



Photo: Dan Williams

Gotta love it

Living is large in northern New Mexico's W.A. "Bill" Humphries Wildlife Area.

Please see Page 6.

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New Mexico wildlife

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New seasons, new rules



Photo: Dan Williams

Northern New Mexico offers some of the state's best mule deer hunting opportunities.

More youth hunts, shooting time in 2011-2012

Earlier deadlines, later shooting hours, lower application fees and more opportunities for young hunters are among rule changes New Mexico big-game hunters can expect next season.

In its efforts to expand hunting opportunities while keeping rules as streamlined as possible, the State Game Commission this year adopted several new approaches to the way the agency allocates licenses and sets seasons and bag limits. Some of the changes will save sportsmen and sportswomen time, money and aggravation as they apply for hunts and purchase licenses. Others will help the Department of Game and Fish better manage the state's wildlife resources.

One of most important changes for hunters is the earlier application deadline for deer, elk, antelope, bighorn sheep, Barbary sheep and javelina licenses. This year's deadline is March 28 – a week earlier than previous years – to allow resident hunters to benefit from discounts available in



Photo: Dan Williams

Shelby Chavez, 13, of Los Alamos was one of many young hunters who took advantage of special opportunities for youths last season.

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Poster contest celebrates prairie chickens

MILNESAND – Artists of all ages are invited to try their hand at depicting one of New Mexico’s most colorful birds as a participant in this year’s High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival poster contest.

The contest is among several events that will celebrate the 10th annual festival in and around Milnesand in eastern New Mexico. The festival, limited to the first 100 registrants, sold out this year in record time. Those interested in receiving advance notice of next year’s event can sign up for early bird registration notification by contacting Tish McDaniel, (575) 762-6997 or pmcdaniel@tnc.org.

The deadline for original artwork submissions to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish is March 1, 2010. The grand prize winning entry will be reproduced on the annual festival poster, and the artist will receive \$300. Top winners in three age categories: adult, grades 7-12, and grades K-6, will receive \$50 each.

Any two-dimensional media, including but not limited to prints, oils, pastels, acrylics, water media, pen and ink, graphite, photography, digital and mixed media will be considered. Images should represent the lesser prairie chicken and its habitat.

Entries must be received by March 1 in the Public Information and Outreach Division, Department of Game and Fish, 1 Wildlife Way, P.O. Box 25112, Santa Fe, NM 87504. Entries will be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope, or may be picked up at the Department office in Santa Fe after



Photo: Dan Williams

A male lesser prairie chicken displays for its reflection on a lek near Milnesand during the 2010 High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival.

March 30. Artists should submit 35mm slides, prints, high-resolution digital images or original work. Artwork must

include the artist’s name, address, phone or e-mail, and entry category. For more information about the contest, please call (505) 476-8004.

The High Plains Prairie Chicken Festival celebrates the lesser prairie chicken and the Llano Estacado (staked plains) of eastern New Mexico. Festival participants see prairie chickens perform their remarkable early morning courtship dances, learn about the cultural and natural history of the southern Great Plains, take daily birding tours, and enjoy good food and western hospitality. Participation in the annual event is limited to 100 to protect the resource and the prairie chickens during their mating season.

The festival in early April is rich with educational tours about birds, archaeology, native plants and history. Sponsored by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, The Nature Conservancy, the Milnesand community and other partners, the idea is to provide recreational opportunities while raising awareness for the plight of a bird that 10 years ago was on the verge of making state and federal threatened lists.

Today, thanks to cooperation among area landowners and conservationists, lesser prairie chickens have rebounded to a population of around 3,000 birds, despite the recent drought and a massive summer hailstorm during the height of the 2009 nesting season. That’s far below the estimated population of 40,000 to 50,000 in the early 1960s, but wildlife biologists consider it great progress considering the ongoing loss of habitat.



Photo: Mark Birkhauser

Desert bighorns at the Red Rock Wildlife Area near Lordsburg.

Written comments may be submitted to Elise Goldstein, Department of Game and Fish, P.O. Box 25112, Santa Fe, NM 87504, or on the Department website, www.wildlife.state.nm.us. The Department’s delisting report and more information about desert bighorns also are available on the website.

For more information about the delisting proposal, please contact Elise Goldstein at (505) 476-8041 or elise.goldstein@state.nm.us.

N.M. desert bighorn sheep on the road to delisting

Desert bighorn sheep are on the verge of becoming New Mexico’s first wildlife species ever to be removed from the state threatened and endangered lists.

This year, the State Game Commission will consider a proposal to delist desert bighorns following a public comment period and after the Department of Game and Fish conducts public meetings in Truth or Consequences and Deming. Dates and times of the meetings are pending.

Desert bighorns first were listed as endangered in 1980 under the state Wildlife Conservation Act. At that time, the statewide population of the species was fewer than 70 animals. Today, the population is estimated at 630, with three herds exceeding 100 animals each. The current population exceeds the criteria for delisting according to the Department’s recovery plan, and is

expected to top 700 by 2012.

“This is a tremendous accomplishment and a credit to the hard work of our staff and the sportsmen who funded the recovery efforts,” Department Director Tod Stevenson said. “To my knowledge, this is the first time any species in our state has been delisted from the New Mexico threatened and endangered list due to restoration.”

Department biologists credit a program of desert bighorn transplants and mountain lion control for the recovery. Since the bighorns were listed in 1980, about \$5 million has gone into the program, with sportsmen paying the bills through sales of hunting licenses, special auction and raffle tags, and federal excise taxes on hunting equipment.

Delisting will open more desert bighorn hunting opportunities in the state.

Support fishing: Put a bass on your bumper

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. Motorists can purchase a specialty plate for a one-time fee of \$25 and a \$10 annual fee in addition to regular registration fees.

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.

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.



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Dan J. Williams
Editor

Lance Cherry
Chief of Publications

Letters may be sent to:
New Mexico Wildlife

P.O. Box 25112

Santa Fe, NM 87504-5112

Telephone (505) 476-8004
dan.williams@state.nm.us



Please visit our Web site,
www.wildlife.state.nm.us



Hunter education registration goes online for all students

The Department of Game and Fish has made it easier than ever for youths to register for mandatory hunter education classes. Registration for classes statewide now can be made online using the student’s unique customer identification number.

Customer identification numbers will be required to register for all hunter education classes. The same number also is required to buy hunting, fishing or trapping licenses online or to apply for any of the Department’s special drawing hunts. Identification numbers are free and can be acquired on the Department website, www.wildlife.state.nm.us by clicking on the “Hunter education” button on the home page. A

list of available classes also is available on the Web site.

Students without internet access can get customer identification numbers and register for hunter education classes at Department offices in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Raton, Roswell and Las Cruces during normal working hours.

New Mexico law requires anyone younger than age 18 to have successfully completed an approved hunter education course before hunting with a firearm, purchasing a firearm hunting license or applying for a firearm hunting license. For more information about the Hunter Education Program please call (505) 222-4731.



Photo: Craig Sanchez

This albino mule deer fawn was spotted in October in the Zuni Mountains.

Albino deer faces tough life

Conservation officer Craig Sanchez was patrolling the Zuni Mountains in late October when he came across something even the most veteran hunters never see: a true albino mule deer. Better yet, he managed to take a photograph before the fawn ventured off with its mother.

The fawn was pure white with pink eyes. Its skin, visible on its ears and hooves, also were light pink, indicating the animal was a true albino, according to Kerry Mower, Department of Game and Fish biologist and wildlife disease specialist.

“In a true albino, the body isn’t producing any pigments,” Mower said. He said the condition

is the result of the animal having two recessive genes that prevent pigment from occurring in the animal’s pelage, or hide. “It’s rare, but repeated with some regularity in deer,” he said.

The fawn spotted by Sanchez may have a tough time surviving in a habitat filled with predators. A white animal does not blend in with its surroundings, making it an easy target. “It also makes them stand out to predators, which tend to be attracted to prey that looks different or weaker than others of its kind,” Mower said.

“Albinism sometimes also is associated with birth defects,” Mower said.



Photo: Dan Williams

State law requires safety training for OHV riders younger than 18.

For more information about the OHV Program and safety training requirements, please call (505) 476-8140.

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.



Northwest



Ross Morgan



Photo: Ross Morgan

The ponds at Albuquerque's Tingley Beach are stocked with about 18,500 trout from November through March.

Don't overlook metro area trout

By Ross Morgan

When you think of Albuquerque, you probably don't think much about trout fishing, or fishing at all for that matter. But believe it or not, there are plenty of trout to be caught in the metropolitan area during the colder months.

From November through March, the Department of Game and Fish regularly stocks area irrigation drains and the ponds at Tingley Beach with lots of good-sized trout. Tingley Beach also is stocked with big catfish in the summer, when the water is too warm to support trout.

"This not only provides a place for individuals within the city to go fishing, but it also provides a place for kids to fish that may not have the ability or means to make it to the mountains," says Rick Castell, Fisheries Manager for the Northwest portion of the state. "Without providing this opportunity, some children and adults within the city may never get the opportunity to fish for a trout."

Tingley Beach, also known as Conservancy Park Lakes, is stocked with more trout than any other water in the state's Winter Trout Waters program. Department trucks show up twice a month from November through March to stock about 1,500 10-inch trout in the ponds. There's a special pond just for kids, a general pond and a catch-and-release pond in the city-owned public park. In 2009, Tingley Beach received a total of 18,500 trout and 2,000 16-inch catfish.

Albuquerque area irrigation drains are perhaps some of the most overlooked trout fishing opportunities in the state. Tucked away along the bosque behind farms and often back yards, the drains can be much like fishing streams in the mountains when it comes to bait and tackle. Every year, the Department gets



Photo: Napoleon Genereux

The Department of Game and Fish regularly stocks irrigation ditches and drains in the Albuquerque area with trout in winter.

reports from anglers catching fish on many things ranging from salmon eggs, power bait, and spinners. Even fly-fishing can be productive.

"You just have to bring a gamut of baits and lures when you fish the drains," says Darrell Cole, Conservation Officer for the Department, "you never know what the fish will be biting on from day to day."

There are several access points to the drains from Bernalillo in the North Valley to Peralta in the South Valley. Maps are available at the Albuquerque office of the Department of Game and Fish, 3841 Midway Place, NE, (505) 222-4700. The drains include:

- **Bernalillo Drain:** Stocked with about 7,000 trout a year, twice a month from November through March.
- **Corrales Drain:** Stocked with about 5,500 trout a year, twice a month from November through March.
- **Albuquerque Drain:** Stocked with about 7,000 trout a year, twice a

month from November through March.

- **Peralta Drain:** Stocked with about 8,750 trout a year, twice a month from November through March.

If you live in the Albuquerque metropolitan area and would like to try your luck at catching a trout or two, get out and visit Tingley Beach or one of the drains. It's a convenient, affordable family activity that's hard to beat, and no better way to spend a day outside enjoying the fresh air.

If you are new at fishing and would like a few pointers on how to get started or what kind of gear to purchase, please contact me, Ross Morgan, Northwest Area public information officer, and I'll help with any questions you may have.

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.

Southwestern trout waters are special in winter

By Richard McDonald

Now that hunting season is all but over, you may be left wondering what to do during the winter months. Don't get discouraged. Even though temperatures have dropped, there are still plenty of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors this winter. There are numerous locations throughout southwestern New Mexico to wet a line. Whether you are looking at camping for a few days or are thinking about a day trip, look to southwestern New Mexico and try your luck at some winter trout fishing.

In Las Cruces, Young Park Pond is very special because it is reserved for

children younger than 12. This pond is in the heart of Las Cruces, just off Walnut Drive. It is stocked once a month, October through March, with 250-500 10-inch rainbow trout. Good baits include salmon eggs and Power Bait. The park that encompasses the pond is very family friendly with lots of trees and playgrounds.

The Silver City area has some really good winter trout fishing. District Wildlife Officer Jon Armijo says Bill Evans Lake is a good place to start. It is stocked twice a month from October through March with more than 3,000 rainbow trout. The lake also contains some nice panfish and largemouth bass. New Mexico's state-record largemouth bass, 15 pounds, 3 ounces and 26 1/2 inches long, was caught at Bill Evans Lake by Steve Estrada in 1995.

Lake Roberts and Bear Canyon Reservoir also are good winter trout fishing spots near Silver City. Lake Roberts receives about 20,000 trout from October through May and Bear Canyon gets more than 12,000 from October through March from the Department's hatchery in Glenwood. "Try your luck at these waters using Power Bait and Kastmasters," Armijo says.

Glenwood Hatchery Pond provides some good fishing and is great for a day trip. The pond is stocked twice a month.

year-round, with some nice trout, including a few lunkers.

For stream fishermen, the Gila River is a nice getaway. Black Canyon and the Forks area are regularly stocked. Recent stockings of native Gila trout add a nice touch to angling opportunities on the river. Fishing for Gila trout is a special opportunity, as the species was off-limits to anglers until it was downlisted from endangered to threatened on the federal endangered species list. Today, limited opportunities to fish for Gila trout are available in select streams. Some streams require a special Gila trout permit, available free on the Department website, www.wildlife.state.nm.us. Gila trout fishing rules vary by water, so be sure to check the latest Fishing Rules & Information booklet for details.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish wants to remind everyone to enjoy our great state and remember to tread lightly and to help prevent the spread of whirling disease and aquatic invasive species by cleaning your gear before traveling from one water to another.

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



Photo: Dan Williams

Few things are as rewarding as seeing the smile on a child's face after catching a fish.

Southwest



Richard McDonald

Pike not welcome in Eagle Nest

By Clint Henson

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish recently confirmed that several northern pike had been caught in Eagle Nest Lake. Eric Frey, Northeast Area Fisheries Manager, confirmed that they were northern pike.

At first, I didn’t understand the problem. We have pike in other lakes and rivers. Pike are a very popular game fish. I thought this might be a good thing -- another opportunity for anglers to catch a different kind of fish on their next trip to Eagle Nest. However, after speaking with Frey about the recent discovery, I learned that this could be a very, very bad thing. The worst-case scenario is that with pike now living in Eagle Nest Lake, the trout and salmon fishery could be seriously impacted.

Department hatcheries stock hundreds of thousands of fingerlings into Eagle Nest Lake each year. These fish can grow without the expense of keeping them in a hatchery. Eagle Nest is a very productive lake for trout; within two years fingerlings can grow to 15 inches long. Other less productive lakes in New Mexico must be stocked with larger, hatchery-raised fish. They are quickly caught by anglers and cannot survive as fingerlings because of existing predatory fish.

Frey said the pike may have been released into Eagle Nest Lake by a disgruntled angler who wanted to reduce the lake’s yellow perch and white sucker populations. However, trout and salmon, which do not have dorsal fin spines like perch, become the favored prey for pike.

So what are the chances that this



Photo: Dan Williams

Northern pike can be a serious threat to a trout fishery such as Eagle Nest Lake.

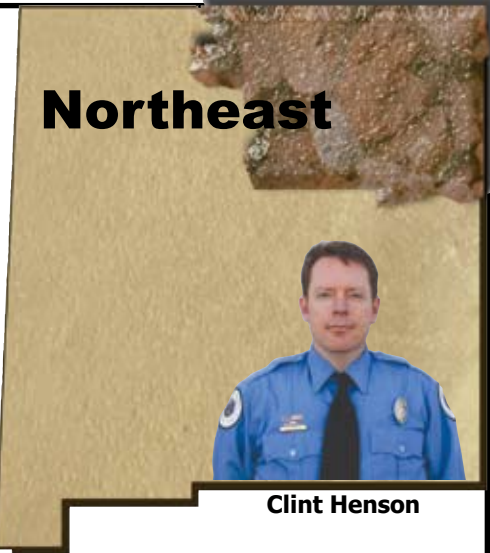
will impact trout and salmon fishing at Eagle Nest Lake? Let’s look at an example from California: Lake Davis is very similar to Eagle Nest Lake in size and elevation and it was a popular trout lake, and sport fishing supported the adjacent community of Portola. Pike were discovered in Lake Davis in 1994. Fearing the loss of this important fishery, the California Department of Fish and Game decided to try and remove predatory pike from the lake. In 1995 the lake was treated with rotenone to remove all fish from the lake. This was done over much protest from the community. Approximately 20 tons of fish were removed from the lake at a cost of about \$16 million.

In 1998, more than 2 million trout were stocked into Lake Davis. Seventeen months later, pike were again discovered in the lake. It’s unknown if some fish

survived the treatment or if they were again illegally stocked into the lake.

In 2000, three full-time biologists and a field crew were hired at a cost of \$500,000 per year. They were charged with manually removing pike with electro-fishing, netting and detonation cord. A community outreach and education program was initiated and law enforcement was increased. By 2003, more than 55,000 northern pike had been removed from Lake Davis, but the population continued to expand and the trout fishery was still in decline. A second treatment of Lake Davis began in 2007 at a cost of another \$17 million.

Today there is a \$50,000 fine for anyone caught stocking pike into any California waters and a \$50,000 reward for tips about illegal stockings.



Clint Henson

Unwanted fish releases have occurred in New Mexico. The release of goldfish into Quemado and Bluewater lakes have cost the Department time and money and made those lakes temporarily unfishable for trout. The solution used to remove goldfish was to stock sterile tiger muskies. However this strategy will not affect pike in Eagle Nest Lake. Chemical removal, as done in California, is unsound, unrealistic and extremely expensive.

A change in Department regulations that would allow anglers an unrestricted take of pike at Eagle Nest may be the first step in a long journey to contain the pike. The Department is asking that any pike caught at Eagle Nest Lake be kept and reported.

The Department is seeking any information regarding the Eagle Nest Lake pike, and as with any wildlife violation, rewards are possible.

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

Lucky youths get a special shot at pheasant hunting

By Mark Madsen

There are many youth-only hunting opportunities offered in New Mexico for species ranging from pheasants to elk. In southeastern New Mexico, two opportunities are offered for kids to hunt pheasants.

Bitter Lake Wildlife Refuge

One youth-only pheasant hunt occurs on the Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge northeast of Roswell. This annual two-day event includes an upland game-bird workshop combined with the hunt. Every year, 16 youths are selected from the numerous applications made available at local businesses and at the Department of Game and Fish office in the Roswell area.

The 2010 event started the first Saturday in December with a one-day game-bird workshop. The morning session is composed of various topics, including the history of the national wildlife refuge system, waterfowl and upland game-bird identification, hunter ethics and firearm safety. An award-winning video about the Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge was shown.

After lunch provided by the Friends of Bitter Lake, the youths participated in hands-on activities that included skeet shooting, dog handling and game-bird field cleaning. The Department set up an archery range that allowed many first-time archers an opportunity to fling arrows.

Sunday morning started out clear and cold with the ever-present southeastern



Photo: Mark Madsen

More than 50 youths are selected by drawing every year to hunt pheasants at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge and the Seven Rivers Waterfowl Area in southeastern New Mexico.

“breeze” blowing. The hunters and their parents met at the old J.P. White farm in preparation for the day’s hunt. The Bitter Lake staff prepared breakfast burritos for everyone; these folks sure know how to cook!

After everyone had their fill, the youths were split into four groups, assigned guides and hunt areas for the morning. One group had the opportunity to hunt over young German wirehaired pointers provided by Kip Paskewich and Barbara Bradley of the Zia Chapter of the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association.

The morning hunt turned out to be slow, with only a couple of pheasants harvested along with a bobwhite quail or two. After lunch, the hunters were free to hunt on their own for the remainder of the day. All in all, five or six pheasants were harvested.

Seven Rivers Waterfowl Area

The other youth-only pheasant hunt

occurs each year on the Department’s Seven Rivers Waterfowl Management Area south of Artesia. Forty youths are selected from applicants from all over New Mexico and surrounding states.

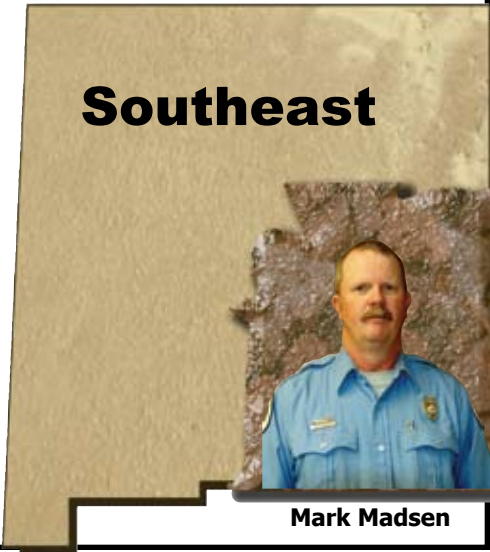
Youths in this season’s Dec. 4 hunt had opportunities to shoot at pen-raised birds that were released before the hunt. For several years, the New Mexico Chapter of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife has purchased pheasants for the occasion. This year, they purchased 120 rooster pheasants for the hunt. Mosaic Inc., a potash mining company, donated \$400 for door prizes. Rocky Bartlett of Hobbs donated four Gander Mountain gift cards and a cash prize of \$25 given to the hunter who harvested the pheasant with the longest tail feathers. Manny Chavez of Artistic Wildlife Studios in Carlsbad donated a free pheasant mount.

The morning of the hunt, Department personnel and volunteers released the pheasants in scattered locations throughout the Seven Rivers Waterfowl

Management Area. After a short orientation meeting, the youths were split into several groups. Each group was guided by Department staff and volunteers. The youths then hunted cultivated fields and surrounding weed patches on the Seven Rivers farm.

More than 80 birds were harvested during the hunt. Richard Artrip, Carlsbad district wildlife supervisor, said, “All of the kids handled themselves well, putting into practice what they had learned in hunter education. They all conducted themselves like true sportsmen.”

For information about Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, contact Steve Alvarez at (575) 622-6755 or visit the Friends of Bitter Lake website, friendsofbitterlake.com. For information about the Seven Rivers Waterfowl Management Area, contact Mark Madsen, Southeast Area public information officer at (575) 624-6135 or mark.madsen@state.nm.us.



Mark Madsen



Wildlife thrives in scenic Humphries

Hunters, hikers enjoy solitude in northern N.M.

Almost 11,000 acres of some of New Mexico's best wildlife habitat sits quietly in the San Juan Mountains of northern New Mexico, beckoning hunters, hikers and others to enjoy the scenery, animals and solitude.

The William A. "Bill" Humphries Wildlife Area wasn't always such a state gem. Before the State Game Commission purchased the area's first parcel in 1966, the country had been a cattle ranch, and constant grazing had taken a toll on the native vegetation and riparian zones. Today, the destructive grazing practices are long gone, habitat improvements are ongoing and the area once again is prime habitat for elk, deer, bears and turkeys.

"The Humphries area definitely is one of the stars among the state's wildlife areas," said Mike Gustin, assistant chief of habitat and lands for the Department of Game and Fish. "Re seeding, water developments and other habitat improvements have made a tremendous difference for the wildlife."



Photo: Don MacCarter

The area, formerly called the Roque Wildlife Area, was purchased in eight parcels from 1966 through 1980. It is named after W.A. "Bill" Humphries, a Department assistant director who died while on official duty in

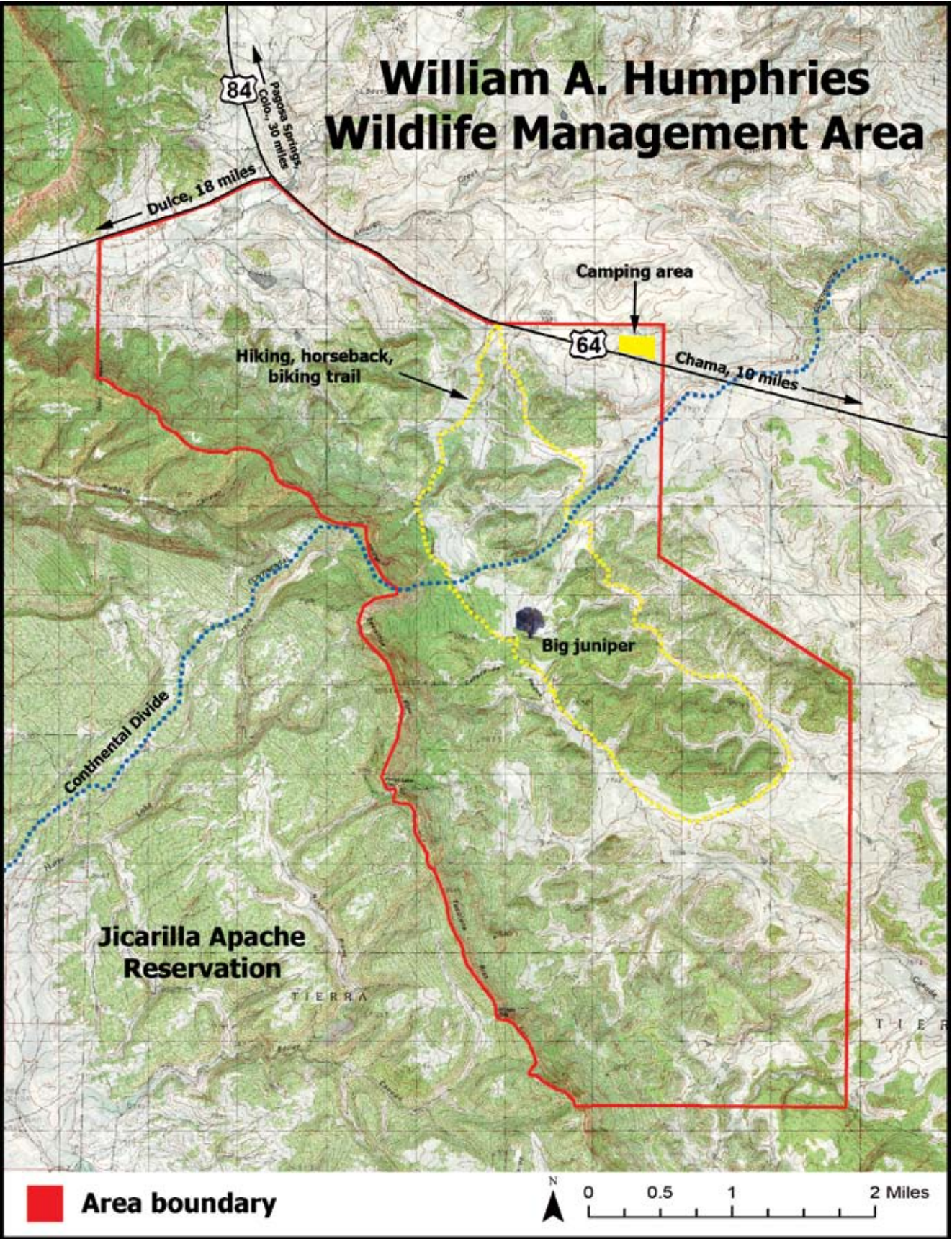
December 1973. It straddles the Continental Divide and habitat includes piñon-juniper and Gambel oak to spruce and fir in the higher country. Numerous grassy parklands are used by deer and thousands of elk as a wintering ground.

Department elk biologist Stewart Liley said the area is an important migration route for thousands of elk that travel south from Colorado in the winter. The area is closed during the winter to protect the elk herd. Only a few hundred elk stay in the area year-round, he said.

Visitors are welcome at the Humphries area from Memorial Day weekend through Nov. 15, except during hunting seasons, when only licensed hunters are allowed. A 10-mile trail, formerly a road, winds through much of the area, but it is restricted to hiking, biking or horseback riding. Motorized vehicles are prohibited. No camping is allowed within the main area, but a designated campground is near the area entrance along N.M. 64 about 10 miles west of Chama.

July through September is perhaps the best time for wildlife watchers to visit the Humphries. A journey along the loop trail is likely to yield sightings of deer, elk, turkeys and perhaps a black bear. Birders will be delighted by the presence of numerous species, including four species of warblers, three species of nuthatches, bluebirds, brown creepers, evening grosbeaks, kestrels, red-tailed hawks and other raptors.

The Humphries Wildlife Area is open 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 or \$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.



Photos: Dan Williams



Mighty juniper

A Utah juniper nominated as one of the largest in New Mexico occupies a spot atop a ridge at the W.A. Humphries Wildlife Area near Chama. Above, Greg Friday, former manager of Los Ojos Fish Hatchery, demonstrates the tree's circumference of 15 feet, 6 1/2 inches. The tree was 52 feet tall and had a crown spread of 47 feet when it was last measured in 1980. To see the tree, hike three miles into the wildlife area along the main trail (road), then turn left and hike 100 yards paralleling the north side of the ridgeline.



CWD testing continues statewide

The Department of Game and Fish confirmed two new cases of chronic wasting disease – one deer and one elk – in 2010, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 27 mule deer and four elk since CWD first was detected in New Mexico in 2002.

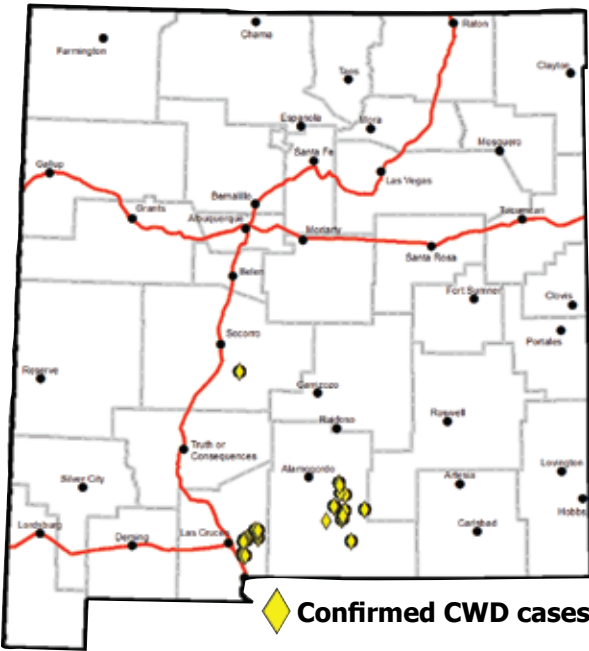
Kerry Mower, Department wildlife disease specialist, said both cases occurred within the known range of the disease in New Mexico – White Sands Missile Range, its eastern neighbor, Game Management Unit 34 in the Sacramento Mountains, and McGregor Range to the south. The deer was tested after being captured on McGregor Range. It was later found dead. The elk was an abnormal animal reported to the Department by a homeowner in the Sacramento Mountains.

Chronic wasting disease is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy disorder known to affect only deer, elk and moose. In the final stages of the disease, an animal with CWD exhibits a drooping head and ears, lethargy and chronic weight loss. CWD is always fatal to deer and elk, but there is no evidence that it ever has been transmitted to humans or domestic livestock.

To date, CWD seems to be centered in the Organ-San Andres Mountains complex and the Sacramento Mountains of south-central New Mexico, with cases radiating outward. The Department continues to monitor and test for the disease by examining hunter-harvested and live animals in areas of concern.

Mower said despite a surge of initial concern when the disease was first discovered, hunters seem to have become less worried about CWD.

“In the field, most hunters readily participate by allowing tissues to be removed from their carcass, but after leaving the field, they are unlikely to expend additional effort to deliver a harvested deer or elk head for testing,” Mower said. During 2010-2011 hunting seasons, CWD tissue collection stations were open for hunters leaving the Sacramento and Guadalupe Mountains of southern New Mexico and for hunters leaving the Cabresto and Carracas Mesa areas in the north. All testing is



voluntary and free to hunters statewide. Hunters also can bring freshly killed animal heads to Department offices for testing.

Although most testing is done on dead deer or elk, testing on live animals increased in 2010 with the capture and release of deer and elk in Timberon, on McGregor Range and on Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Tonsil or rectal tissues from live animals are sent to Veterinary Diagnostic Services, part of the New Mexico Department of Agriculture. Tested animals are fitted with radio transmitters so they can be located if CWD is detected in a tissue biopsy. Test results from more than 300 deer and elk in 2010 are pending.

Mower said hunters play an important role in the monitoring of CWD by participating in the testing programs. Nonhunters can participate by reporting deer or elk that are acting unusual.

Anyone who finds a deer or elk that appears unaware of human presence and displays symptoms including droopy ears, emaciation, chronic thirst, frequent urination, and reluctance to leave water, should report their observations to the Department of Game and Fish, Wildlife Management Division, (505) 476-8038.

Test your head, boost your odds for oryx, elk tags

Need some motivation to turn in your deer or elk head for chronic wasting disease testing? How about a 1 in 100 chance at an oryx hunt on White Sands Missile Range? Or an opportunity to hunt elk on the Valle Vidal?

“Many hunters don’t realize that their odds of winning one of these CWD incentive license authorizations are much better than if they go through the regular draw,” said Kerry Mower, wildlife disease specialist for the Department of Game and Fish.

Last year, 221 deer and elk hunters were eligible for the CWD incentive drawing. Two were awarded authorizations to purchase licenses – one for oryx, another for a Valle Vidal bull elk hunt. Another bonus: The highly valued authorizations are transferrable, meaning the drawing winners can sell, trade or give them away. Unlike regular hunts for those areas, these are not once-in-a-lifetime, and the oryx hunter can choose his or her season.

Hunters wishing to participate in the CWD testing must deliver their freshly harvested deer or elk head to any Department office or field collection station so tissues can be collected. Hunters will be contacted if their deer or elk tests positive for CWD. There is no evidence that CWD ever has been transmitted to humans.

For more information about chronic wasting disease in New Mexico, please visit www.wildlife.state.nm.us.

Bosque del Apache elk focus of latest CWD tests

A growing elk population along the Rio Grande bosque in central New Mexico has prompted the state’s latest investigation into the spread of chronic wasting disease among deer and elk.

In early November, the Department of Game and Fish and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began capturing elk at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife refuge in a joint effort to test for CWD and also determine the size of the herd.

Currently, no elk hunting is allowed in the refuge north of Socorro, allowing the population to steadily grow. Refuge Wildlife Biologist John Vandrenburg said 40 to 50 elk now live in the refuge and are beginning to damage corn and alfalfa fields. One purpose of the current study, he said, is to evaluate whether hunting is a viable option to control the herd. The refuge already offers limited hunting for deer, oryx and small game.

Such isolated, protected and growing populations of deer and elk worry Kerry Mower, Department wildlife disease specialist.

“It’s a classic situation of a high density of deer and elk where CWD could spread widely and quickly through the population,” Mower said. “Plus, we found a single positive case of CWD in a deer in the Stallion Range of White Sands Missile Range 20 to 25 miles away.”

Using a helicopter, Mower and veterinarian Jeannie Ross darted and radio-collared 14 refuge elk in late October. Tissues from each animal were taken to be tested for CWD. It was the first time the Department took rectal tissues from live elk to be tested. Previous tests were from dead animals.

Mower said he hopes to capture and test another 16 elk when the project continues in mid-February, after thousands of sandhill cranes and snow geese leave the refuge.

Results of the tests should be available sometime next spring or summer.

Kerry Mower, wildlife disease specialist for the Department of Game and Fish, steadies a bull elk as the effects of a tranquilizer wear off at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Fourteen elk were captured, radio-collared and tested for chronic wasting disease in early November.

Photos: Greg Wright



Ligon's ride

Early biologist blazed wildlife management trail

By Harley G. Shaw

Although New Mexico was late in becoming a state, its policies regarding wildlife management were amazingly advanced for their times. This was largely due to the presence of three individuals who helped formulate and guide state and federal wildlife programs: Aldo Leopold, Elliott Barker and J. Stokley Ligon.

Leopold became an icon in wildlife conservation and is heralded by several biographies. Barker wrote extensively throughout his long life, leaving ample biographical information. Ligon, while undoubtedly the best field biologist of the three, has faded into relative anonymity.

Ligon wrote many articles and four books during his career, but he left little information about himself. His name is associated with



File photo

Historic southwestern wildlife biologist J. Stokley Ligon was especially fond of Mearn's quail.

a myriad of publications and photographs about southwestern wildlife, especially birds, but to this day, Ligon the man remains rather a mysterious figure historically. Until recently, research about Ligon and a quest for rumored personal diaries of his working years have been disappointing, except for archives of many of his photographs kept in the Denver Public Library.

Journey grew with age

Among the stories passed down by those who knew Ligon was the legend of a horseback trip he made early in his career during which, according to one writer, he traveled the length of the New Mexico from south to north six times.

The true story of Ligon's 1913 ride came to light when San Andres National Wildlife Refuge biologist Mara Weisenberger found a handwritten diary and report by Ligon that described the legendary ride. There, it seemed, was an original resource that would provide insight into his early work. It also recorded, once and for all, the story of his trip and why he carried it out.

According to his own reports, Ligon did not criss-cross the state six times. Instead, he encircled New Mexico during the summer of 1913 surveying nesting waterfowl and shorebirds as a temporary employee of the United States Biological Survey. His supervisor was Vernon Bailey who, with his wife



Courtesy, J. Stokley Ligon Collection, Denver Public Library

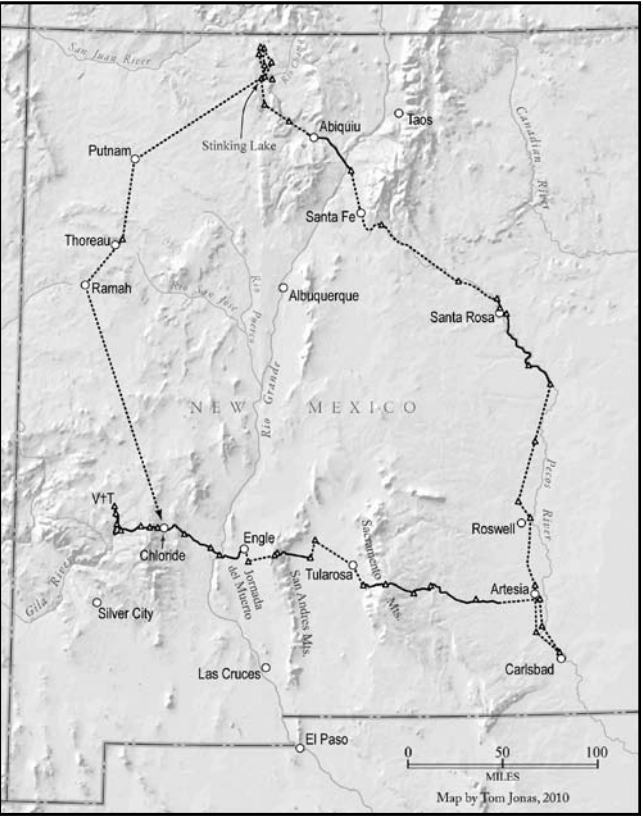
With his horse, Gila Red, and burros Albert and Smoky, biologist J. Stokley Ligon traveled a 1,200-mile circuit of New Mexico in 1913, documenting the state's birds and other wildlife for the U.S. Biological Survey.

Florence Merriam Bailey, had gathered more information regarding birds and mammals in New Mexico than anyone living at that time. Ligon's job was to fill in gaps in their earlier research. The project was initiated by W. W. Cooke, also of the Biological Survey, who was the North American Authority on migratory birds. Cooke had a massive archive of wildfowl migration records, developed by working with a network of correspondents throughout the Americas. Ligon, who became interested in birds early in his life, was one of those correspondents.

Windmills and birds

Ligon grew up near Pecos, Texas. His father and brothers ran a windmill business, and Ligon had made trips onto New Mexico's Jornada del Muerto in 1905, helping with windmill installation. In 1907 he moved to the Jornada to work for his uncle, L. A. Renick, who also drilled wells and installed windmills. When no windmill work was available, Ligon headed for the woods, often packing burros to the isolated San Mateo Mountains for month-long hunts for deer, turkey, bear and lions. Throughout all of this, he collected bird eggs and recorded birds for the U.S. Biological Survey, developing a reputation as a competent field biologist who could work under primitive conditions for extended periods.

By late May, 1913, Ligon had established a camp a couple miles upstream from Chloride. On May 31, he received his letter of employment, a package of supplies for preparing and preserving bird and egg specimens, and detailed instructions on the area he was to survey. On June 1, he took the oath of office from Judge Edwin Holmes in Chloride and on June 3 set out afoot driving two burros named Albert and Smoky. On the first leg of the trip, he followed the trail up Chloride Creek, across the Continental Divide and then down Taylor Creek to the present site of Wall Lake. He then looped up Beaver Creek to its headwaters, picking up his horse named



Gila Red that he had left pastured at the V+T Ranch (now Slash Ranch). With his horse and pack outfit, he headed back to Chloride, spent one night, and then headed eastward.

Jornada to Jicarilla

Over the next two months, Ligon crossed the Rio Grande and traversed the arid Jornada del Muerto, San Andres Mountains (via Sulphur Canyon), and the glaring Tularosa Basin. He ascended the Sacramento Mountains to Cloudcroft, and then descended along the Penasco River to Artesia. He made a three-day loop down the Pecos, recording waterfowl use of Lake Avalon and the wetlands around Seven Rivers, picked up mail at Carlsbad, and then headed back up the Pecos, surveying the lakes near Santa Rosa and following the ancient Indian trail past San Miguel. He gathered supplies in Santa Fe and then headed up the Rio Grande through Espanola, turned up the Chama River, and then traveled northward to Stinking Lake on the Jicarilla Reservation.



Whether traveling by horseback or vehicle, J. Stokley Ligon rarely was without his trusty camera. Many of his images archived in the Denver Public Library document his journeys through New Mexico as he researched writings including “New Mexico Wildlife,” “The History and Management of Merriam’s Wild Turkey,” and “New Mexico Birds.”

Photo: Dan Williams



Ligon spent two weeks surveying the various lakes on the Jicarilla and, having finished his assignment, submitted his diaries and handwritten report and headed back to Chloride, more or less following the Continental Divide. His diary ended with his departure from the Jicarilla Reservation, but his route home was documented by his photographs. He took time to go westward to Chaco Canyon, passed through the railroad siding of Thoreau and the small settlement of Rama. By September, he was back in the San Mateos. He wintered in the upper Gila Country, living off the land and operating as a free-lance collector and photographer. He had covered approximately 1,200 miles.

Ligon’s work must have impressed the people at the survey, because they hired him in 1914 to survey prairie dog colonies in the White Mountains of Arizona, a task he once again accomplished astride Gila Red, driving Albert and Smoky. The survey’s interest in prairie dogs at that time did not stem from ecological curiosity; Ligon was plotting their locations so that the survey would know where to send crews with poison for their eradication. By 1915, he was an “inspector” for the Predator and Rodent Control Branch of the Survey, a task he handled with customary efficiency. He

hired such notable men as Ben Lilly and Albert Pickens, along with several other trappers and hunters, to take on the battle against wolves, cougars and bears.

An historic wildlife inventory

In 1927, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish hired Ligon to do its first statewide inventory of game species, so he once again traversed the state, this time mostly by motor vehicle. He wrote the results of this inventory into a book entitled “New Mexico Wildlife,” in which he began to expound some changing ideas regarding management of wildlife and habitat. By that time, he opposed the killing of all raptors except eagles, and he questioned the value of unrestrained killing of black bears. The book, originally a collaborative effort by Ligon and Leopold, is now an important historic document regarding the status of wildlife in New Mexico. Leopold moved to Wisconsin and Ligon completed the book on his own. Leopold’s early notes on the project morphed over the next 10 years into Game Management, which earned Leopold the title of “Father of American Game Management. “

Ligon and his wife, Rose, moved to Carlsbad and established a game bird farm in 1929,

working privately to preserve threatened species such as the masked bobwhite and lesser prairie chicken. He returned to the Biological Survey in 1934, this time as statewide supervisor. In 1938, he assumed the responsibility of administering the new Federal Pitmann-Robertson Funds. Desk work apparently didn’t appeal to him, for by the mid-1940s he and Rose were back at the bird farm, which they sold to New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. They retired to a smaller property nearby, where Ligon continued to write and raise quail.

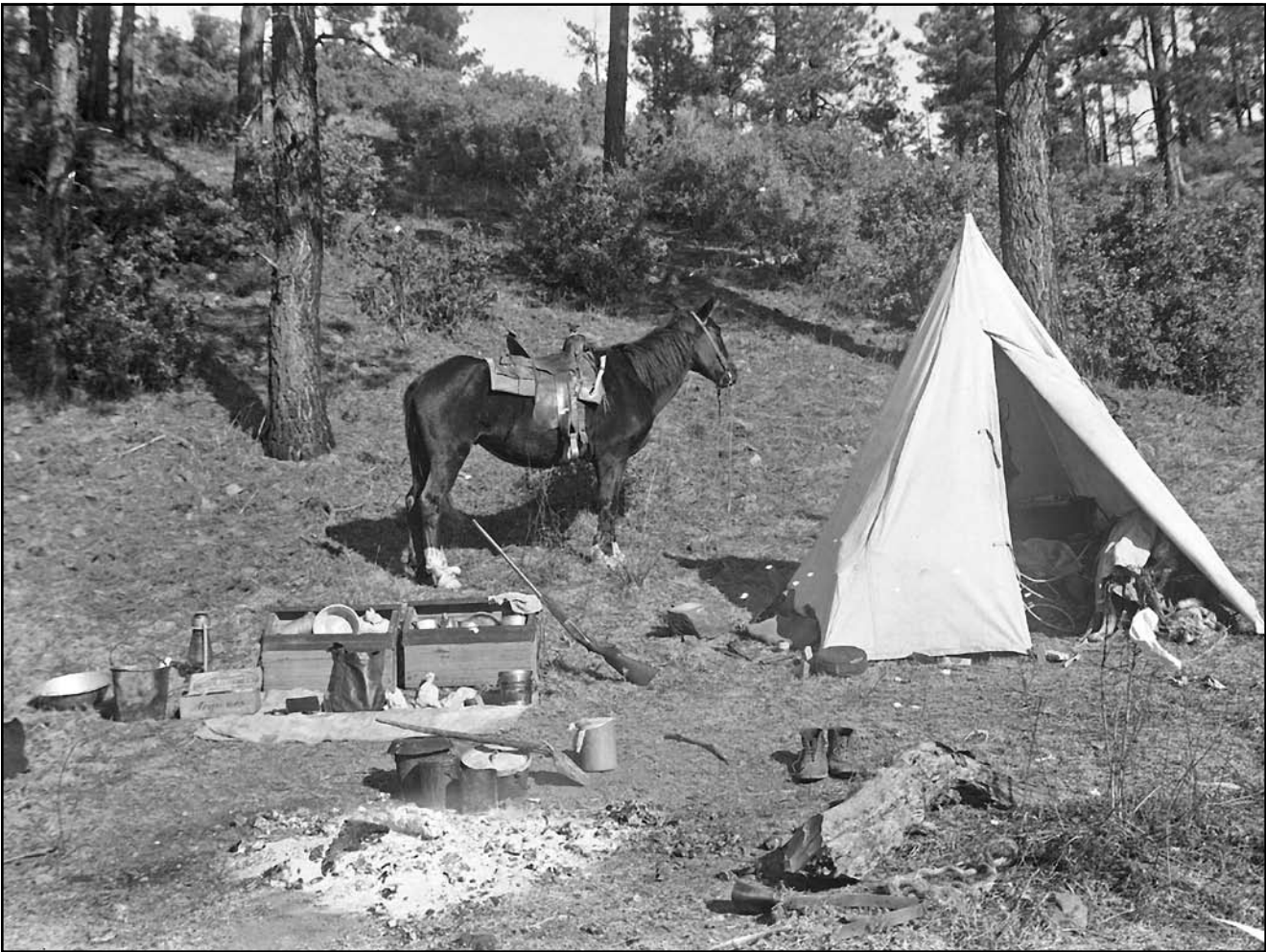
A passion for birds

One of Ligon’s later works was the small 1946 book, “The History and Management of Merriam’s Wild Turkey,” which remained the only available life history of the southwestern subspecies through the 1960s. His understanding of the bird was impressive, developed mainly through long observation rather than intensively designed research.

In 1952, the University of New Mexico awarded Ligon an honorary doctorate for lifetime accomplishment. Florence Bailey and Elliott Barker also eventually were so honored. Ligon died in 1961, leaving a nearly complete manuscript entitled “New Mexico Birds.” Rose collaborated with then-director Bill Huey to see the book through to publication.

Ligon is remembered now more for “New Mexico Birds.” Few people remember his other writings or his early years, spanning 1905 to about 1918, when he wandered New Mexico with two burros and a horse. In his obituary of Ligon, David Jackson called him “the gentlest of mountain men.” During his early manhood, he truly had emulated the lives of early mountain men, traveling and camping alone, living off of the land. Instead of trapping beaver, however, he spent his days calmly climbing trees, hanging over cliffs on ropes, or wading chest deep in lakes to gather biological specimens for science. If he was ever uncomfortable or uneasy in these solitary endeavors, it never appeared in his writing.

Harley A. Shaw was a research biologist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department for 27 years. He is the author of two books, “Soul Among Lions” and “Stalking the Big Bird,” both published by the University of Arizona Press. His latest book, “Twelve Hundred Miles by Horse and Burro,” with co-author Mara Weisenberger, chronicles Ligon’s historic ride through New Mexico. It is scheduled to be published in 2011, also by the University of Arizona Press. Shaw currently lives in Hillsboro, N.M.



Courtesy, J. Stokley Ligon Collection, Denver Public Library

J. Stokley Ligon’s trusty horse, Gila Red, stands ready at one of the field biologist’s modest camps in southwestern New Mexico.





Dog Canyon afternoon

Turbulent history carves rich beauty at Oliver Lee Park

Story and photos
by Marti Niman

Perched at the edge of the rugged cliffs of the Sacramento Mountains and the vast parched Tularosa Basin, Oliver Lee Memorial State Park hides an oasis of near-tropical lushness that belies its prickly façade. The sheer 1,500-foot steep cliffs of dolomite and limestone echo tales of migration, warfare and murder amid the quiet hush of its spring-fed pools. Ramshackle remains of rock cabins and walls lay in witness to 19th century homesteaders, while thousands of artifacts testify to the canyon's occupation dating 10,000 to 12,000 years ago.

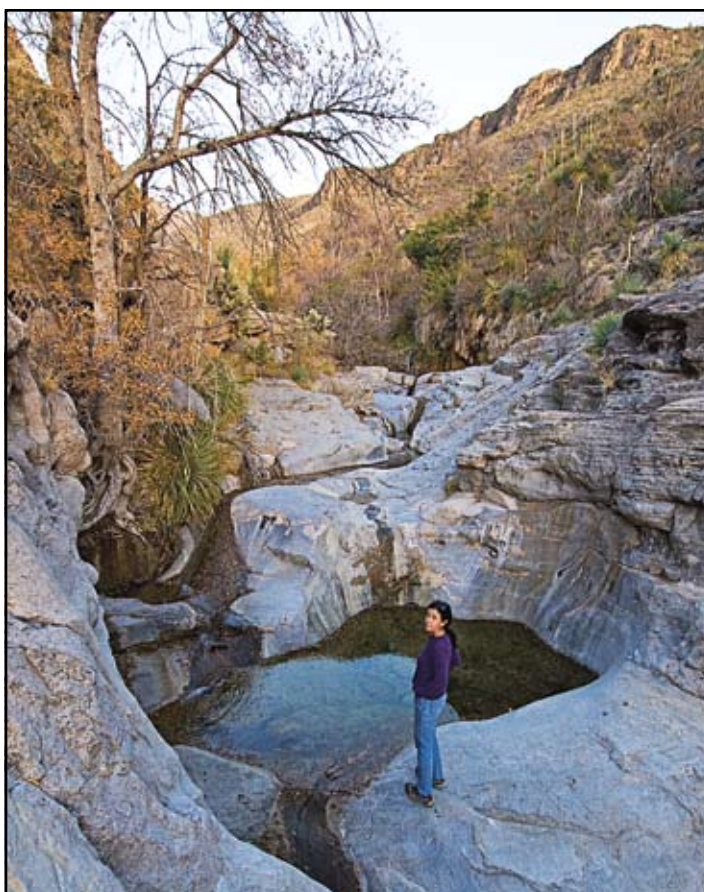
Rising almost 3,300 feet above the visitor center, the 5.5-mile Dog Canyon Trail has served as a thoroughfare between the Tularosa Valley and the Sacramento Mountains for thousands of years. A site of many skirmishes between the U.S. cavalry and the Apaches, the canyon got its name around 1850 when settlers who were tracking Apache raiders lost the trail and found only an abandoned dog. That history repeated itself in 1997, when two Dobermans that were apparently abandoned in the high forest were coaxed back to the park visitor center for eventual rescue.

One of only four spring-fed Chihuahuan Desert canyons on public land in New Mexico, this year-round water source is a rare treasure in a land of little rain. Its wealth of pools, grottos and hanging gardens has lured wildlife and human occupation for centuries. The park offers a haven for both and a glimpse into the Wild West of the 19th century and beyond.

One of the park's main attractions is the restored ranch house built and occupied by its namesake Oliver Lee, who founded the Dog Canyon Ranch in 1893. Lee was a prominent rancher and served both houses of the New Mexico Legislature, but not before becoming embroiled in local rivalries and several murder indictments for which he later was acquitted.

"People still lived by the Code of the West,"

The restored ranch house of renowned southwest rancher and politician Oliver Lee now serves as a visitor center for Oliver Lee Memorial State Park near Alamogordo.



Rugged Dog Canyon channels runoff from approximately 11,000 acres to Oliver Lee Memorial State Park in the canyon bottom 3,300 feet below. Surging torrents from flash floods over the years have carved pools and grottos, and created habitats for wildlife and native plants. A 500-year flood in 2008 sent a wall of water 30 feet wide and 20 feet deep to the canyon bottom.

said Park Ranger Charles Wood, one of several park staff who leads tours of the ranch house on weekends. "He was a man of his time. My tours focus more on ranch life and anecdotal stories about life in the time period."

The house is furnished authentically and is

surrounded by ruins of the barn, corral and chicken house. The house suffered severe damage a few years ago by the very force that drew people here for millennia: water.

Water defines this place, by either scarcity or excess. When the rains do come, they occasionally arrive with a vengeance reserved only for Mother Nature. In 2006, the quiet canyon refuge became a thundering water wall as repeat mountain rainstorms flushed their excess into the narrow canyon.

"There was no advance warning and it totally cut me off from civilization," Park Manager Wendy Justice said. "It was un-nerving; once the canyon flooded there was no movement in and out for about a day."

The flood washed out the road into the park, cut off access to the campground and to Justice's park residence for about a day. The summer of 2006 brought not one, but 12 flash floods within a month's time in an unusually heavy monsoon season. The floodwater





Oliver Lee Memorial State Park is known for its spectacular sunsets and harsh desert climate. Temperatures can reach 110 degrees on the Dog Canyon Trail in summertime.

measured about 20 feet wide by 15 feet deep and tore out the bridge to the boardwalk and part of the nature trail. Park staff no sooner repaired some of the damage in the park and reopened the roads when yet another flash flood obliterated their work. That year sometimes is called the 200-year flood; little did area residents realize it was just a harbinger of things to come.

“In 2008 a remnant of Hurricane Dolly brought a low pressure system from the Gulf of Mexico and dumped a year’s worth of rain into the drainage,” Wood said. “The top of the canyon got 16 inches in 24 hours and it all had just one place to come.”

That 500-year flood brought a wall of water about 30 feet wide by 20 feet deep to the canyon bottom. Access to the campground again was lost for limited amounts of time, although park staff had a little more advance warning and prepared for it.

“We knew it was raining above us,” said Justice. “We figured that Dog Canyon drains about 11,000 acres, so all that water on top of the five inches of rain we were getting here and everything was saturated.”

The Oliver Lee Ranch House was one of the flood’s victims, although the damage was not immediately evident. “The water spread out into sheet erosion, with six inches of mud flowing onto the porches, coming through the walls and the foundation,” Wood said, adding that the roof was built by the day’s standards, using wood planks with gaps to conserve materials. The tin was nailed to that rather than a solid decking, so if the nails came loose, the roof leaks and is not stable enough to work on it.

“It took forever to repair,” he said. “The question was whether to keep it historically accurate or make it modern with the appearance of historical accuracy.” The solution was to replace the roof with solid decking to withstand future inundations, but retain the building’s historic appearance. Drainage structures were built around the house to divert water away from it and repairs were made to the visitor center as well, which suffered an influx of mold and also was re-roofed.

Water diversions of another sort were built in the canyon by Lee and another homesteader



of the time, Francois Jean Rochas, known as “Frenchy.” The two men developed an irrigation system to carry water to the ranch house and pastures. Frenchy was identified in the late 1990s as the mysterious builder of Santa Fe’s Loretto Chapel staircase. The ruins of his humble two-room adobe and rock cabin, mortarless stone walls and irrigation ditches are visible today near the park’s visitor center and canyon slopes. In 1895, Frenchy was found shot to death in his cabin



A riparian trail in Dog Canyon attracts visitors of all ages to Oliver Lee Memorial State Park near Alamogordo. Spring and fall are the best times to visit.

– one of a number of unsolved murders of the time.

Two of the park’s big attractions are literally worlds apart and both are overseen by local volunteer groups: the Chihuahuan Desert garden in front of the visitor center and the Chihuahuan Desert night skies.

“The Otero County Native Plant Society helped with the design, planting and maintenance of the desert garden and we get lots of questions about xeriscaping and where to get seeds,” Justice said. “We irrigate as needed, but after a good rain it can be gorgeous and there usually is something blooming throughout the year.”

Members of the Amateur Astronomer’s Group of Alamogordo bring their telescopes to the group shelter and offer cocoa, coffee and a tour of the night sky. The park’s relative seclusion and dry desert air offer a crystal clear view of the starry expanse.

“It takes longer for objects to rise above the mountains so they are visible,” Wood said. “But we have a dedicated core of regular visitors, mostly from Las Cruces and El Paso, where they can’t see much of anything in the sky.”

The average park visitor tends to be of the snowbird persuasion – mostly mature RVers and a few families with kids. Quite a few buy annual passes and move park to park in New Mexico, while others are passing through to Texas or Arizona. “We have a lot of people who just love the riparian trail and walk it regularly, including a woman in her 80s,” Wood said. “We truly have a split season, with most visitation from September to Thanksgiving and February through April.”

Summers are just too hot, with temperatures approaching 110 degrees. Spring offers the best weather with pleasant temperatures and less wind, but Justice’s favorite time is fall. “The colors are really spectacular, with sumac turning bright red and cottonwoods are golden,” she said.

Most visitors simply want to relax and bask in the mild sunny weather, but some come to tackle the rugged canyon trail – often without adequate preparation. “The trail is nothing to mess with if you’re not prepared,” Wood said. “Some people try to hike it in flip flops and a liter of water, then they come out on the verge of heat exhaustion if not heat stroke.”

One young man from a nearby military base tried to return down the canyon through the wash rather than taking the trail. About a half mile below the head of the canyon, he

... continued on Page 12





Dog Canyon

... continued from Page 11

encountered a 12-foot ledge and tried to climb around its side rather than turn back.

"He fell into the ravine, broke both his legs, an arm and had to be airlifted out by helicopter," said Park Ranger Howard Thomas. "It can be dangerous up there, especially in the stream bed." Park staff leaves search and rescue operations to State Police because they are trained for it.

The trail winds through spiky Torrey yucca and ocotillo clutching to tumbled rocks on the narrow ascent, then slowly unwinds into a relatively flat bench overlooking the stream channel below. The vegetation shifts to cholla, four-wing saltbush, juniper and native grasses, with the shifting gypsum sands at White Sands National Monument shining in the distant horizon.

The Dog Canyon Trail has retained a number of relics from the past, including pot shards, spear points, stone implements and the stone ruins of the Fairchild line cabin, used as recently as the 1960s to run cattle in the canyon. Near the cabin is a small round depression in the rocks called a mortar, one of many in the canyon that were formed by prehistoric people for grinding seeds with manos. Sometimes called Indian wells because they collect water in their shallow basins, they also offer a brief respite for the many species of wildlife that take advantage of the canyon's habitat.

Abundant coyotes, mule deer, cougar, javelina, bobcat, black bear as well as coatimundi and ringtail make the canyon home.



A 500-year flash flood sent a 20-foot wall of water down Dog Canyon in 2008, destroying the boardwalk at Oliver Lee Memorial State Park.

Gambel's quail, roadrunners, five species of hummingbirds, cactus wrens and other birdlife frequent the area.

"About four years ago I heard a yowling near the visitor center that sounded like kids screaming," Wood said. "There was a mountain lion being harassed by two foxes. They kept circling around the lion and charging it from different directions. The foxes have a den over there and there probably were kits in the den. It was just amazing to watch."

As recently as this summer, rangers witnessed a mountain lion stalking a deer near the fence line and a family of javelinas in the canyon. But ranger-wildlife encounters are not restricted to critters in the canyons; sometimes they come home to roost.

"My cat was lying on the kitchen table at home," said Justice. "I heard her screaming and ran into the kitchen to find a juvenile Cooper's hawk hung up on the window screen. I grabbed some work gloves and

tried to get it loose before my dogs came running around the corner. It had one talon loose and fortunately got free before they got to it."

Notwithstanding the occasional dramatic wildlife encounters, flash floods and hiking hazards for the unprepared, Oliver Lee Memorial State Park offers a quiet retreat from more northerly snow and icy winters and a glimpse into Chihuahuan Desert life. Interpretive exhibits in the visitor center and a nature trail, 48 developed campsites and a newly remodeled, solar-powered comfort station provide almost all the comforts of home. Weekends offer educational programs, star viewing programs and ranch house tours. For a complete schedule and more information, visit www.nmparks.com or call the park at 575-439-1290.

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

Wildlife, training, tours on tap at state parks

Jan. 15: Rio Grande Nature Center Winter Bird and Bat Festival

Events include a presentation and book signing with Jean-Luc Cartron, editor of "Raptors of New Mexico", and a talk on bat ecology by University of New Mexico biologist Bill Gannon. Bird and nature walks, kids' crafts, live birds with Wildlife



Photo: Dan Williams

Saw whet owl

Rescue, and bird identification with the New Mexico Audubon Society are featured. For more information, contact festival chairman Peter Kelling, cloudsandwater@juno.com.

Jan. 22: Rio Grande Nature Center Volunteer Training 2011

Prospective volunteers are invited to a short introduction to this year's volunteer training program, which continues the following six Saturday mornings. Trainees will delve into nature and the green future in their own community. Focusing on the ecology of the Rio Grande Valley, educators review the history of our great river and consider the impact of human activities as well as restoration measures under way. Trainees

will examine the birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and plants that make up the bosque's web of life and they'll discover many ways to support the Nature Center. The cost is \$10 plus purchase of "A Field Guide to the Plants and Animals of the Middle Rio Grande Bosque," available in the Nature Center gift shop. For information and to register, call (505) 344-7240.

March 5: Pancho Villa State Park's Camp Furlong Day

Folklorico dancers, mariachi music and a parade led by 100 Mexican Cabalgata horseback riders highlight Pancho Villa State Park's seventh annual Camp Furlong Day. The annual event promotes friendship and goodwill between countries. It commemorates the March 9, 1916, attack by troops of Mexican General Francisco "Pancho" Villa on the village of Columbus and adjacent U.S. military camp, and the United States' response with the Punitive Expedition into Mexico by General John "Black Jack" Pershing and his soldiers.

Camp Furlong Day will feature live music by Rubio Old Time Fiddlers, food vendors, arts and crafts, folklorico dancers, military re-enactors, Carlos Herrera and his trick horses, special speakers and other family-oriented activities. Nearly 100 horseback riders from the Cabalgata Binacional Villista will join the celebration – the culmination of a 14-day ride



Photo: Marti Niman

Camp Furlong Day promotes friendship and goodwill between the United States and Mexico.

from Guerrero, Chihuahua, to Columbus, N.M. At Palomas, Mexico, the Cabalgata will be joined by American horse riders. For details, call (575) 531-2711.

March 12 -13: Oliver Lee State Park's Dog Canyon Experience

The natural resources of Dog Canyon have enabled human occupation for 10,000 years. Come discover the natural, cultural and historical resources of Oliver Lee Memorial State Park at this annual park event. Ranch house tours, hikes and talks take place both days. A full schedule of programs will be announced. Call (575) 437-8284 for updates.



New seasons

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combination hunting and fishing licenses.

“The earlier deadline will allow hunters to save some money by buying combination licenses, and to have full use of their license when the license year begins April 1,” said Alexa Sandoval, the Department’s chief of administrative services.

The new rules also will allow hunters to shoot a little later this year.

“I think the change hunters will like most is the expanded shooting hours,” said Jim Lane, the Department’s chief of wildlife management. “It’s something that affects every sportsman in the state and provides more opportunity.” The new rule allows shooting from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. Previously, hunters had to stop shooting promptly at sunset.

Four-year rule cycle

Lane applauded the Commission’s decision to add consistency to the big-game hunting rule-making system by making it an every-four-years process instead of the current two-year cycle. “Going through the process every four years instead of every two years will simplify things and allow us to gather good data to make our management decisions,” Lane said. “That doesn’t mean all the rules will be set in concrete for four years. The Commission maintains the authority to modify rules if data suggests a new management strategy is needed.”

A four-year rule cycle also will benefit hunters, Lane said, because the rules will



Photo: Dan Williams

The Department of Game and Fish received almost 56,000 applications for 21,535 public-land elk licenses for the 2010-2011 seasons.



Photos: Above, Dan Williams; below, Larry Federici

Pronghorn antelope thrive in many areas of New Mexico. Hunting opportunities are plentiful on private and public land. Below, hunter Lora Federici shows off her muzzleloader buck taken near San Antonio Mountain.

be more familiar and consistent.

Hunters are encouraged to learn more about the new rules, season dates and other details about the 2011-2012 big-game and trapping seasons by reading the 2011-2012 Big Game and Trapper Rules & Information booklet, available online at www.wildlife.state.nm.us, all license vendors and Department offices in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Raton, Roswell and Las Cruces. Information also is available by calling (505) 476-8000.

Here are some details about changes in this year’s big-game and trapping rules:

New legal shooting hours

Legal shooting hours are now one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset for all big game, turkey and small game unless otherwise prohibited. This change will align New Mexico with 47 other states that allowing shooting one-half hour after sunset.

Expanded youth hunting opportunities

To encourage New Mexico’s strong family hunting heritage, the Department has added hundreds of youth licenses to the drawings in the past few years, including many hunts for deer, elk and oryx. This year, the Department expanded youth opportunities for pronghorn antelope, adding about 170 youth-only hunts to the draw.

To participate in youth-only hunts, applicants must be younger than 18 on the opening day of the hunt and must provide proof that they passed an approved hunter education course before they apply.



Application deadlines

Feb. 2 is the deadline to apply for oryx draw licenses, oryx population management hunts, bear Wildlife Management Area permits and most turkey draw permits. Online applications must be made before 5 p.m. MST and paper applications must be postmarked no later than Feb. 2.

March 28 is the deadline to apply for public deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, ibex, Barbary sheep, javelina, bighorn sheep draw licenses and all population management hunts except oryx. Online applications must be made before 5 p.m. MDT and paper applications must be postmarked no later than March 28.

Combination licenses

New Mexico residents have several options to purchase combination hunting and fishing licenses online with their

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New seasons

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application. Those who buy combination licenses will be issued authorization numbers that will serve as their legal Small Game and/or Fishing License.

Reduced application fees

Nonrefundable application fees have been reduced to \$8 for state residents and \$20 for nonresidents to reflect a reduction in charges to the Department for credit card processing. Application fees will be charged to credit cards at the time of online application.

Application tips

• **Apply online at www.wildlife.state.nm.us:** The automated process is fast, convenient and secure. It will spot most common errors that could result in an application being rejected, and also will allow changes to be made on an application until the deadline. Last year, almost 80 percent of all applications were online.

• **Notify your credit card issuer:** Some banks will refuse to pay charges that may look suspicious, such as multiple charges of similar amounts on one day. Applicants can help prevent this by contacting their credit card issuer in advance and advising them to accept charges by the Department of Game and Fish. This especially applies to applications with multiple hunters charged to one credit card, because the card is charged separately for each hunter on the application.

Full fee at application deadline

Beginning this year, all applicants -- paper or online -- will be charged the full license



Photo: Dan Williams

Hunters’ odds are very good for drawing a javelina license in New Mexico. Last season, there were more licenses than applications.

fee at the time of, or shortly after the application deadline. This differs from previous years when paper applicants were charged the full fee at the time of application. Hunters are urged to ensure they have funds available in credit or debit accounts to cover license fees for all applications. Applicants will be notified by e-mail before their card is charged for a license fee.

Crossbows allowed

Crossbows and bolts now may be used in “Any Legal Sporting Arm” or “Muzzleloader” hunts unless otherwise restricted. Crossbow use during bow-only hunts is still prohibited except by certified mobility-impaired hunters.

Population management hunts now a fifth choice

The application process for population management hunts has changed. Beginning this year, hunters interested in being placed on a statewide list to be considered for a population management hunt for deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, Barbary sheep or oryx must do so by checking the fifth choice option on their paper or online application. Applicants must apply for at least one regular draw hunt if they wish to be eligible for the population management hunt for the same species. By choosing the fifth choice option, hunters unsuccessful in drawing any of their first four choices will be placed on a list of eligible hunters for population management hunts for that species.

If a population management hunt becomes necessary, the Department will contact hunters on the list and notify them of the hunt areas, dates, bag limit, allowable sporting arm and any other special restrictions. If a hunter accepts the hunt, they will be required to purchase the proper license, validation and stamps. If a



Courtesy photo

The Department of Game and Fish received about 20,000 applications for 2,764 oryx licenses in 2010-2011. Above, Glenn Smith poses with his once-in-a-lifetime trophy.

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hunter declines a hunt, another hunter will be contacted.

Furbearer hunter and trapper reporting

Furbearer hunters and trappers must report their harvest results by April 7 to be eligible to purchase a license for the following season. The harvest reporting deadline will allow Department biologists to better monitor the species and number of furbearers taken during the season. Furbearer licenses for residents and nonresidents will be available only online, by mail or at a Department office. Those who miss the reporting deadline can purchase a license after they report and pay an \$8 late fee.

Boundary change for Game Management Units 6A-6C

The northern boundary separating Units 6A and 6C was changed back to the original boundary – so hunters could better identify it. Most of the boundary will be along U.S. Forest Service Road 103.

Game Management Unit 51 split

Unit 51 has been divided to create Units 51A and 51B for deer hunts only to better distribute deer hunting pressure.

No Antelope Management Units

To eliminate confusion and create consistent boundaries, the Department now will use the same statewide Game Management Units for all big-game species and will no longer use Antelope Management Units.

Bighorn ewe hunts

To prevent disease outbreaks, reduce impacts to the alpine ecosystem and reduce the herd size, hunts for bighorn ewes (females) will be offered in the Latir Mountains. One hunt is set aside specifically for youth hunters.

Bear and cougar harvest limits raised

Harvest limits have been increased for bears and cougars to better manage the two species within the social and ecological carrying capacities. The Department closely monitors harvest numbers during the seasons and stops hunting in most parts of the state when harvests are within 10 percent of the limits.

Mandatory cougar identification course

All cougar hunters must pass the Cougar Identification Course offered on the Department website before hunting cougars in the state. Hunters who successfully complete the course will be issued a number that must accompany every cougar hunting license. The course is designed to teach hunters to identify male from female cougars and help reduce female harvest.



Photo: LuAnn Tafoya

New Mexico resident soldiers returning from duty in Iraq or Afghanistan can apply for special, military-only oryx hunts on White Sands Missile Range.

Veterans, active-duty soldiers eligible for special licenses

New Mexicans who serve their country as members of the armed services earn more than the state’s appreciation and respect when it comes to hunting and fishing privileges. The Department of Game and Fish rewards active military and disabled veterans with several discounted licenses and special hunting opportunities.

Opportunities range from free licenses for 100 percent disabled veterans to premier oryx hunts for veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan. Information about veteran and active military hunting and fishing opportunities and necessary documentation are available on the Department website, www.wildlife.state.nm.us, or by calling (505) 476-8000.

Military and veteran opportunities include:

Free licenses for 100 percent disabled veterans

New Mexico residents who are 100 percent disabled as a result of having served in the armed services are eligible for a free, lifetime general hunting and fishing license. Disabled veterans can apply for a Disabled American Veteran card, issued by the Department, which allows the card holder to fish, hunt small game and to receive a deer hunting license, free of charge. Card holders do not need to buy or possess a Habitat Stamp or Habitat Management and Access Validation when hunting small game or deer, or fishing. Hunters who apply for a public-land deer license will not be charged an application fee.

Small game and fishing licenses for disabled veterans

Resident veterans who have a service-related disability of less than 100 percent are eligible for a \$10 combination small game and fishing license, a savings of \$23. Veterans can obtain these licenses by presenting a copy of their

Veterans Administration Award Letter at any Department office.

Discounted licenses for active-duty military

Active-duty service members who are New Mexico residents can buy a General Hunting and Fishing License for \$28 – a \$34 savings -- by presenting a valid military identification card and proof of residency at any Department office.

Free licenses for Iraq-Afghanistan returnees

Veterans who return from service in Iraq or Afghanistan are eligible for one free General Hunting and Fishing License, available by presenting proof of service at any Department office. No stamps are required to fish or hunt small game or deer. Veterans who participate in the public-land deer license draw will be charged the full amount up front, and then refunded that amount through the Santa Fe office.

Special oryx hunts for Iraq-Afghanistan returnees

Forty once-in-a-lifetime oryx hunts are available through a drawing limited to resident applicants who are returning from service in Iraq or Afghanistan. Applicants must submit a copy of their orders or DD-214 with their draw application by mail, fax or e-mail before the application deadline. Please call (505) 476-8087 for more information.

Fort Bliss opportunities

Active-duty soldiers stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso can purchase hunting and fishing licenses at New Mexico resident prices for activities that occur on portions of the Fort Bliss military reservation in New Mexico. Proof of assignment is required to be submitted before the draw. Information: (505) 476-8087.





A pouch of pelicans

Big birds are frequent visitors to New Mexico

By Marti Niman

When you look across some of New Mexico's lakes in the winter, you might see something that looks like a scene from Jurassic Park.

You might see a flock of big white birds with huge orange beaks and their long necks tucked back. They soar on thermals in a V-formation, each flapping together with slow, deep wing beats, circling higher and higher. Are they cranes? Are they geese? No, they are American white pelicans – you can tell the difference from afar by the way they tuck their long necks back instead of stretching them out.

Pelicans! In New Mexico?

Yes, pelicans love New Mexico. Like snowbirds, they come for the warm sunny beaches, cool fresh water and most of all, the fish. A pelican can eat 40 percent of its weight in fish every day. How many hamburgers would that be if you ate that much? White pelicans get together to catch fish, driving the fish into shallow water by beating their wings on the surface. They scoop up the water in their throat sac, which can hold three gallons of water. Then they tilt their heads back to drain out the water and swallow the fish. Can you imagine what your cafeteria would look like if kids ate like that? Pelican beaks are so amazing; there is even a famous poem about them:

*A wonderful bird is the Pelican.
His beak can hold more than his belly can.
He can hold in his beak
Enough food for a week!
But I'll be darned if I know how the hellican.*

A poet named Dixon Lanier Merritt wrote that Limerick, a funny style of poem. Try writing a poem or a rap song about pelicans.

The pelicans you see in New Mexico are American white pelicans. They weigh up to 20 pounds – as much as a small dog! Their wings stretch nine feet and their beak is 14 to 16 inches long. Ask a friend to measure your arms spread wide.

Pelicans are very social and do just about everything in a large group, sometimes called a pouch, pod, scoop, squadron or gang. Pelicans seem to love a party and hang out together to nest, loaf, forage, feed and fish. They call to one another with a croak, croak, croak –kind of a cross between a frog and a duck. Pelicans feed in shallow areas of lakes, marshes and rivers. Loafing together is important and they like to bask on banks and sandbars near their feeding areas.

Pelicans don't like human company and prefer to get away to islands and shallow bays for nesting. Their nests are not very deep and barely



Photos: Jim Stuart, above and bottom; Mark Watson, center insert

White pelicans can be seen in winter at the Rio Grande Nature Center in Albuquerque, above, and in the headwaters of Elephant Butte and Caballo lakes, bottom. Brown pelicans, center, are rarely seen in New Mexico.

contain the two eggs that are laid. Pelicans incubate (warm) the eggs with their feet instead of their breast. When the eggs hatch into chicks, the parent pelicans feed them by regurgitating (vomiting) food on the ground or into their large throat sac.

Pelicans don't like to be bothered by humans, especially near their nesting grounds, and whole colonies may abandon their nests if they are disturbed. Loss of habitat, floods, drought, predators and poisons may reduce their numbers. Pelicans, like other birds, can get tangled in fishing lines and plastic can holders. So if you go fishing or swimming at a lake or river, give the birds some distance and take everything out that you brought with you.

You may remember the pelicans that were caught in the oil spill in the Gulf Coast. Those birds were mostly brown pelicans that live only along ocean shores and rarely come inland. Only a few have been seen in New Mexico. Brown pelicans dive 20 feet into the water to catch their fish. The brown pelican is the state bird of Louisiana.

American white pelicans may be seen in the winter at Elephant Butte Lake and Caballo Lake state parks, especially at the northern ends away from people. They also are seen farther north at Eagle Nest, Clayton, Bluewater and Santa Rosa lakes. Pelicans sometimes can be found in other lakes as well.

Watching for pelicans and other birds in the winter is a fun way to spend time at state parks. See if you can tell the difference between pelicans and other large water birds like heron, cranes and geese.

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

