



Photo: Mark Renz

Bighorn success

Wicked weeds

Noxious, non-native weeds threaten New Mexico landscapes and wildlife.

Please see Page 8.

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



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Photo: Mark Birkhauser

New Mexico's desert bighorn population has grown from near extinction to more than 550 animals and is on the verge of being removed from the state threatened and endangered species list.

Desert herds meet criteria for removal from 'endangered' list

By Dan Williams

Eric Rominger gauges the success of New Mexico's desert bighorn restoration efforts by the number of skulls he carries out of the rugged mountains of the Chihuahuan Desert.

"From 1996 to 2001 I picked up maybe 75 bighorn skulls and carried them across the desert," said Rominger, a bighorn sheep biologist with the Department of Game and Fish. "I was filling my pickup bed with them. Now, I hardly ever pick up a skull."

Rominger and fellow bighorn biologist Elise Goldstein credit sheep transplants and aggressive mountain lion control for saving New Mexico's desert bighorns from extinction. Today, thanks to a 30-year, \$5 million restoration program, the statewide population has grown from a low of 69 to more than 550 animals. That's just enough to remove the bighorns from the state threatened and endangered species list.

The Department will recommend delisting desert bighorns under the state Wildlife Conservation Act at the July 8 meeting of the State Game Commission.



Photo: Dan Williams

Helicopters are used to capture and relocate desert bighorns from Red Rock Wildlife Area near Lordsburg.

... continued on Page 14



Boat inspections begin statewide to stop aquatic invasive species

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, State Parks Division, and several federal agencies are initiating Aquatic Invasive Species roadblock-style boat inspections during major holiday weekends at popular reservoirs during the 2010 boating season.

Aquatic Invasive Species include zebra and quagga mussels, which occur in water bodies in states adjacent to New Mexico. Inspectors will be looking for the small mussels, which can cause significant problems to water delivery systems, boat motors, irrigation pumps and native ecosystems. The costs of dealing with an infested water body can be significant.

“Expect to be inspected,” said Barbara Coulter, AIS Coordinator for the Department of Game and Fish. “If boaters make sure their boats and gear are clean and dry prior to launching, they will be doing their part to protect our most precious resource. So far we have not found any invasive mussels in our state’s reservoirs.”

Although inspections are performed regularly at lakes throughout the state, the roadblock-style inspections will add an additional level of scrutiny that could delay boaters anxious to hit the water.

“Inspectors are trained to inspect boat hulls, live wells, motor ports, and other places where AIS are known to hide,” said Dan Brooks, chief of Law Enforcement for Game and Fish. He said it is illegal to transport AIS into or within New Mexico, and the fines can be up to \$500.

Earlier this year a State Parks employee prevented a seismic oil-exploration barge from entering Navajo Lake when marine mussels were found onboard. During a subsequent inspection, the Department of Game and Fish and Parks found zebra mussels on equipment used in concert with the barge.

The barge motors and 35,000 feet of cables used for a seismic survey for natural gas were cleaned and decontaminated with high-pressure, high-temperature washes and treatment with a bleach solution.

This is the second consecutive year at Navajo Lake that contaminated vessels have come close to entering New Mexico’s waters. Last May, a houseboat previously moored in infested Lake Mojave in Nevada, was attempting to launch at the Sims Mesa marina at Navajo Lake when an observant marina operator stopped the launch.

The Department of Game and Fish is urging everyone who uses the state’s lakes and streams to recognize the



Photo: Doug McKim

Motor parts and other equipment associated with gas-exploration barges were ordered to be decontaminated before they could be used at Navajo Lake after a State Parks employee discovered non-native mussels attached to them.

importance of the 2009 Aquatic Invasive Species Control Act and help keep invasive species out of state waters. Although zebra and quagga mussels have not been found in New Mexico, the mussels are in all bordering states except Texas. Once the mussels contaminate open waters, they can’t be removed.

The Aquatic Invasive Species Control Act gives officers with the Department of Game and Fish and the State Parks Division authority to inspect and require decontamination of vessels, trailers or other equipment suspected of being contaminated with invasive species before entering state waters. The act requires that all boats, personal watercraft and equipment used in waters infested with invasive species be certified as decontaminated before entering New Mexico waters.

Western waters contaminated with zebra and quagga mussels include:

- Colorado: Lake Pueblo, Grand Lake, Jumbo Reservoir, lower Colorado River between Lake Mead and the Gulf of Mexico,

- Lake Granby, Shadow Mountain Reservoir, Tarryall Reservoir, Willow Creek Reservoir.
- Arizona: Lake Mead, Lake Havasu, Lake Mohave, Lake Pleasant, suspected but not confirmed in Lake Powell.
- Utah: Electric Lake, Red Fleet Reservoir.
- Nevada: Lake Mead, Lake Mohave.
- Oklahoma: Arkansas River, Verdigris River, Oologah Lake, Lynn Lane Reservoir, Kaw Lake, Sequoyia National Wildlife Refuge, Grand Lake O’ the Cherokees, Sooner Lake, Skiatook Lake, Middle Bird Creek, Fort Cobb Reservoir, Foss Reservoir.
- California: Lake Havasu, all southern inland waters in Orange, Riverside, San Diego, Imperial and San Bernardino counties.

Boaters can help prevent alien mussels from invading New Mexico by following these simple steps:

- Remove visible mud, plants, fish or other debris before transporting equipment.
- Eliminate all water from your boat and equipment before transporting it anywhere.
- Clean and dry everything that came in contact with water, including boats, trailers, live wells, bait buckets, equipment, clothing, waders, dogs, etc.
- Never release plants, fish or other animals into a body of water unless they came from that same body of water.

For more information about aquatic invasive species, please visit the Department of Game and Fish Web site, www.wildlife.state.nm.us, or these other Web sites: <http://100thmeridian.org/>, www.fws.gov/answest, www.protectyourwaters.net, or <http://invasivespecies.nbii.gov/index.html>.



STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!



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Officers impound 5 OHVs during enforcement operation

Five off-highway vehicles were impounded and several citations were issued to riders following a Department of Game and Fish plain-clothes enforcement operation at Gallinas Ice Pond near Las Vegas in May.

Department conservation officers were checking anglers May 16 when they observed OHVs illegally riding on a paved road. The OHVs were stopped by uniformed officers, who discovered violations of vehicle registration and other laws. Subsequent investigation indicated that one of the OHVs had been reported stolen.

Officers also observed a 5-year-old child riding an OHV without a helmet, which is illegal under the state's Off-Highway Vehicle Safety Act.

State Police officers assisting with the case impounded five OHVs pending further investigation.

The operation was one of several conducted by the Department of Game and Fish in its



Photo: Weston Burris

Riding on a paved road new Las Vegas led to the impoundment of five OHVs.

ongoing efforts to enforce the state's wildlife and off-highway vehicle laws. Officers involved in the May operation were Andrew Gray, Tyson Sanders, Kyle Jackson, Ty Jackson and Weston Burris.

For more information about OHV safety and laws, please visit www.B4uRide.com.

Los Alamos Middle School wins Archery in the Schools championship

Young archers from Los Alamos Middle School in Grants captured the 2010 New Mexico Archery in the Schools championship this spring, besting 15 other schools, including many high schools.

Khalid Monawar and Demetruis Gutierrez led the Los Alamos team, finishing first and second, respectively, in the boys division. Monawar scored 282 out of a possible 300. Gutierrez scored 281. In the girls division, Mariah Gonzales and Starr Spenser finished second and third for the winners with respective scores of 269 and 257. Kyra Laumbach of Springer Middle School claimed first place in the girls division with a score of 274.

The top two finishers in the boys and girls divisions received Genesis bows.

Albuquerque Institute for Math and Science, a charter high school, finished second in the team standings, followed by Raton Middle School, Roosevelt Middle School, Raton High School, Berrendo Middle School and Las Cruces High School.

Complete tournament results are available on the National Archery in the Schools Web site, www.nasptournaments.org.

Overall, 318 students competed in the tournament, conducted as a "virtual" tournament in which the actual competition was conducted at individual schools, and then scores were submitted to tournament coordinators.

Please leave wildlife babies alone

Early summer is the time of year when wildlife give birth to their young. It also is a time when people must remind themselves not to touch or approach young wildlife.

"That deer fawn, elk calf or baby bird may seem to be lost or abandoned, but it is not," says Darrel Weybright, big-game program coordinator for the Department of Game and Fish. "It is natural for young animals to be left alone so their mothers can feed, and to protect them from predators. If you find one, it's always best to just admire it from a distance and quietly move on."

Every year, the Department receives calls from people who find young wild animals and take them home or to an animal clinic believing they are helping. Actually, that is the worst thing they can do, Weybright said. Young wildlife rarely survives when removed from its natural habitat, and close encounters with humans and their pets can be fatal. Young animals can become stressed and not recover. Too much contact with human and pet scents also may prompt the mother to abandon her young, he said.

In New Mexico, early June is the peak time when deer and elk have their fawns and calves.



Department file photo

An elk calf hides in the grass while waiting for its mother to return.

Weybright said this year's good moisture will help young animals survive by providing plenty of foliage where they can hide. Deer fawns are born without scent, and their spotted coats are very effective camouflage. Often, fawns will hide motionless for hours before their mother returns from feeding, or after luring predators away from her young. Baby birds often fall from their nests or are pushed out by parents encouraging them to learn to fly. Birds on the ground usually learn to fly quickly. People can successfully return them to their nest if they do it quickly, but it usually is best just to leave the birds alone.

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.

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. 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, (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.

Albuquerque Wildlife Federation: An all-volunteer organization focused on New Mexico's wildlife and habitat resources. It offers monthly meetings with guest speakers, in-the-field habitat restoration projects and a monthly newsletter. (505) 281-2925, <http://abq.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) 892-1250. National website: www.rmef.org.

Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge: An organization of about 1,000 members supporting the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge and promoting appreciation and conservation of wildlife and habitat through environmental education and natural history experiences. In addition to other events, the group helps sponsor the annual Festival of the Cranes. (575) 878-2320, www.friendsofthebosque.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.

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.newmexicotu.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.

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, www.newmexicotrout.org.

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. Northern New Mexico Chapter: Brian Payne, b_payne10@msn.com.



Northwest



Ross Morgan

Wet winter means outdoor fun

By Ross Morgan

New Mexico's abundant moisture this past winter and spring has set the stage for some fantastic outdoor recreation in the northwestern part of the state. The ample snowpack on Mount Taylor near Grants was visible to Albuquerque-area residents in mid-May, something that hasn't been seen in 10 years or more.

The extra snow means anglers, hikers, bikers and others who enjoy the outdoors will be seeing lots of green this summer. The only question is where to go.

New Mexico has some great streams and lakes that are just waiting for visitors to come and test their angling and boating skills. Some popular spots can be reached by vehicle, while others may require more time and effort with a backpack and hiking boots.

Don't assume easily accessible waters will be less productive because of the crowds. Some of the best fishing spots in the state are only walking distance from the pavement. The San Juan River below Navajo Lake is a prime example. True to the river's world-class fishing reputation, the San Juan offers anglers a good chance of playing a trophy trout minutes after leaving their vehicle.

The Northwest part of the state is fortunate to offer a wide variety of fishing opportunities. An angler can catch anything from a bluegill to a native cutthroat trout, depending on their



Photo: Dan Williams

Easily accessible and regularly stocked with trout, Fenton Lake in the Jemez Mountains is an ideal spot for family fishing and camping.

destination and their desire. In fact, there are places where an angler might catch a rainbow trout, catfish, and even tie into a 40-inch tiger muskie and never leave the same spot.

Sound tempting? Head for Bluewater Lake near Grants, where trout and catfish are abundant, and the state's new fishing rule allows anglers to keep one tiger muskie 40 inches or longer.

If stream fishing is more your style, the Jemez Mountains offer a variety of fishing opportunities. If you prefer to drive to your fishing spots with minimal exertion, try the Jemez River, which is stocked regularly and has many access points along N.M. 4 from Jemez Springs all the way to La Cueva. If you are more adventurous and prefer hiking and camping, the San Pedro Parks

Wilderness is the spot for you. The park offers some great native Rio Grande cutthroat trout fishing in the Rio Puerco, Rio De Las Vacas, Rito Perchas and the Rito Anastacio.

If you just prefer to enjoy a couple of days in the tall Ponderosa pines, smelling the fresh air and relaxing, the Jemez Mountains are hard to beat. There are plenty of trails to hike, hills to climb and wildlife to watch. For maps and more information about the Jemez Mountains and the Santa Fe National Forest, visit www.fs.fed.us/r3/sfe.

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

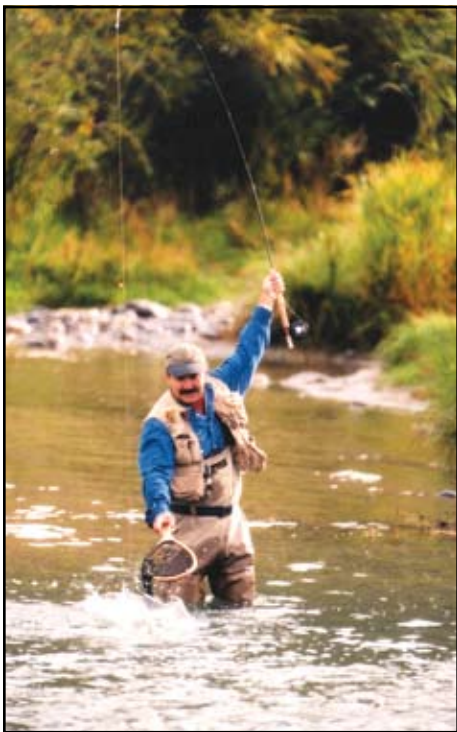


Photo: Dan Williams

Looking for trophy trout? Head for the San Juan River.

Don't miss the white bassin' action this summer

By Richard McDonald

If you're looking for some reel action this summer, don't pass up an opportunity to fish for white bass. They are abundant, fairly easy to catch and are among the best-tasting fish from New Mexico waters.

Also known as sand bass, silver bass, barfish or streakers, white bass are sight-feeding carnivores that eat insect larvae, crustaceans and other fish. During the spring, large schools of white bass (*Morone chrysops*) can be found spawning in fresh-water tributaries and lakes. They average in size from 10 to 16 inches long and usually weigh 1 to 2 pounds. The New Mexico record is 4 pounds, 13 ounces, caught at Bill Evans Lake in 1983. The world record, weighing in at 6 pounds, 13 ounces, was caught by a fly fisherman in Lake Orange Virginia.

White bass like to spawn in moving water during the day. They move in large schools and prefer clear water.

Casey Harthorn, Department of Game and Fish warmwater fisheries biologist, said the timing of the white bass spawn is determined by water temperature, light intensity and runoff. When water temperatures reach the low 60s, it's time to start checking for the whites. Peak fishing will last about three weeks.

When fishing for white bass, look for gulls or other shore birds flying near the surface of the water. White bass like to chase shad and other live bait, which may cause the bait fish to break the surface of the water. Large shore birds will follow this progression and may lead you to a large hungry school of white bass. On reservoirs, look for whites off rocky points, islands, sudden dropoffs or sand bars. In rivers, look for areas where current flow is disrupted, just above or below riffles.

So where can we find white bass in New Mexico?

Elephant Butte Lake offers some great white bass fishing. Look for large schools, especially in the early morning and afternoon hours. If you find a school, and you will know when you find one, don't creep in too close. Try "jump fishing." Get to the action area quickly, throttle back upwind, shut off the motor and drift down through the surfacing fish. Hit it just right and your arms will get tired of catching fish.

White bass can be very prolific in some of our rivers. One good area is the Rio Grande between Elephant Butte and Caballo lakes. Focus on areas of the river near King Canyon and Palomas.

Live bait such as minnows, along with artificial lures such as white Sassy Shad or white grubs seem to work best on the



Photo: Richard McDonald

Ed Sprague shows off a nice mess of white bass he caught this spring at Elephant Butte Lake.

Rio Grande. Kids love using bobbers and watching them disappear. Use a minnow with a bobber about three feet from the hook and let the current decide where it will go. Watch the kids go crazy when the bobber vanishes under the water.

Properly prepared, white bass can make for some great eating. I like to fillet several nice-size bass with an electric knife, and then cut the fillets into small 2-by-2 inch nuggets. Prepare some flour, corn meal, salt, lemon pepper and other seasonings in a small paper bag. Place the nuggets into the bag and shake vigorously for a minute or so. Place the nuggets into a preheated Fry Daddy and cook until the nuggets float to the

surface. Place the nuggets on a plate on top of a paper towel, drizzle with lemon juice, and enjoy. Your taste buds will be in heaven.

White bassin' can be fun for the entire family. Get out, enjoy the outdoors, and remember to take a kid fishing today.

Richard McDonald is a Department of Game and Fish conservation officer who works in southwestern New Mexico. His favorite white bass lures are white Rooster-Tail spinners, Blue Fox No. 2 spinners, white Sassy Shad lures, and white grubs. McDonald can be reached in Las Cruces at (575) 532-2100 or richard.mcdonald@state.nm.us.

Southwest



Richard McDonald



Skulls: tempting but illegal

By Clint Henson

Throughout my career, I have seen certain violations of the law that seem to be repeated more than others. Outside of the common fishing without a license citation, which usually is caused by a quick attempt to wet a hook while no one is looking, there are two violations that are more innocent in nature but can have serious consequences.

In the spring, when people emerge from their caves in search of sunshine and exercise, many will take a hike in the woods. Some people are searching for shed antlers, while others are just wandering, when what do they find but a beautiful deer or elk skull with big antlers still attached. Who can pass up a find like this? It will look great hanging on the barn or maybe over the fireplace with a little cleanup. Often, the finder picks up the head and takes it home with no idea they have just broken the law.

Big-game skulls with the horns or antlers attached remain property of the state until a person has documentation that they are possessed legally. The moment a head is picked up, it is possessed illegally. A citation can be written immediately and the skull will be seized. This differs from a shed antler, which is not property of the state and as long as you picked it up on property you are on legally, there is no violation.

So what do you do when you run across a skull with antlers? Well, let's first look at it from a warden's perspective:

When you have a skull with antlers on it, we can only assume that you killed it. It is illegal to possess unless you put your hunting tag on it. The best thing to do is leave it where you found it and contact your local game warden or the area Game and Fish office. Tell us that you found a skull with antlers attached and that you would like to purchase it.



Photo: Clint Henson

Unlike shed antlers, it is illegal in New Mexico to possess big-game skulls or antlers with skulls attached without proper documentation such as a hunting tag or a sales receipt from the Department of Game and Fish.

The officer may do one of several things, including meeting you at the skull so they can investigate it as a possible poaching case, or they may tell you to go ahead and pick it up and meet them with it. When I get such a call, I usually will investigate the area, and then take the head and make arrangements to sell the person a different head later. I think this keeps someone from shooting an animal and then "finding" it later.

Once the officer sells the head and you have a receipt, then it is legal and it can be sold or traded. Never buy a head that does not have legal documentation such as a hunting tag or a game-sold receipt. Just as if you are found driving a stolen car, you get arrested, even if you didn't know it was stolen. If you have questions, please contact a game warden. We would much rather answer questions before a violation occurs.

The second common violation I see is

improper tagging of harvested game. Here is what usually happens: After harvesting your first deer, you are so excited. You pose for a few quick photos then get to work field-dressing your game. The next thing you know, you have loaded it in your truck and are hurrying to get it to cold storage when you come upon a Game and Fish roadblock. Suddenly you realize that you totally forgot about the tag in your pocket. Your first deer soon will be taken away.

We understand you were excited, but again, let's look at this situation from the warden's perspective:

If your tag is not properly attached to your game and the day and month are not notched, we think that you plan on using that tag to take another animal. At that point, the law says that the officer "shall" seize the animal. We don't have a choice. We will seize your game and



your tag as evidence and your hunt will be over, with a court date pending.

So, what do you do? Make a habit of tagging your game before any photos are taken. Make it a reminder that you want your tag in the photo! You want proof that you are a responsible, ethical hunter. Here is my tip: Take along a sandwich bag. Cut out the day and month or your kill and place the notched tag in the sandwich bag, and then tape it to the antler. For a warden, it will be easy to check and the tag will not be torn by the tape or ruined by rain and snow.

Check the Big-game Rles and Information Booklet for specific rules if you have to make multiple trips to pack out your game, but please, notch the tag before you do anything else!

Game and Fish officers want you to have a successful hunt and we will do everything we can to help you, but you must do your part to understand and follow the law. Again, please call us if you have any questions. Good luck and hunt safe!

Clint Henson is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer and a conservation officer for the Northeast Area. He can be reached in Raton at (575) 445-2311 or clint.henson@state.nm.us.

Small waters, big fun in southeastern New Mexico

By Mark Madsen

Southeastern New Mexico is not known for its world famous fishing destinations, but there are plenty of opportunities to "wet a line" in small local lakes.

Most of these waters are in or near towns such as Fort Sumner, Clovis, Lovington, Hobbs and Dexter, and are included in the Department of Game and Fish "Big Cat" and winter trout stocking programs.

Fishing these small bodies of water is pretty simple. You don't need a high-dollar bass boat or fancy fishing tackle. Just about all angling at these waters is accomplished from the bank with a variety of fishing equipment ranging from spinning and casting to fly-fishing gear.

These small waters are best known for being stocked with channel catfish throughout the summer months as part of the Department's "Big Cat" or urban catfish program. The same waters are normally stocked with rainbow trout in the winter, when cooler temperatures will support them.

What many people don't realize is that some of these small waters offer angling opportunities beyond catfish and trout. Shawn Denny, Southeast Area fisheries biologist, said Chaparral Lake in Lovington has excellent populations of



Photo: Dan Williams

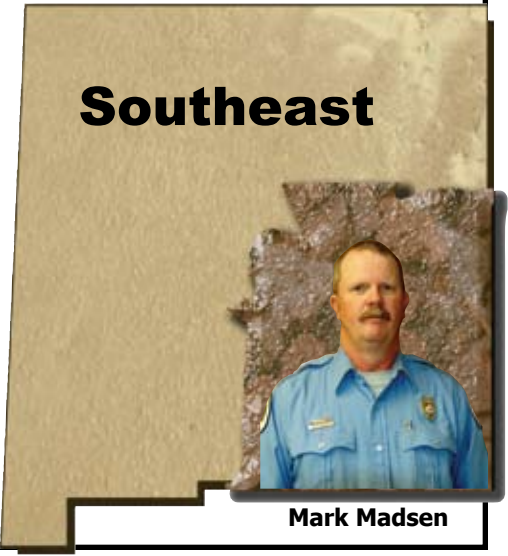
New Mexico's small urban lakes offer year-round family fishing fun.

green sunfish and bluegills that should hit small lures, spinners, or jigs. Worms or small grasshoppers, when available, also work.

Green Meadow Lake in Hobbs and Lake Van in Dexter hold catfish and some largemouth bass often overlooked by anglers. A common method at Lake Van is to cast soft-plastic, minnow-shaped lures around or under the docks. Don't expect to catch the new state record

largemouth in either lake, but fish up to 13 or 14 inches are fairly common.

Anglers looking for a change of pace might try Bosque Redondo south of Fort Sumner for some light-tackle fly-fishing action. Bosque Redondo has a healthy population of sunfish that can be caught using dry or wet flies when the water conditions permit. The water at Bosque Redondo is normally pretty clear, making for some good fly-fishing action.



Ultra-light spinning gear and casting bubbles with flies or spinners also work. The lake holds some largemouth bass for anglers who prefer casting with a crank- or spinner-bait.

So the next time you're looking for a little angling action, don't pass up the opportunities offered by these smaller waters. In many cases, you won't have to drive far. To make your trip even better, take a kid or two fishing and let them wear themselves out fishing with worms and bobbers for bluegills or sunfish.

Mark Madsen is the Department of Game and Fish public relations officer for the Southeast Area. He can be reached in Roswell at (575) 624-6135 or mark.madsen@state.nm.us.



Auctions raise big bucks for big game

Big-game conservation efforts in New Mexico picked up an extra \$472,500 at recent auctions for special licenses and permits, and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish will triple that amount with federal matching funds for habitat restoration and big-game enhancement projects statewide.

Well-heeled trophy hunters showed once again this year how much they are willing to pay for chances to go after record-book big-game in New Mexico, shelling out big bucks in auctions for opportunities to hunt big bucks, bulls and bighorns. The auctions are important fund-raising tools for the Department, which uses them to supplement money raised primarily through license sales.

A hunter from Georgia made this year’s highest bid of \$150,000 for a package of hunts -- deer, elk, pronghorn, oryx and ibex. The hunt package sold at the annual Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation National Convention and was one of two made available this year. The other package sold for \$130,000 to a hunter from Arizona at the Mule Deer Foundation Convention.

Other hunting opportunities sold at auctions and their prices included:

- Elk: \$42,500 to a hunter from Tennessee.
- Bighorn sheep: \$107,500 to a hunter from Illinois.
- Mule deer: \$42,500 to a hunter from Arizona.

The special licenses and permits allow hunters to harvest animals with any legal sporting arm during extended seasons on public land or on private land statewide with a landowner’s permission.

The Department of Game and Fish calls them “enhancement” licenses because the money raised in the auctions is used for big-game habitat enhancement, conservation and protection. Most of the money raised at auctions is matched 3-to-1 with Federal Wildlife Restoration Grant money, giving the

Department captures, relocates 277 pronghorn antelope

GLADSTONE -- The Department of Game and Fish captured 277 pronghorn antelope this spring on private land in northeastern New Mexico and relocated them to Mexico, Santa Ana Pueblo, a ranch near Grants, and Bureau of Land Management property near San Antonio Mountain.

The trapping operation allowed the Department to augment existing herds while removing animals that had been damaging alfalfa fields on the Smith Ranch between Springer and Clayton. The pronghorns sent to Mexico were part of an exchange in which New Mexico will receive desert bighorn sheep rams to expand the gene pool in the captive herd at Red Rock Wildlife Area.

Thirty-three of the captured pronghorns were released on Santa Ana Pueblo, 25 went to the Floyd Lee Ranch near Grants and 72 went to BLM land near San Antonio Mountain. Mexico received 147 pronghorns and they



Photo: Don MacCarter

A hunter from Texas paid \$107,000 at auction this year for a statewide, extended-season license to hunt bighorn sheep in New Mexico.

Department opportunities to restore and improve significant and meaningful areas of habitat statewide.

Enhancement funds currently are being used to restore deer habitat in Game Management Unit 2C in northwestern New Mexico and Chupadera Mesa in central New Mexico. Elk enhancement projects include 35,000 acres of habitat work on Slaughter Mesa in Unit 15 of the Gila National Forest, and habitat projects in the Polona and Luera mountains of Unit 16, and in Units 34 and 36 of the Sacramento Mountains of southern New Mexico. Proceeds from the bighorn enhancement funds are used to continue the Department’s efforts to improve habitat and enhance bighorn sheep

populations statewide. The enhancement license program also includes annual raffles through Department partnerships with sporting and conservation groups. Those raffles include statewide, extended-season licenses for elk by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, bighorn sheep by the Foundation for Wild Sheep, and deer by the Mule Deer Foundation. Raffle drawings were conducted in late June.

For more information about the Department’s enhancement permits and licenses, please visit www.wildlife.state.nm.us, or call the Department Wildlife Management Division, (505) 476-8038.



Department of Game and Fish conservation officers used special stretchers to carry captured pronghorns to waiting trailers for transport to their new homes. Each animal received a health check and ear tags.

Photo: Clint Henson

were transplanted in three areas: 68 to Valle Columbia, Coahuila, 55 to Rancho Pilares, Coahuila, and 24 to Rincon de la Madera, Nuevo Leon.

A helicopter was used to herd the antelope into a large funnel trap, a technique developed by the Department in the 1930s, when crews herded the animals with horses and automobiles. More than 60 people were involved in the capture March 8-10. The effort included erecting four miles of fencing, some of

which will remain on the ranch as a permanent barrier to keep pronghorns off the alfalfa fields. Department wildlife biologists and participating veterinarians said they were pleased with an extremely low mortality rate during the operation. Only eight pronghorns died as a result of injuries or stress from trapping and transit operations. Each animal received a health check, ear tags and some were fitted with radio collars before they were transported in trailers to their new homes.

Barker area recovers from wildfire

Elliott S. Barker, New Mexico’s first game warden, probably would approve of how the wildlife area bearing his name has fared since its dedication in 1966. Despite some hard times that included a raging wildfire, the area northwest of Cimarron still boasts some of the state’s finest wildlife habitat.

The State Game Commission bought the Barker area in December 1965 for \$250,000 with federal aid and Land and Water Conservation funds. It was purchased as big-game habitat, and supports healthy populations of deer, elk and turkeys.

People also are welcome at the Barker Wildlife Area, but don’t expect to find many. It is truly one of New Mexico’s out-of-the-way gems -- one way in, one way out. If you’re there, it’s because you planned to be -- or you’re lost.

“It’s a cool spot, recovering well from the fire of 2002,” said Eric Frey, northeast area fisheries biologist for the Department of Game and Fish. He has been monitoring the fish population of Middle Ponil Creek since the fire, and he occasionally hunts turkeys and fishes in the canyon. Rainbow/cutthroat hybrid trout inhabit the three miles of Ponil Creek that flow through the 5,416-acre area.

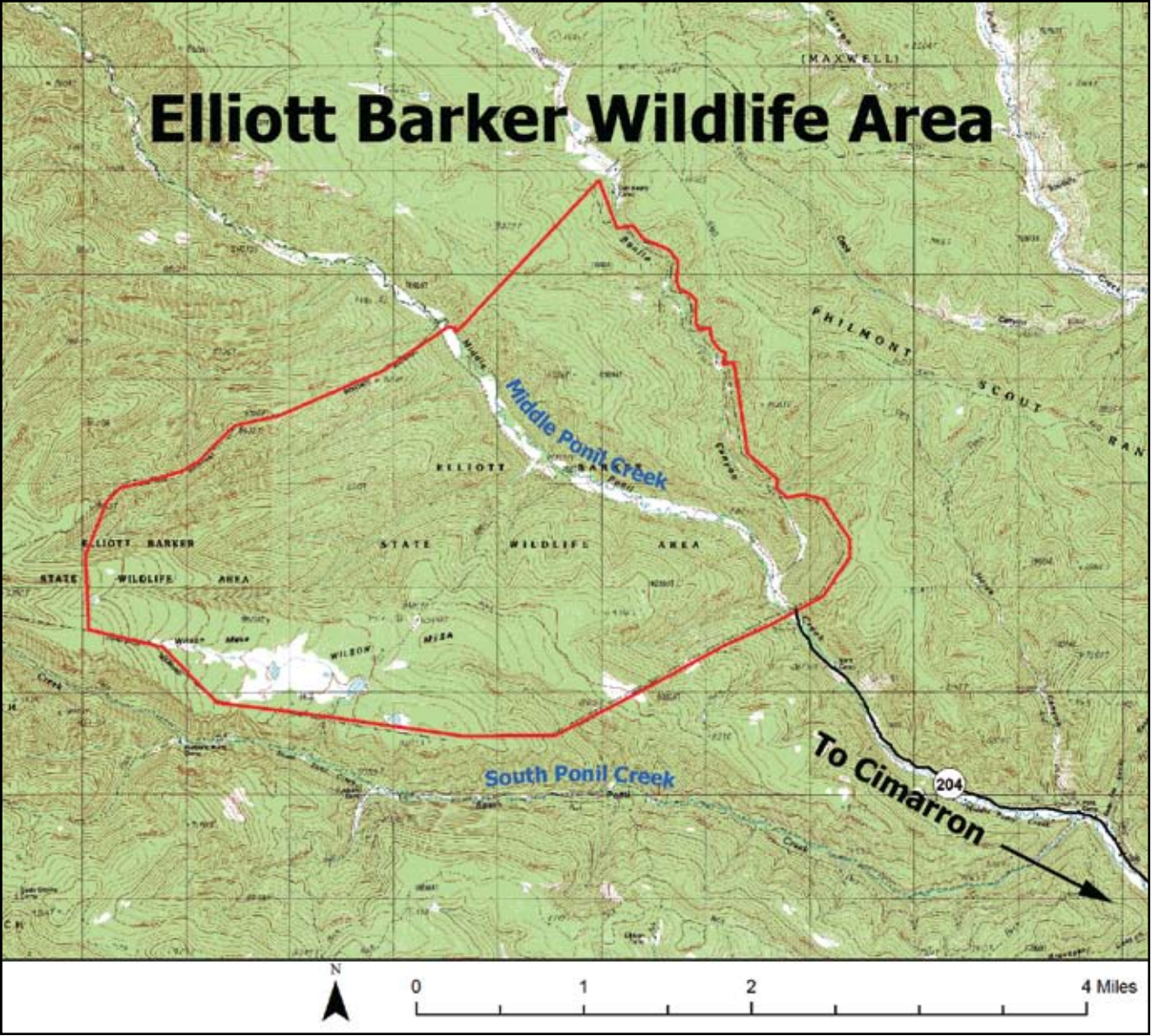
“One neat thing about the Barker is that your chances of seeing another fisherman are nearly zero,” Frey said.

Visitors to the Barker area also might see an occasional bear, bobcat or mountain lion.

Like some other state wildlife areas, the Barker is closed during critical times for wildlife, such as during the winter months, and during calving and fawning season for deer and elk. The Barker is closed to all public entry May 15 through July 31 and Dec. 15 through March 31 each year. That leaves plenty of time for recreation, however, including hunting, fishing, hiking and wildlife viewing.

Hunters are allowed to camp in the Barker area only during hunting seasons. Other visitors must restrict their stays to day-use.

The Barker Wildlife Area recently was opened to wildlife-associated recreation other than hunting or fishing through the Gaining Access Into Nature, or GAIN, program. Visitors ages 18 or older must have either a GAIN permit or a current hunting or fishing license, and a Habitat Management and Access Validation.



Permits, including the validation, cost \$19 for a full year, \$8 for five days. Permits are available from license vendors statewide, Department offices in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Roswell and Raton, or online at www.wildlife.state.nm.us.

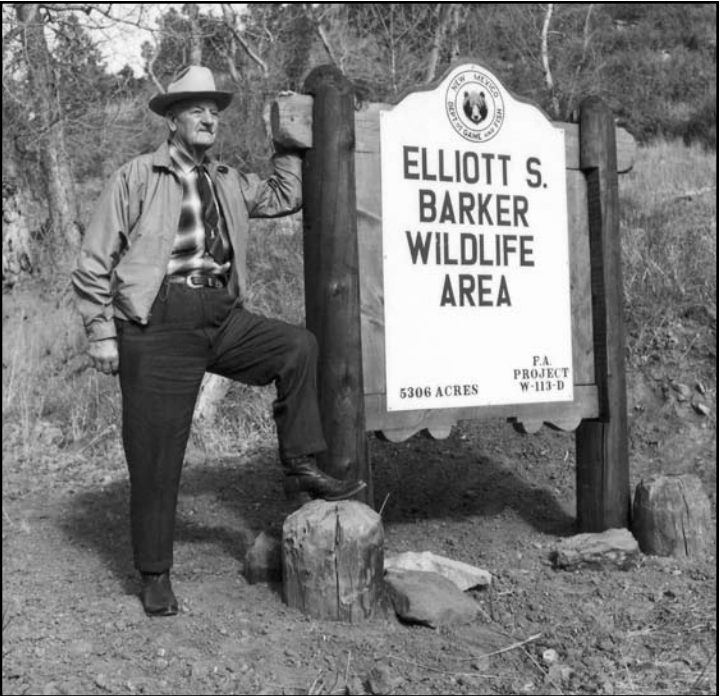
Middle Ponil Creek offers some decent trout fishing opportunities, although it has a ways to go before it fully recovers from the 2002 Middle Ponil Complex Fire that burned across 90,000 acres and wiped out the fish population. Frey said the creek now contains about 120 adult six-inch or larger trout per mile from the area’s eastern boundary with Philmont Scout Ranch to the fence line of the Valle Vidal Unit of the Carson National Forest to the northwest.

“The fire rejuvenated everything and the habitat is starting to look pretty good,” Frey

said. “We’re seeing thicker willows, a few cottonwoods and some beaver activity.” He said the Department recently received a \$100,000 federal grant to install silt-preventing culverts at road crossings and to remove invasive weeds.

Those efforts no doubt would please Barker, who devoted much of his career to protecting and restoring wildlife habitat. Barker worked for the U.S. Forest Service for 10 years as a ranger and a supervisor before he was named New Mexico’s first game warden in 1931. In his 22 years with the Department, Barker helped the state acquire 75,000 acres of land for recreation and wildlife refuges. He also established fish hatcheries and spurred efforts to reintroduce several species of wildlife into the state.

Barker died April 3, 1988, in Santa Fe. He was 103.



Elliott S. Barker, left, was named New Mexico’s first game warden in 1931 and held that position for 22 years. A 5,416-acre wildlife area in northern New Mexico now bears his name.

Photos: Clint Henson, right; Department file, left.



A wildfire of weeds

Non-native species threaten New Mexico wildlife, landscapes

By Jim Wanstall

Thanks to good snow accumulations in the high country and rainfall at lower elevations, last year’s fire season in New Mexico was not that bad. However, that same moisture actually fueled another wildfire -- a biological wildfire of noxious weeds.

What exactly are noxious weeds? According to New Mexico’s Noxious Weed Management Act, a noxious weed is “a plant species that is not indigenous to New Mexico, and that has been targeted . . . for management or control because of its negative impact on the economy or the environment.”

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture maintains a list of 45 plant species considered noxious weeds on its Web site, www.nmda.nmsu.edu. The plants on this list are not your ordinary weeds. They are non-native, extremely invasive, often poisonous, and once established, they are very difficult and costly to control.

Noxious weeds are often referred to as a biological wildfire. According to a 1996 study by the U.S. Department of Interior, noxious weeds are spreading at a rate of 2,300 acres a day on western federal lands.



Photo: Mark Renz

Leafy spurge

Like a wildfire, noxious weeds can severely alter native plant and animal communities. However, unlike wildfire damage, which over time heals through natural processes, the effects of noxious weed infestations are permanent. Without sustained human management and control, noxious weed infestations and their negative effects on native plant and animal communities persist and grow.

The way that noxious weeds spread is similar to wildfire behavior. Noxious weed populations start small, with only a few plants. If not controlled, these few plants spread quickly. Seeds and plant parts act as embers. They can be carried great distances by wind, water, animals, people and equipment. From these embers new populations are started. If left uncontrolled, new populations quickly spread and merge into other populations. Soon, entire landscapes are affected.

One example of a quickly spreading noxious weed is Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*), which is fairly common in New Mexico. Each plant can produce up to 1,200 seeds that remain viable in the soil for two to three years. Seeds, however, are not its primary means of reproduction. Russian knapweed’s creeping root system has been observed to grow six to eight feet deep in one season, and a single plant can expand radially up to 14 yards in two seasons.

Russian knapweed plants also emit an allelopathic substance into the soil, which



Photo: Jim Hirsch

The Department of Game and Fish used a helicopter to spray herbicide on acres of invasive salt cedar on the Ladd S. Gordon Waterfowl Area.

can prevent other plants from growing. If left uncontrolled, over the course of several growing seasons Russian knapweed can form dense stands, eliminating any competing native vegetation.

Major ecological impacts

Noxious weed infestations have major impacts on the ecological conditions that support New Mexico’s wildlife. They displace native plants, reduce biodiversity, alter ecological processes, decrease habitat, reduce recreational value and increase soil erosion and stream sedimentation.

Due to wide variations in elevation, topography, and latitude, New Mexico has a diverse array of ecosystems and habitat types that supports a corresponding diversity in fish and wildlife species. That biological diversity is reduced when noxious weed species displace native vegetation.

Noxious weeds reduce wildlife forage, alter thermal and escape cover, change water flow and availability, and may reduce territorial space necessary for wildlife survival. Some examples:

- Areas dominated by leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) are used three times less by deer, compared with similar uninfested areas.
- On native bunchgrass sites in Montana, dense spotted knapweed (*Centaurea biebersteinii*) populations reduce available winter forage for elk by 50 to 90 percent. Elk used the sites almost four times more after dense spotted knapweed infestations were controlled.
- On wetlands, invasions of purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and salt cedar (*Tamarix*) degrade habitat for furbearing animals and waterfowl.



Photo: Mark Renz

Spotted knapweed



Scott Draney, Northeast Area habitat specialist with the Department of Game and Fish, sprays herbicide on leafy spurge, a noxious weed threatening wildlife habatat in the Elliott S. Barker Wildlife Area.

Photo: Jim Hirsch





Diverse plant communities with a variety of grasses, shrubs and forbs, above, provide good habitat for mule deer and other wildlife. Noxious weeds such as Russian knapweed, right, can form dense stands and eliminate native vegetation if left uncontrolled.

Photos: Jim Wanstall, above, Mark Renz, right and inset.



- In the intermountain west, medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) and cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*) invasions have increased the frequency of fires, and reduced native shrub communities important for winter wildlife habitat.

The good news is that many noxious weeds are still at manageable levels in New Mexico. There are areas that are severely infested with some species, but many noxious weeds are in isolated locations that can be controlled.

Know your weeds

The first step in controlling the weeds is to identify the plants. New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service has a plant identification Web site, <http://weeds.nmsu.edu/weedid.php>, to help with that. There are more than 400 species of native and non-native plants on the site. Users enter known information about a plant, and a series of thumbnail pictures of plants fitting those criteria appear. Pictures can be used to quickly narrow the search.

A pocket-sized noxious weed identification booklet, “Troublesome Weeds of New Mexico,” also is available through local county extension offices, or soil and water conservation district offices. The New Mexico Department of Agriculture also is developing a statewide noxious weed mapping GIS database. The site will house noxious weed mapping data from across the state. The site should be available online this summer. Check the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Web site, <http://nmdaweb.nmsu.edu>, for details.

The best way to manage noxious weeds is to

prevent them from getting started. Containing and controlling existing noxious weed infestations is the best way to prevent new infestations.

Noxious weeds can be spread through a variety of outdoor recreational activities, including hiking, camping, fishing, hunting and boating. A Montana State University study showed that a vehicle driven several feet through a spotted

knapweed infestation picked up about 2,000 seeds. Ten percent of the weed seeds remained on the vehicle when it was 10 miles from the infestation. Cleaning clothing and equipment that has plant seeds attached, avoiding driving through existing noxious weed populations, and cleaning mud and other debris from off road vehicles goes a long way to help prevent the spread of noxious weeds.

Cooperative Weed Management Areas

In an effort to coordinate noxious weed control efforts at the local level, 17 Cooperative Weed Management Areas have been formed throughout the state. The areas continue to multiply as local agencies, landowners and federal land managers struggle to address the threat of noxious weeds. Cooperative Weed Management Areas are voluntary organizations that work to integrate all of the noxious weed management resources within their boundaries, across jurisdictional lines, in order to identify and control noxious weeds.

The weed management organizations are resources to obtain technical assistance in identifying and controlling noxious weeds on the local level. They frequently offer workshops and field trips designed to help residents identify, monitor and control noxious weeds. To find out if there is a Cooperative Weed Management Area group in your area, please visit www.nmda.nmsu.edu.

Over the last 10 years, awareness regarding noxious weeds has increased dramatically in New Mexico. Landowners, federal, state and local government agencies and private citizens have done a great deal to develop and implement noxious weed control efforts statewide.

Sportsmen also have the potential to be great champions for noxious weed management. Good habitat is the key to successful wildlife and fisheries management, and noxious weeds are a serious threat to that habitat. If you are a member of a sportsmen’s group and would like to have your organization learn more about the noxious weed issue in our state, please contact the New Mexico Department of Agriculture at (505) 646-2642.

Jim Wanstall is the state noxious weed coordinator for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture. He can be reached at (505) 269-7761 or jwanstall@nmda.nmsu.edu.



Photo: Dan Williams

Department of Game and Fish crews cleared out salt cedar and planted native cottonwoods and willows along La Plata River on Jackson Lake Wildlife Area near Farmington.



Put your wildlife questions to a BISON

By Chuck Hayes

It's normally not a good idea to cozy up to a bison. If you've ever watched an American bison (which is commonly, although not scientifically, referred to as "buffalo") destroy a live tree with its horns during a rutting display, or stare DOWN at you sitting in your car as it refuses to move off of the road, you'll understand the cautions associated with bison. Although I've personally experienced these types of encounters with wild American bison, I still recommend that wildlife enthusiasts in New Mexico become personally familiar with BISON in another form: the Biota Information System of New Mexico (www.bison-m.org).

The Biota Information System of New Mexico (often called BISON-M or BISON for short) may not seem as formidable as a stocky four-legged beast, but it can be a powerful tool in providing information to all types of wildlife enthusiasts in New Mexico. BISON-M can answer a wide variety of questions regarding New Mexico wildlife, such as:

- What species of fish could I find in the San Francisco River of southwest New Mexico?
- How can I help a student with an assigned report on the endangered Noel's amphipod,



Photo: Jim Stuart

The long-tailed weasel is among hundreds of wildlife species images within BISON-M that assist with identification and learning about wildlife species of New Mexico.

- when I don't even know what an amphipod looks like?
- What wildlife species of conservation interest might be affected by a timber management project to be conducted near Chama in the fall?

A database may not sound like the most exciting way to learn about wildlife, but you might not even recognize BISON-M as a database. BISON-M's output is largely in plain-English text, and

includes many photographs and interactive habitat maps. You won't find a long string of numbers that you have to decipher in order to make sense of BISON-M.

The database part of BISON-M is searchable based on about 30 characteristics of the wildlife you're interested in -- what animals occur within a particular county, what their protected status is, or even what land or habitat management practices may affect wildlife species present at the project site. Or, if you've got wildlife questions that relate to one species in particular, you can simply type in that name and get a whole booklet full of information regarding the biology and management for the wildlife of interest.

BISON-M is maintained as a public domain resource that is available to users without cost or copyright restrictions for the database. So if you haven't used BISON-M in a while (or ever before), now might be good time to have your face-to-face encounter with a BISON -- without any fear of injury!

Chuck Hayes is the Department of Game and Fish BISON-M/Share with Wildlife coordinator. He can be reached at (505) 476-8111 or chuck.hayes@state.nm.us.

Hunter education strives to meet growing demand

Spring 2010 was especially busy for New Mexico's hunter education instructors, who set new records for numbers of classes and participants.

The Department of Game and Fish Hunter Education Program and its volunteer instructors conducted 73 classes and enrolled 1,679 students in March alone. Both were one-month records for the program. Classes were offered in large cities such as Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Cruces and Roswell as well as small communities such as Tularosa, Bayard and Jemez Springs.

"Because the big-game license application deadline is in early April and the law requires anyone under the age of 18 to have completed a hunter education course before applying for any hunt, March has become our busy month," said Mark Birkhauser, coordinator for the Hunter Education Program. "Our volunteer instructors know this, and they do a great job offering as many classes as possible before the application deadline."

Hunter Education classes are offered throughout the year. For a complete listing of classes being offered statewide, please visit the Department Web site, www.wildlife.state.nm.us, and look under the education tab for Hunter Education. Classes are continuously being added, so check back regularly to find a class in your community.

Hunter education classes became mandatory in 1976 for all hunters younger than age 18. Since then, the Department and volunteer instructors have conducted 9,827 classes and trained 174,500 students. The classes have contributed to dramatic declines in firearms-related accidents and fatalities.

"It's amazing how these volunteer instructors give of their time to ensure the sport of hunting not only remains safe, but also ethical," Birkhauser said.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer hunter education instructor, please contact the Hunter Education Program at (505) 222-4731.



Support New Mexico fishing with new specialty license plate

New Mexicans now have one more way to show their support -- and their enthusiasm -- for a family activity that puts more than \$400 million into the state's economy every year.

The new "Fish New Mexico" specialty license plate, featuring a jumping bass on the new turquoise centennial plate, is available at Motor Vehicle Division offices statewide and on the MVD Web site. Motorists can purchase a specialty plate for a one-time fee of \$25 and a \$10 annual fee in addition to regular registration fees. Check the Department Web site, www.wildlife.state.nm.us, for details.

Funds raised by the plates will contribute to the Bass Habitat Management Program of the Department of Game and Fish Game Protection Fund.

A bill passed by the 2009 state Legislature authorized the Motor Vehicle Division to issue the special plate for any private motor vehicle except a motorcycle or off-highway vehicle. The bill was promoted by the New Mexico B.A.S.S. Federation, which joined the Department of Game and Fish to offer a contest with prizes for the logo chosen for the plate.

Gregory Lucero's design of a largemouth bass



jumping for a lure with a New Mexico background of blue sky, white clouds and a Zia-symbol sun was selected as the grand-prize winner in the logo contest. Lucero, of Santa Fe, was among dozens of entries from around the state and the country. He will receive \$500 in addition to having his design on the specialty plate.

Dominic Reyna, 14, of Clovis, and David Walrod, 13, of Clovis, were winners in the youth division for artists ages 17 and younger. They received \$50 prizes. Taylor Mirabal, 10, of Grants, received an honorable mention.

The New Mexico B.A.S.S. Federation Nation and the Department of Game and Fish each paid half the prize money.

There are 248,000 anglers in New Mexico and 84,000 anglers who visit the state each year, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-associated Recreation. Those anglers spend more than \$400 million a year on equipment and trip-related expenses. They also purchase licenses and stamps that support fish management and production, law enforcement and habitat.





Artists find inspiration in state parks

By Marti Niman

What would lead an artist to leave a perfectly ordered studio and schlep tubes of paint, canvas, turpentine and brushes into the wild, trying to lay paint on canvas in the face of blustery winds, whining insects, glaring sun and constantly shifting shadow and light?

"There's something about being in the outdoors that is exhilarating – it feeds my soul," said Lee McVey, pastelists and member of Plein Air Painters of New Mexico (PAPNM).

The Plein Air Painters and New Mexico State Parks recently launched a partnership for Arts in the Parks, loosely modeled after the Arts for the Parks program of the National Park Service and drawing on the long American tradition of plein air painting as a catalyst for the conservation of wild places.

Plein air (French for "open air") evolved in the early 19th century as a result of the invention and manufacture of pre-mixed paint colors and portable box easels, or "pochades," that facilitated work in the field. Today it conjures a not-altogether inaccurate image of a wild-haired, beret-sporting artiste set up in a field of wildflowers, madly dabbing paint and squinting down a brush handle – think Santa Fe's own Tommy Maccione or the Taos School of Artists in the 1930s.

"Plein air painters have a great appreciation for nature," PAPNM member Diana Stauffer said. "There is something really pleasurable about painting outdoors; it's both physically demanding and intellectually stimulating."

Stauffer is the organization's Arts in the Parks coordinator, planning monthly trips to different state parks throughout the summer for members to paint and interact with visitors about their work and the plein air tradition. Although the artists have painted in state parks on occasion, this year marks the first formally-recognized partnership between New Mexico State Parks and artists.

The first official group paint-out coincided with Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park's International Wetlands Month celebration in early May. Typical of the Chihuahuan Desert in springtime, howling windstorms greeted the artists with flying dust and threatened to invert their shade umbrellas, dump wet canvases into the sand or fling pastels into the Picacho Drain. Undaunted, the artists remained unflappable in the face of such apparent hostility from Mother Nature.

"It's fun to go to an exhibit and see all these little black spots in a painting," said member Gwen Wileman. "You wonder 'how did they get these?' until you look closer and realize those are bugs stuck in the paint."

Aside from the environmental challenges, painting in the open air requires rapid composition and brushwork to capture the image before the fleeting light alters the scene completely. Artists often use their paintings from the field as studies for larger or more complex finished pieces worked out in a studio environment.

"This is nice if it winds up being a study," said painter Punk Cooper. "I might take it home and finish it on canvas, depending how well I like it."

Cooper, a rancher from Cloudcroft, took up painting a few years ago after working for a number of years as a bronze sculptor of western art and wildlife. "Plein air painting is relaxing to me; it's sanity," he said.



Photos: Marti Niman

The Plein Air (Open Air) Painters of New Mexico are planning trips to different state parks this summer, where they will share their artwork and creativity with park visitors as part of the Art in the Parks program. Above, pastelist Lee McVey captures the scenery at Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park. Below, Punk Cooper works on his painting at the park.



The plein air tradition in North America helped shape the public imagination about wild places and ultimately played a key role in conserving some of the truly spectacular regions of the country for generations to come.

The Hudson River School, headed by Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, generally is considered the beginning of American landscape painting. Artists accompanied many of the survey expeditions during the 19th century and their sketches, watercolors and lithographs were exhibited to audiences in the East. Thomas Moran's paintings of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone helped influence Congress to create the world's first national park. Albert Bierstadt and Maynard Dixon painted vivid and compelling images that helped to set aside Yosemite and Zion as national parks.

"There are special places in the West that would not be in the public domain if it were not for artists," Stauffer said. "In the 19th century, there wasn't an appreciation of views for the sake of views; the land was valued strictly for its use as farming or resources. Artists saw something spectacular and captured it."

It is this traditional alliance of arts and conservation that informs the newly minted partnership between State Parks and the Plein Air Painters of New Mexico. Paintings often drive viewers to see a place themselves and a visit to a park with painters in action adds a certain romance to a scenic vista.

"We expect people to watch, of course, and probably ask questions," Stauffer said. "Many of our artists are flattered by that as long as it doesn't interrupt the creative process too much. Also, it's not unheard of for viewers to want to buy a canvas right off the easel!"

People will have an opportunity to buy artwork at the fall Arts in the Parks exhibit, scheduled from Nov. 10 through Dec. 18 at the New Mexico Art League, 3407 Juan Tabo Blvd. NE, in Albuquerque. The League's usual portion of the proceeds from exhibit sales will be contributed to the Foundation for New Mexico State Parks, a nonprofit organization that supports State Parks programs.

"The New Mexico Art League is excited to host the year-end show of the Plein Air Painters of New Mexico, especially because it will support Arts in the Parks and the special places in the New Mexico landscape preserved and managed through the New Mexico State Parks," League President Charlie Carroll said. "We look forward to the show and painting in the parks for years to come."

Scheduled paint-outs are June 26 -27 at Sugarite Canyon State Park, mid-July at Fenton Lake State Park, mid-August at Eagle Nest/Cimarron Canyon State Parks, mid-September at Villanueva State Park, and mid-October at Hyde Memorial State Park.

For more information and an updated schedule of paint-outs, please visit pleinairpaintersnm.org, newmexicoartleague.org, or www.nmparks.com.





Festival celebrates river ecosystem

Participants learn about Rio Grande migratory corridor

Story and photos
by Marti Niman

The tiny yellow bird seems hopelessly tangled as its feet are carefully, patiently extracted from clumps of netting. There is no question about cutting the expensive net to free the Wilson's warbler, captured near the banks of the Rio Grande by wildlife biologists from San Andres National Wildlife Refuge.

"I've never failed to get a bird free of a net," said Mara Weisenberger, refuge wildlife biologist, as the bird flit suddenly from her grasp in a spark of sunlight. Weisenberger was showing a small group of rapt visitors the fine art of mist netting and bird banding.

The early morning mist net demonstration was part of Leasburg Dam's inaugural River of Birds festival in early May, a celebration of all things avian and the Rio Grande – the sometimes forgotten lifeblood of the Southwest desert.



"The River of Birds festival highlights the importance of the Rio Grande as a significant presence close to our backyard," said Beth Bardwell, director of Freshwater Conservation of Audubon New Mexico, which partners with New Mexico State Parks in several conservation efforts.

"Our land, water, agriculture, wildlife and local economies are all tied to the health of the Rio Grande."

The new festival offers a means to raise awareness about the river ecosystem and to cement the already existing partnership between State Parks and Audubon New Mexico, as well as other nongovernmental organizations.

"State Parks has been looking for ways to strengthen its partnership with Audubon and, at same time, looking at newly acquired properties along lower Rio Grande corridor and their importance as migratory corridors," said Steve Cary, natural resources planner for State Parks. "There has been a dialog between the two organizations for some time and the festival will elevate that to higher level."

Bird walks, mist netting, a bat sonar program and



Mara Weisenberger, above, and Joan Day-Martin, below, shared their knowledge of mist netting and bird banding at the River of Birds festival at Leasburg Dam State Park.

butterfly walk brought visitors closer to the winged creatures that use the flyway much like people use Interstate highways, while a program on the Camino Real introduced the parallel human travel corridor.

"Birds use the river corridor as their highway to get to their nesting grounds," Bardwell said. "Many of our favorite songbirds, swallows, flycatchers and orioles are coming from Mexico and further south via the river corridor."

The Camino Real de Adentro, designated a National Historic Trail in 2000, integrated human cultural history with that of the avian persuasion. The trail offered a timeless route of trade and cultural exchange, influencing the character and settlement of the greater Southwest. It brought European colonists to "New Spain" some 22 years before Pilgrims on the Mayflower saw landfall at Plymouth Rock.

"I have an interest in bringing the cultural component to the festival as well as a focus on birds," Bardwell said. "Capturing the cultural history and use of the river corridor may be unique and we want to make this as much a bilingual festival as possible – for example, using Spanish names for birds."

The language of birds – of golondrinas and pajaros cantors – shifts bird watching to bird listening, identifying birds by ear rather than sight. Rob Yaksich, instructional coordinator for State Parks, helped participants track birds by signature songs to hone in on an individual bird. Green-tailed towhees, violet green and tree swallows were highlights of the day. An osprey



flying over Leasburg Dam upstaged most other species except for one pyrrhuloxia perched in a mesquite, singing and singing and singing.

"I didn't see as much bird diversity as I was hoping to, given the habitat," Yaksich said. "The windy weather that day was a real bugaboo, but Leasburg has the perfect blend of bosque and desert to bring in a great diversity of birds."

That perfect blend is expected to get better as Leasburg Dam State Park works toward habitat restoration and renovation with salt cedar removal, cottonwood and willow pole plantings.

"Eventually we're going to have a mature native bosque like the one at Percha Dam State Park, where there are up to 100 more species of birds because of the intact native habitat," Park Manager Evaristo Giron said. "I wanted the bird festival to happen; that's the direction we want to head and we had some of New Mexico's finest as presenters."

One of the "finest" is Yaksich, who peppers his bird walks with anecdotes that make the birding experience more expansive than simply attaching name – Spanish, English or scientific – to bird.

... continued on Page 13

Birders from across the country are drawn to Percha Dam, Leasburg Dam and Mesilla Bosque state parks in southern New Mexico, where migrating birds follow the Rio Grande corridor to and from their nesting grounds.



Continued from Page 12 ...

"I have a special affection for swallows," he said, glassing the tiny flyers that zigzagged across the river surface in a relentless quest for a buggy meal. "They like to line their nests with goose and duck feathers, so when I was a kid I used to blow feathers in the air and they would swoop after them. Sometimes they would even pluck them from my fingers and that was such a thrill."

Joan Day-Martin, another of New Mexico's "finest," shared her passion and knowledge of hummingbirds from the back of her van, crammed top to bottom with nest samples, photos, books and delicate wires used to band hummingbirds from her operations base at Lake Roberts.

One of just 150 individuals worldwide with hummingbird banding permits, Day-Martin elicited smiles and exclamations from all who stopped by. She is the founder and president of the nonprofit Hummingbirds of New Mexico, a scientific and educational organization with the philosophy that "it's never too soon or too late to help adults and children appreciate the world around us."

"It's a very specialized task; watching Joan band birds is amazing," Yaksich said. "She takes these tiny birds and treats them like little jewels; she's very careful and thoughtful. They can't be held for very long."

Banding birds is a means of tracking movements, ages, migration, measurements, physiology and other factors. Birds are commonly captured in a mist net set up during the morning hours when they are most active. Once captured and extricated from the net – a delicate act requiring intense focus, dexterity and patience – the bird has a tiny band with an identification number fastened to one of its legs and then let go. Bird banders in other parts of the world may recapture the same bird along its migration path, discovering and recording information that offers new perspectives on the secret lives of our feathered friends.

"Certain birds have developed longer flight feathers, an indication that they are flying farther on migration than normal," Yaksich said. "There is speculation that climate change may be the cause, but that is just one possibility."

Other discoveries include a hummingbird that survived for 11 years and white-crowned sparrows that regularly visit the Rio Grande Valley from Montana.

"State Parks' goal is to make these state parks in the lower Rio Grande –Leasburg Dam, Caballo Lake, Percha Dam and Mesilla Valley Bosque – into great birder destinations," Cary said. "Birdwatchers make important economic contributions and bring people from out of state."

Bardwell agrees, noting that bird watching is wonderful in Southern New Mexico with the Rio Grande flyway. The Mesilla Valley Audubon Chapter is growing and Las Cruces is growing and bringing in a lot of retirees, who are within the demographic of age 50 and up. They already may be birders or become interested in picking up another hobby they can do anywhere, including their backyards.

"Bird watching is the number one sport in America and New Mexico has more birdwatchers than the national average," Bardwell said. "Birding is a good focus for promoting ecological awareness because people become very passionate about birds. By watching these colorful, charismatic animals, they begin to care about what is happening to their habitat. There is a very strong relationship between birders and an interest in conservation."

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Summertime at state parks



Cimarron Canyon River Round-up



Heron Lake Paddle Festival



Rio Grande Nature Center Summer Wings



Heron Lake Paddle Festival



Living Desert Vulture Appreciation Day

Photos: Marti Niman

July 3: Fireworks explode over the waters of **Elephant Butte, Eagle Nest and Ute Lake** state parks; call the parks for times.

July 9-10: The 5th Annual **Heron Lake** State Park Ospreyfest is an educational program for all ages with live raptor exhibits, crafts, a wine and cheese feast, speakers, and boat excursions to view these birds in the wild. There are fees for some activities; (800) 605-2411.

July 10: The **Cimarron Canyon** State Park Annual River Round-up invites volunteers to help pick up litter along a portion of the Cimarron River. Free T-shirts will be offered to the first 50 volunteers who sign up at the park office and lunch will be provided. (575) 377-6271.

July 11: **Hyde Memorial** State Park near Santa Fe hosts the premier sports car event in Northern New Mexico with more than 175 stock and custom Corvettes on display. A parade will cruise from the Roundhouse along Old Route 66 to the park at 8,000 feet elevation, with a picnic lunch and awards program to follow. (505) 983-7175.

July 17: Bring the kids to the **Sumner Lake** State Park Youth Daze and have a day full of fun with water games and relays on land and water. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish will bring the Poach Coach. Bring sun screen, a swimsuit and enjoy a hotdog cookout. (575) 355-2541.

July 31: Bring your caballo to the **Santa Rosa Lake** State Park Trail Ride on and enjoy 13 miles of trails and good company, with facilities available for horses. (575) 472-3110.

Aug. 14: **Rio Grande Nature Center** State Park in Albuquerque celebrates New Mexico's small but spectacular wildlife: hummingbirds, butterflies, dragonflies and bees during its Summer Wings festival. Hummingbird banding, dragonfly capture and release, Rio Grande Bird Research banding station, nature walks, kids' crafts, and a speaker program highlight the day. (505) 343-1373.

Aug. 20-22: **Heron Lake** State Park's Paddle Festival features a weekend of clinics, demos, safety talks, races, games and paddling skills for all ages. The focus is on kayaks and canoes, but rafts and small sail craft are welcome as well. (575) 756-1323.

Sept. 4: **Living Desert Zoo & Gardens** State Park near Carlsbad celebrates vultures as nature's sanitation engineers on International Vulture Appreciation Day with children's crafts and turkey vulture displays. (575) 887-5516.

Sept. 4: **Oasis** State Park near Portales features the Biggest Catfish Challenge Derby for anglers of all ages with prizes based on the weight of the fish. (575) 356-5331.

Sept. 4-6: Scuba divers take the plunge at the annual Bottomless Bubblefest at **Bottomless Lakes** State Park near Roswell with a "dive poker" contest, underwater games, snorkeling, swimming, beach volleyball and nature hikes. (575) 624-6058.

Sept. 18: **El Vado Lake** State Park Heritage Days near Chama offers educational programs for all ages on Sept. 18 with crafts and demonstrations for every interest. (800) 605-2411.

All events are subject to change or cancellation; please call the park in advance to confirm.





Photo: Mark Birkhauser

A group of desert bighorn rams keeps a wary eye out for predators at the Red Rock Wildlife Area captive breeding facility in southwestern New Mexico.

Bighorn success

... continued from Page 1

The Commission is expected to make its decision Dec. 9, following public meetings and opportunities for public comment.

Delisting desert bighorns will be a milestone for everyone who enjoys wildlife, Department Director Tod Stevenson said.

“Restoring our native wildlife species and protecting their habitat is one of our agency’s priorities,” Stevenson said. “This will be the first species ever delisted from the New Mexico threatened and endangered species list due to restoration.”

Stevenson praised the State Game Commission, Department staff, partners from other agencies, conservation groups and others who contributed to the restoration.

“The biggest heroes in this effort are the sportsmen,” Stevenson said. “Without their support and their funding through sales of hunting licenses, equipment, and special auction and raffle tags, we might not have any desert bighorns in New Mexico today.”

Desert bighorn restoration has received broad support from sporting and conservation groups for years, and especially since 1980, when the species was first listed under the Wildlife Conservation Act. Like most wildlife restoration efforts, sportsmen were the biggest contributors.

“A lot of people want desert bighorns in our state, and sportsmen made it happen for everyone’s benefit,” Goldstein said. “Since the bighorns were listed as endangered, sportsmen have paid more than \$5 million toward recovery.”

Most of the money for desert bighorn recovery comes from the annual auction and raffle sale of a bighorn hunting license. The auction, conducted by the Wild Sheep Foundation since 1990, has raised as much as \$210,000 in one year. The auction hunter has a choice between a desert or Rocky Mountain bighorn license, with second choice going to the winner of a raffle. The auction and raffle combined have raised more than \$2 million for the bighorn sheep program since 1990. That money is matched three-to-one by federal funds raised through excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment and boat fuel.

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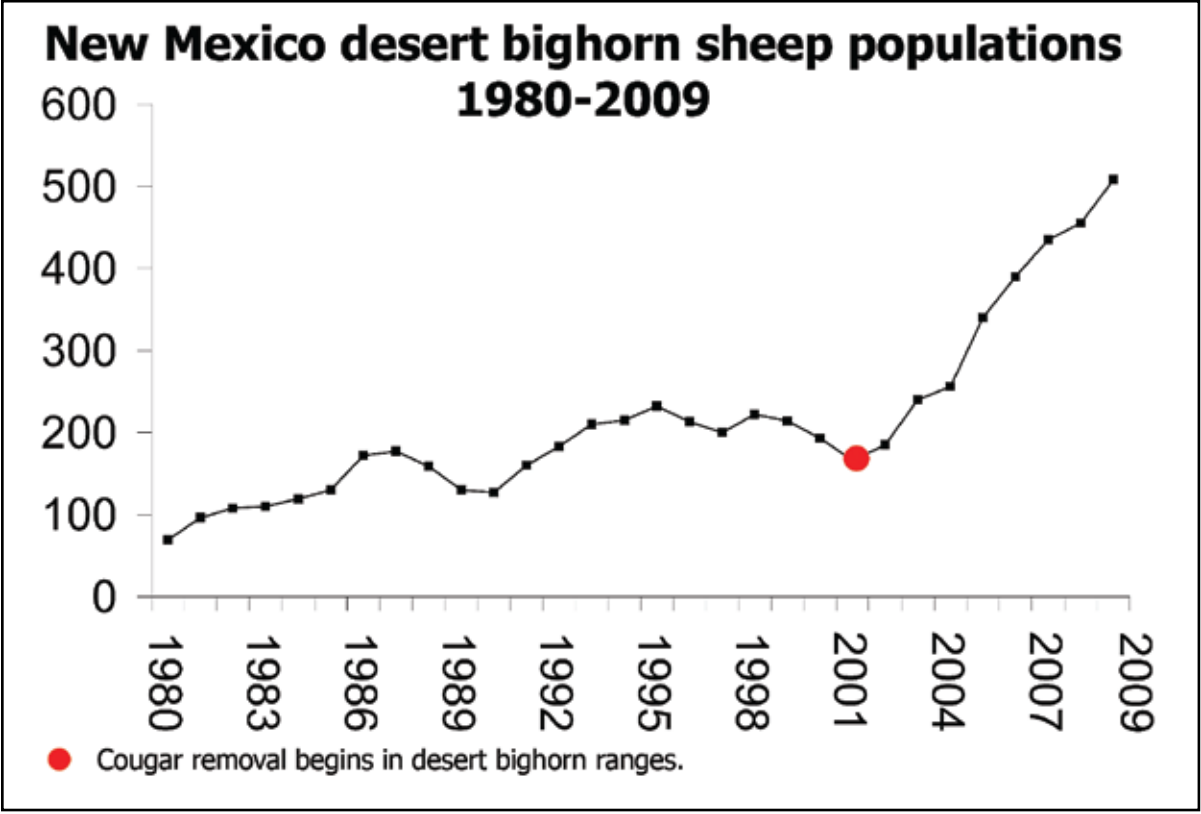
A rough history for desert bighorns

- **1500:** Thousands of desert bighorn sheep were believed to live in arid mountain ranges in southern and central New Mexico.
- **Mid-1500s:** Spanish settlers introduced domestic sheep into the Rio Grande Valley and Native Americans adopted sheep herding.
- **1820-1880:** Domestic sheep flocks grow from an estimated 1 million to 5 million animals statewide.
- **1860-1900:** Large-scale cattle operations controlled the open range in southern New Mexico, affecting habitat.
- **1889:** Hunting of desert bighorns prohibited by state law, but illegal market hunting continued.
- **Early 1900s:** Most desert bighorn populations were extinct, mostly due to disease introduced by domestic livestock and overhunting.
- **1920s:** State game refuges established in the Hatchet and Guadalupe mountains, but livestock were not prohibited in the refuges.
- **1941:** San Andres National Wildlife Refuge established to help protect the bighorn herd of approximately 41.
- **1946:** Guadalupe Mountains bighorn herd extirpated. Only two populations of desert bighorns remained in New Mexico -- in the San Andres and Big Hatchet mountains.
- **1950s:** Overgrazing from cattle and severe drought contributed to the decline of the Hatchet Mountains bighorn population.
- **1972:** Captive desert bighorn herd established at Red Rock Wildlife Area.
- **Mid-1970s:** San Andres herd grows to about 200.
- **1978:** Hatchet Mountains bighorn population drops to fewer than 15.
- **1978:** Scabies mites detected in San Andres bighorns. Subsequent attempts to treat bighorns and eradicate the mites were mostly unsuccessful. Population declines to about 50.
- **1980:** State Game Commission adds desert bighorns to the state list of endangered wildlife under the New Mexico Wildlife Conservation Act. Statewide population estimated at 69.
- **1981:** Peloncillo Mountains bighorn herd established with 10 rams transplanted from Red Rock and 10 ewes from the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge and Plomosa Mountains in Arizona. All Red Rock rams died of pneumonia following contact with Arizona bighorns. Subsequent releases increased the herd to 60 by 1995, when the first hunt was held.
- **1982-94:** San Andres herd ranges between 25 and 35 animals.
- **1992:** Ladrone Mountains bighorn population established with 23 animals transplanted from Red Rock.
- **1995:** Fra Cristobal Mountains population on the Armendaris Ranch established with 37 bighorns transplanted from Red Rock.
- **1997:** San Andres herd drops to only one ewe due to scabies and mountain lion predation. Statewide population estimated at 200.
- **2001:** San Andres herd considered scabies-free following two-year study of six sentinel rams.
- **2001:** Mountain lion removal begins in desert bighorn ranges after mortality studies determined lions were mostly responsible for a statewide population decline to 166, despite the release of 151 bighorns between 1992 and 1999.
- **2002-2005:** 142 desert bighorns released statewide, including 81 in the San Andres Mountains -- 50 of those from the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona.
- **2008:** Desert bighorns downlisted from endangered to threatened under the State Wildlife Conservation Act. Population estimated at 455 animals in six mountain ranges.
- **2009:** 18 bighorns transplanted from Red Rock to the Caballo Mountains to augment a small existing herd. The Peloncillo and Ladrone mountains received five rams each.

Department of Game and Fish Wildlife Disease Specialist Kerry Mower, left, and Bighorn Sheep Biologist Eric Rominger fit a desert bighorn sheep with a radio collar before it is transplanted to the Little Hatchet Mountains in 2005. Trapping and transplanting operations and mountain lion control have helped increase the state’s desert bighorn population from 166 in 2001 to more than 550 today.

Photo: Dan Williams





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The state currently offers only one other desert bighorn license -- a once-in-a-lifetime hunt through the public drawing process. That could change, however, once desert bighorns are delisted.

As many as 10 desert bighorn licenses could become available through the public drawing as soon as 2011, said Jim Lane, chief of the Department's Wildlife Management Division. "We're being conservative at first. The herds can easily sustain an increased harvest of rams."

Harvesting more bighorn rams will have very little effect on the Department's objective to grow the herds, Goldstein said.

"Bighorns mate opportunistically, and our research shows that the biggest three or four rams will do 50 percent of the breeding in a herd, and smaller rams do the other 50 percent," she said. "In the end, all the ewes get bred and continued to grow the herd -- even if there are not quite as many rams on the mountain."

Unmanaged hunting was partly responsible

for the desert bighorn's downfall in the early 1900s, when vast herds in nearly all desert mountain ranges dwindled to only two. The other big threat was disease introduced by domestic sheep and goats, a problem that still threatens today's bighorns. Today, bighorns are never transplanted into areas where there are domestic sheep.

Currently, the major threat to bighorns is mountain lions. Aggressive lion control in bighorn ranges has resulted in bighorn population increases statewide. It also has eased Rominger's burden of having to carry bighorn skulls off the mountains.

"Lion control was the most important factor in desert bighorn recovery," Rominger said. "When the population was at 166 with only 70 ewes despite our transplants, we were never going to recover without lion control."

In 2001, the Department began paying lion hunters to remove lions from bighorn ranges, where research indicated that the top predators had been responsible for as much as 85 percent of desert bighorn mortalities. The strategy, along with more transplants from the Department's Red Rock captive breeding area, allowed the bighorns to turn the corner and

begin expanding their numbers -- and ranges.

Today, desert bighorn herds are thriving in six mountain ranges. The most recent population estimates place the statewide herd at more than 550, and at its current rate, it is projected to surpass 700 by 2012. Those numbers and trends have paved the way to delisting.

According to the Department's desert bighorn recovery plan, the threshold for delisting is a statewide population of 500, with at least three separate herds of 100 or more.

"We easily meet those criteria, so it's time to delist and move ahead," Goldstein said. "Our next challenge will be to build on the existing populations, especially in the San Andres Mountains."

The San Andres, a 100-mile mountain chain on White Sands Missile Range, has the capacity to have the largest herd in the state. The herd there is one of the oldest and has endured some of the most difficult challenges, including an outbreak of scabies mites that cut the herd to a single ewe by 1997. Since then, the San Andres herd has been scabies-free and transplants from Red Rock and Arizona have helped build it back to around 100 animals.

"We will be looking at expanding the San Andres herd in the near future," Rominger said. "The size of the range and the fact that the bighorns are protected on the missile range and the San Andres National Wildlife Refuge give it the potential of holding well over 1,000 sheep."

"One of our big hopes," Rominger said, "is to capture and transplant wild sheep, something we've never done with desert bighorns. So far, all our transplants have been from Red Rock or the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona."

For now, however, Rominger, Goldstein and the many partners who have contributed to desert bighorn restoration over the years can be content knowing that a historic occasion is only months away.

"It has taken lots and lots of players to make this happen," Rominger said. "From Department staff, other agencies and people who help us trap, to high-dollar auction hunters and conservation groups, we've gotten support from everywhere."

"It's not often that you see animals delisted because of recovery. Usually, it's because they went extinct."



Photo: Dan Williams

Desert bighorn ewes leap from the trailer into their new home in the Little Hatchet Mountains after a successful trapping and transplant operation from Red Rock Wildlife Area in 2005.





INVASION

of the bird snatchers

By Rob Yaksich

It happens suddenly. In the blink of an eye, it's over. One moment, a small bird is enjoying some seed at a bird feeder. The next moment, it's gone. All that remains are a few feathers floating slowly to the ground. The bird never saw it coming.

Like many backyards across New Mexico, this one was just visited by a bird snatcher. It's not a ghost or a dream or a secret government experiment. Rather, it's a little bit of the wild making itself at home where we live. They're fast. They're sneaky. And they're hungry! They are small birds of prey, and they've discovered city life.

Little hawks, big attitude

When you think of a hawk, you probably imagine a large soaring bird that eats rabbits and prairie dogs. This is certainly true of red-tailed and other large hawks. But Cooper's hawks and sharp-shinned hawks are different. Not only are they much smaller, they are designed to hunt other birds. Their wings are short and rounded at the tips, and their tails are very long. This combination helps them zip and dodge through forests at top speed.

These small, quick hawks will hide in thick vegetation and suddenly ambush a feeding bird, or they may cruise along walls, roads and arroyos and pounce quickly on whatever birds they surprise. Their favorite hunting method seems to be to hide near a bird feeder and wait for hungry birds to visit. When you set the table for doves, sparrows, finches and jays, you're also setting it for the hawks.

Cooper's hawks, often called Coops, prefer dove- and pigeon-sized birds. Large female Coops are



Photos, above and right: Dan Williams

Juvenile sharp-shinned hawk



Photos, above and top: Jim Stuart

Adult Cooper's hawk

about the size of crows, and they can capture birds as large as chickens. In fact, Coops were once known as "chicken hawks" because of their ability to hunt chickens, sometimes chasing them right into the open doors of houses! Fierce and persistent predators, Coops may land on the ground and chase prey on foot through thick brush.

Coops have really taken to city life. They nest wherever there are large trees, especially elms and cottonwoods. They seem to particularly like golf courses, which have large trees for nesting and lots of open ground for hunting pigeons and doves. During winter, Coops from farther north migrate to New Mexico, where they stake out busy bird feeders in backyards. When birds suddenly blast away from a bird feeder, it usually means a Coop has been spotted or has made an attack.

With suitable nesting sites, abundant pigeons and bird feeders, Coops are often more common in town than in the wild. Once hunted because they were considered pests, Coop numbers are strong and growing across most of the United States.

Sharp-shinned hawks, or "sharpies," look almost identical to Cooper's hawks, but are usually much smaller – often not much bigger than pigeons. But large females may be bigger than small male Coops. It can be extremely difficult to tell them apart at times. As with Coops, the females are much larger and more aggressive than the males.

Sharpies winter across New Mexico, traveling from as far away as Canada. Like Coops, they

will hide out near bird feeders in yards, picking off juncos, sparrows and finches. When nesting season arrives, New Mexico sharpies head to the mountains to nest in ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forests. Their eggs hatch around the time other baby birds are leaving the nest. These young birds don't fly that well yet, and they are usually clueless about predators. That makes papa hawk's hunting easier, and his young grow quickly on a diet of other young birds.

Big city, little falcon

Some large cities have become home to peregrine falcons. Nesting on skyscrapers or other high structures, peregrines find plenty of pigeons to eat. But its much smaller (and more colorful) cousin, the American kestrel, has known city life for a long time.

Kestrels are the smallest diurnal (die UR null – or daytime active) raptors in North America. Not much larger than robins, kestrels are often seen perched on power lines over open grassy or weedy areas. When they spot a lizard, mouse or large grasshopper on the ground, they dive down for a quick pounce. They're also skilled bird hunters, snagging small birds gathered at bird feeders or snatching some right out of the sky. People have reported seeing them pluck hovering hummingbirds and young swallows learning to fly.

This fierce little dynamo nests wherever it can find a large woodpecker hole, birdhouse, or rotted cavity in a tree or cliff. They like edge habitats, where woodlands meet meadows. Parent kestrels may use the same nest site every summer, raising two to four young each year. At the State Parks office building along a busy road in Santa Fe, a pair of kestrels has nested in cavities made by flickers (a large woodpecker) in decorative blocks. Several times each day, the male delivers mice, lizards, grasshoppers and young birds to his mate and their young – right in the middle of Santa Fe! They're back again this year, giving the people who work in the Chino Building a little taste of the wild.



American kestrel

Staying wild in the city

Creating habitat in your yard - providing food, water, and shelter - is a great way to help wildlife no matter where in New Mexico you may live. Remember that predators - like these three small raptors - are part of any habitat, including your yard. Don't be surprised one day to find a little pile of feathers in your yard. It's a sure sign that you've been visited by a bird snatcher.

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