



Photo: Dan Williams

Wildlife haven

Limited public access helps deer, elk thrive in Rio Chama Wildlife Area.

Please see Page 6.

IN THIS ISSUE:

7. **A new species**
Department biologist identifies unique land snail.

8. **Youth elk hunt**
Young hunter finds success in cold Gila country.

departments

2. **game & fish news**

- Remembering Bill Huey
- \$10,000 poaching penalty
- Donation for habitat
- Water for quail

4. **regional outlook**

- Give waterfowl a shot
- Care for your game meat
- Taos poachers convicted
- Southeast quail forecast

11. **state parks**

- Sugarite coal camp
- Clayton's dark skies
- Arts in the Parks

16. **kidtracks**

Anglers with feathers

Share the waters with fishing birds.

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Bears gone wild



Photo: Ross Morgan

A young bear peers from a tree in Edgewood before he was relocated to the Manzano Mountains this summer.

Encounters rise as bear population grows

By Dan Williams

The phone calls start in April and end in September or October.

Black bears are hanging around houses, scattering trash, eating dog food, killing chickens, raiding orchards, destroying bee hives, attacking livestock and cleaning out birdfeeders. The more aggressive ones try to break into houses or cabins. Sometimes, they succeed.

The calls to the Department of Game and Fish come from communities statewide. Some of the busiest: Cedar Crest, Raton, Chama, Ruidoso, Cuba, Edgewood, Silver City, Los Alamos, Taos and Santa Fe. The callers are afraid of the bears, annoyed by the bears, or would just prefer the bears go visit someone else's yard. They want the Department to make their problems go away.

More often than not, callers are told to haul off their trash, take down their birdfeeders and feed their pets inside. If a bear becomes aggressive or attacks a human, it is trapped and killed. Bears involved in attacks are tested for rabies.



Photos: Phil Howes, above; Beth Perry, left

Armed with rubber bullets, Conservation Officer Andy Gray coaxes a bear out of a trailer at a release site near Las Vegas. At left, a young bear tries to figure out how to open a door on Cochiti Mesa.

Persistent bears occasionally are trapped, hauled away and released elsewhere. That's a popular strategy with people who like bears, but it doesn't always work for the bears. Many of them end up dead. Some are killed pillaging new garbage cans, birdfeeders and goat pens. Many others end up as road kill in attempts to find their way home.

"Most of the bears we move end up in more

... continued on Page 14



Bill Huey, champion for wildlife

Bill Huey, 85, a former Department of Game and Fish director known to his friends and colleagues as a visionary champion of wildlife management, died peacefully Aug. 25 at his home in Tesuque. His health had been declining since his wife of 62 years, Mary Blue Huey, died March 6, 2009.

Many who worked and associated with Huey during his long career considered him the godfather of New Mexico wildlife management. His impressive list of accomplishments stretched from his days as a department game warden fresh out of New Mexico State University in the late 1940s to his retirement from state government in 1982 – and beyond.

“Bill was always an advocate for wildlife, whether he was on the payroll or as a volunteer in retirement,” said Jesse Williams, chief of public affairs when Huey was department director from 1975-78. “He truly had vision about the direction he thought the Department should go. He was always looking ahead, calculating how the things we were doing that day would affect things 10 or even 50 years down the road.”

Huey’s career at the department included positions as public affairs chief, chief of game management and assistant director before he was appointed director by the State Game Commission. In 1978, he became the state’s Natural Resources Department cabinet secretary.

Huey was instrumental in bringing a broad-based conservation approach to a department traditionally regarded as mostly a hunting and fishing agency. He helped start the



Photo: Dan Williams

William S. Huey

agency’s Endangered Species Project and constantly advocated for state funding beyond revenue from licenses and fees. Shortly after he became director in 1975, he said, “The single biggest problem facing wildlife is the loss of habitat altogether or the loss of its availability. We’re going to have to increase our knowledge and our ability to manage rapidly if we are to identify the management plans that will provide the greatest protection for the wildlife resource and least inconvenience the hunter and angler.”

Dale Jones, former director of fisheries and wildlife for the U.S. Forest Service and a longtime friend of the Hueys, was one of several speakers at a memorial service Sept. 18 in Santa Fe. “Bill’s accomplishments could fill a book ... and probably should,” Jones said. “To me, he’s New Mexico’s Aldo Leopold.”

Huey directed many research projects while he was with the department. His work with sandhill cranes was instrumental in efforts to restore endangered whooping cranes to the wild at Bosque del Apache National

Wildlife Refuge. He was involved in early efforts to restore desert bighorn sheep to their native ranges, and in projects that helped re-establish elk and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. In retirement, he played key roles in protecting Otero Mesa from oil and gas development, and he was an advocate for the purchase of the Valles Caldera, formerly the Baca Ranch.

Huey’s work was recognized by many, including the Nature Conservancy, which honored him as a conservation hero. He received the Winchester Award for outstanding contributions to conservation and was recognized by the International Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies and the National Wildlife Federation.

“He was very dedicated, and was an especially good chief of game management,” said former Department Director Harold Olson, who succeeded Huey as director in 1978. “And he was an excellent manager. He didn’t tell you how to do things – he just expected you to do your job.”

Off the job, Huey was known for his big heart and his love of animals and gardening. His Tesuque property always was populated with dogs and various fowl, at one time including four pair of cranes. He had a fondness for Africa and its wildlife, traveling there many times in retirement.

Huey is survived by his dogs Kate and Sandy III, his cousins Dina Smith of Fort Worth and Ross Morrow of Dallas, and Betty McCampbell of Amarillo. Bill and Mary Huey also are survived by several young neighbors who regarded the Hueys as surrogate parents, including Lisa Dendahl West, Ricky Pacheco and others.



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Texas hunter bags trophy bighorn ram

Cory Knowlton didn’t waste time making good use of the 2010 bighorn sheep enhancement license. Aug. 1, opening day of the season, he harvested a record-book ram in the rocky terrain near Wheeler Peak.



Photo: Daniel Peeples

Cory Knowlton with his trophy.

Knowlton, of Rogue City, Texas, paid \$107,500 for the license at the Wild Sheep Foundation’s annual auction in Reno. His ram scored 186 7/8 inches.

The license is one of two bighorn enhancement licenses offered each year to raise money for bighorn research, management and propagation. The second is awarded to the winner of a foundation raffle.

The bighorn license auction has raised \$2,167,000 since it began in 1990. The raffle has raised \$464,232 since 2000 at \$20 a ticket.

Poacher ordered to pay \$10,000 in civil penalties

HOBBS -- A southeastern New Mexico man convicted of poaching a trophy mule deer in 2007 has been ordered to pay \$10,000 in civil penalties to reimburse the state for the loss of a valuable game animal.

Bradley A. Smith, 27, had contested the civil judgment sought by the Department of Game and Fish in addition to two criminal counts of poaching. The Magistrate Court entered a \$10,000 civil judgment, which was appealed to the District Court. After hearing testimony and arguments, Lovington District Judge Don Maddox determined that evidence established that the value of the deer was at least \$10,000 and entered a judgment in favor of the Department of Game and Fish.

Smith was convicted June 1, 2007, and ordered to pay \$914 in fines and court costs for illegally killing two deer out of season and without a license. One of those deer had 32-inch wide antlers that scored 202 3/8 inches according to the Safari Club International

system. The score qualified the deer as a “trophy” according to standards adopted by the New Mexico Legislature and the State Game Commission. The Legislature passed a law in 2006 that allows civil penalties up to \$10,000 for poaching a deer that scores 200 or more inches.

“Civil penalties like this send a strong message to anyone thinking about stealing New Mexico’s valuable wildlife,” said Conservation Officer Brian Guzman, the Department’s lead investigator on the case. “This deer would have been a super trophy for any legal hunter.”

Smith’s arrest in January 2007 followed a report to the Operation Game Thief hotline from a citizen who witnessed 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 the trophy antlers.





Photo: Dale Hall

Heavy metal pipe fences help keep off-highway vehicles off fragile wetlands.

Pipe donation will help protect state’s fragile wildlife habitat

Fragile wildlife habitat across New Mexico such as wet meadows and watering stations soon will be protected by pipe fences, thanks to a generous donation from private industry in partnership with a conservation organization.

Williams Production and Exploration, Inc., of Farmington partnered with the conservation group Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife to donate more than 32,000 feet of pipe for the fencing projects. The value of the pipe, about \$50,000, also will help the Department of Game and Fish leverage other federal funds for habitat projects.

“It is this type of private-government partnership that makes this state a force for improving habitat for future generations,” Department Director Tod Stevenson said. He and State Game Commission Chairman Jim McClintic accepted the donation at a recent Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife banquet.

Dale Hall, coordinator of the state Habitat Stamp Program, said the pipe will be instrumental in maintaining important

wetlands and wildlife water developments and protecting them against vandalism. The pipe will be used on public lands across the state. Projects include water developments on Bureau of Land Management land in the Farmington area, the Carson and Cibola national forests; and for riparian enclosures in the Sacramento Mountains of the Lincoln National Forest and other areas.

David Randleman, an employee of Williams Production and Exploration, offered to help with the pipe donation after hearing about the need at an earlier meeting of the conservation group. He said company owners didn’t hesitate. “We in the industry produce gas to help people, and we want to help the wildlife, too,” Randleman said.

Robert Espinosa, executive director of New Mexico Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, said, “This is our organization’s seventh year of participating in habitat improvements in New Mexico. Each year we are doing more and more so our children and grandchildren have places to hunt and fish.”

New name, same goals for conservation group

One of New Mexico’s oldest conservation organizations will celebrate its first anniversary under a new name this month. Southeast New Mexico Wildlife, Inc., formerly a chapter of Quail Unlimited, has the same goals since the group was formed 14 years ago, group president A.O. Stephens said.

“Over the years, we’ve made a lot of difference for the wildlife down here,” Stephens said. The organization based in Hobbs helped build and continues to maintain 114 sites that provide water and essential habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Members built three new water developments in the past year in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Department of Game and Fish Habitat Stamp Program.

Stephens said the group adopted the new name after it severed ties with Quail Unlimited, an organization with chapters nationwide that suffered financial problems in the past few years. The new group is one of two former Quail Unlimited chapters in New Mexico that split from the national group. New Mexico Quail, based in Las Cruces, also is operating on its own now.

Southeast New Mexico Wildlife, Inc.,



Photo: U.S. Bureau of land Management

Scaled quail at a wildlife watering station in Lea County.

currently has about 200 members and always welcomes more, Stephens said.

“All the volunteer work out here has really helped,” he said. “We’re seeing more scaled quail, the bobwhites are increasing and the watering sites help a lot of other wildlife. We water everything out there – deer, coyotes, quail, you name it. We’ve even got javelinas coming in to the water now, although they’re kind of a pain in the rib cage.”

People interested in learning more about Southeast New Mexico Wildlife, Inc., can contact Stephens at (575) 393-2895.

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:

Sportsmen for Fish & Wildlife: A conservation organization organized to promote the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat, the quality of wildlife management programs and America’s family heritage of hunting and fishing. (505) 486-4921.

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, www.rmef.org.

New Mexico Muskies, Inc.: A group of anglers interested in fishing for tiger muskies in Bluewater and Quemado lakes formed this organization in 2008 as a chapter of Muskies, Inc. Information: Matt Pelletier, (505) 264-2999, www.newmexicomuskiesinc.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 protection and restoration of riparian habitats and through educating the public about trout fishing and the ecological and social 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.

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.

Southeast New Mexico Wildlife, Inc.: A conservation organization (formerly Quail Unlimited) dedicated to preserving and enhancing wildlife habitat, especially quail habitat, in southeastern New Mexico. (575) 393-2895.





Some people say that waterfowl hunters must be crazy for getting up in the early morning darkness, setting out hundreds of decoys, and then sitting for hours in sometimes frigid weather to shoot a duck. Others say there is nothing like sitting in a blind with a good duck call, good friends, a thermos of coffee and a good hunting dog waiting for a chance to bag a mallard or pintail.

Waterfowl season started in mid-September with teal season and a hunt for sora and Virginia rail. These seasons run through March, with a little break between Sept. 26 and Oct. 2. Seasons and bag limits vary according to the two different migratory bird flyways that split New Mexico, the Central and Pacific. The flyways are divided into North and South zones.

"Waterfowl hunting is a sport that not only tests your patience, but also tests your skills when it comes to bird identification and calling," said Don Bradley, an avid duck hunter from Edgewood. "Hunters should also realize that hunting waterfowl is no different than hunting elk or turkey: No matter how hard you hunt or how good you are with a call, sometimes you might go home empty-handed."

Caring for meat is a hunter's responsibility

It is that time of year again, and all you hunters know what I'm talking about. As the temperature drops and the winds die down, that itchy feeling creeps up the back of our necks. The cold, crisp mornings let us know we're alive. As we wake up and walk out of the camper or tent and see our breath in front of our nose, we know that hunting season is upon us.

Most sportsmen truly love the overall experience of the outdoors. Hunting with friends and family has become a tradition for many people worldwide. Taking an animal can be a very exciting experience, whether you are a first-time novice or an experienced big-game hunter.



Southwest

Time to hunt waterfowl

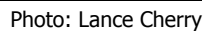
Long season, plenty of birds lure hunters to wetlands

Because hunters are only allowed to harvest and possess a certain number of each species, hunters must be capable of identifying birds not only on the ground, but at a distance in the air. Failure to do so could result in a citation for exceeding the bag limit.

If you decide to give waterfowl hunting a try, you'll need a few key things to get started. First, you will need to buy a small-game license, Habitat Management and Access Validation, Habitat Improvement Stamp (if hunting on U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands), Migratory Bird Permit (HIP) number and a Federal Duck Stamp (for hunters 16 years of age or older). Equipment in addition to a shotgun should include a good duck call, warm camouflage clothing, and waders.

If you're fortunate, you'll have a set of decoys and dog or a good buddy to retrieve the birds. But just sitting in a blind along the river with a good duck call and a thermos of coffee will work, too.

Once you're hooked on waterfowl hunting, then you can make an investment in a dog and decoys. A good starter set runs about \$50, and will increase your chances of bagging a duck.



La Joya Waterfowl Area is a popular hunting area in the Rio Grande Valley south of Belen.

If you're looking for a place to hunt waterfowl, you'll find some ideas in the Rules and Information Booklet. Several Wildlife Management Areas in northwestern New Mexico are open and provide some good duck hunting. A list of these areas and the days they are open can be found in the booklet.

Hunting and conservation organizations such as Delta Waterfowl and Ducks Unlimited have chapters in New Mexico, with members eager to help novices. Both organizations have Web sites. If you choose to try waterfowl hunting

this year, good luck and I hope it will leave you with a memory that will last forever. For more information on waterfowl hunting, please read the 2010-2011 Small Game Rules and Information Booklet available at www.wildlife.state.nm.us, any license vendor and Department offices statewide.

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



Hunters can donate, but not sell or trade their big-game meat.

big-game animals is to donate the meat to organizations such as Hunters for the Hungry or the West Texas Food Bank. Rob Hoffman and Robert Major, who lead the Hunters for the Hungry Program, said the primary goal of these groups is to obtain wild meat for organizations such as El Caidito Soup Kitchen and Casa De Peregrinos. Hoffman said it is a great program that truly helps feed hungry people in our communities.

For more information about the Hunters for the Hungry program, please contact

Hoffman, (575) 523-9101, or Major, (575) 644-5176.

The Department of Game and Fish encourages everyone to have a safe and enjoyable hunting season. So get out, enjoy the outdoors and remember to take a kid hunting or fishing today.

Richard McDonald is a Department of Game and Fish conservation officer who lives and works in southwestern New Mexico. He can be reached in Las Cruces at (575) 532-2100 or richard.mcdonald@state.nm.us.

Taos poaching cases resolved

By Clint Henson

Department of Game and Fish conservation officers resolved two important court cases recently involving the illegal killing of elk in the Taos area, one case dating back four years.

Four men were convicted in a December 2006 case in which officers discovered three dead cow elk in the back of a hunting party's truck near Angel Fire and another cow elk in Taos. The men were Herman Olguin, 57, of Taos; John Olguin, 30, of Albuquerque; Travis Holland, 29, of Clayton; and Bill Burch, 69, of Angel Fire.

The party had only three valid elk licenses among them. Burch possessed a license that had expired.

The investigation revealed that John Olguin, although properly licensed, had decided not to kill an elk. Holland killed one for him and then shot another elk after illegally tagging the first elk and hauling it to Taos.

- John Olguin was convicted of two charges and fined \$1,000. He had



his hunting, fishing and trapping privileges revoked for three years by the State Game Commission.

- Burch was convicted on two charges and fined \$1,100.
- Holland, having previously been convicted of spotlighting and unlawful possession of a deer and fishing without a license, fit the criteria of a habitual offender. He pleaded guilty to four charges and was fined \$4,900. Holland had his hunting, fishing and trapping privileges revoked for three years by the State Game Commission for persistent and flagrant hunting violations.

- Herman Olguin also fit the criteria of a habitual offender. After lengthy court proceedings, he was convicted of four charges and agreed to pay \$4,000 to Operation Game Thief. Olguin is now subject to revocation and may be banned from hunting, fishing or trapping in New Mexico and 31 other states. In addition, Olguin is still subject to civil penalties of up to \$2,000 for the unlawful killing and possession of elk.

In a separate case, conservation officers working the Valle Escondido area in December 2009 noticed a suspicious vehicle parked near Carson National Forest Road 437.

Officers determined that the passengers of the vehicle were still in the area. Upon returning to their vehicle, an interview with the men revealed that Miguel Martinez, 30, was responsible for illegally shooting a deer.

Martinez pleaded no contest to two charges of hunting during a closed season and hunting while his license

Northeast



Clint Henson

privileges were revoked. He was sentenced to 180 days in jail and ordered to pay \$1,250 in fines.

Anyone with information about wildlife crimes in New Mexico is encouraged to call Operation Game Thief, (800) 432-GAME (4263). Reporters can remain anonymous and may be eligible for rewards.

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

Southeast quail populations looking good

By Mark Madsen

It's that time of year again -- time to get the shotguns out of the safe and blow off the dust. It's time to stock up on a couple of cases of shells and maybe a new shotgun or at least a new hunting vest.

Quail season starts Nov. 15 and runs through Feb. 15 in New Mexico. Calls are coming in from all over the country from hunters wanting to know what the quail situation is going to be in southeastern New Mexico.

The country in southeastern New Mexico looks great going into the fall hunting season, with above average precipitation in many areas, leading to lots of grass, feed and cover for quail. The hunting forecast for quail can be bad or good depending upon specific areas.

The forecast for Roosevelt and Curry counties looks promising for both scaled and bobwhite quail. Brady Griffith, Clovis District wildlife officer, reports seeing at least two hatches of scaled quail and a good hatch of bobwhites. The majority of Roosevelt and Curry counties consist of private property, so hunters need to do their homework and get written permission from local landowners.

Hunters also can concentrate their



Photo: Dan Williams

Try the Tularosa Basin or Otero Mesa for a mixed bag of Gambel's quail, above, and scaled quail, below left.

efforts on legally accessible State Trust lands throughout Roosevelt and Curry counties. Other areas to try include the Department's prairie chicken areas south of Portales near Milnesand. Keep in mind that non-toxic shot is required on all Department wildlife management areas, including the prairie chicken areas. Hunters can expect a mixed bag of scaled and bobwhite quail occupying many areas in eastern New Mexico.

Farther south, the quail forecast is a little gloomier. Terry Nelson, Carlsbad District wildlife officer, reports that the overall quail hunting forecast is fair at best. He recommends trying the area along the Jal Highway (N.M. 128) near the Eddy/Lea county line for scaled quail.

Reports are good in Otero County for scaled and Gambel's quail. Colin Duff, Alamogordo District wildlife officer, recommends the Tularosa basin from south of Alamogordo north to Tularosa for good numbers of Gambel's quail. For a mixed bag of Gambel's and scaled quail, try Otero Mesa and the foothills of the lower Sacramento Mountains. Quail hunting on McGregor Range also should be good. For information on hunting and access on McGregor Range, contact Fort Bliss at (915) 569-9505.

Quail hunting in the Santa Rosa and Fort Sumner areas should be fair according to Santa Rosa District Wildlife Officer Mark Holguin. The best chances for success will be south of Fort Sumner on state land east of the Pecos River in the Bojax area.

Reports on quail numbers in the Roswell area are mixed. Populations appear to be good in the northern portion of Mescalero Sands east of Roswell. Reports from the southern Mescalero Sands east of Hagerman aren't as promising, with coveys being few and hard to find. Don't be surprised to bump into a covey or two of bobwhites if you plan on hunting the sand country east of Hagerman. Quail hunting west and north of Roswell should be good according to the Roswell District Wildlife Officer Josh Waldrip.

For additional quail hunting opportunities in southeastern New Mexico, hunters can take advantage of the Department's Open Gate program. Under this program, the Department pays private landowners for opening their private property for public hunting opportunities. Several Open Gate properties are in the Fort Sumner area and a few more are in eastern New

Mexico. Many of these properties are open for quail hunting. A complete list of participating properties and maps can be found on the Department's Web site, www.wildlife.state.nm.us.

While not as good as a few years ago, the overall quail hunting forecast for southeastern New Mexico for this fall looks to be favorable. It is certainly going to be better than what we've seen over the last couple of years. However, coveys may be hard to find because of the good habitat conditions throughout most of the region, with lots of cover being found in many areas.



Photo: Texas Parks & Wildlife
Bobwhite quail

For more information about small game hunting in New Mexico, check out the 2010-2011 Small Game Rules and Information Booklet on the Department's Web site, or pick up a copy at license vendors statewide.

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

Southeast



Mark Madsen



Photo: Dan Williams

Scaled quail



Wildlife find refuge at Rio Chama

By Dan Williams

Sitting pretty in northern New Mexico between Heron and El Vado lakes, the Rio Chama Wildlife Area is hard to beat when it comes to hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing.

Originally purchased by the State Game Commission in 1954 for its rich wildlife habitat, the area provides a safe haven for deer, elk, turkeys and other species to live and reproduce without being pressured by humans during their most vulnerable times. It also provides some of the best deer hunting and trout fishing opportunities in the state.

The Rio Chama perhaps is best-known as a winter resting area and spring calving and fawning grounds for deer and elk.

“After the last elk hunt, from November until Memorial Day, it’s just for the deer and elk to play. They’re pregnant during that time and they don’t need to be chased around,” said John Zamora, a Department of Game and Fish conservation officer. He’s worked the Chama District for the past 14 years and says he can’t imagine working anywhere else.



Photo: Dan Williams
The Rio Chama Wildlife Area is known for its big mule deer bucks.

“I like it here, especially in the winter when there are lots of deer and elk around,” Zamora said. “What makes it special is that it’s closed to motorized vehicles, and closed to everyone much of the year. When there’s great habitat and no access, it’s good for the wildlife.”

The area is open to fishing, wildlife watching, hiking and horseback riding from Memorial Day until the first big-game hunts begin in late September. Deer and elk hunting is limited

to a select few who are lucky enough to win a hunt in the annual big-game drawing. This season, only 55 deer tags were issued, 15 of those reserved for youths younger than 18.

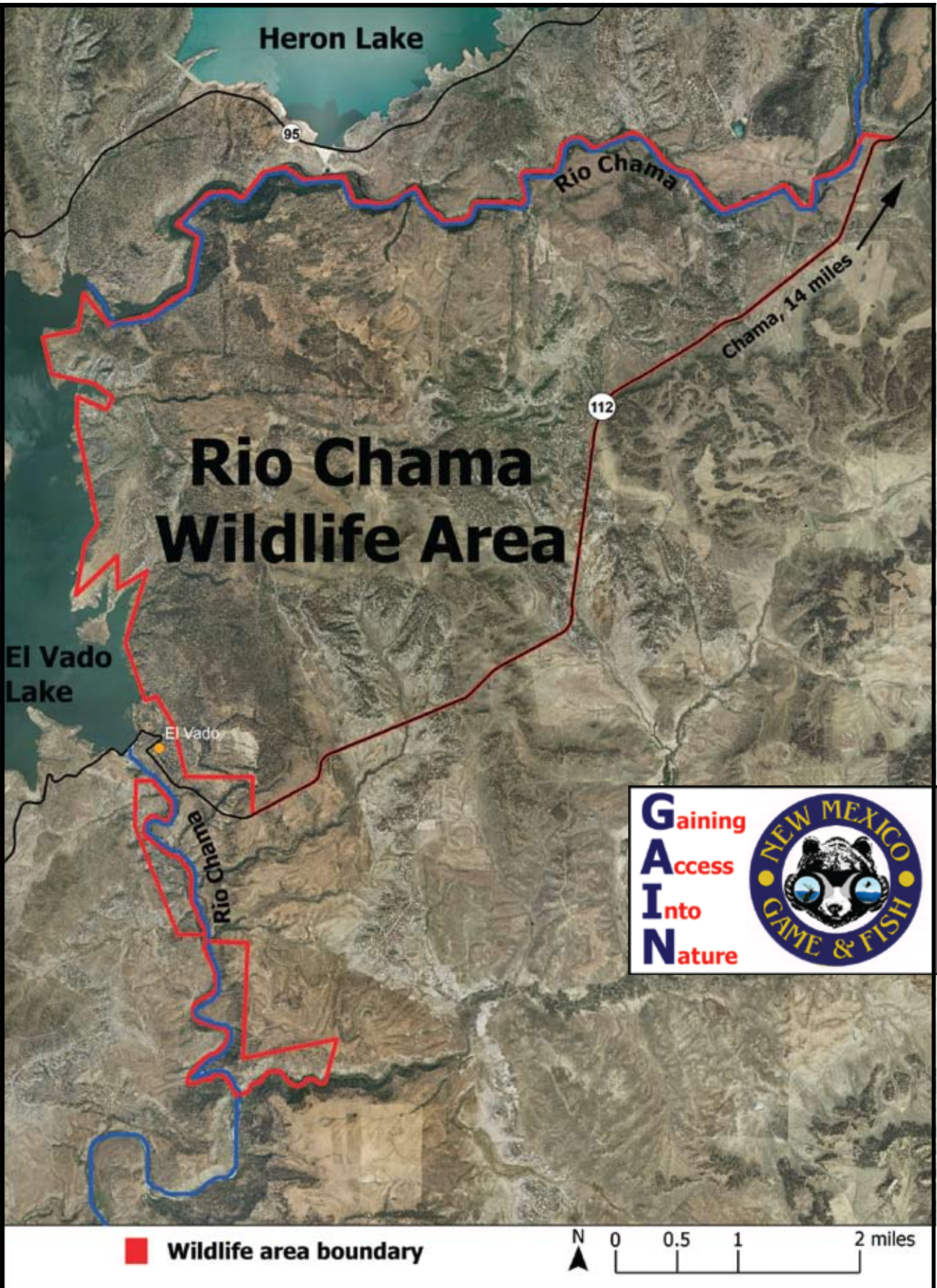
The deer and elk herds that use the area in winter are migratory, Zamora said, most of them coming in from higher country to the north and west. Based on artifacts found in the area, some archaeologists believe those same migratory patterns are what brought Late Paleo-Indian hunters to the region in 8,000 to 6,500 BC.

The restricted access also makes the Rio Chama known for its big mule deer. Trophy bucks are taken from the area every year by hunters with bows, rifles ... and cameras. Wildlife watchers particularly enjoy driving past the Rio Chama from Thanksgiving to Christmas, when chances are good at catching a big buck near the highway while they are distracted during the “rut” or breeding season.

In February and March, many of those big bucks and bull elk drop their antlers somewhere in the 13,000-acre area, which attracts another type of visitor – the shed hunter. Zamora said his job gets tough in March and April trying to keep the shed hunters out until the area opens on Memorial Day.

“We watch it carefully,” he said.

The Rio Chama Wildlife Area recently was opened to wildlife-associated recreation 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 at all license vendors, Department offices and on the Department Web site, www.wildlife.state.nm.us.



Rio Chama Wildlife and Fishing Area

- **Location:** Approximately 15 miles southwest of Chama between El Vado and Heron lakes, bordered by N.M. 112 on the southeast and the Rio Chama on the northwest.
- **Purchased:** Original purchase in 1954 with additional land purchases through 1989 for a total of \$103,500 to provide deer and elk habitat and increase hunting and fishing opportunities.
- **Land and water:** 13,239 acres, including access to more than 12 miles of the Rio Chama and 4.5 miles of the El Vado Reservoir shoreline. A portion of the property is leased to the State Parks and Recreation Division for camping and boating facilities.
- **Wildlife, fish:** Deer, elk, many species of birds and other wildlife. Rainbow and brown trout thrive in the river and El Vado lake. The lake also contains some kokanee salmon.
- **Activities allowed:** Hunting, fishing, hiking and horseback riding; no motorized



- vehicles. Camping by licensed hunters only in designated areas during seasons. More camping is available at El Vado Lake and Heron Lake state parks.
- **Restrictions, closures:** Open Memorial Day through Nov. 15, with limited seasonal closures during hunting seasons. Nov. 16 through Memorial Day closures are to protect deer and elk while wintering and while they are having their calves and fawns. The only exception is for hunters who draw for the special spring turkey hunt.
 - **Information:** Department of Game and Fish Northwest Area office, (505) 222-4702.





Endangered toads surviving despite threat of fungus

Wildlife biologists from New Mexico and Colorado were rewarded this summer when an endangered boreal toad – one of a group stocked as tadpoles in 2008 – was discovered at Trout Lakes in Rio Arriba County.

The 2-year-old toad was the best sign so far that efforts to restore the amphibian to its native habitat were paying off. Remarkably, the toad had survived two harsh northern New Mexico winters, and likely reproduced. Perhaps more remarkably, the toad had survived despite the presence of chytrid fungus, which was discovered in the area in 2009.

Discovery of the 2008 boreal toad and others from subsequent stockings encouraged biologists to continue restoration efforts. The tadpoles are raised in the Colorado Division of Wildlife Native Aquatic species Restoration Facility in Alamosa before they are stocked in the Trout Lakes area. Four groups of tadpoles have been stocked since 2008, some of them after a short “fattening-up” period at Los Ojos Hatchery.

The boreal toad (*Bufo boreas boreas*), is found only above 8,000 feet. It was last seen in New Mexico in 1986 and is listed as endangered under the state Wildlife Conservation Act.

The restoration project suffered a major setback in the summer of 2009, when several toads were found dead. They later were confirmed to have succumbed to chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*), the same fungus that might have extirpated the boreal toad from the state in the first place. Implicated in massive amphibian die-offs worldwide, chytrid fungus likely arrived at Trout Lakes through wildlife or human activity that transported mud containing the fungus from another wetland.

Despite the presence of the fungus, hundreds of healthy toads and toadlets were being found in 2009, fueling biologists' hopes that a strain of toads resistant to the fungus might be fostered at Trout Lakes. That optimism was bolstered by a population of boreal toads in Utah that continues to survive despite the presence of chytrid fungus.

This summer, biologists found a bumper crop of toads, chorus frogs and northern leopard frogs at Trout Lakes. Tests for chytrid fungus are pending but the optimism is high. To date, no more dead toads have been found.

Leland Pierce is the terrestrial species recovery coordinator for the Department of Game and Fish. He can be reached at (505) 476-8094 or leland.pierce@state.nm.us.

Meet *Sonorella painteri*, New Mexico's newest species of land snail

Herpetologist Charlie Painter thought something was odd about the snail shell he found while searching for an endangered rattlesnake in the San Luis Mountains of southwestern New Mexico. So he picked it up, planning to show it to a colleague who knew a thing or two about snails.

What Painter didn't know at the time was that his discovery would become a 12-year project for Brian Lang, a Department of Game and Fish biologist and invertebrate specialist. After years of painstaking research and field work in collaboration with Lance Gilbertson, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Lang identified that obscure snail as a new species. Confirmed this year by his peers with the Biological Society of Washington, *Sonorella painteri* became one of Lang's major career achievements.

Lang named the new species after Painter, he said, “because if Charlie hadn’t have brought that one shell in, I probably never would have gone down there to investigate. The species name honors Charlie’s contribution to the conservation of reptiles and amphibians.”

Familiar with most land snails found in New Mexico's "Bootheel," region, Lang suspected he had something special the first time he saw the new shell.

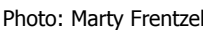
“There were no records of this genus in the San Luis Mountains; the nearest known population is in the Animas Mountains to the north,” Lang said. “That told me it was likely a new species.”

It also told him he was in for a whole lot of work if he wanted to get the species officially recognized.

For the next 12 years – among his many other tasks with the Department – Lang traveled to the Bootheel, searching for and collecting shells and live snails from the San Luis, the Animas, Hatchets, Peloncillo and Florida mountain ranges. He needed samples from all of the snails of the genus for comparison.

It was tough work in often hot weather, especially considering the snails' favored habitat – talus slopes.

"You have to dig two to six feet into the talus before you even start to find snails," Lang said.



Despite its dry climate, New Mexico has 117 species of land snails that are found nowhere else in the world.

"Then you start finding them in decaying leaf litter, soil mold and lichens."

After the field work came hours of tedious labor in the laboratory, taking meticulous measurements of shell characteristics and reproductive genitalia.

When Lang and Gilbertson finished, not only had they identified a new species, but they also recommended to the society that two formerly recognized subspecies of *Sonorella*, *S. hatchitana flora* and *S. hatchitana peloncillensis*, in the Bootheel merit full species rank. Based on their comparisons, they recognized significant differences in shell morphology and soft anatomy, supported by geographic isolation.

The society agreed, elevating the two sub-species to full-species status. For Lang, it was icing on the cake.

“When people think of New Mexico, they don’t normally consider land snails as part of our native fauna. After all, many of us live in the Chihuahuan Desert,” he said. “What we may not realize is that of the 117 species of land snails native to New Mexico, about 42 percent are indigenous to our state. In other words, these species are found nowhere else in the world.”

Coincidentally, *Sonorella painteri*, land snail species No. 117, was first discovered in a region of the San Luis Mountains called Lang Canyon.



Sonorella painteri, a new species of land snail, lives two to six feet down in the talus slopes of the San Luis Mountains of New Mexico's "Bootheel" near the Mexico border.

Hard, cold . . . elk country



Photo: Don MacCarter

Youth elk hunting opportunities in N.M.

The Department of Game and Fish is offering more elk hunting opportunities for youth hunters to ensure future generations continue to enjoy the state's wildlife resources through hunting.

This season, more than 600 licenses were available to hunters younger than age 18 through the big-game drawing. Youths who were unsuccessful in the drawing had opportunities to buy one of 1,900 Youth Encouragement Elk Licenses – most of them for “any legal sporting arm” -- on the Department Web site.

For more information about youth hunting opportunities in New Mexico, please consult the annual “Big-game and Trapper Rules & Information” booklet, available at www.wildlife.state.nm.us, and at Department offices and license vendors statewide.

Gila youth elk hunt puts frost in boots, meat in freezer

By M.H. “Dutch” Salmon

It's a hard, cold country up there in Catron Country at the north end of the Gila National Forest. An ocean of mountains, pine forests and grassland parks grab the visitor; only later do you realize that none of it has running water. The sparse human population is a plus. To the hunter it is Game Unit 15 and if it had a flowing stream, it would freeze at summer's end.

No place in America gets so cold that far south. Take that triangle from Reserve northeast to Datil then back west to Quemado and the Arizona state line and you'll have a fair picture of the geography and the map. Santa Fe is several hundred miles north and at 7,000 feet is known for cold with an all-time record of 18 below zero. Reserve is only about 5,800 feet and yet it is colder with a record of 23 below zero. Taos is even higher than Santa Fe, farther north, and one night dipped to 27 below zero. That's not even close to Quemado at 6,900 feet and a record low of 33 below. Name a colder

town in New Mexico! No, not even Chama at 7,600 feet and a record 30 below right on the Colorado border.

Game abounds in this hard, cold country, particularly Abert's squirrels and elk. Two weeks earlier we'd had a good squirrel hunt. Our terrier, Jack, put them up a tree and Bud sharpened his shooting eye, bringing them down with a bolt-action .22 magnum. We had a fine squirrel stew, but even then Bud was already contemplating his first elk hunt. He had drawn a youth elk tag for any antlerless animal in that unit. Of course, we had to power-up from that .22 magnum. I had the only center-fire arm in the house and we took it to the range to sight it in. Bud handled the gun well and we did a competent job, as it turned out, tuning-up the inherent accuracy of the gun.

I said, “Bud, if you group them in the field like you do on paper, you've got a dead elk.”

I had a tip from a local hunter for an area to camp and hunt, and we came prepared to pitch

a tent, hunt meat rather than horns, and try to stay warm, especially at night.

That first afternoon, before season, we set up camp on a cool, sunny day and set out on foot to scout. We found tracks and elk droppings most everywhere, but no place in particular. More than one informant had warned: “That unit is no good anymore . . . wolves got most of them.”

It appeared not. There was plenty of elk sign, fresh enough that we knew they hadn't all been taken down by wolves in the last week. But it appeared the herds were broken up and scattered (wolves will do that) and we would need to cover some ground to find elk. Fair enough; we were hunting, after all.

The next morning we were set up before first light in a small stringer of pine close to a feeding area. The thought was that the elk would be out in the open park under cover of darkness and we would bushwhack one coming back into the ponderosa about legal shooting time. It was a good plan, but did not



Photo: Don MacCarter

New Mexico's sometimes harsh winter weather can make Rocky Mountain Elk tough quarry for late-season hunters.





Photo: Dutch Salmon

Pre-season practice helped make Bud Salmon a crack shot when it came time to sight-in on his first cow elk.

produce sight or sound of an elk. As the sun rose we did enjoy the sight of an antelope herd at play on a dry lake bed. They never saw us so we were doing something right. Then we retreated to camp for breakfast and a nap.

We hiked out a good section in the afternoon, then, toward evening, attempted to dry-gulch one, as before. No luck. We also made it to an overlook of a nice meadow below.

“You think they might be down there early some morning, Dad?”

“Maybe so, Buddy.”

It sure got cold that night – I found out later it went below zero at Quemado – and getting up to answer a call of nature at 3 a.m. was a test of manhood. Or so it seemed, standing in the snow on bare feet away from the tent in my long johns. I surmised that no place in New Mexico was colder that night.

In the morning, friend Jeremy arrived to show us how to hunt elk. Though a young man, he’s killed some 15 elk, which were 15 more than we’d killed and he wanted to help. We hunted a day of futility, ranging farther afield on foot, and it was easy to see where they’d been. But where they were now was still a mystery. We climbed a big bluffy mountain and looked all around. Amazing how herds of animals that weigh 500 pounds and more can melt away when the hunt is on.

It began to snow in the afternoon and the water jugs were still frozen from the night before. We took to heating up cans of stew or hash on the grill over the fire and then eating it right out of the can . . . Like I said, a hard, cold country.

In the morning the white stuff lay on the ground and we were all thinking, “a tracking snow!” And sure enough, we spotted some elk – maybe 25 – from that same high bluff we’d visited two days before. We slid and climbed down the bluff as the elk meandered out of the meadow into the trees, headed east. But they did not seem to have seen us and in time we entered the big woods ourselves, saved by a tracking snow.

With three inches of snow on the ground it wasn’t hard to follow a group of cloven-hoofed wildlife. In about an hour, in our most surreptitious way, we stumbled into five bedded down together. They saw us before

we saw them and, once spooked, Jeremy said it was “not likely” that they would bed down again.

Elk tracks merged, divided, merged again, and as each big print took on its share of the falling snow it was easy to tell which was the freshest. But these elk were not following the ridges; they were crossing them. Everything was uphill or down and they were making better time than us. Still, Jeremy urged us on, and we stopped at the crest of each ridge to peer across the next canyon, on the off chance that a sub-herd would stop to feed.

At first, looking through the weather, I didn’t believe my eyes. None of us did. Were those elk, or the ghosts of elk, or just a snowy mirage of 500-pound animals reaching and eating high into the branches, far across the canyon?

“Incredible, they’ve stopped to feed!” Jeremy whispered.

Bud got in a prone position at the ridge crest, rested the gun on Jeremy’s backpack, and shot her at 160 yards with my Browning lever-action .308. The bullet angled into the front quarters, and then the biggest cow on the hillside staggered three steps back and went down like a house of cards. The one-shot kid.

So we had a 500-pound ungulate near the bottom of a canyon and two miles from camp. Jeremy boned out the meat and we carried it all out in backpacks. It took two trips by each of us, and from the first cut till the last bag, we made it to camp just before dark. It was a workout, but there were three of us packing meat fairly earned and nobody complained.

Now 14, Buddy will always remember the elk tracks in the snow, the stalk, getting into position, and the 160-yard shot across the canyon. Me? I’ll remember how pleased I was for my son, that at the core I’m a houndman, not a rifleman, and that I wouldn’t have been bragging on the kid without the help of the one guy there who knew what he was doing.

And I’ll always be grateful for that hard, cold land. From 3-pound squirrels to 500-pound elk, it is game country.

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

Christmas elk tenders

2 to 4 servings

Ingredients:

- 1 pound elk steak
 - ½-pound broccoli florettes
 - 1 tsp. cinnamon
 - 1 tsp. salt
 - 2 cloves crushed garlic
 - 6 tsp corn starch
 - 1 tsp red chile powder
 - 2 tbsp soy sauce
 - Olive oil
-
- Slice or cube elk steak and season with cinnamon, salt and garlic.
 - Shake seasoned elk steak in a paper bag with corn starch and chile powder.
 - Remove broccoli florettes from stems, set aside.
 - Combine 4 tsp. corn starch, 2 tbsp. water and soy sauce in small bowl; set aside.
 - Coat skillet evenly with olive oil and sauté elk for 3 or 4 minutes.
 - Add florettes and fry for five minutes, stirring regularly.
 - Stir in corn starch mixture and cook until sauce thickens.

Stir in the cornstarch mixture, and cook until the sauce thickens.

Serve with wild rice and/or pinto beans.

Green chile elk loaf

4 to 6 servings

- 3 lbs ground elk meat
 - 1 cup green chili, chopped
 - 2 large eggs
 - 1 pack Saltine crackers, finely crushed
 - 6 to 8 potatoes
 - 2 cups baby carrots
 - ½ tbsp cooking oil or non-stick spray
 - 2 cups warm water
 - Salt
 - Pepper
 - Garlic powder
 - Meat tenderizer
 - Seasoning salt
 - Beef bouillon
 - 1 large cooking bag
-
- Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees.
-
- Peel and chop green chili, add 1 tablespoon of garlic powder and salt. Refrigerate.
-
- Place ground elk in large mixing bowl. Add eggs, cracker crumbs, 2 tablespoons of salt, garlic powder, and pepper. Add 1 tablespoon of meat tenderizer and seasoning salt. Start kneading the meat with all ingredients. Add green chili and continue to knead. Place ball of meat onto a cutting board and form into a loaf.
-
- Place cooking bag into a baking pan, lightly oil bottom of bag. Place the meatloaf into the bag.
-
- Peel and cut potatoes in equal sizes.
-
- Surround the meatloaf with the potatoes and baby carrots.

Mix 3 tablespoons of beef bouillon with 2 cups of warm water. Pour water into the bag. Close and tie opening of bag. Place in the oven and cook for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Recipe: Tanya Vigil





Photo: State Parks archive

Built by the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railroad, Sugarite Coal Camp had a population of about 1,000 shortly after it was established in 1912.

Coal camp to state park

Sugarite Canyon celebrates 25th anniversary

By Marti Niman

In 1985, Bob Dye was offered the dubious task of transforming a wild and remote canyon notorious for partying, illegal wood cutting and wildlife poaching into an orderly, well-preserved state park. He had no tools or equipment outside a two-wheel-drive pickup with a propensity for getting stuck, no radio, an office in the basement of one of the few standing coal camp houses, and no phone service.

"I'd call in once a week to the boss in Santa Fe and let him know I was still alive," said Dye, who has served as the park's superintendent for more than 25 years. With a skeleton staff, a hearty volunteer crew and a supportive local community, Sugarite Canyon State Park today is one of the state park system's crown jewels, both in New Mexico and across the nation. Named one of the top 10 state parks in the country by *Camping Life Magazine* in 2006, Sugarite offers a wealth of human history, gorgeous scenery and abundant wildlife.

The caprock cliffs of Sugarite Canyon have witnessed several millennia of transformations. The origins of its coal beds evolved 60 million years ago when its boggy wet swamp lands swallowed dead leaves, roots, tree trunks, moss, eroding sand and mud buried them for centuries. Compressed into coal, it formed part of the Raton Basin, extending 100 miles long and 60 miles wide between Cimarron, N.M., and Huerfano Park, Colo. The area lured coal companies in the early 20th century to mine the coal for home heating and to power steam locomotives. Several



Photo: Marti Niman

A bridge over Chicorica Creek leads to the visitor center at Sugarite Canyon State Park.

coal camp towns sprang up in northeastern New Mexico, including one in Sugarite Canyon.

The Sugarite mines were adits – 11 miles of tunnels driven into the hillside along the coal seams. Mules pulled coal cars from the depths of the mines to a tram that hauled it down the steep slopes to the canyon bottom, where it was loaded into railway cars bound for Raton. Miners often complained that mules were valued more highly than people, and harming a mule was a serious offense. Indeed, the mule barn is one of the few

remaining intact structures from the coal camp days.

"They always took care of the mules," said Dye, who helped guide the mule barn's renovation as the park's maintenance shop.

A few rock foundations and restored structures remain in the canyon – a framework for stories left behind when the town eventually closed in 1941. An extensive outdoor interpretive exhibit now tells the story, with the trail and the coal camp remnants as a backdrop.

"The Sugarite Coal Camp exhibit was definitely a labor of love for me," said Sarah Wood, who served as a regional interpretive ranger based at Sugarite from 2001-2005. Wood, who now manages Cerrillos Hills State Park, credits the work of Dye and volunteers Don and Lorene Schamber for gathering the oral histories that tell the story of the Sugarite Coal Camp.

Established in 1912, the bustling company town – population 1,000 – was built by the St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railroad. Life was hard and poverty the norm. Nonetheless, the oral history project by the Schamblers revealed that their lives offered a wealth of stories and fond memories. Immigrants from 20 countries banded together to get through the rough times, sharing recipes from their homelands of Yugoslavia, Japan, Greece or Scotland and joining in festive dances at in the community center with nine-piece orchestras. Mining towns competed in baseball and soccer games, augmented with family picnics, betting and cheerleading followed by tea shared between rival teams. Italian and Slavic families could make five barrels of wine from a ton of grapes that were shipped by train from California.

The last school principal was one of the first outdoor classroom teachers, leading her charges

Continued on Page 11 ...

Scenic Lake Maloya, one of two small lakes at Sugarite Canyon State Park, is well-stocked with rainbow trout. The lake is open to boats powered by electric trolling motors or oars, and its thick ice beckons hardy anglers in winter.

Photo: Marti Niman



... continued from Page 10

into the canyon for geology and botany field trips. When the school building caught fire in 1939, tearful students and other residents braved the flames to rescue books and a piano.

Many Spanish families relied on traditional herbalists, called curanderas, to treat injuries and illness. Osha, poleo, and malva grew wild in Sugarite Canyon and were used for a variety of ailments.

“The community, including my grandmother who was a curandera, harvested natural herbs and medicines,” Park Ranger Greg Romero said.

The park’s current visitor center once was the town’s post office, with a letter slot in the door and a woman who delivered the mail in her spare time while caring for the family she raised there. In 1977 Romero moved in to renovate the house for the City of Raton, which owned the area before it became a state park.

“I was living in what is now the visitor center raising my son and daughter, Adam and Eve, by myself,” he said. Romero moved out of the house in 1983.

“My family has a lot of history here. My paternal grandmother was a Jicarilla Apache and they used to summer here. My maternal grandmother came from England on the Lusitania, then came to Sugarite and ran a boarding house called Bartholomew’s.”

Romero’s ties to the area have been difficult to break. In 1990, after falling 40 feet from a telephone pole during a stint as a lineman, he was in Santa Fe interviewing for jobs under the American Disabilities Act. The interviewer informed him there was only one position available: in a new state park called Sugarite.

“You’re kidding – I’ll take it!” he responded. Romero has worked at Sugarite ever since.

The first task confronting staff in 1985 was hauling out the tons of trash strewn throughout the area and routing the partiers from their roosts in the woods. The area was a city park with no budget or manpower and not enough expertise to



Photo: Marti Niman

Spectacular fall scenery awaits visitors at Sugarite Canyon State Park.

provide oversight. The Lake Alice campground alone required at least a week of hauling trash. Dye had help from staff from other state parks, who stopped illegal campfires and shut down the four-wheelers by blocking the roads with big rocks. Dye recalls one party at Lake Alice Campground that was full of 75 to 100 cars and kids who were underage drinking with 14 cases of beer and two kegs. He told them, “This is a state park now and you guys have 15 minutes to get packed up.”

“I had to back out fast,” laughed Dye. “I had no radio so I asked State Police for backup and they came out and cleared them out. Word got around and pretty soon they went somewhere else.”

After two years contractors put in campgrounds and remodeled the mule barn into a maintenance shop, which needed repairs after years of neglect. The old post office where Romero raised his kids became the visitor center.

“I was not happy at first when State Parks took

over the area,” Romero said. “It meant rules, regulations and fees, but now I think it’s the best thing that could have happened here. It’s one of the best-managed parks, with a balance between visitor use and keeping it pristine. We might have lost a good part of it otherwise.”

Sugarite offers limited but quality hunting opportunities, including mule deer, elk and turkey bow hunts. Dye recalls one bow hunter who fell out of a tree and was seriously injured but managed to crawl to the highway for help. Another hunter became disoriented in the thickly wooded canyon. He ended up across the Colorado border in Trinidad after walking 17 miles, mistaking the distant city lights for those of Raton.

“We still have our hunts through the draw, Romero said. “We have 40 permits for mule deer, five for elk and the herds are managed for a quality hunt.”

That conservation mindset, combined with the canyon’s ecological uniqueness as a transition zone between the rugged Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains, offers a haven for wildlife rarely seen in other parts of the state.

“I saw more wildlife there than in my whole life, Wood said. “Every day I’d see mule deer and wild turkeys and sometimes bobcats. I saw a mountain lion on the side of the road one night and huge elk, muskrats and beavers. They have everything up there.”

Dye recalls witnessing two mountain lions mating on one of the park trails. “He’d sniff at her, she’d scream at him, he’d swat her,” he said. “Eventually they made their way to Gobblers Knob. They were like housecats with very long tails, flopping back and forth.”

Bears frequently are seen along the road or in the campground areas, but rarely does Sugarite report bear problems such as those seen elsewhere.

“We have only trapped three bears in the whole history of the park,” Dye said. “We kept food away and in the early 90s we got bear-proof trash containers that really helped. We were the example, the first people in that area of the state who installed bear-proof containers.”

A bear sighting in Sugarite Canyon does not offer the same cause for alarm that it does in cities and towns. Staff, volunteers and visitors have learned to co-exist and welcome their presence with aplomb. Human-bear encounters there form part of the canyon’s ongoing legends and more grist

Please see “Sugarite,” Page 13 ...



Workers at the Sugarite Coal Camp changed their coal-stained work clothes for crisp uniforms and enjoyed soccer and baseball in their spare time.

Photos: State Parks archives





Park wins Dark Sky award



Deep in the heart of New Mexico's eastern prairie lies little-known Clayton Lake State Park, just a horeshoe's toss from the Texas and Oklahoma borders.

Photo: Alex Postnik

By Marti Niman

Tucked into lava breaks amid rolling grassy cattle country, Clayton Lake State Park is best-known for waterfowl and fishing. It's wide-open spaces and clear western skies also offer amazing views of dark starry nights.

In July, the park received Gold Tier recognition as an International Dark Sky Park from the International Dark Sky Association. It is one of only six parks in the world to achieve this status. Goldendale Observatory State Park in Washington received Silver Tier recognition at the same time. The honor was bestowed just four years after Clayton Lake was selected as the second state park in New Mexico (after City of Rocks) to receive an observatory.

"I thought it was pretty cool that we received a higher rank than the park in Washington, and they are an astronomy park," Park Superintendent Charles Jordan said.

The State Parks Division chose Clayton Lake for an observatory in 2006 "because we have some of the darkest skies in New Mexico and even the continental United States," Jordan said. "The only town near us is Clayton (population 2,524) and it's over the hillside. Denver and Albuquerque are 300 miles away."

Peter Lipscomb, a Santa Fe astronomer, was contracted in 2006 under State Parks' Reach for the Stars program to help install the observatory and educate volunteers and community members about its operation. Opening the observatory was a creative effort by a state park to engage the community in natural resource protection, he said.

"On opening night, some local guys introduced themselves as the Clayton Astronomy Club," Lipscomb said. "There were just three of them."

The club now has a roster that includes members in Australia, New Zealand, Arizona, Maryland, Iowa and Colorado. "They like what we do and especially what we do with kids, introducing them to the night sky and astronomy," club member Daniel Luther said.

Clayton barber and park volunteer Art Grine is clearly the group's firebrand. He was so amazed by the telescope during Lipscomb's opening night demonstration that he promptly signed up to take classes on his own in astronomy as well as solar maintenance and

'The people of Clayton saw that they could be astronomers; this was something they could do.'

-- Peter Lipscomb, astronomer

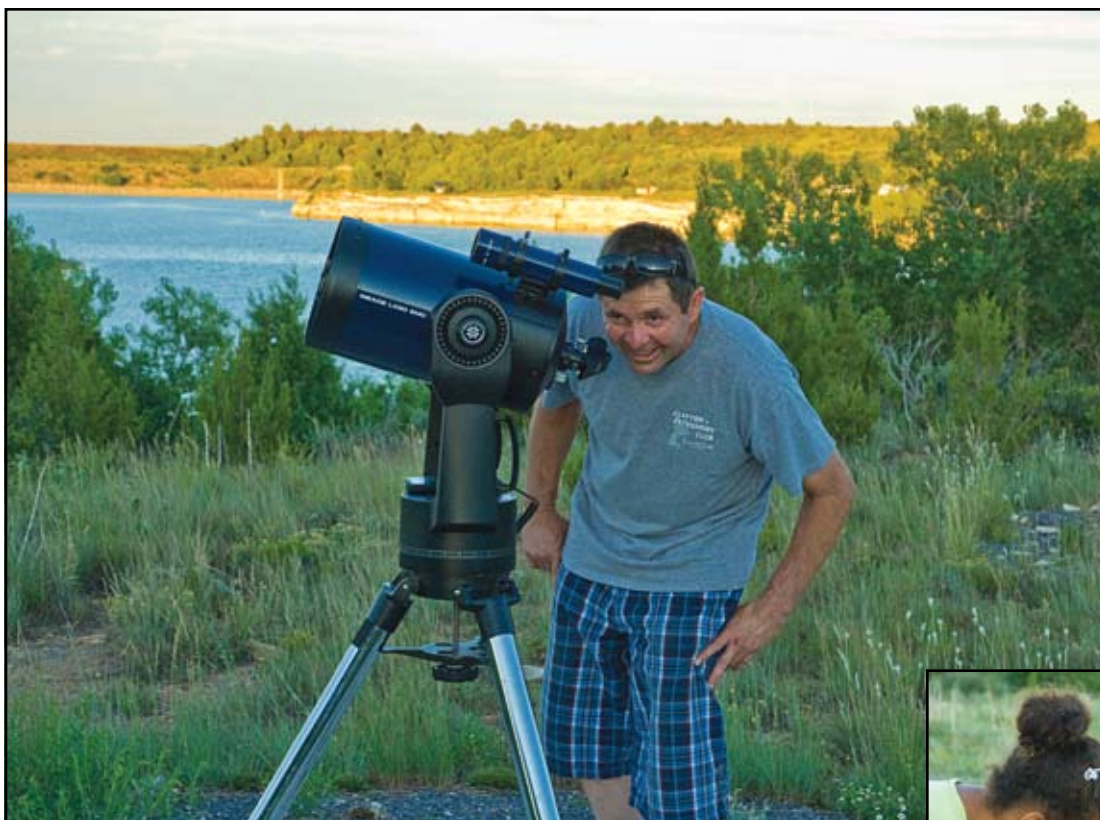
installation, because the observatory is solar-powered.

"Art kept asking me, 'How do you make it do that?'" Lipscomb said. "As things progressed, I ended up doing a two-day workshop on equipment, telescope alignment, maintenance and interpretation."

Grine now runs a solar installation business as a side to his work as a barber, bringing renewable energy to remote ranches and windmills in the surrounding area. "Renewable energy and astronomy go together; astronomers need dark skies," he said.

The International Dark Sky designation isn't awarded solely because a park has dark skies. It must show a genuine community effort, long-term planning, retrofitting, preservation efforts, a lighting management plan, and energetic public awareness regarding the night sky as a natural resource.

The astronomy club and the people of Clayton grasped the night



Clayton barber Art Grine volunteers to help with the Clayton Lake State Park astronomy program. Below, he shows Alvis Elementary School student Callie Bates one of the park's telescopes.

Photos: Marti Niman



sky as their own and jumped on the task of preserving their night skies.

"I came to know what these people felt was precious and important," Lipscomb said. "The starry sky has been over their heads for a long time. I could see it fire their imaginations and offer a level of enrichment for their lives."

The observatory helped the community recognize that the dark sky overhead was not something available everywhere. Visitors came from Oklahoma, Texas and other parts of the world to witness in Clayton what was lost at home.

"The people of Clayton saw that they could be astronomers; this was something they could do," Lipscomb said.

Art's Barber Shop - with its black-and-white tiled floors, trophy heads

Please see "Clayton Lake," Page 13 ...



Clayton Lake

... continued from Page 12

mounted on the walls and memorabilia scattered among the combs and razors of his trade – is a classic old-time town meeting hall. People gather here to share stories, catch up with neighbors and swap ideas. Among those ideas are dark skies and renewable energy, and Grine doesn’t hesitate to advocate the benefits of both from his barber chair pulpit.

“Seventy-five percent of Americans no longer see the Milky Way,” Grine said. “We’re going back to the way people used to live. They had wind turbines in the 1920s, so now we are going back to the way it used to work.”

“We just turned the radio off if the wind stopped blowing,” said Val Wilkinson, waiting for his haircut. Wilkinson grew up in neighboring Gladstone in the 1930s. “Folks in Gladstone in the 30s had no lights, no electricity, just a kerosene fridge.”

The city and county passed dark sky ordinances to require lighting to meet certain standards. Community members approached the local prison warden to encourage a switch to LED lights with shields that deflect the light toward the ground. The club took a model of a shield to show prison officials, who then had them fabricated by the prisoners.

Lipscomb said that passing a local ordinance usually takes from two to 10 years before

anything happens. “What was surprising was how quickly a majority of the community realized that this was important,” he said. One couple was so enamored by the observatory that they took their vows by starlight.

“Two members met in the astronomy club and got married at the observatory,” Jordan said. “Their honeymoon was at a star party.”

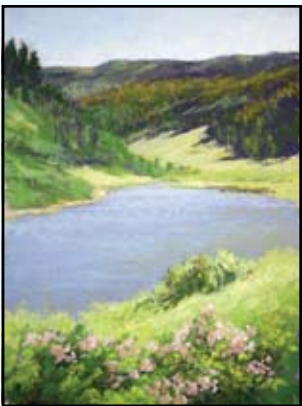
Grine is so dedicated to the observatory that he sleeps inside during the annual trout derby to guard it from potential vandalism. Many an icy winter night has seen club members huddled inside the observatory walls at 3 a.m. while the stars rise and the winds howl above the opened roof. A computer monitor mounted in the outside wall projects images from the telescope, allowing elderly stargazers to see through the scope from the comfort of chairs set up outside.

The community raised money to ship the telescope for repairs when it broke down a couple years ago, but that didn’t stop them from stargazing. Club members brought their own smaller telescopes and set them up around the observatory during the 18 months the big telescope was gone.

“How did a town in the middle of nowhere become the center of the universe for the dark sky movement?” asks Lipscomb. “They were not afraid to dream big. The romantic sense of the night sky is about more than telescopes – it’s about preserving a sense of place, educating kids, offering a destination. They’re not sitting inside; they’re out under the night sky.”

Arts in the Parks

Artists from the Plein Air Painters of New Mexico will exhibit paintings created at several state parks at the Nov. 19 opening exhibit of the Arts in the Parks at the New Mexico Art League, 3407 Juan Tabo Blvd. NE, in Albuquerque. The works will be available for sale Nov. 10 through Dec. 18. The League’s usual portion of the proceeds from exhibit sales will be contributed to park Friends groups where the paintings were done.



Pastel painting of Sugarite Canyon State Park by Lee McVey.

The Plein Air Painters and New Mexico State Parks launched a partnership last spring for Arts in the Parks, loosely modeled after the Arts for the Parks program of the National Park Service. The genre draws on the long American tradition of plein air painting as a catalyst for the conservation of wild places. Plein air is French for “open air” and evolved in the early 19th century.

For more information, please visit pleinairpaintersnm.org, newmexicoartleague.org or www.nmparks.com.

Sugarite

... continued from Page 11

for campfire stories.

“I was talking with a camper while collecting trash in the pickup and he kept looking over my shoulder,” said Dye. “Finally he asked, ‘Do you have a dog?’ I turned around and there was a black bear pulling trash out of the truck.”

“I was giving a bear program at the amphitheater and a bear walked by during the middle of it, eating berries,” Wood said.

“We had a ranger named Leon who attracted bears,” said Dye. “He threw a mop at one as it came out of the toilets, and accidentally hit another over the head with a bag of trash while loading the compactor.”

Not only are lions and bears frequently seen; the canyon also plays host to abundant bird life. Merriam’s wild turkeys roost in the Ponderosa pines at night. Waterfowl, ospreys and bald eagles may be viewed as they migrate through the region. Evening grosbeaks pass through in spring and black-headed grosbeaks like to hang out near the visitor center’s feeding station, along with rufous and broad-tailed hummingbirds. Belted kingfishers, spotted sandpipers, great horned owls, Cooper’s hawks, woodpeckers, Northern flickers, spotted towhees, Western tanagers, chickadees and canyon wrens are just a few of the avian species that visit or live in the canyon.

Sugarite Canyon is situated in a habitat transition zone at the intersection of the eastern prairie, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the Raton-Clayton volcanic field that attracts and nurtures numerous butterfly species.

“A local specialty there is the Raton Mesa fritillary and we also see Aphrodites and banded hairstreaks,” said Steve Cary, natural resource planner for State Parks.

So abundant are butterflies in the canyon that the park plays host to the two-day “Bodacious Butterfly Festival” the third weekend in June,

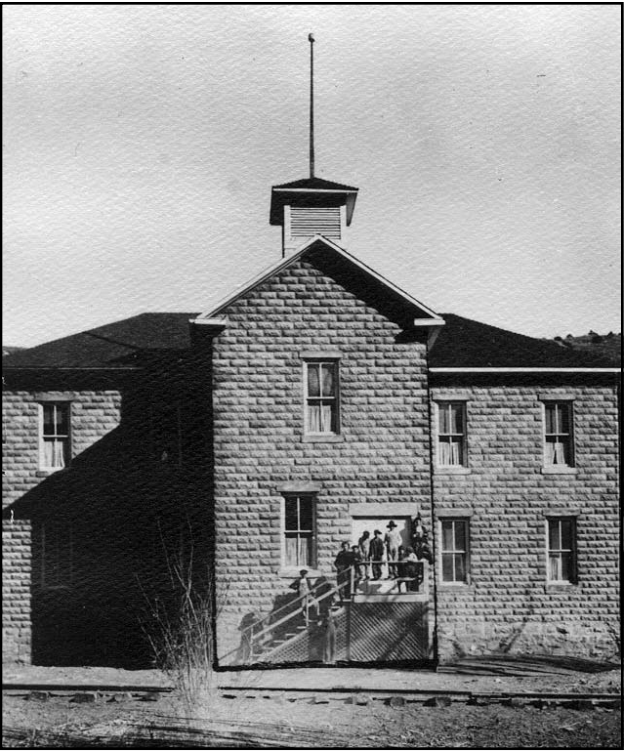


Photo: State Parks archive

Immigrants from 20 countries enrolled their children in the Sugarite Coal Camp school, which was destroyed by fire in 1939.

featuring butterfly identification hikes, face painting and storytelling. The festival evolved from an annual butterfly count led by Cary, who authored “Butterfly Landscapes of New Mexico” in 2009.

When winter settles into the canyon, Sugarite’s small lakes freeze over and draw hardy ice fishermen.

“During winters at Lake Maloya, the ice would start to melt and I could hear it cracking,” Wood said. “It sounded like a bunch of whales up there in the canyon.”

Managing wildlife in the canyon is more straightforward than managing people, as the park staff’s early experiences with partying campers can attest. Animals are one thing and a lot of times you can predict their behavior, but people are a little bit different, as Dye recalls some of his encounters with the latter.

“I’d have someone knocking on my door at 3

a.m. or a call from someone who wrecked his car up in the canyon,” he said. “I remember one guy was screaming he was going to kill himself in the toilet, but he was just a little inebriated. You never know what you’re going to run into out there.”

The park has several miles of backcountry trails that are accessible by foot or horseback, a nature trail, and an historic trail through the Sugarite coal camp where a living history re-enactment is held every Memorial Day weekend. Horse corrals are near the Soda Pocket trailhead.

The park has two lakes for fishing from the shore, courtesy boats dock or fishing pier. Only boats with electric trolling motors, paddle boats or sails are permitted on Lake Maloya. Because the lake serves as Raton’s water supply, no gasoline motors or swimming are allowed.

The Friends of Sugarite Canyon State Park recently launched an initiative to raise money for building a new visitor center to provide more office and exhibit space for staff and visitors. The canyon receives from 120,000 to 150,000 visitors a year. The current visitor center offers only about 900 square feet of office space shared by four or five staff members and the small exhibit area doesn’t do justice to the park’s rich cultural and natural history. Because the visitor center is an historic building, it can’t be remodeled to accommodate the park’s current needs.

“The existing visitor center is charming and old style, but a very small office for everybody,” Wood said. “Sugarite has a multitude of cultural and natural resources and it would be nice to do an indoor program somewhere other than the maintenance shop.”

Sugarite Canyon State Park is about seven miles northeast of Raton via N.M. 76. Tucked against the Colorado border below Johnson Mesa, the park offers a refuge and solitude amid the blunt-topped mesas and steep wooded canyons cut through by Chicarica Creek. For more information about the park, or to get involved with the visitor center fundraising effort, call 575-445-5607.

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



... continued from Page 1

This year, the Department responded to more calls about bears than any year since 2002, when 181 problem bears were euthanized or died on highways. One of those bears broke into an elderly woman's home and fatally mauled her.

- July 21, a man from Switzerland was attacked in his tent by a bear in the Manzano Mountains. He suffered minor scratches and was able to scare away the bear by standing tall and holding his ground.

Photo: Ross Morgan

Many bears that find their way into urban areas are young bears away from their mothers for the first time.

"I had one bear that entered a house through a window and left a watermelon on the kitchen table but went into the bedroom, messed up the bed and ate the cat food," Pecos area officer Phil Howes said. "Another bear pulled the bumper off a car. For some reason they seem bolder this year, but not as bad as 2001. That year I was getting four or five calls in the middle of the night – every night."

Winslow said this year's bear problems stem from a growing bear population that needs to be controlled – for the sake of the people and the bears. Natural bear habitat in some areas of the state can't support any more bears, he said.

A brown bear is walking across a gravel path. The bear is facing left and has a thick, shaggy coat of brown fur. The background consists of green grass and some small purple flowers.

Photo: Dan Williams

and more bears are ranging afield and getting into trouble."

When bears find trouble in the East Mountains area near Albuquerque, chances are good that they'll be dealing with Conservation Officer Mike Ahlm. In early June, Ahlm responded to 11 bear calls in two days, including a road-kill bear on Interstate 40. A week earlier, he had to kill an aggressive bear that was frequenting a picnic area.

Like all conservation officers, Ahlm hates to kill bears.

“There were indications that that bear was being fed by people, and that’s usually a death sentence for bears,” Ahlm said. “If I find out you’ve been feeding bears, I will prosecute you.” Under state law, anyone who intentionally or unintentionally feeds a bear that becomes a nuisance or a danger to people can be fined \$500.

The state's current cap on bear harvest, which includes hunting, nuisance kills and road kills, is based on an eight-year study completed in 2001 that estimated the statewide bear population at around 6,000. A more recent assessment of available habitat indicates the population has grown substantially, and is becoming a problem in areas where more humans are moving into bear country.

"That's why we're proposing to increase the harvest in some areas – to knock the population back 20 percent and see if that will alleviate some of these problems," Winslow said. "It may not, and we may have to change strategies down the road, but we need to get ahead of some of these problems."

Currently, New Mexico does not limit the sale of bear licenses, and sells about 4,500 of them each year. That does not translate into 4,500 dead bears, as some may suspect. In fact, only 10 percent of those hunters will actually kill a bear.

New Mexico controls the harvest of bears through zone management. In each zone a

... continued on Page 15



Photo: Dan Williams

In their natural habitat, black bears fatten up on a variety of foods, including fish.



Friday, Aug. 20, 10:13 p.m.



Sunday, Aug. 22, 3:38 a.m.



Monday, Aug. 23, 3:38 a.m.



Photos: Claire Willden

Wednesday, Aug. 25, 12:53 a.m.

Claire Willden, an eighth-grader at Raton Middle School, set up a motion-activated camera at a town dumpster to monitor bear activity for her science project. The bears were willing participants, showing up nearly every night to dine on garbage. This year, the City of Raton spent more than \$30,000 cleaning and repairing dumpsters visited by bears.

... continued from Page 14

number of variables determine how many bears should be removed from the population to meet management goals. To minimize the chance of overharvest, zones are closed when the harvest is within 10 percent of either the total number of bears that can be removed from the zone, or 10 percent of the number of female bears that can be removed.

The harvest limits are determined using three computer programs that consider factors from available habitat to the condition of the annual acorn crop. In some zones sometimes it's appropriate to grow more bears, and sometimes it's appropriate to kill more bears.

The State Game Commission is currently setting the season dates and harvest limits for bears for the 2011-2014 bear hunting seasons. The Department of Game and Fish is recommending increasing the harvest limits for several zones in the state.

Those zones have been identified through increases in nuisance bear calls, attacks on humans and livestock, and analysis of available habitat and population estimates. When New Mexico conducted the eight-year bear study, those same zones were identified as having the most bear habitat closest to human habitation. That study was based on 5,723 radio-telemetry locations from 409 radio transmitters placed on 316 bears.

The zones proposed for reductions in bear populations include Zone 2 (Sangre de Cristos from Raton to Pecos); Zone 4 (Sandia and Manzano mountains), and Zone 6 (Cloudcroft and Ruidoso). The Department of Game and Fish encourages everyone who lives or travels in bear country to observe some common-sense strategies to avoid unpleasant encounters with bears:

Living with bears

- Keep garbage in airtight containers inside your garage or storage area. Place garbage outside in the morning just before pickup, not the night before. Occasionally clean cans with ammonia or bleach.
- Remove bird feeders. Bears see them as sweet treats, and often they will look for other food sources nearby.
- Never put meat or sweet-smelling food scraps such as melon in your compost pile.
- Don't leave pet food or food dishes outdoors at night.
- Clean and store outdoor grills after use. Bears can smell sweet barbecue sauce and grease for miles.
- Keep your camp clean, and store food and garbage properly at all times. Use bear-proof containers when available. If not, suspend food, coolers and garbage from a tree at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet out from the tree trunk.
- Keep your tent and sleeping bag free of all food smells. Store the clothes you wore while cooking or eating with your food.
- Sleep a good distance from your cooking area or food storage site.
- Store toiletries with your food.

To learn more about New Mexico's black bears and their management, please visit the Department's web site at www.wildlife.state.nm.us.

Enjoy wildlife from a safe distance

By Rick Winslow

New Mexico's spectacular scenery invites thousands of state residents and visitors outdoors every year for fresh air and recreation. Often, these outdoor adventures include encounters with wildlife and rare opportunities to see animals in their natural habitat, doing what they do in their daily lives.

Rarely, encounters with wildlife can be dangerous, and we must not forget that.

The most important thing to remember about the wild parts of our state is that they are wild. The animals that live there are not from a zoo; they do not behave like pets, and they do not need anything from us. Whether it's a bull elk during the rut near Chama, a bighorn sheep in the Pecos Wilderness or a bear with designs on our ice chest, wild animals should be seen, appreciated and left alone as much as possible. Avoidance is our best strategy most of the time.

Unfortunately, avoidance doesn't always work. Black bears in particular, and occasionally cougars, sometimes learn to associate humans and human activity with potential food sources. Encounters with wildlife are to be treasured, but some simple steps can make those encounters safe for people and wildlife:

- **When you spot wildlife**, enjoy it from afar. Getting closer can startle or frighten many species, causing them to run, or in rare instances, approach you.
- **Never feed wildlife!** This habituates them to humans and human food sources and eventually may cause them to be destroyed.
- **Do not run** if you encounter a cougar or bear! Fleeing behavior may trigger the instinct to attack.
- **A popular notion is to play dead**, if a bear attacks. This is not true with black bears.
- **If a cougar or bear approaches** or behaves aggressively, speak loudly and firmly, clap your hands, wave your hand above your head, arm yourself with a stick, throw rocks or sticks at the animal; convince the animal that you are dominant and a danger to it.
- **If you have small children with you**, keep them close and don't allow them to panic.
- **If the animal attacks**, fight back. Use any possible object as a weapon, such as rocks, sticks, a backpack or your bare hands. Cougars and bears have been driven away by prey that fights back. Stay standing and if you fall down, get back on your feet.

Most people are not lucky enough to see bears or cougars in the wild, even though our beautiful state has many areas that these animals and other wildlife call home.

Bears rarely attack people and usually will run from you as soon as they are aware of your

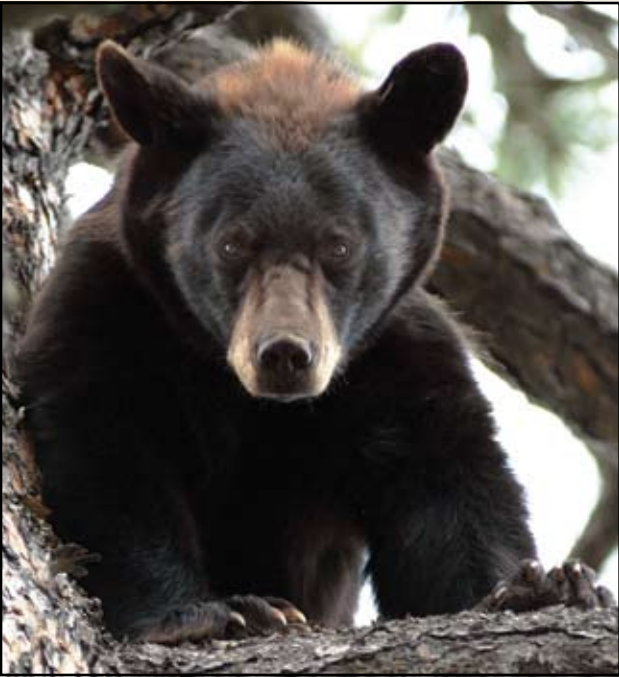


Photo: Department of Game and Fish

Never run or play dead if you have a close encounter with a black bear.

presence. Bears are omnivorous and primarily eat vegetation such as chokecherries, piñons and acorns, lots of insects and occasionally carrion. If one should show undue curiosity about you, the steps above may help you avoid an unfortunate encounter.

Encounters with cougars are much more rare. They are harder to see than bears and they are normally very secretive. Cougars are strictly carnivorous and can be found virtually anywhere in New Mexico. They primarily prey on deer and elk. However, they have been known to attack, and sometimes kill, humans.

Cougars convey their intentions through various body postures, facial expressions and vocalizations. Some these are important to recognize because they may be warning signals. A cougar may convey curiosity by looking intently at the subject of interest with its ears perked forward. If it approaches in a half or full crouch, with its ears perked forward and eyes riveted on the subject, it means serious business and may be preparing to attack. Even a cougar lying on its belly can launch an attack in a split second. If a cougar is cornered, it may bluff-charge or attack. The most important thing to remember is never approach a cougar and always give it a clear escape route.

Keep in mind that every situation is different with respect to the animal, the terrain, the people involved and their activities. Use common sense and more awareness when in cougar and bear country; alter your behavior and keep the risk of interaction with the cougars and bears to a minimum. While hiking or camping, it is best to travel in small groups and make enough noise to avoid surprising an animal. Also, do not approach dead animals; it may be a predator's meal.

This information is provided not to intimidate but to educate. We do not need to live in fear, but we must respect the lifestyle of cougars and bears. The likelihood of an encounter is low, but knowledge of what to do is essential.

Cougars and bears are important components New Mexico's wildlands and even our urban/wildland interface areas, and they are integral parts of the biotic community. For more information, please visit the Department Web site, www.wildlife.state.nm.us.

Rick Winslow is the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish large carnivore and furbearer biologist. He can be reached at (505) 476-8046 or frederick.winslow@state.nm.us.



Photo: Nick Smith

Always give cougars plenty of room to get away from you.





Osprey

Feathered fishing buddies

By Colleen Welch

Imagine you are at your favorite fishing hole. The sunlight is filtering through the cottonwood and willow branches. The air is warm and newly hatched aquatic insects flit above the water. You are quietly waiting for that tug on your fishing line while a great blue heron also waits quietly on the opposite side of the pond. As you watch in wonder, the heron moves with lightning speed and spears a fish with its long, pointed beak.

Great blue herons have serrated or tooth-like edges along their beaks, allowing them to eat a variety of prey, including fish. They are found in many places in New Mexico, including Bluewater Lake and Las Vegas National Wildlife Refuge during winter migration and along the San Juan River wetlands and at



Photos: Top, Mark Watson; above, Dan Williams

A great blue heron looks for a meal at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.

at Heron Lake during the summer. A lucky teenager recently watched a bald eagle swoop down to fight with an osprey over a fish. These two large birds – called raptors – use their hooked beaks to catch, hold and sometimes kill their prey. Ospreys catch fish by hovering high in the air and then plunging into the water. Ospreys have barbed pads on their feet to grip slippery fish while they carry them to a nearby tree to eat.

Two kinds of fish-eating cormorants, double-crested and neotropical, are found in New Mexico. Cormorants dive to catch fish and

bring them to the surface, where they swallow them head-first. Double-crested cormorants live in the lower Rio Grande Valley and Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Neotropical cormorants are found year-round on many of the state's lakes and reservoirs.

Common, hooded and red-breasted mergansers also dive for fish. Common mergansers have long, slender bills with tooth-like points to grip small fish. They are winter visitors on New Mexico lakes, reservoirs and rivers from October to March.

Another diver, the common loon, often peers beneath the water's surface to look for fish. When they spot one, they use their large, powerful feet to dive and swim underwater. Loons hold their necks coiled, ready to strike for a fish. Sometimes, they can be seen in spring or winter at Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge and other large bodies of water.

To learn more about aquatic birds, visit these Internet sites:

www.PartnersInFlight.org
www.birdday.org
www.hawkwatch.org
www.birds.cornell.edu

Colleen Welch is co-coordinator for conservation education and Project WILD for the Department of Game and Fish. She can be reached at (505) 476-8119 or colleen.welch@state.nm.us.



Photo: Jim Stuart

Neotropical cormorant

Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge in the summer. One good place to see a great blue heron is the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park pond in Albuquerque, where herons live year-round.

When people think of birds, they often think of songbirds, crows or Canada geese. However, there are other birds that catch fish for food. A few birds are experts at catching fish.

Great blue herons and belted kingfishers are two of these birds. Belted kingfishers sometimes dive from high perches to catch fish. They can be seen during spring migration at Morgan Lake wetlands east of Farmington, or possibly at Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge, or along the Rio Grande in winter.

Heron are very large wading birds. They eat fish, frogs, crayfish – even chicks and eggs of other birds. They use a variety of skills and tricks to catch fish. Sometimes, a heron will spread its wings to shade the water so it can see its prey more easily. The black-crowned night heron tricks fish to come to the surface by placing bait – insects, flowers, seeds or twigs – in the water. Black- and green-crowned herons live in New Mexico's wetlands and river bosques in the summer.

The bald eagle, member of a group known as fish eagles, uses its flying skill, its strong, sharp talons and its beak to catch and eat fish. Bald eagles and ospreys can be seen in action



Photo: Dan Williams

Bald eagle at Heron Lake.



Photo: Jim Stuart

Hooded merganser