They're no dummies.

## Running birds

Pheasants are runners and they're very fast; faster than you, me and the best hunting dog. They actually prefer to run rather than fly. I have seen wounded birds run more than a half-mile. Pheasants usually only take flight if they are startled, cornered or have no other option.

## Use blockers

Knowing that your quarry would rather hoof it into the next county, there are important strategies available to hunters. One is to push birds toward other hunters in your party known as blockers. If you are hunting in a group, place some members at the far end of the field and hunt toward them. Remember however to shoot ONLY high-flying birds. If you are alone or in a small group, go slowly and stop often. Push birds toward a natural or man-made opening in the cover. Pheasants don't like to run across open patches or roadways and will often remain at the end of the field before taking flight.

## Be quiet!

Pheasants have incredible hearing. I have seen birds running across a snow-covered field a quarter-mile from a truck that pulled off the road. Hunters got out, slammed the doors and tailgate and shucked a few shells into their guns. The birds were long gone before these hunters ever got into the field.

Predators are far quieter than hunters. Think of the Swainson's hawk, a common pheasant predator. No noise; just silent, swift and deadly. Be quiet when entering a field. Don't slam doors and don't yell commands at other hunters or hunting dogs. Plan your hunting strategy in advance, while sitting in your vehicle away from the field.

## No need to get out at 0-dark-30

As my friends know, I am not an early riser and thankfully pheasants don't care. Some states don't even allow hunters to enter fields until mid-morning and this suits me just fine. There is no obvious advantage to getting out early when pursuing pheasants. Enjoy a good breakfast and an extra cup of tea or coffee. You'll be glad you did.

## Safety matters

I have a simple rule. If anyone does something stupid with a gun when hunting near me, that's the end of us hunting together -- plain and simple. No second chances. Shotguns don't cause minor flesh wounds.

When birds are in the air, hunters easily get excited and some get confused. That's when bad things happen. Blaze-orange is a must when you're in the field. No need to look like an Allis-Chalmers harvester, but some orange, especially on top, can make all the difference.

Learn to handle a gun safely. Take a hunter education course; you're never too old. Always know where members of your hunting party are. This applies to man's-best-friends too. Never, ever shoot low flying birds. Use your safety. It's okay to pull up on a bird and never fire because you forgot to release the safety mechanism. Embarrassing maybe, but it's safe.

New Mexico's pheasant season is very short -- just four days long. Plan a place to hunt, whether it's on public or private land (with written permission of course) or one of our wildlife management areas. Take your kid and dog. Be safe and enjoy a few days in the field. The season may be short, but what the heck, it's better than working!

*Mark Gruber is an editor for the Department of Game and Fish. A self-described "pheasant fanatic," he has hunted *Phasianus colchicus torquatus* from the East Coast to the Rocky Mountains, from the northern Great Plains to the scrubby high deserts of the Southwest.*



**New Mexico may not be known for its pheasant hunting, but opportunities are out there for the enthusiast willing to do a little research, travel and legwork. New Mexico has had pheasant hunting seasons since 1935, mostly in the middle Rio Grande and southern Pecos River valleys.**

Photos: Mark Gruber, left; George Gumerman, below



# New Mexico pheasant hunting

There are three types of land to hunt pheasants on in New Mexico: public land, private land and state wildlife management areas.

## Hunting on public land

- Statewide season, Dec. 10-13, 2009. Bag limit: 3 males per day/6 males in possession.

There is very limited public land in New Mexico where pheasants may be found. Some may be found around Brantley Lake and Bitter Lake Refuge.

## Hunting on private land, Valencia County

- Dec. 12, 2009. Bag limit: 3 males per day and in possession.

Landowners in Valencia County may receive unlimited, specially marked applications from the Department's Northwest Area Office in Albuquerque for hunting pheasants on their private land. Hunters wishing to hunt private land in Valencia County must obtain a specially marked application from a landowner and submit it to the Department's Northwest Area Office. There is no public-land pheasant hunting in Valencia County.

## Private land with written permission

- Dec. 10-13, 2009. Bag limit: 3 males per day/6 males in possession.
- Contact landowners in the Clayton, Roswell and Portales/Clovis area.
- For a modest fee, hunters may obtain access to private land near Pleasant Hill and Arch. Contact Pleasant Hill Volunteer Fire Department (505) 398-5482 or the Arch Community Center (505) 276-8201.

- Hunting preserves: Check online for "Pheasant hunting in New Mexico."

## Hunting on state wildlife areas

- Casa Colorada, Seven Rivers and W.S. Huey wildlife areas.
- Dec. 12, 2009. Bag limit: 3 males per day and in possession.

To hunt on one of the above three wildlife areas, hunters must enter a drawing to receive a permit. Hunters may apply online or complete a paper application and send it to the Department of Game and Fish. Applications must be made online or postmarked by Nov. 4. For more information, see the Small Game and Waterfowl Rules and Information Booklet, available at any Department office, any license vendor or online at [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us).

## Youth-only hunts on wildlife areas

- Seven Rivers and Casa Colorada wildlife areas.
- Dec. 5, 2009. Bag limit: 3 males per day and in possession.

Two youth-only pheasant hunts are available by drawing. Youths who are younger than 18 on Dec. 5 may apply online or complete a paper application. Youth hunters must be accompanied by a non-hunting adult.

## Bitter Lake youth-only hunt

- Bitter Lake Refuge
- Dec. 6
- 3 males per day and in possession

Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge near Roswell will offer a youth-only pheasant hunt Sunday, Dec. 6. Contact the refuge at (575) 622-6755 for more information.



# White-tailed wonders

## Tiny Coues deer a big challenge for NM hunters

By Jason Amaro

About 15 years ago I was hiking in Salis Pass, between Glenwood and Reserve, and I found a goofy little shed antler that look like a small eastern whitetail shed. At the time I didn't really know what I was looking at, but I called my local Game and Fish officer to ask if we had a pocket of Texas Whitetail in the Gila. He proceeded to tell me about Coues deer.

"First of all, the correct pronunciation is more like 'cows,' but it for some reason we say Coues like 'booze,' he said.

"OK, what else," I asked.

"If you're talking trophies, a 100-inch (antlers) Coues deer would be the equivalent of a 370-inch bull elk, and a full-grown Coues buck would weigh only 90 to 115 pounds." He said that if I was lucky, I might see some Coues deer running around the Fort Bayard Wildlife Refuge near Silver City.

Trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together, I went for a drive around the refuge that evening. Unfortunately, I only saw mule deer. I figured that maybe I wasn't looking in the right place, so later in the week I decided to sit at a little spring to see if any of the little deer would come in to water. The hunting gods must have been looking down on me, because just before dark a doe and a fawn came in for a drink. Even today it is hard to describe those amazing deer -- tiny and sleek, simply the most beautiful deer in North America.

At the time I was living in Santa Fe and I



Photo: Dan Williams

**Coues deer, a subspecies of white-tailed deer, have been described as the most beautiful deer in North America.**

didn't have the time to properly scout and prepare to hunt these little guys. So I put the experience in my back pocket, vowing to someday resume my quest to take a Coues deer.

As fate would have it, a few years later I ended up accepting a job at Fort Bayard Medical Center. The first day I reported for work I saw a Coues deer darting through the bushes. With that, the hunt was on.

The first thing I needed to do was learn everything I could about Coues deer. I needed to find out all their distinguishing physical characteristics; I needed to figure out what type of habitat they like, what they like to feed on, how often they water,

when to they rut and what weaknesses I could capitalize on.

### Description and distribution

Coues deer bucks generally range in size from around 95 to 110 pounds and stand about 30 inches at the shoulder. Other than their small size, the quickest way to identify a Coues deer is by its tail -- dark on top and pure white on the underside. It is much broader than a mule deer's tail and it doesn't have a black tip. Coues deer also have white patches around their eyes and muzzle, and their antler configuration is much different than a mule deer's. Coues deer have one main beam with points coming off the beam, while mule deer have a forked configuration. Now that we know what we are looking for, we need to find them.

Coues deer can be found in just about any Game Management Unit of southwestern New Mexico, although their highest densities are in Units 16A, 16B, 16C, 16D, 16E, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26 and 27. Their required habitat varies widely from mesquite and prickly pear thickets to ponderosa pine forests. From my experience, they tend to hang in transition zones between habitat types. The bottom line: Coues deer are just like other wild animal; they need diverse food, water and shelter.

### Hunting strategies

Many first-time Coues deer hunters will either never see a deer or only see the south end of



**A mature Coues deer buck stands about 30 inches tall and rarely weighs more than 100 pounds. Unlike mule deer, which often will pause for a second or two when startled, Coues deer usually won't break stride as they flee from a threat. Above, a nice Coues buck flees from a helicopter during a Department of Game and Fish population survey. At right, Cole Horchler and his dad, Bob, proudly pose with Cole's impressive Burro Mountains Coues deer.**

Photos: Jon Armijo, above; Jason Amaro, right







Coues deer photos: Jon Armijo

**“A mule deer sees a human and he thinks it is a stump, while a Coues deer sees a stump and thinks it is a human.”**

a north-bound deer. Coues deer aren't like your average mule deer that will give you the opportunity to get set up and make the shot. These deer are high-strung. When they see, hear or smell something that isn't right, their response is to run and ask questions later.

I have always said, “A mule deer sees a human and he thinks it is a stump, while a Coues deer sees a stump and thinks it is a human.” If you are going to become a successful Coues deer hunter, you need to see them before they see you.

The best way to consistently take Coues deer with a rifle is to “spot and stalk.” With this method of hunting, you typically find a high point, sit down and glass, glass, and then glass some more. My glassing setup consists of a high-end pair of 15x56 binoculars on a tripod. Some people use spotting scopes, but I have found that binoculars are easier to look through for extended periods of time. Regardless of the type of setup you go with, buy the best quality glass you can afford. I always tell myself that I will forget about the money before I forget about the quality of the glass.

Coues deer really enjoy warming themselves in the morning sun, so it's a good idea to spend your first few hours looking on sunny slopes.

The biggest mistake hunters can make once they have spotted a deer is to bail off the mountain and make a straight line for the deer. A better approach is to spend some time to really study the landscape, pick out distinguishing terrain features and find a good travel plan that will allow you to get to the deer without being detected. Once you have determined your plan of attack, you need to determine your pace. By that, I mean you need to know when you can just put your head down and cover country and when you need to slow down and be prepared for a shot.

Another common mistake is to try to get too close for a shot. Coues deer will not cut you any slack when it comes to stalking; you need to be able to make a 300- to 400-yard shot with consistency and confidence.

While I have taken Coues deer with a rifle, I prefer to hunt them with a bow. In general, hunter success is much less, but if you are willing to spend the time scouting, you can greatly increase your odds by hunting them during the rut. There are three different ways of killing Coues deer with a bow: spot-and-stalk, still-hunting or hunting from a stand. Each has its pros and cons. You need to find a method that suits your style.

Killing a deer using the spot-and-stalk method is by far the hardest method. If you are looking for the ultimate challenge, this style of hunting is for you. The trick is getting a deer within your effective archery range.

Still-hunting can be a lot of fun because you are slowly covering country looking for Coues deer. The key is to walk very slowly through an area you know has a pocket of Coues deer. What you are trying to do is catch a buck cruising the area looking for a hot doe -- and you need to see the deer before he sees you. I also like to rattle horns and use grunt calls to try and get a buck's attention. Remember to walk slowly. If you cover two or three miles a day, you are walking too fast.

Stand hunting probably is the most successful method of getting a shot at a Coues deer. Find an

area deer are using and wait for them to come to you. You can either hunt from a tree stand, a pop-up ground blind or use the available cover to hide yourself. I like to hunt from the ground for three reasons: First, I am not a monkey and I don't like tree stands; second, I like to be mobile; and third, the January hunt can be really cold, so it is nice to get out of the wind and stay in the sun.

Where do I set up? The key to consistently being a successful stand hunter is to dedicate enough preseason scouting time to be in the right place at the right time. I typically set up along travel corridors, over remote water sources or over scrapes.

Hunting travel corridors is probably the trickiest because you need to understand how the deer move between feeding, watering, bedding and breeding areas. Hunting over water is just a matter of finding a water source that the does are hitting and the bucks will eventually show up.

Hunting scrapes is probably my favorite because I

know that unless the bucks have gone nocturnal, something will eventually show up. Also, if I find a scrape just before the season, I can place a trail camera over it and see which bucks are coming by.

One of the great things about Coues deer hunting in New Mexico is that there usually are a few leftover licenses each year after the draw. Many of these licenses are in great areas, but require plenty of homework if a hunter expects to get a shot at a Coues deer. One of the biggest differences between Coues deer hunting and mule deer hunting is the amount of scouting time required. Successful Coues deer hunters often scout year-round to become familiar with the terrain and movements of the deer.

*Jason Amaro of Silver City has hunted and fished in New Mexico for 35 years. He is editor of [www.thenewmexicosportsman.com](http://www.thenewmexicosportsman.com), a Web site dedicated to hunters and anglers in the state, and he is a partner in the popular online podcast, [www.bowcast.com](http://www.bowcast.com). He can be reached at [amaro\\_jason@hotmail.com](mailto:amaro_jason@hotmail.com).*



Photo: Dan Williams

**Coues white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus couesi*)**

The Coues deer is a subspecies of the white-tailed deer. It was classified in 1874 by Elliot Coues, a U.S. Army surgeon and naturalist who was assigned to Fort Whipple, Ariz., in the 1860s.

**Range:** In New Mexico, most areas of the southwestern mountains and foothills, including the Burro and Peloncillo mountains and much of the Gila National Forest. In Arizona, Coues deer range from the southeastern and south-central mountains to the edge of the Mogollon Rim and eastward into the White Mountains.

**Habitat:** Oak, grasslands, chaparral and pine forests and clearings in elevations ranging from 3,000 to 10,000 feet. Coues deer prefer areas with predictable summer rainfall and are most abundant in elevations from 3,500 to 5,500 feet. In prime habitat, they usually stay within a

four-mile range, feeding on weeds, shrubs, grass, mistletoe and fruits from cacti.

**Physical characteristics:** Smooth, silvery, salt-and-pepper gray coat with a long, broad tail that is pure white on the underside and gray to black on top. Unlike mule deer, Coues deer have characteristic white patches around their eyes and muzzle. Mature bucks stand at about 30 inches at the shoulder and rarely weigh more than 100 pounds. Does average about 65 pounds. Antlers of mature bucks normally have three to four tines on each side that rise from a main, forward-curving beam .

**Breeding:** The Coues deer rut, or breeding period, is January. Does have an average of two fawns in August.



# Green power at Eagle Nest

## State park unveils new visitor center

Story and photos  
by Marti Niman

From its birth at the hands of an immigrant Danish engineer and two Iowa brothers to the graceful new lakeshore visitor center complex, Eagle Nest Lake is the stuff of dreams.

Before New Mexico became a state, Charles and Frank Springer stood on the banks of the Cimarron River and envisioned a way to capture the tumbling water for irrigation. Their vision was realized when Eagle Nest Dam was completed in 1919. The dam was built in a natural curve of rock so the mountains could absorb the pressure of 79,000 acre-feet of water.

Today, the newly-completed Eagle Nest Lake State Park Visitor Center offers a structure of another kind that taps forces of nature much more plentiful than water in New Mexico: sun and wind. Situated just north of the marina, the 3,770 square-foot complex contains administrative offices, interpretive exhibits, a classroom/multi-purpose room and a pavilion overlooking the lake. Natural day lighting, natural ventilation cooling, passive solar heating, a solar photovoltaic array and vertical wind turbine take advantage of the Moreno Valley's prevailing weather and provides a structure that produces as much energy as it uses – a “net zero energy” building.

“The first thing to do is to dial down the building's need for energy, beginning with insulation so when it comes time to heat, not much is needed,” said Rob Vadurro, park architect who designed the complex.

In this case, the building is insulated with straw -- leftover stems from cereal farming -- a waste product that is dried and compressed for straw-bale construction. Topped with a 12-inch thick SIP (Structural Insulating Panel) roof system and inset with triple-glazed windows that are attuned to direction, it takes full advantage of the sun's warmth in winter. To that mix was added photovoltaic panels and a vertical wind turbine that resembles a giant inverted egg-beater. Linked to the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, the two “green” energy systems funnel excess power back to the cooperative. During times of severe



**Eagle Nest Lake State Park's new 3,770 square-foot visitor center and surrounding pavilion will be an ideal spot to view the community's annual July 4 fireworks show on the lake.**

weather, the building may draw power from the grid system.

“Our models show that overall, the energy output and usage should balance,” Vadurro said. “This should save the park a substantial amount of operating money, just as budgets are getting tight.”

The 1.2-kilowatt vertical axis wind turbine is quieter and more bird-friendly than the more common horizontal axis turbines.

While the technical wizardry of green energy takes a high profile at Eagle Nest Lake, the complex offers a more subtle sense of place and grounding within the Moreno Valley. Vadurro designed the two buildings that comprise the visitor center complex to mimic the mountainous landscape that frames the backdrop.

“The roof peak is the skylight. A narrow slit distributes most of the light without losing much heat to provide light without using electricity,” he said. “I really wanted to take advantage of the views and engage with the landscape, so people would care about the park and the beauty of the



natural world in general.”

An expansive pavilion overlooks the lake with New Mexico's highest mountain, 13,161-foot Wheeler Peak, as a backdrop. It incorporates extensive outdoor spaces, including a covered outdoor classroom with a Rumford fireplace that doubles as a cozy refuge for bone-chilled ice fishermen. Rumford fireplaces are tall, shallow fireplaces originally designed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to radiate heat outward rather than up the chimney.

“There's a lot of talk these days about reducing or eliminating fossil fuel use and about sustainable building in general,” Vadurro said. I really wanted to see what that would look like and this building gets pretty close. It's lean and green and I hope people will use it for events, classes, weddings, reunions and meetings as well as fishing and boating.”

People were beginning to line up to use the center as construction crews were adding the final touches before the building opened to public use.

“There've been a lot of fingerprints on the windows,” Park Superintendent Marshall Garcia said. “There's a lot of curiosity. We closed the parking area because people were running over the rebar during construction, but they still can walk in.”

The grounds around the visitor center and parking area will be landscaped with native plants and irrigated using an automatic drip system supplemented by stormwater infiltration. Plants include aspen, cottonwood, red osier dogwood,



**State Parks Architect Rob Vadurro designed the Eagle Nest Lake State Park visitor center complex to be energy efficient while engaging with the Moreno Valley's spectacular landscape.**

box elder, ponderosa pine, blue spruce, mountain mahogany, fringed sage and wildflowers. Outlying areas will be revegetated with native grass seed.

“Landscaped islands in the parking lot and planting beds adjacent to the building are designed to collect stormwater,” said Judy Kowalski, landscape architect for State Parks. “This system has the dual benefit of providing supplemental irrigation water to the plants, while also managing the storm water runoff from impervious areas.”

A short trail around the visitor center provides access to picnic shelters and open space areas, where a demonstration garden is planned as part of an education program, Kowalski said. Space is available there for a future natural playground. Campers often walk through the park from adjoining RV parks and hike the Lakeview Trail into town. The trail is a mowed path to the Village of Eagle Nest and eventually could extend most of the way around the lake, offering multi-use trail opportunities.

Pat Walsh, instructional coordinator for the Northeast Region, already has offered programs on the pavilion. Using a spotting scope to look at birds on the lake and a portable telescope for people to gaze at the unfiltered night sky, she finds the pavilion an excellent outdoor education venue. During one nighttime program, a series of whirrs and zipper-like buzzes revealed the presence of bats in the sky. The sounds were emitted by a bat detector – a small portable device that converts the bats’ echolocation ultrasound signals to frequencies that are audible to humans.

While the pavilion offers an adult and child-friendly educational playground, having a classroom space in the visitor center will allow the park to provide school programs during the school year.

“We can start developing programs and be more involved with school systems with the way the facilities are set up,” Garcia said.

“The classroom is a benefit when the weather gets cold and wet,” Walsh said. “It expands the benefit of interpretation in the park.”

The visitor center houses new educational interpretive exhibits to orient visitors to the park and the Moreno Valley. A “Circle of Life” theme plays off the Enchanted Circle Scenic Byway that traverses the region, said Christy Tafoya, State Parks Education and Resource Manager.

“We’re trying to give visitors a sense of the context of the place – its location in the Moreno Valley,” Tafoya said. The exhibits were designed and fabricated by Exhibit Design Associates.

Panels placed outside offer an introduction to regional and park attractions, so visitors arriving

## Eagle Nest Lake facts

Eagle Nest Lake and about 2,500 acres of surrounding property was purchased by the state in 2002 for \$20 million with substantial funding through the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Game Protection Fund.

In 2004, the State Game Commission approved the transfer of 864 acres to the State Parks Division for development of Eagle Nest Lake State Park. Since then, State Parks has spent \$3.03 million developing the park and visitor center, which had its grand-opening ceremony Sept. 19.

For more information about the park, please call (575) 377-1594.



**Interpretive programs will be among activities offered at the the new visitor center complex at Eagle Nest Lake State Park, which gets most of its power from solar panels and a vertical wind turbine, below.**



after hours can get oriented to the area, and also interpret the windmill that helps power the visitor center. Inside, the building’s sustainability is exhibited using a “truth window” – a Plexiglas covering revealing the straw insulation through the stucco. Another interactive panel shows how energy is “banked” for this visitor center, through solar and wind power.

An interactive fish panel illustrates the lake’s fish species, while a mural and diorama portrays the dam and lake from the perspective of the dam located on the other side. An apparently incongruous 1940s-era diver garbed in a science-fiction suit à la Jules Verne greets visitors in one free-standing panel, while another panel illustrates a miner – both interpreting the diverse heritage of people in the region. A panel with a monitor interprets the nesting and feeding patterns of the osprey.

A second phase for the exhibit project will include a wildlife diorama, plant and bird interpretation, and a second history panel. The osprey panel will show real-time osprey activity and will connect the monitor to a camera inside the osprey nest on a platform outside. Outdoor interpretive panels are also planned.

“The community is a lot more interested in

the area now that it’s state park,” Garcia said. “Everybody asks us about what direction the park will take and they are not bashful about giving opinions.”

A draft management plan currently is in progress and will be available for public review and comment this fall, but visitors and local residents are not waiting for the officials to express their thoughts. Some want more trails; some want different things to do because not everyone fishes, Garcia said.

“The new campground gives the park a major new dimension,” Garcia said. “People have been asking for campsites ever since the park opened and now the public can enjoy the lake all day and stay with us overnight.”

Some visitors are clamoring for improved amenities such as electric and water hookups as well as a comfort station to replace the vault toilet currently in place. Park plans include adding seven sites in the campground to the State Park reservation system this spring.

“I think there will have to be another campground in the future,” Garcia said. “During this five-year cycle we’re not looking at expanding, but that could change with comments. A new campground would have to be farther south, between Six-mile and Cieneguilla.”

Some visitors arrived too late to camp at the new 19-site campground on the July 4 weekend because it quickly filled up by Friday evening. The campground was completed in late June and each site has a shelter, picnic table, fire grill and spectacular views of the lake and mountains, but vistas are just part of the experience.

“It was like a jungle movie out there,” said one camper, who arrived mid-week to assure a campsite for the July 4 weekend. “I heard lots of woos and chirps and howls all night long.”

Brown pelicans are among the wildlife attractions at the lake, settling on the water near the campground or at Six-mile and the north end of the lake.

“When I looked out on the lake at first I thought people were moving my buoys, but it was actually the pelicans I was seeing,” Garcia said.

*Marti Niman is the public information officer for New Mexico State Parks. She can be reached at (505) 827-1474 or marti.niman@state.nm.us.*



# Fabulous Fenton

## State Park celebrates 25th anniversary

By Marti Niman

A pervasive thrum and flutter pervades the air as all sorts of creatures fly, sing, hop, buzz, bumble, rattle, hover and flit in a midsummer afternoon dream. The wetlands at Fenton Lake State Park evoke a mythical age where the 21st century techno-world fades away. Tall grass and sunflowers tower above trails and hikers may find themselves eye-to-eye with hummingbirds and sphinx moths, monarchs and meadowlarks.

Rimmed with ponderosa pines and cliffs of volcanic tuff, Fenton Lake offers a sheltered retreat for wild creatures and urban refugees alike. Fenton Lake State Park observes its 25th anniversary this year.

“We’re going to offer more interpretive programs such as an elk discovery weekend, storytelling, geology programs, birding and local school programs,” Park Manager Paul Lisko said.

The park has its roots as a waterfowl resting and nesting area that also benefits beaver, muskrat, deer, elk and wild turkey. In 1940, the State Game Commission purchased 80 acres from homesteader Elijah McClean Fenton, Sr. for \$2,176 using federal Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration funds. The Department of Game and Fish built Fenton Dam in 1946 to create a lake with 35 surface acres for the benefit of wildlife, with a bonus as a recreational lake for fishing, paddling and electric-powered boats.

Some local residents had their own ideas about dam-building. Beavers have constructed six dams below Fenton Dam, creating even more wetlands in this already lush region. A walk along the Rio Cebolla is likely to offer views of some of these engineering marvels and possibly the furry engineers themselves as they zip swiftly through the water.

“Their activity has increased significantly in recent years,” Lisko said. “I’m real excited about it; it’s nice to have a space where they can spread out and they’ve helped create some additional wetland meadows.”

The park streams and meadows provide habitat for many species of birds, including western bluebirds, song sparrows, yellow-rumped warblers, western tanagers, lesser goldfinches, wood pewees, pine siskins, belted kingfishers,



Photos: Marti Niman

**Wetland areas around Fenton Lake and along the Rio Cebolla in the Jemez Mountains provide important habitat for wildlife.**



osprey, bald eagles and numerous hawks and ravens. One other beneficiary of the ambitious beavers’ dams is the meadow jumping mouse, a species state-listed as threatened. During the paving of N.M. 126 a few years ago, the athletic little mouse was the focus species of a request for the federal Department of Transportation to incorporate wetlands mitigation into the project.

“They were just going to build a berm and bisect the wetlands, which would interrupt the natural hydrologic flow,” said Mark Watson, habitat specialist for Department of Game and Fish Conservation Services Division. “Instead, they built a bridge across it and also developed another wetland area to compensate for several acres lost during construction.”

Energetic athletes of a human persuasion also are drawn to Fenton Lakes’ 7,900-foot elevation to test their aerobic staying power. The New Mexico Adventure Racing Club slated the paddling part of their triathlon at the lake, and Lisko plans to begin an “over the hill” mountain biking trek for those over 50 years old that circles 10 miles through Bailey Canyon to Fenton Lake. Archery is enjoying a revival in the park as it hosted a three-day competitive tournament in July sponsored by Northern Rio Grande Sportsmen’s Club of Espanola.

Fenton Lake State Park also provides a vivid vista into New Mexico’s geologic origins with its pockmarked cliffs formed of volcanic tuff deposits that date from 1.6 million years ago at the bottom and 1.2 million years ago at the top.

“They represent two caldera eruptions sitting inside one another, like nested calderas,” said Roberto Trevizo, interpretive ranger for State Parks’ Northwest Region. “We are really fortunate to have a state park inside the Valles Caldera complex. It’s the most studied caldera in the United States and a world-class geological laboratory.”

The Valles Caldera is one of 130 known super-volcano structures in the world, Trevizo said. It is a relatively small one at 14 miles in diameter, but big enough to see from space.

“Super-volcanoes result from extremely violent explosions, similar to Mount St. Helens but much more explosive,” he said. “They can affect the potential for mass extinctions and climate change. They’re the bad guys of volcanoes.”

The geology of Fenton Lake is part of an outdoor interpretive exhibit completed in August that incorporates seven interpretive panels. The panels will help visitors and school groups use Fenton as an outdoor classroom to describe the park’s geology, cultural and natural resources with a focus on beavers, fire ecology and the history of Fenton himself.

“The panels also will interpret railroads. There’s an old railroad bed at the end of the park that was used by the old Santa Fe Northwestern Railroad,” said Christy Tafoya, State Parks’ education and resources manager. “The foundations of Elijah Fenton’s house are visible as well. He was a Presbyterian minister missionary at Jemez Pueblo in 1892, surveying and homesteading in the Fenton area.”



The meadow jumping mouse is a unique riparian denizen with powerful hind legs and a tail that enables it to live in the canopy of grasses above ground level.



**Beavers and the meadow jumping mouse coexist in the wetlands surrounding Fenton Lake. Construction of a special bridge during a paving project helped protect the wetlands and the mouse, which is listed as threatened in New Mexico.**

Photos: Bill Pentler, above; Jim Stuart, right



# National association names Butte officer best in the West

Gov. Bill Richardson announced in June that Chris Bolen, marine enforcement officer at Elephant Butte Lake State Park, was named the 2009 Western Boating Officer of the Year by the western states affiliate of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators.

This is the first time a New Mexico officer has received the award. The award made Bolen one of three finalists for the association's 2009 National Boating Officer of the Year award. Gov. Richardson made the announcement and congratulated Ranger Bolen at the Richard Cooper Training Center at Elephant Butte Lake State Park.

"Chris Bolen is a great public servant and an example of how New Mexico is striving to have the best boating program and state park system in the nation," Gov. Richardson said.

"Officer Bolen is an excellent State Parks employee who has done so much to support 'Boat smart, boat safe' programs," State Parks Director Dave Simon said. "He also represents well the men and women of New Mexico State Parks who work so hard to provide recreation opportunities for the public."

Bolen was recognized for his discipline, courtesy and professionalism in boating education, law enforcement and community service. He helped rewrite training curriculum, revise policies for boating law enforcement and has coordinated numerous community safety programs.

Ranger Bolen has served as marine enforcement officer at Elephant Butte Lake State Park for nine years and also serves the community as a coach and volunteer for numerous service organizations.

Bolen formally received his award June 22 at the Western States Boating Administrators Association Conference in Boise, Idaho.

In 2006, Gov. Richardson signed the New Mexico Boating Safety Law, which requires all motorboat operators who were not 18 years old as of Jan. 1, 2007, to complete a safe boating education course and requires all children 12 years old and younger to wear a life jacket while on the deck of a moving vessel. The law won an award of recognition in September 2006 from the federal National Transportation Safety Board.



Photo: Marti Niman

**Governor Bill Richardson joined New Mexico State Parks Marine Enforcement Officer Chris Bolen and family, Helen, Zack and Forest, right, during a ceremony honoring Bolen as 2009 Western Boating Officer of the Year.**

# Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park gets facelift

## Chapel, grounds remain open during renovations

The visitor center at Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park in Angel Fire is closed to the public for an \$855,000 renovation and expansion project. All other facilities at the park will remain open during the construction project, including the grounds and chapel. Park staff will continue to provide guided tours and special events such as Veterans Day ceremonies in November.

"We regret having to close the visitor center temporarily," Park Manager Tom Turnbull said. "But next spring we are going to have a significantly upgraded facility that will mean dramatic improvements to the visitor experience."

This project is part of Phase II renovations to upgrade park facilities and educational exhibits to national standards. Phase I improvements to the chapel and grounds were completed in May 2008. Phase II improvements to the visitor center include reconfigured interior space to accommodate new interpretive exhibits, a new veterans' research room, a conference room, a curation and storage space for the memorial's artifacts, and a new gift shop.

The interpretive exhibits, originally installed in the 1980s, were showing signs of severe wear and were lacking major elements to fully relate the history of the Vietnam War. An interpretive master plan was developed for the park with the extensive input of veterans groups and other key stakeholders in the Memorial. The new exhibits will be museum-quality and will help the park achieve its goal of promoting remembrance, healing, honor and education.

Park staff offices will be improved and moved closer to the entrance and three new rooms and a garage space will be added. Other improvements



Photo: Marti Niman

**The visitor center at Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park in Angel Fire is temporarily closed during an \$855,000 renovation and expansion project.**

to the building include maintenance for the floors, leak repair and new plumbing fixtures. New windows and doors will be installed in the front entrance to reduce energy requirements for heating the facility in the winter.

During the construction period, which is expected to last until May 2010, the memorial's staff will be available by phone at either Eagle Nest Lake State Park, (575) 377-1594, or Cimarron Canyon State Park, (575) 377-6271. Staff will be on-site periodically at the memorial. Tours, special events and holiday celebrations will continue at the

memorial as usual. The David Westphall Veterans Foundation and gift shop will be housed in temporary facilities near the visitor center during the renovations.

A "grand re-opening" celebration is tentatively planned for Memorial Day 2010.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial was established in 1968 and became New Mexico's 33rd state park in 2005. The site is the only state park in the United States dedicated solely as a Vietnam Veterans Memorial.



# Rules of the road

... continued from Page 1

etiquette already practiced by "legitimate" OHV riders.

The new law was passed after an explosion in OHV sales flooded the nation's back roads and trails with ATVs and dirt bikes. According to one study, the number of OHV users nationwide climbed from 5 million in 1972 to 52 million in 2006. In New Mexico and other states that recently passed OHV laws, the main concerns were rider safety and environmental protection.

Before 2005, there had been little if any regulation on OHVs in the state. The new law calls for education, registration, resource protection and enforcement.

That doesn't mean the Department of Game and Fish is the only agency that will be in the field writing citations.

"From the very beginning, it was clear that the law would not be enforced by any one law enforcement agency," Alcon said. "In time, we will see it enforced by sheriff's departments, state police, BLM and Forest Service officers, as well as Game and Fish."

Dan Brooks, Chief of Law Enforcement for the Department, said while conservation officers will enforce the new laws, they also will concentrate on education.

"We will be out there encouraging OHV riders to use them safely, legally and with respect for others," Brooks said. "We want to help OHV riders recognize that their actions reflect on their activity as a legitimate recreation that provides great enjoyment to many people."

Fines for violations that include lack of registration or permits, using improper gear, or riding off-road range from \$50 to \$250 for a first offense to up to \$450 for subsequent offenses.

Mark Werkmeister, president of the New Mexico Off-Highway Vehicle Alliance, said he doesn't think the new law will have many negative impacts on OHV recreation in New Mexico. His group especially supports more educational opportunities and enforcement.

"The Department of Game and Fish has a solid background in enforcement and education -- much more than tourism," Werkmeister said. "We're hoping that experience, especially with youth education, takes root with this program."

## Rider safety

As numbers of OHVs dramatically increased nationwide, so did numbers of injuries and



Photo courtesy Desert Green Equipment

**Snowmobiles must be registered to operate legally in New Mexico.**



Photos: Dan Williams

**While off-highway vehicles provide exciting opportunities to enjoy New Mexico's back roads and trails, irresponsible use of the go-anywhere vehicles can seriously damage the landscape. Below, erosion caused by an illegal ATV trail left a scar in the Santa Fe National Forest.**

deaths. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the number of ATV-related injuries requiring emergency room treatment rose from 92,200 in 2000 to 150,900 in 2007, when 27 percent of those injuries were to youths younger than 16. In that same period, the number of ATV-related deaths rose from 451 to more than 800. New Mexico reported more than 86 ATV-related deaths from 1982 through 2007, including 24 children younger than 16.

To address safety concerns, the new law focuses mostly on young riders, requiring everyone younger than 18 to complete a certified safety course, wear approved helmets and eye protection, and never to carry a passenger when riding on public lands. The law prohibits any child younger than 6 from operating an ATV on public lands.

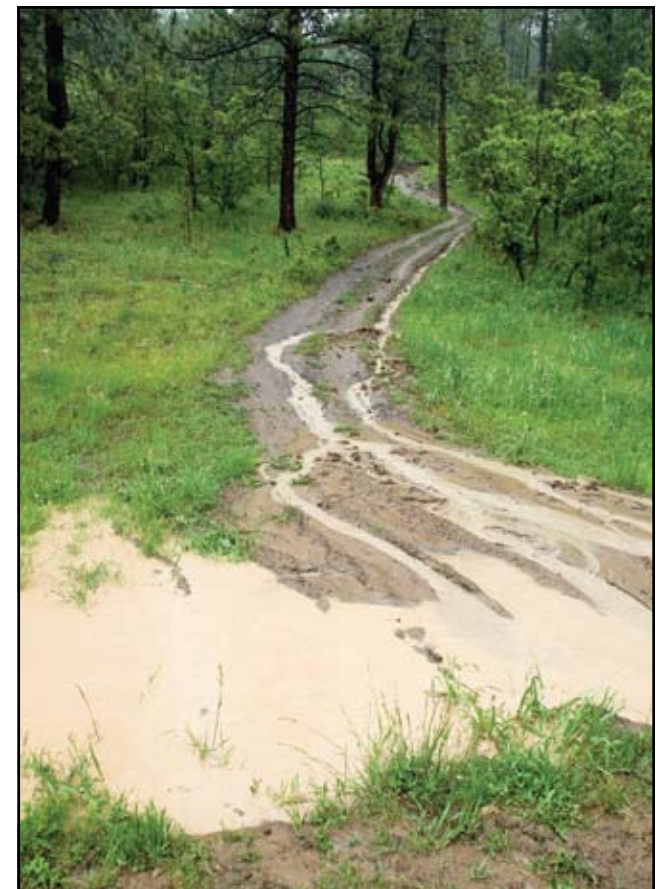
Alcon said while he supports strict safety requirements, the Department needs to provide more training opportunities so young riders can comply with the law. Currently, there are very few "hands-on" ATV courses available for youths, and no courses available in New Mexico for dirt bikes or snowmobiles. The Department plans to make more opportunities available in the future. For now, the agency accepts certified online training courses from other states and training organizations such as the ATV Safety Institute.

"Essentially, the law has made it illegal for our kids to ride unless they complete the training component -- which is not available," Alcon said. "Right now there is a bit of apprehension and fear from legitimate riders; we ride in fear that we might have to defend our actions at some point."

## Roads and trails

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of OHV use in New Mexico and across the West is where the vehicles are allowed on public lands. Most OHV groups oppose closing more roads and adding more designated trails in national forests and on Bureau of Land Management properties. Some environmental groups and hunting organizations support some road closures.

"What's happening is that with more and more OHV users, land that wasn't being used even



five years ago is being rapidly re-entered," VeneKlasen said. "We're seeing more old logging roads being used, more user-created roads ... and they're destroying our wildlife habitat." He suggested closing more than half available public back roads to allow the wildlife a chance to recover.

Other OHV riders disagree, and many vehemently oppose the U.S. Forest Service's ongoing plans to close or restrict access to thousands of miles of Forest Service roads nationwide.

In 2005, the Forest Service published a new rule requiring regional forests to designate systems of roads, trails and areas open to motor vehicle use. In New Mexico, the Santa Fe, Carson, Cibola and Gila national forests are in the process of designating legal routes and defining what types of vehicles and activities are allowed. Decisions are expected in 2010, following an exhaustive process of public meetings and comments.

Some of the Forest Service travel management proposals in New Mexico call for closures of as many as half the roads currently used in some areas. That hasn't set well with avid OHV riders.



“We have to feel threatened by them (management plans),” Werkmeister said. “Nationally, a lot of forests have taken this as an opportunity to restrict OHVs rather than manage OHVs, which was the original intent. I would say the bulk of our national forests are headed in that direction, and I would say the same is true in New Mexico.”

The U.S. Forest Service Southwestern Region Web site says the travel management plans are intended to balance recreational needs with resource protection as numbers of OHVs continue to increase. The agency is getting limited support from hunters, but very little support from other OHV riders.

“For hunters, the management plan is the best thing that has happened in a long time,” VeneKlasen said. “Reducing the number of roads will protect the big, contiguous chunks of country that wildlife needs. If we don’t do something to protect our resources now, we will be very ashamed of ourselves within the next five years.”

As a businessman and advocate for recreational OHV riders, Alcon has a different view of the management plans.

“We’re not threatened by restrictions on cross-country travel; legitimate users stay on the roads and trails,” Alcon said. “When we look at the management plans, what we see is that for us the absolute best-case scenario is the status quo. Every other option is going backward, leaving us from zero percent to 50 or 70 percent of what we have now.”

Alcon, VeneKlasen and Werkmeister said they couldn’t predict how many OHV riders will be using New Mexico lands five or 10 years from now. But they all agreed: The activity will continue to grow despite a drop in OHV sales the past few years.

“Who could have foreseen 14 years ago the impact ATVs would have on us?” Werkmeister said. “Logic tells me it will continue to grow. It’s not an expensive activity and New Mexico is a beautiful state with lots of opportunities. And it’s a good way to get people outdoors.”

VeneKlasen said he’ll continue to ride both of his ATVs, but in quite a different style than he did years ago. There will be no chainsaw strapped on the front, and he’ll spend most of his time walking.

“Sacrificing a little bit of convenience for better habitat, more wildlife and an improved outdoor experience is more than worth it,” he said. “I love riding my bike, but the resource is more important than my right to ride.”



Photo: Dan Brooks



Photo: Dan Brooks

## OHVs in New Mexico

The New Mexico Off-Highway Vehicle Act of 2005 and subsequent legislation in 2009 were designed to protect the safety of OHV users and ensure responsible and sensitive use of OHVs on public lands. Here is a summary of the new requirements:

### What is an OHV?

New Mexico defines an off-highway vehicle as an all-terrain vehicle (ATV), dirt bike, off-road vehicle (ORV, UTV, mule-type vehicle), or snowmobile.



Photo: Motorcycle Safety Foundation

### Registration and use permits:

- New Mexico residents must have their OHVs registered with the state Motor Vehicle Division to legally operate their vehicles on public lands. Registration is \$50 every two years.
- Nonresidents whose OHVs are not registered or have accepted use permits in their home state must obtain a use permit to legally operate on public lands in New Mexico. Permits cost \$48 for two years or \$18 for 90 days. They are available at [www.B4uRide.com](http://www.B4uRide.com), [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us), any Department of Game and Fish office, or by calling (505) 476-8000.

### Vehicles exempt from registration or permits:

- Motorcycles registered for use on public streets.
- Vehicles used strictly for agricultural use.
- Vehicles used strictly on private land.

### Safety requirements:

- Riders younger than age 6 may not operate an ATV on public land.
- Riders younger than age 18 must:
  - Complete a certified OHV safety course and obtain a safety permit.
  - Wear an approved, securely fastened helmet.
  - Never carry a passenger, even on OHVs designed for two persons.
  - Be visually supervised by an adult when operating an OHV unless they are age 13 and older with a valid motorcycle license or age 15 and older with a valid driver’s license.
- Approved safety courses include online and hands-on training by the ATV Safety

Institute, (800) 447-4700 or [www.atvsafety.org](http://www.atvsafety.org). Some training courses in other states are accepted in New Mexico, and many OHV dealers include free safety training with each OHV purchase. For more information about OHV training in New Mexico, please call (505) 476-8140.

### Prohibited uses:

It is illegal for any person to use an OHV to:

- Travel on paved roads or highways.
- Damage or destroy signs, windmills or other property.
- Operate any OHV in a way that damages the environment, plants, animals, or creates excessive noise.
- Harass, pursue or hunt wildlife or domestic animals.
- Operate any OHV where prohibited or on private land without permission.
- Negatively affect livestock and or agricultural practices.
- Drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

### Helpful OHV Web sites:

- New Mexico Off-Highway Vehicle Alliance: [www.nmohva.org](http://www.nmohva.org)
- New Mexico Motor Vehicle Division: [www.tax.state.nm.us/mvd](http://www.tax.state.nm.us/mvd)
- ATV Safety Institute: [www.atvsafety.org](http://www.atvsafety.org)
- Motorcycle Safety Foundation: [www.msf-usa.org](http://www.msf-usa.org)
- MSF Dirt Bike School: [www.dirtbikeschool.com](http://www.dirtbikeschool.com)
- National Off-Highway Vehicle conservation Council: [www.nohvcc.org](http://www.nohvcc.org)
- 4-H Youth ATV site: [www.atv-youth.org](http://www.atv-youth.org)
- Tread Lightly: [www.treadlightly.org](http://www.treadlightly.org)
- U.S. Forest Service Travel Management planning: [www.fs.fed.us/r3/projects/travel-mgt](http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/projects/travel-mgt)





## A season for young guns

### Bird hunting offers families fresh air, fun

Story by Kevin Holladay,  
Photos by Lance Cherry

If you're just learning to hunt and shoot, there's probably no better way to get your feet wet than waterfowl and pheasant hunting. It's loads of fun, usually close to home and gives you a chance to shoot, shoot, and shoot some more.

If you're young, it gets even better: Every year, there are special youth waterfowl and pheasant hunts scheduled all over the state.

There are three types of waterfowl and small-game hunts or seasons that are designed for youth. They are easy to apply for and many of them are not hard to get. For the Federal Youth Waterfowl Days, you don't even need to put in an application.

Here are some youth hunting opportunities in New Mexico. Please check the Rules and Information Booklet for hunt dates and other information. And remember, everyone age 17 and younger must have successfully completed a hunter education class before applying for or buying a hunting license in New Mexico.

#### Federal Youth Waterfowl Days

These special hunts in October on state wildlife areas are a great way to get started duck



hunting during one of the most beautiful times of the year. You have to be fully licensed but there is no application, federal Duck Stamp or special permit required. There are a few catches. You have to be younger than 16 years old, an adult has to be with you and only ducks or coots can be hunted. The Wildlife Areas open during these days are Bernardo, La Joya, Seven Rivers, Salt Lake, Charette Lake, McAllister Lake and Tucumcari.

#### Bernardo Wildlife Area

Bernardo has two versions of special youth hunts for snow geese: a youth/adult light goose hunt where kids and adults hunt together, and a youth-only light goose hunt where the adult helps out but doesn't hunt. Hunters have to have a valid license, their special hunting permit and Migratory Bird Permit number. If you are 16 years of age or older you will need a Duck Stamp.

To qualify for these youth-only or youth/adult light goose hunts you have to be younger than 18 on opening day of the hunt.

The youth duck hunts at Bernardo have the same requirements but are open to hunting other waterfowl besides geese. These hunts occur only on ponds north of U.S. 60. To get a blind during the September teal and federal Youth Waterfowl Days, just show up early and be the first to claim one of two blinds set up around the ponds.

Blinds are first-come, first served and once the blinds are claimed, no other hunters are allowed to enter the area.

#### Youth pheasant hunts

Seven Rivers and Casa Colorado Wildlife Management Areas each have a youth-only pheasant hunt Dec. 5 that is available by drawing. You have to be younger than 18 on opening day of the hunt.



#### Ducks in a row

Plan your hunt by learning details about hunting rules, season dates and other information. You can find it in the Small Game & Waterfowl Rules & Information Booklet, available where you buy your license, by visiting [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us) or by calling (505) 476-8000.

You have a better chance at Seven Rivers, where 40 permits are available compared to Casa Colorado, where there are 15 permits up for grabs. Youth hunters have to be with a non-hunting adult.

Seven Rivers is between Artesia and Carlsbad and is close to Brantley Lake State Park. Casa Colorado is a small area less than 500 acres along the Rio Grande 8 miles south of Belen.

#### Federal refuge youth hunts

A December youth light goose hunt at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge is available for hunters younger than 16. Bitter Lakes National Wildlife Refuge has a youth pheasant hunt Dec. 6. Contact the refuges for application information.

A couple conservation groups working to conserve wetland habitat and the sport of waterfowl hunting are Delta Waterfowl and Ducks Unlimited. Both have chapters in New Mexico and great Web sites. For fun waterfowl identification quizzes, videos, hunting tips and recipes, visit [www.deltawaterfowl.org](http://www.deltawaterfowl.org); or [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org). If you are 12 or younger, try [www.greenwing.org](http://www.greenwing.org).



#### Bird hunting's fun because:

- Shooting a real shotgun beats the heck out of any video game.
- Freezing your feet in a duck blind really is quality time with family and friends.
- Wild duck or goose tastes nothing like chicken.
- We could all use more sunrises in our lives -- especially those around lakes and rivers.
- There's nothing quite like the smells of marshes, gunpowder and wet dogs.
- The best discussions in the world take place outdoors.
- Missing all those shots builds character and humility.
- Making one great shot makes up for all the ones you missed.

