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Fishing the drought



Department of Game and Fish file photo

Despite the ongoing drought that has sent lake levels at Elephant Butte Lake to near-record lows in recent years, the reservoir continues to be one of the state's largest and best spots for fishing and recreation.

Low water, high temps challenge anglers, fish

By Eric Frey

Through my tenure as a fisheries biologist, I have joked many times: "I have learned that fish need water."

Joking aside, this could be more evident this year than ever before.

Two of the driest years on record and a disappointing winter snowpack have left New Mexico's reservoir levels extremely low. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Services, most of the state's reservoirs are at or below 23 percent of capacity.

So what does this mean to our fish populations?

Walleye worries

First, let's look at one of our most popular spring-time fish species, the walleye. Walleye are a "cool-water" species that thrive in our nutrient-rich large reservoirs. They seek out cool, deep water during hot summer months. As reservoir levels drop, water temperature increases and the available amount of cool-water habitat is lost.

Walleye are very piscivorous (fish eating) and require large amounts of prey such as gizzard shad and sunfish. When lake levels drop, predator and



Photo: Dan Williams

Higher-altitude waters such as the newly renovated Cowles Ponds near Pecos are good fishing destinations during the drought.

prey species are concentrated, which can lead to a reduced prey base for walleye. Also, many prey species such as sunfish require flooded vegetation to spawn and hide. As water levels drop, flooded vegetation is no longer available. This can stress walleye populations, especially the larger brood fish.

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Sandoval takes Game and Fish helm

Alexa Sandoval wanted to be a game warden from the time she was a little girl. May 15, she got much more than her wish when she became director of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, a position that also carries the title, "State Game Warden."

"It is such an honor for me to have this opportunity to work with so many talented people who are dedicated to conserving our state's wildlife," Sandoval says. "I'm excited about working with our staff and all of our constituents to make our department a leader in wildlife management across the West and the nation."

Sandoval, who began her 20-year career with the department as a game warden in Clayton, was chosen among four finalists for the job by the State Game Commission at its meeting in Albuquerque. As the second woman director in the department's 101-year history, she will be responsible for managing a state wildlife agency with more than 300 employees and an annual budget of more than \$38 million.

Sandoval moves into the director's chair after serving as the department's chief financial officer and chief of the Administrative Services Division.



Alexa Sandoval
sion. She previously served as a district wildlife officer (game warden), wildlife specialist, federal grant manager and licensing supervisor. She holds a master's degree in Business Administration from New Mexico Highlands University and a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management from Colorado State University. She also is a recent graduate of the prestigious National Conservation Leadership Institute.

Her passions, Sandoval says, are her family and New Mexico's outdoors. She is married to a retired New Mexico game warden, Ernie Sandoval. They have one daughter in college and two young sons.

"We are avid hunters and anglers and we love the outdoors," she says. "Every opportunity we get, we go camping and we're checking out new places."

In her new position, Sandoval said one focus will be building upon positive partnerships with the state's sportsmen and sportswomen, landowners, livestock operators, conservation groups and other government agencies.

"Everybody has a role to play in managing wildlife," she says.

Another focus will be retaining and recruiting a diverse constituency of hunters, anglers, trappers and wildlife supporters in New Mexico.

"Our state has so much to offer to so many people," she says. "Our wildlife is a resource everyone should respect and enjoy."

Young archers score big at state tournament

Young archers loosed 18,930 arrows at the Santa Ana Star Center in Rio Rancho, where teams from across New Mexico gathered March 8 for the third annual National Archery in the Schools State Tournament.

"This was our biggest turnout ever - 631 kids," said Brian Guzman, program coordinator for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. "There was a lot of good competition, and a whole lot of fun."

High School Division

Aztec High School's Clint Valerio was the top archer of the day, scoring 290 out of a possible 300 in the High School Division. Twenty-one of his 30 shots were bulls-eyes. His teammate, Douglas Hood, scored 280, helping Aztec beat defending champion Albuquerque Institute of Math and Technology by 167 points. Dalton Hamilton of Mescalero took third place with an individual score of 277 to help his team win third place.

Twenty middle schools, eight elementary schools and nine high schools registered for the tournament. Archers shot 15 arrows each from distances of 10 and 15 meters. The winners advance to the national tournament later this year in Louisville, Ky.

Middle School Division

Paloma Villalobos of Mesa View Middle School in Farmington scored 279 to take individual honors in her division. Teammate Allen Bradshaw was close behind in second with a score of 277 and Cody Smith of Koogler Middle School in Aztec was third at 273. Koogler took the team



Photo: Dan Williams

Members of the Aztec High School state championship National Archery in the Schools team compete from 10 meters at the state tournament.

title with a score of 3,069, followed by Mesa View with 2,985 and Albuquerque Institute for Math and Science with 2,950.

Elementary School Division

In the Elementary School Division, Juan Carrillo of Albuquerque's Pajarito Elementary took the individual prize with a score of 256. His teammate, Nadia Gonzales hit nine bulls-eyes to edge out Carlos Reyes of Las Cruces Sun Rise Elementary for second place. Both archers scored 250, and Reyes had three bulls-eyes. In the team competition, Seven Bar Elementary of Albuquerque won its third straight title by outscoring Pajarito Elementary 2,607 to 2,575. Sun Rise Elementary took third place with a score of 2,519.

The top three archers in each division won Genesis compound bows. The top three teams won trophies. Complete lists of individual and team scores can be found on the Department of Game and Fish website, www.wildlife.state.nm.us under "Events and Opportunities" or by clicking here.

Approximately 100 schools and home-school students across New Mexico participate in the National Archery in the Schools Program. Schools receive free training for instructors, and the department provides 50 percent of the funding for each school to purchase archery equipment.

For more information about the program, please contact Brian Guzman at (505) 231-4375 or brian.guzman@state.nm.us.



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Please visit our website,
www.wildlife.state.nm.us





Department of Game and Fish file photo

Elk calves are born with natural camouflage and without scent, giving them some defense against predators when they are very young.

Please don't try to 'rescue' New Mexico's young wildlife

Every year, the Department of Game and Fish receives calls from people who find young wild animals and take them home or to an animal clinic believing they are helping lost or abandoned wildlife.

Actually, "rescuing" young wildlife is the worst thing you can do. Wild animals rarely survive when removed from their natural habitat, and close encounters with humans and their pets can be fatal. The young animals can become stressed and not recover. They also need nourishment only their mother can provide.

Only licensed wildlife rehabilitators legally can care for wildlife.

Early June is the peak time when deer and elk have their fawns and calves in New Mexico. For the first two weeks, the neonates are especially vulnerable to predators and other threats. That's also when their mothers leave them alone while the mothers forage for food and water.

"Because they are alone doesn't mean they're abandoned," says

Nicole Quintana, the department's elk biologist. "The mother is close by and probably watching you."

Part of the deer or elk's strategy is to hide its young until it is old enough to run with its mother, Quintana says. Deer and elk are born without scent, so if they are hiding and their mother isn't around, it gives them some protection against predators. The mothers return every several hours to nurse their young.

"The best strategy if you find a young animal is to admire it from a distance and move on," Quintana says. "Rescuing" the animals, she says, usually is stealing it from its mother.

While the department appreciates public concern for wildlife, people are encouraged to leave wild animals alone. If animals appear to be injured or a safety threat, please call the Department of Game and Fish. Reports can be made at offices in Santa Fe, (888) 248-6866; Albuquerque, (505) 222-4700; Raton, (575) 445-2311; Las Cruces, (575) 532-2100; or Roswell, (575) 624-6135.

Expect roadblocks statewide during hunting, fishing seasons

The Department of Game and Fish will conduct roadblocks throughout the state during hunting and fishing seasons to collect harvest data and to detect wildlife law violations.

New Mexico hunters are in the field year-round trying for various species that are in season. Fishing is allowed year-round in New Mexico.

At roadblocks, conservation officers also will check for compliance with the Off Highway Motor Vehicle Act and the Aquatic Invasive Species Control Act. Drivers of vehicles hauling wood products will be asked to produce documentation as required by the Forest Conservation Act.

Department officers may be assisted by other law enforcement agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Police or county sheriff's offices. As a result, the public may encounter minor delays.

To report a wildlife-law violation, please contact a Department of Game and Fish area office in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Raton, Roswell or Las Cruces, or call the toll-free Operation Game Thief hotline at (800) 432-GAME (4263). Callers can remain anonymous and earn rewards for information leading to charges being filed.

Get involved

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

New Mexico Quail, Inc.: A conservation organization of more than 140 members from southwestern New Mexico, with goals to improve wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities primarily for upland birds. John Moen, (575) 644-3936.

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 Chapter, Wild Sheep Foundation: 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.

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.

The Nature Conservancy: A national organization dedicated to the preservation of plants, animals and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. In New Mexico, it has worked to preserve 1.4 million acres of landscapes and waterways. www.nature.org/newmexico.

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.

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.

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

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.

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>.

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.new-mexicomuskiesinc.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. (575) 878-2320, www.friendsofthebosque.org.

Albuquerque Wildlife Federation: A volunteer organization focused on New Mexico's wildlife and habitat resources. It offers monthly meetings with guest speakers, in-the-field habitat restoration projects and a monthly newsletter. (505) 281-4609, <http://abq.nmwildlife.org>.

New Mexico Council of Outfitters and Guides: An organization of about 78 members that supports hunters and the outfitting industry, and efforts to promote wildlife conservation on private and public lands. (505) 440-5258, www.nmoutfitters.com.

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

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.

Safari Club International: Promotes wildlife conservation worldwide while protecting the hunting heritage and supporting many 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.

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

New Mexico Trappers Association: Promotes and protects trapping and wild furbearers native to New Mexico. Works with agencies and groups to advance scientifically based management protocols, and educates trappers and the public about ethical trapping equipment and practices. (505) 897-0719, www.newmexicotrappers.com.



Ambassadors hit the OHV trails

By Ross Morgan

The growing popularity of using off-highway vehicles for hunting, fishing and family fun has created a need for better, safer trails statewide. Often, land-management agencies and others responsible for trail maintenance and safety could use some extra help.

To help meet that need, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish created the OHV Trail Ambassador Program, which allows private citizens to work with federal, state, and local public lands agencies and public safety officials to promote

responsible OHV recreation in the state. The volunteer ambassadors contribute their time, experience and local knowledge of riding areas in by patrolling trails in groups of two or more on motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles or recreational off-highway vehicles.

Another important aspect of being an ambassador is informing OHV operators of the state requirements and distributing New Mexico Department of Game and Fish OHV program brochures at high-use sites.

One great example of the ambas-

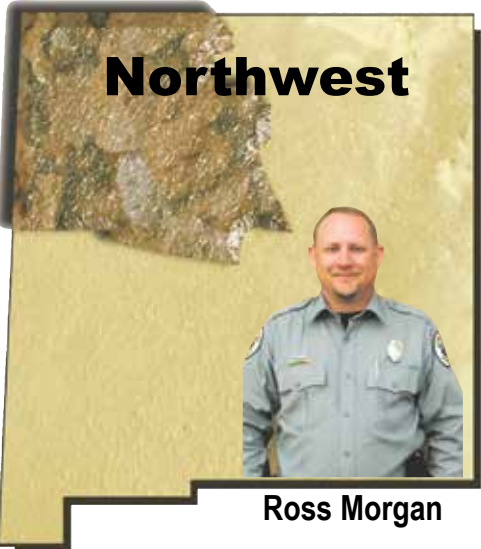
sador program at work was a recent trip to northern New Mexico by Chris Johnson, OHV education coordinator for the department, and OHV Trail Ambassadors Ernst Esch and Steven Sanchez. Their mission was to ride a few of the popular trails, contact some riders and do some trail maintenance.

The group spent the first part of the day talking to riders about safety in the Bureau of Land Management area known as La Puebla. From there, they headed to the BLM area known as Palacio Arroyos, where they did some trail maintenance work and picked up trash.

“Our ambassadors are a hard working group of folks,” said Johnson said. “They are always willing to get their hands dirty whether it’s working on trails, educating the public or picking up trash.”

Would you like to become an OHV Trail Ambassador? As an ambassador, you might be asked to help with special projects such as fence repair and clean-ups, or help identify road, trail, and other resource issues. Here are some of the requirements:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Possess a valid driver’s license.
- Be able to operate an OHV responsibly and safely.
- Be an experienced rider who is able to navigate roads and trails of varying difficulty and length.



- Own a properly maintained and equipped OHV suitable for roads and trails.
- Complete and maintain all required ambassador training.
- Be able to walk over uneven terrain.
- Be able to lift at least 30 pounds.
- Wear personal protective equipment as required by the land management agencies, including Department of Transportation-approved helmets on all off-highway vehicles.
- Agree not to carry firearms while participating in OHV Trail Ambassador patrols or events.

For more information about the OHV Trail Ambassador Program, please visit www.wildlife.state.nm.us, click on the OHV tab, or contact Chris Johnson at (505) 222-4712.

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



Photos: Chris Johnson

Off-highway Vehicle Program Ambassadors Ernst Esch, left, and Steven Sanchez help the Department of Game and Fish keep OHV trails and riders safe.

Shooting ranges need partners, participation

By Marty Frentzel

Anthony Chavez, chief of the Department of Game and Fish Information and Education Division, is fond of saying it takes three things to build a shooting range: land where people can shoot, money to establish a safe range, and partners who want the range to be successful and will dedicated their time to it.

The department currently is looking for partners to build and maintain shooting ranges, because the agency does have some money to invest in safe ranges. The money comes from the Federal Pittman-Robertson excise taxes people pay every time they buy firearms, ammunition or

archery equipment. This money pays for hunter education classes, our National Archery in the Schools Program, and the Department’s fledgling shooting program, which is working to put that money into ranges across the state.

Southwest New Mexico has several safe places to shoot, and here’s a quick look at some of them:

Las Cruces: Just a dozen or so miles west of Las Cruces, The Butterfield Shooting Range is one of the largest ranges in the southwest quadrant of the state. It is 520 acres of Bureau of Land Management property under lease by the City of Las Cruces. It offers several types of shooting,

everything from pistols to shotguns, and is managed by two groups of shooting enthusiasts – the Picacho Gun Club and Mesilla Valley Shotgun Sports.

“It’s a pretty comprehensive facility,” said Coralie Carrier, the contact for the Picacho Gun Club, which manages rifle and pistol shooting for the range. “During the week we probably have 300 to 500 shooters, but when we have big events, some of those can have 200 shooters themselves.”

John Moen is president of the Mesilla Valley Shotgun Sports, which runs the smooth-barrel side of the Butterfield range.

“We have 160 paid members,” Moen said. “We have three skeet ranges and three trap ranges, and in late April we broke ground on two more trap ranges. We should have those finished by August.”

Mesilla Valley Shotgun Sports works very closely with the state’s 4-H shooting program. In February, Mesilla Valley joined with the Department of Game and Fish for the second annual Southern New Mexico Clay Target Challenge, and 108 young shooters participated. The kids came from as far away as Alamogordo, Los Alamos and El Paso.

“We are going to add another high-house skeet for that youth shoot, and we think we can handle 160 kids, and we expect to get that many,” Moen

said. Moen can be reached at (575) 526-3571. Or call Joe Fries at (575) 642-2072.

In Glenwood, the Mogollon Mountain Gun Club is working to extend its lease with the U.S. Forest Service.

“We have about 50 members,” said Cathy Murphy, club secretary. “We pay for the insurance, provide improvements and clean it up when we need to.” Her husband, John Murphy, is the contact for the range. Call him at (575) 539-2527.

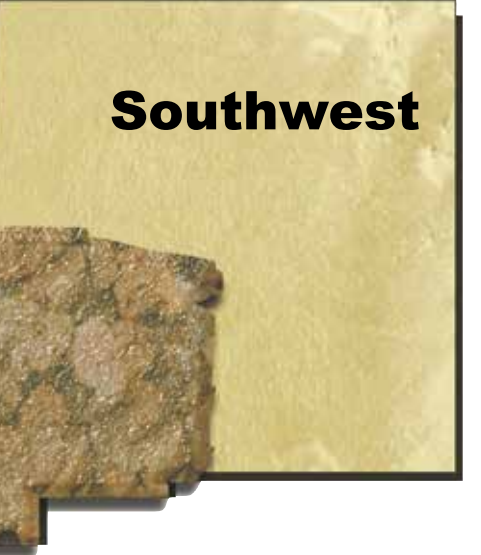
Jessica Fisher coordinates the Department’s shooting program. She can be reached at (505) 476-8100 or jessica.fisher@state.nm.us.

Marty Frentzel is the Department of Game and Fish assistant chief for education. He can be reached at (505) 222-4713 or martin.frentzel@state.nm.us.



Photo: Marty Frentzel

Mesilla Valley Shotgun Sports and the Department of Game and Fish sponsored the second annual New Mexico Clay Target Challenge this spring in Las Cruces.



So you want to be a game warden

By Clint Henson

“How can I be a game warden?” I get that question a lot, even though wild-life law enforcement is not a common career path.

I didn’t know about the field until I was in college and worked for the Department of Game and Fish as a student intern. Today, many people see me and realize that they would prefer to have my job than what they currently are doing.

There are two main requirements for this job: a college degree and staying in good physical shape.

New Mexico requires its conservation officers to have a four-year degree in one of the following fields: biology, fisheries science, wildlife science, animal science, forestry, range science, agricultural science, environmental science, wildlife law enforcement, criminal justice, ecology, natural resource science or zoology.

There are other jobs within the department that do not require a degree, but all commissioned officers are required to have at least a bachelor’s degree.

The second requirement is being able to pass the Department of Public Safety physical entrance examination. The test recently has been simplified so that all applicants must be able to run 1.5 miles in 15 minutes, 20 seconds. They also must be able to run 300 meters in 65.4 seconds, do 31 sit-ups and 29 pushups, each under one minute. The police academy also has



Photo: Kelly Richardson

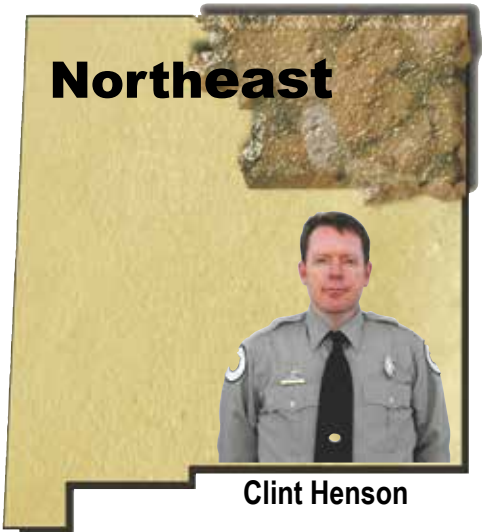
Conservation officers Travis Nygren, front, and Craig Sanchez check a hunter’s license in the field.

an exit exam, but applicants will be working to meet those goals throughout the academy.

But beyond the college degree and the police academy, there are several factors that everyone must contemplate for this career. New Mexico is a big state with only 54 game warden districts, so each officer covers a huge area, usually alone. There is no book that tells you how to get a raccoon out of a chimney or how to arrest someone when you are horseback in the wilderness. Those situations make the job fun and exciting, but being alone is not for everyone.

Another consideration is the difference between regular police work and being a game warden. Most of our contacts are very service-orientated. We want hunters and anglers to be successful and give them as much help as possible. An officer then must be able to seamlessly change gears from a regular license check to an enforcement situation where perhaps a game animal or a firearm must be seized. We must be professional and adaptable to so many quickly changing situations.

A game warden will change residences frequently, especially in the first few years of service. A rookie will be



in training for one year including up to 22 weeks in the police academy. I will never forget how my wife, two kids and I lived in a very small camp trailer in Silver City for my first year before moving to Clayton. It takes someone special to move for a job, but it takes a very, very special wife to follow.

A game warden has a very flexible schedule and is required to work 40 hours a week unless compensated for overtime. While there is a general schedule of what days you will work, that is subject to change and usually does. It is very common to start work on Saturday, which is our Monday, and be done with your 40-hour work-week by Monday afternoon.

For more information about becoming a game warden, please visit www.wildlife.state.nm.us and click on the “enforcement” tab.

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

Hunters, anglers pitch in with Habitat Stamps

By Mark Madsen

Hunters and anglers raise almost \$1 million a year for wildlife habitat projects on U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Lands in New Mexico.

Anyone who hunts or fishes on Forest Service or BLM lands within the state require the Sikes Act Stamp, commonly called the habitat stamp. A yearly \$5 fee is required by anyone over the age of 12 who hunts, fishes, or traps on those lands. The State Game Commission approved the Habitat Stamp Program in 1991, recognizing that habitat is the key to managing wildlife populations.

The money raised through habitat stamp sales is collected by the Department of Game and Fish and distributed to land management agencies that then use the money to improve wildlife habitat on federal lands. Wildlife habitat improvements can take many different forms: including water developments, prescribed burns, cutting and thinning, riparian area enhancements and enclosures. Other projects could include wildlife surveys, species reintroductions and fence modifications.

The Forest Service and BLM submit more than 200 wildlife habitat projects each year for funding through the habitat stamp program. Not all projects receive funding, but more



Photo: Mark Madsen

Habitat Stamp Program volunteers hard at work repairing the Bate’s trick tank in the Gallinas Mountains near Corona.

than 1,900 have been funded during the lifetime of the program. Land management agencies are responsible for the completion of all project work, both new construction and the maintenance of existing projects.

Volunteers play a huge part of the program’s success. Projects are reviewed and prioritized by five regional Citizen Advisory Committees. Those committees are composed of volunteers representing hunters and anglers, public-land permittees and conservationists. After public and committee input, a list of prioritized projects is presented to the State Game Commission for final approval.

Volunteers also assist with the implementation of on-the-ground habitat projects by providing expertise and labor. This was the case Feb. 26 when several volunteers from the Albuquerque area assisted Cibola National Forest and department personnel with the repair of a wildlife trick tank in the Gallinas Mountains near Corona.

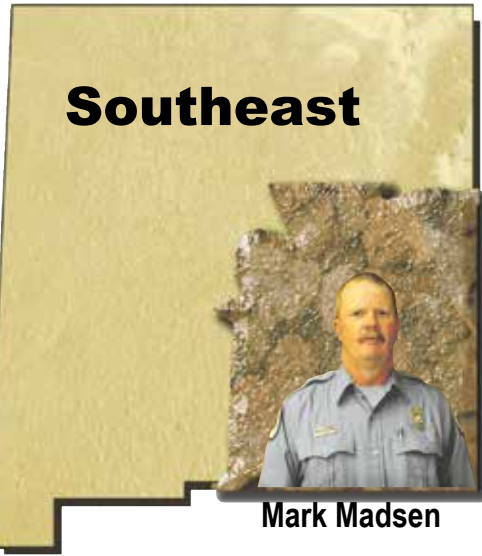
The Bate’s trick tank had fallen into disrepair and was no longer functioning. The metal water catchment was repaired and a new in-ground drinking box was installed below the storage tank. Once repaired, a reliable source of water once again was avail-

able to many wildlife species, including mule deer, elk and black bear.

For more information about the Habitat Stamp Program, or to volunteer, contact the regional habitat biologists at the department’s area offices in Roswell, Las Cruces, Raton, and Albuquerque.

Volunteer work could include project construction, monitoring and maintenance. Got a good idea of a wildlife habitat project that you would like to see implemented? Work with your local biologist and submit a project proposal.

Mark Madsen is the southeast area public information officer for the Department of Game and Fish. He can be contacted at (575) 624-6135 or mark.madsen@state.nm.us.



Feral hogs take a hit across N.M.

By Karl Moffatt

New Mexico appears to be winning its war against feral hogs. The invasive swine essentially have been eliminated in 10 of 17 infected counties in the state last year, according to federal authorities.

“The majority of pigs in those counties are largely gone now,” said Alan May, state director of the Wildlife Services Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal Plant Health Inspection Service in Albuquerque. “And we’re making good progress with the rest.”

Federal hunters tracked down and eliminated about 700 wild pigs last year on about 5 million acres of land in 15 of 17 affected counties, mostly the state’s east side, May said. Most of those pigs were females, which should seriously cut down on repopulation, he said.

Two counties in the state’s southwestern “Bootheel” are targeted next, while efforts in the far northeast corner of the state are ongoing.

Domestic pigs turned wild are a highly destructive, invasive species that compete with native wildlife for limited supplies of food and water. For example, deer and bears rely heavily on acorns for food, but wild hogs seek out and devour them, too. Feral pigs also prey heavily on birds and other small animals, which has a negative impact on the natural food chain. They also can carry and spread diseases dangerous to wildlife and domestic livestock.

That’s why the state Department of Game and Fish and other state, tribal and federal agencies, as



Photo courtesy USDA Wildlife Services

Efforts to control the spread of feral pigs were successful in New Mexico last year. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, federal hunters eliminated 700 of the invasive species on about 5 million acres of land.

well as private groups and individuals have come together to work with Wildlife Services to attack the problem.

The Department of Game and Fish has no jurisdiction over feral swine, which are considered domestic livestock gone wild – not wildlife. And while feral hog hunting is a popular sport, it is illegal in New Mexico to conduct commercial hunts for them or to import, hold, release or sell feral hogs.

The pigs first were found in the state in 2006, and their population has spread rapidly. Last year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture earmarked \$1 million to eliminate them in New Mexico. And the agency has seen good results, despite some unco-

operative private landowners hindering the effort.

“We will continue to work with those few folks to explain the importance of what we’re trying to do so we can hopefully achieve statewide eradication someday,” May said.

To read an in-depth report about the feral pig invasion, see the winter 2011/2012 edition of “New Mexico Wildlife” at www.wildlife.state.nm.us under “publications.”

For more information on dealing with feral pigs, contact Wildlife Services in Albuquerque at (505) 346-2640 or visit the agency’s website, <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>, and look under “Wildlife Damage.”

It’s OHV riding season; are you legal?

By Ross Morgan

For most of us, summer transforms into countless days of outdoor fun with friends and family. Whether it’s fishing at the lake or just spending the weekend outdoors enjoying the beautiful scenery, many of us rely on our off-highway vehicles to get us from place to place. Before you head out this summer, make sure that you and your family have the proper off-highway vehicle training and registration for your equipment.

What is an off-highway vehicle? New Mexico defines an off-highway vehicle as an all-terrain vehicle, dirt bike, off-road vehicle, or snowmobile. The New Mexico Off-Highway Vehicle Act of 2005 and subsequent legislation in 2009 were designed to protect the safety of off-highway vehicle users and ensure responsible



and sensitive use of off-highway vehicles on public lands.

Off-highway vehicles are required to be registered or permitted if they are going to be operated on public lands. Vehicles exempt from registration or permits include motorcycles registered for use on public streets, vehicles used strictly for agricultural and vehicles used strictly on private land.

Registration requirements for off-highway vehicles vary depending on the residency status of the own-

er. Residents of the state of New Mexico must have their off-highway vehicles registered with the state Motor Vehicle Division. Registration for residents is \$53 for the initial registration and \$50 every two years thereafter.

Nonresidents whose off-highway vehicles are not registered, or are currently in compliance with another state’s off-highway vehicle registration, user fee or similar rule demonstrated by certificate of registration, must obtain a New Mexico use permit. Nonresident permits cost \$48 for two years or \$18 for 90 days.

Off-highway vehicle safety is important and there are many requirements that people should be aware of before heading out to ride in public areas. Here are a few youth safety requirements that you should know.

- Riders younger than age 6 may not operate an off-highway vehicle on public land.
- Riders younger than 18 must complete a certified off-highway vehicle safety course and obtain a safety permit.
- Riders under 18 must wear an approved, securely fastened helmet and safety goggles.
- Riders under 18 cannot carry a passenger, even on off-highway vehicles designed for two persons.
- Riders under 18 must be visually supervised by an adult when operating an off-highway vehicle unless they are 13 and older with a valid motorcycle license or age 15 and older with a valid driver’s license.

- Ensure the all-terrain vehicle or recreational off-highway vehicle is an age-appropriate size-fit vehicle as defined by rule of the department.

We all know that operating off-highway vehicles on public land can be very fun. However, there are a few things that riders should be aware of and pay attention to when riding.

- It is illegal for any person to use an off-highway vehicle in a careless, reckless or negligent manner so as to endanger any person or property.
- It is illegal for any person to operate an off-highway vehicle while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs, in a manner that has a direct negative effect on or interferes with persons engaged in agricultural practices.
- It is illegal to ride in excess of 10 miles per hour within 200 feet of a business, animal shelter, horse-back rider, bicyclist, pedestrian, livestock or occupied dwelling.

Before you head out this summer to enjoy some fun on your off-highway vehicle, make sure that you take the time to register your vehicle and take the necessary safety training required. Hands-on training courses are offered free of charge by the Department’s Off- Highway vehicle program. To register for a free hands-on safety training class, call 505-222-4728 or visit www.B4URide.com.

The Department is looking for volunteer instructors to teach OHV safety training. If you or someone you know would like to become a certified off-highway vehicle instructor or just want to learn more information about off-highway vehicle safety, please call 505-222-4728 or visit www.wildlife.state.nm.us.

Black bears are dying for our food

By Dan Williams

Take a look at those sad, hungry brown eyes. Do they tug at your heartstrings? Don't you just want to feed them and make them happy?

Don't do it. Ever.

"We say it over and over every year, and I imagine we'll be saying it 10 years from now: A fed bear is a dead bear," says Rick Winslow, bear and cougar biologist for the Department of Game and Fish. "Once black bears associate humans with food, they are ruined forever."

The Department of Game and Fish and homeowners killed 173 problem bears in 2013. Many of them had been tagged at least twice for raiding campsites, dumpsters or neighborhood birdfeeders. They had become food conditioned and habituated to humans. They also had become dangerous. Others sealed their fate by becoming aggressive toward humans, breaking into homes and campers, knocking over tents and sometimes biting or scratching someone.

"It almost always comes down to one thing," Winslow says. "The food. If you're a bear, it's all about the food."

Winslow isn't sure how this bear season will play out, whether the problem bear kill will be in the 170s like 2013 and 2011, or in the 50s (2010) or 20s (2009). That depends on several variables, among them: drought and how much natural bear food is in the high country, how many juvenile bears are kicked out by their mothers, and how many easy food sources humans provide them.

"Right now, it's impossible to tell what the food resources will be like in late summer," Winslow said. "The fruit crop is looking pretty decent now and the acorns usually turn out the same. Right now we're just holding out for some good summer moisture."

If the drought that has plagued New Mexico for the past three years continues, people are likely to see bears coming into towns looking for food. If they find it, whether it be in bird feeders, garbage cans or pet food dishes, they're likely to stick around. That's when they get in trouble. Dogs chase them up trees. They get hit by cars. Everyone freaks out when they show up around a school or playground.

First- or second-offender bears usually are captured and relocated, usually some distance away. If they don't return – which they often try – they must fend for themselves in another bear's territory. Their chances of survival are not good. Likely scenarios: They get killed by a dominant bear, hit by a car trying to find their way back to town, or they find another human food source and get in trouble all over again.

Winslow says 2014 has the potential to be another troublesome year for bears. The natural food supply is iffy and because 2012 was a fairly good year, more cubs were born. That means more juveniles will be out and about, looking for food without mom's help.

"One thing's for sure," Winslow says, "There is no lack of bears out there."

The Department estimates the state's black bear population at 6,000 to 7,000 – and probably higher -- based on carrying capacity of the habitat and 15 years of bear-age data from all known mortalities. An ongoing three-year study is expected to produce a more accurate population estimate. Preliminary results are expected next spring.



Photo: Dan Williams

Coexisting with black bears

If you enjoy New Mexico's state animal, the black bear, here are some ways to keep them alive and you safe:

Bears at home

- **Garbage:** Store your garbage in airtight containers inside a garage or a sturdy shed, or in an approved bear-resistant receptacle. Clean trash cans with ammonia to reduce odors that can attract bears. Put the garbage out the morning of a scheduled pickup, not the night before.
- **Pet food:** Feed your pets indoors. Don't leave pet food outside. Store it in a sturdy building or the garage. Make sure your garage door is closed at night.
- **Barbecues:** Keep grills clean and free of grease. Store them in the garage or a sturdy shed.
- **Birdfeeders:** Hang birdfeeders out of reach of bears, not on your porch or from the house rafters. Bring hummingbird feeders inside every night.
- **Fruit trees:** Plant fruit trees away from your house, and pick fruit as it ripens. Spoiled fruit that falls to the ground should be removed because the odor is a powerful bear attractant.
- **Compost piles:** Keep compost piles away from your house. Don't put meat, fish, other pungent scraps or fragrant fruits such as melons on your compost pile. Add lime to reduce odors and accelerate decomposition.
- **Talk to neighbors:** Bear problems are community problems. Make sure your neighbors know about bear behavior and how to avoid encounters.

Bears in camp

- **Garbage in, garbage out:** Keep your camp clean and store food and garbage in bear-proof containers if possible. 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. Do not bury or burn your trash.
- **Stow your cooler, pots and pans:** Keep your

cooler and cooking utensils in a secure place, preferably in a bear-proof container. Vehicles or hard-sided camp trailers usually are secure, but bears have been known to break in anyway.

- **No food in the tent:** Keep your tent and sleeping bag free of all food smells and toiletry items -- even chewing gum and toothpaste. Change your clothes and store the ones you wore while cooking outside the tent with your food.
- **Don't cook where you sleep:** Your cooking area should be a good distance -- some say at least 100 yards -- from where you sleep, if possible.

Close encounters

What would you do if you suddenly came face-to-face with a black bear on the trail or in your back yard?

- **Don't run!** If you come across a bear, stay calm and slowly back away while continuing to face the animal and avoiding direct eye contact. Pick up small children so they don't panic and run, which can trigger the animals' instinct to chase.
- **Travel in groups:** There is strength in numbers, and most bears will respect that and leave the area.
- **Make yourself big:** Hold out your arms and spread your jacket so the bear doesn't consider you its prey. Don't kneel or bend over, which could trigger an attack.
- **Back away:** If the bear has not seen you, slowly back away while making noise so it knows you are there. If it still approaches, stand tall, yell, rattle pots and pans or whistle. If you are on a trail, step off on the downhill side and give the animal room to pass.

- **Don't mess with mama:** Never, ever, get between a mother and her cubs.
- **Never offer food:** Offering food to a bear is inviting it to stick around. When it's done with your friendly offering, it may consider having you for dessert.
- **If you are attacked:** Fight back aggressively, using anything you can reach as a weapon. Do not play dead.





Photo: Dan Williams

Northern New Mexico’s Rio Grande Gorge historically has been one of the state’s best -- and most challenging -- trout fisheries.

The lure of the Gorge

Renowned stretch of the Rio Grande an angler’s delight

By Karl Moffatt

New Mexico’s Rio Grande Gorge and its tumbling river is an intimidating and stingy place for many anglers. Its reputation for skunking even seasoned anglers often prompts some to pass it up for easier fare elsewhere.

But those who’ve managed to overcome this maddening river’s mysterious ways say the fishing can reach mystical proportions. And perhaps no one knows that better than long-time friends, fishermen and fellow Taos writers Taylor Streit and John Nichols.

Nichols was one of those guys who could be found fishing the river in cheap sneakers and jeans with the cuffs rolled up back in the 1970’s. Rods were made of fiberglass then, leaders from “cat-gut” and reels were by Martin.

In those days, Nichols bounced along rutted roads on the rim of Gorge in a low-slung, four-door Impala, looking for new ways down to the river. He carried no net, used crude, nameless flies and lunched on bologna sandwiches washed down with warm Coke.

Nichols fished the late afternoons and loved hopping from one slippery boulder to another to fish the foaming pools. He loaded his line with a duo of wet flies, “skittered” them across the surface on a short leader and regularly “cleaned up.”

Streit, in the meantime, had opened a fly shop in Taos and was building a name for himself as one of the Rio Grande’s best fishing guides.

Ironically, both men learned to fish the Rio



Photo: Karl Moffatt

Angler, author and fishing guide Taylor Streit ponders a stretch of the Rio Grande before casting for trout in a section of the Rio Grande Gorge above Pilar.

Grande from legendary local angler, Charley Reynolds, but they rarely had occasion to do it together. That’s because Streit spent his days guiding clients while Nichols was home in bed after writing all night. They became longtime friends after meeting at Streit’s fly shop, where they often compared notes and exchanged tales.

These days Nichols, 73, doesn’t fish his beloved river much. A chronic inner ear problem makes it difficult to keep his balance on the river’s tricky terrain. Despite that, Streit, 67, took him out during last year’s caddis hatch to a gentle stretch of the river near Manby Hot Springs.

They got into a few trout that day and Nichols says he hopes to do it again this year.

More recently, the two were able to get together down on the Rio Grande near Pilar, where

they were asked what the secret was to fishing the big river.

“Buy our books,” they said with a chuckle.

Streit’s guidebook “Fly Fish New Mexico,” and his instructional manual “Instinctive Fly Fishing” are essential reading for any angler. But it’s his book “Man vs Fish” where one can read about a rare day of day of fishing the Rio Grande with Nichols, the man Streit says knows more about the river than even him.

To many, Nichols, 73, is best known for his trilogy of fictional northern New Mexico-based novels, the “Milagro Beanfield War,” “The Magic Journey” and “The Nirvana Blues.” Others might know Nichols from his trilogy of memoirs, “If Mountains Die,” “The Last Beautiful Days of Autumn” and “On the Mesa.”

In those books one can gain some insight into



Nichols’ world and also learn a lot of what it takes to fish the mercurial Rio Grande.

Nichols notes in “Last Beautiful Days of Autumn” that entering the Gorge “is like walking into both a physical and spiritual meat grinder” where “there is no end to the fabled calamities of this mighty river.” And with his trademark humor and irony, Nichols proceeds to recount all of the things that can and will go wrong while fishing in the Rio Grande gorge. Busted rods, missing reels, spills and the ever-present fear of an encounter with a rattlesnake.

“You know, I never did meet one during all those years,” he says.

While much has changed in recent years on the Rio Grande, even more has remained the same, Nichols says.

“It’s still a rugged, remote, challenging river where half the battle is getting there,” he says. “That’s what I loved about it, the work involved and the triumph of surviving it.”

Nichols’ “skittering” technique involves the use of a short leader from which two or even three wet flies are dangling. The rig is then twitched across the top and just under the surface of the water to entice trout to strike.

Nichols says the technique works best in the roiling waters among the boulder fields of the river. One of his favorite spots is the run between Little and Big Arsenic Springs campgrounds in the Wild Rivers Recreation Area near Cerro.

The keys to successfully fishing the Rio Grande are to be alert and prepared, he says. Always let someone know where you’re going and carry matches, a poncho, sweater and windbreaker, polarized sunglasses and water. Other than that, pack as lightly as possible and leave the waders behind, Nichols suggests. “Just watch your step; the basalt rock down there is very slippery when wet,” he warns. “Try not to fall in.”

Nichols says the fishing is actually pretty easy



Photo: Karl Moffatt

Between them, author John Nichols, left, and fishing guide Taylor Streit have spent more hours fishing the Rio Grande Gorge than almost anyone.

once you get down steep canyon trails. If the sun is off the water, it can be really good. Streit agrees that the Rio Grande fishes best in the shade and that an angler can do better in the more remote areas of the gorge. By simply hiking a couple miles up the canyon from either the Taos Junction Bridge north of Pilar or the John Dunn Bridge at Arroyo Hondo, an angler can find unspoiled water and great fishing.

“There are still places on this river where the trout have never been caught,” says Streit. “And we’re still finding new ways to get to them.” The Rio Grande Gorge and its stunning scenery are protected from most commercial development under its designation by President Barack Obama last year as a national monument. And the long-neglected campgrounds and day-use areas along the river at the Orilla Verde Recreation Area near Pilar have received much-needed facelifts.

The popular nine-mile stretch of river between the Taos Junction Bridge at Pilar and County Line takeout downstream was stocked with about 30,000 catchable-size rainbow trout last year, says Eric Frey, Sportfish Program manager for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

The upper stretches of the river between the Wild Rivers Recreation Area and John Dunn Bridge have been stocked in recent years with native cutthroat trout, Frey said. Those stockings have produced a population that is now reaching the 14- to 16-inch range and with time could rival some of the bigger brown trout in the river.

An unintended benefit of stocking cutthroats into the Rio Grande is that they can breed with the wild rainbows to produce “cutbows,” very colorful, hard-fighting and drought-tolerant fish, Frey said.

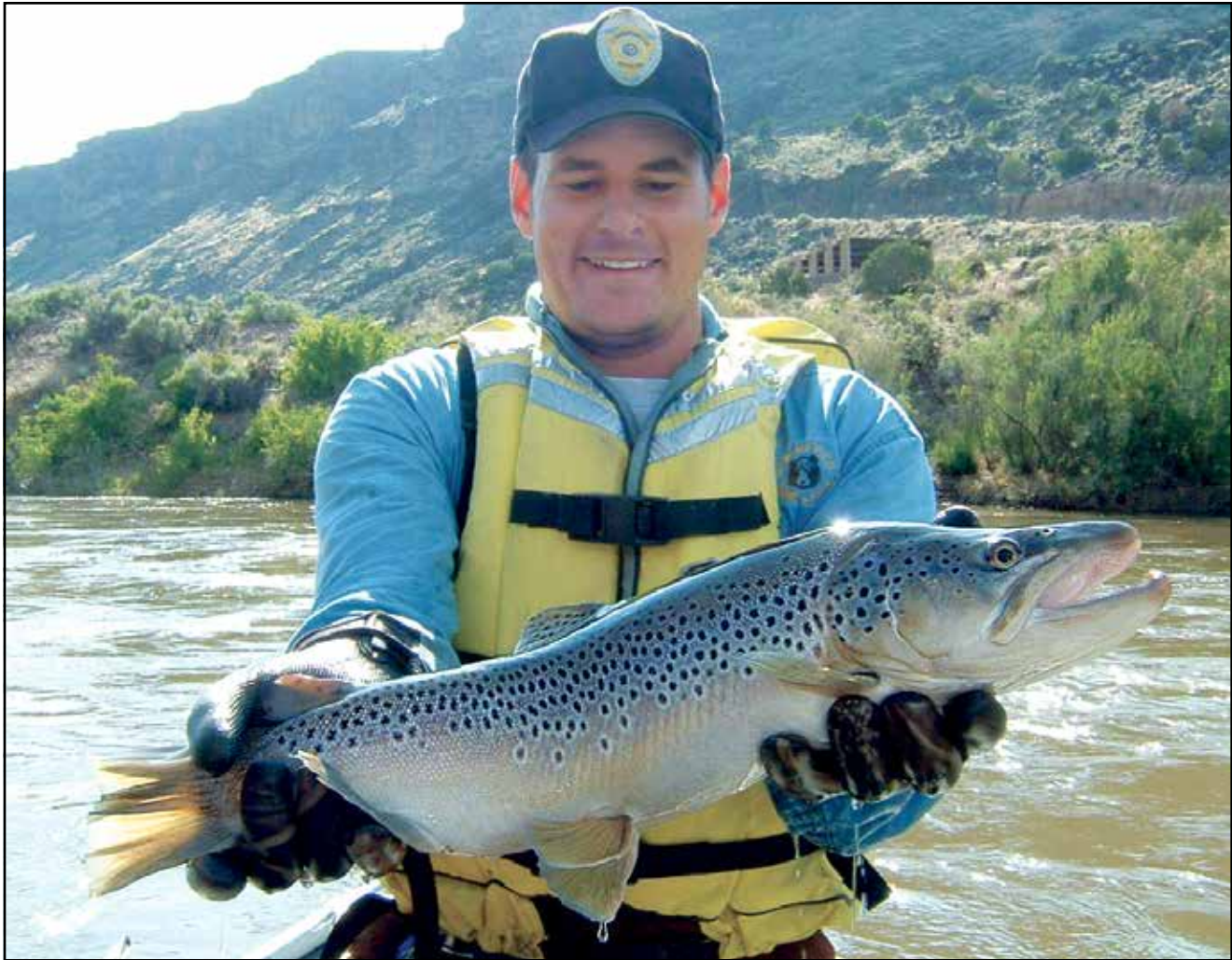
The Rio Grande is holding a lot of fish these days, Frey says.

The most recent electro-shocking survey on the river in 2008 revealed healthy numbers of trout in the 8-mile stretch of river between La Junta and the John Dunn Bridge, he said. The survey revealed about 1,400 trout per mile with twice as many browns as rainbows and some monsters in the 25-inch range.

The survey recorded catching almost three times as many fish per mile in the remote 16-mile stretch between the John Dunn and Taos Junction bridges, Frey said. Along the way, shocking crews also turned up impressive numbers of large northern pike, predators that have made their way downstream from Colorado over the years.

Streit says the long-running drought actually has improved fishing on the river. There’s less spring runoff carrying silt and sediment into the river, so it’s running clearer more often, which allows for extra fishing days.

“I’ve never seen it fish any better than it is right now,” Streit says.



Department of Game and Fish file photo

Eric Frey, sport fish program manager for the Department of Game and Fish, shows off one of the big brown trout that turned up during one of the agency’s surveys of the Rio Grande Gorge.

Karl Moffatt is a longtime New Mexico journalist and avid outdoorsman who publishes regularly at www.outdoorsnewmexico.com.



Transplants give turkeys new homes

By Dan Williams

Sixty-seven wild turkeys have new places to roost in southern New Mexico this spring following successful trapping and transplant operations by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

The separate transplants will increase existing turkey populations in southwestern and southeastern New Mexico, with a goal of one day offering more hunting opportunities in those areas.

Early this year, the department partnered with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to trap 20 Gould’s turkeys in Arizona and move them to the “Bootheel” region of extreme southwestern New Mexico. The Gould’s turkeys, a threatened species in New Mexico, were released in the Coronado National Forest, where they will add to a growing population of birds.

The Gould’s turkey transplant was part of a trade in which the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish trapped and moved 43 pronghorn antelope to Arizona in exchange for 60 Gould’s turkeys. Twenty turkeys will be trapped and moved to New Mexico each year for three years.



The Department of Game and Fish released 20 Gould’s turkeys in the Coronado National Forest of New Mexico’s “Bootheel” in February.

Photo: Dan Williams

In early February, the department trapped 47 Merriam’s turkeys at Philmont Scout Ranch near Cimarron and moved them to the Guadalupe Mountains of the Lincoln National Forest of southeastern New Mexico. The transplants will be a big boost to a small population of Merriam’s turkeys in the area northwest of Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

Volunteers from the National Wild Turkey Federation, wildlife students from New Mexico State University and staff members from the National Forest Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department

and Philmont Scout Ranch joined the department in both trapping operations.

Three subspecies of wild turkeys, Merriam’s, Rio Grande and Gould’s, inhabit New Mexico. The state offers spring and fall hunting seasons for Merriam’s and Rio Grande turkeys. Gould’s turkey licenses are limited to two a year, one by auction and one by lottery, from the National Wild Turkey Federation.

For more information about turkeys and turkey hunting in New Mexico, please visit www.wildlife.state.nm.us.

Department traps, relocates 201 pronghorn antelope

By Ryan Darr

Department of Game and Fish biologists, conservation officers and staff captured and relocated 201 pronghorn in January in an ongoing effort to reduce pronghorn use of irrigated crops and to bolster low populations in other areas of the state.

The pronghorn were captured in a four-day effort at the UU-Bar Ranch outside of Cimarron using a wing-trap design invented in 1937 by Department Biologist T. Paul Russell. That design has helped the Department restore a pronghorn population of 1,740 reported by Aldo Leopold in 1916 to around 45,000 today.

The wing trap is a simple V-shaped design with fences set up along traditional pronghorn routes. Crews set up the trap in advance, pounding posts and lining wire and netting with 8-foot tarps so the trapped animals can’t see out or easily escape as they are driven into a small corral, first by a helicopter, then by a line of crew members who fall in behind and block the gaps. As the animals approach the corral, a hidden gate is quickly closed behind them before they realize they are in a trap.

Once the pronghorn are in the corral, they are allowed to settle down a bit before they are guided into a padded, darkened chute called the “grinder,” where two crew members catch and carry the animal to waiting veterinarians. The pronghorns are kept calm during the ordeal by keeping them blindfolded and keeping their hooves off the ground until they are put in trailers.

The pronghorn captured in January were released at four sites. Forty-three were taken to two release sites in Arizona as part of a cooperative project between Arizona and New Mexico to enhance game species in each state. In exchange for the pronghorn, New Mexico will receive 60 Gould’s wild turkeys from Arizona in an effort to augment populations in the state.

“The pronghorn have integrated well with the small existing herd,” said Amber Munig, Big Game Management supervisor with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. “Mortality appears to be low.”



Photo: Dan Williams

A group of pronghorn is trapped in the corral of a wing trap during a Department of Game and Fish capture-transplant operation.

The remaining 158 pronghorn were relocated to two sites in southern New Mexico. Sixty-nine were moved to Fort Stanton near Capitan and 89 went to the “Macho Site” northwest of Roswell. Eight animals were lost before release due to complications during capture and transport.

“New Mexicans benefit on multiple fronts from the outcome of this trap,” Assistant Director R.J. Kirkpatrick said. “Southern New Mexico pronghorn herds increase in size, the trade with Arizona provides critical new birds to augment our turkey populations, and New Mexicans can enjoy opportunities to see more wildlife in their natural habitat.”

The pronghorn received blood tests, vaccinations and some were fitted with radio collars to track survival and movements. Some female pronghorn that went to Fort Stanton also received vaginal implant transmitters as part of a fawn survival study in conjunction with researchers at Texas Tech University. These transmitters alert biologists when a pronghorn gives birth so crews can mark fawns and monitor their survival patterns.

Pronghorn at both sites were released directly into the wild. Three were lost to capture-related complications post-release at Fort Stanton, but none were lost at the Macho Site. Excluding capture-related losses, present survival is 100 percent for 54 radio-collared pronghorns at the Macho Site and an additional 30 at Fort Stanton.

Most of the pronghorn have remained within a few miles of their release locations. In addition, most of the pronghorn at the Macho Site have readily integrated with the resident herds of pronghorn.

Department staff and graduate students from Texas Tech University will continue to monitor survival, movements and reproduction of released pronghorn to evaluate the effectiveness of capture and translocation efforts in New Mexico.

Ryan Darr is the deer and pronghorn biologist for the Department of Game and Fish. He can be contacted at ryan.darr@state.nm.us.





Deer in Silver City have become so habituated to humans that they aren't even scared of a trap over their heads. At left, Department of Game and Fish Conservation Officer Matt Pengelly offers a young buck a pretend treat while a crew sets up a trap.

New hope for troublesome deer

Traps, transplants good for deer herds, Silver City residents

Story and photographs by Dan Williams

There aren't many rosebushes in some neighborhoods around Silver City these days. As much as residents would like to grow them, the deer like to eat them.

"A lot of people would plant roses and then just give up trying to take care of them because they couldn't stop the deer from eating them," said Adan Jacquez, the Silver City game warden for the Department of Game and Fish. "There are so many deer in some of those areas that if you pay attention, you can see a browse line on the plants where the deer have eaten everything they can reach."

Residents' complaints about deer and reports of deer killed on the roads have subsided a bit this spring and summer, Jacquez said, partly due to two capture-transplant operations by the department. The department trapped and moved 185 deer from the Silver City area the past two years.

But the respite from the ravaged rosebushes isn't likely to last long.

Despite the transplant operations and a special hunting season in the area, the urban deer population is extensive and growing. Before the trapping, Department of Game and Fish staff counted more than 400 deer in a one-day survey covering part of Silver City. The survey accounted for a fraction of the deer in and around the entire city.



Department staff carry a doe from the trap.

"And the deer population is likely to grow quite a bit," said Darrel Weybright, the department's assistant wildlife management chief. "When you have hundreds of does around the city and a fawn-to-doe ratio of

50 per 100, that's a lot of deer hitting the ground every year."

Department staff conducting the survey reported many does with twins. The department is working with the city and residents to determine the best ways to deal with the urban deer. More trapping is one option, along with hunting incentives.

The trapping and transplant operations were suc-



Department of Game and Fish staff and volunteers set up a deer trap, above, and later struggle to free a deer from trap netting, left, during of of two trapping operations in the Silver City area this past year. The department trapped and relocated 185 deer from the area.

cessful in three ways: they removed nuisance deer from Silver City, supplemented small herds in other areas of the state, and contributed to ongoing research by the New Mexico State University-Wildlife Cooperative Unit. Another 104 deer captured from an overpopulated herd near Arabella also are part of that research.

The deer captured in Silver City were taken to the Peloncillo Mountains south of Lordsburg and to the San Francisco River Valley near Glenwood. The deer from Arabella were taken to the San Francisco River Valley and to the Caballo Mountains to help establish and grow declining populations there. Some of the deer received radio collars to track survival and movements. Some does received vaginal implant transmitters as part of an NMSU fawn survival study.

Biologists were surprised by early data from the NMSU study, which focused on survival and mortality of translocated mule deer. Earlier studies of translocated deer indicated a high mortality rate, but these deer appear to be doing quite well.

"Monitoring of radio-collared deer shows that the survival rate of translocated deer from this year's

captures is above 90 percent," said Ryan Darr, deer and pronghorn biologist for the department. "Considering that we lose 15 to 20 percent of deer to natural mortality each year, the present survival rates are very pleasing."

NMSU graduate students and department staff also have observed that movement of released deer has remained relatively small. Movement from a release site toward a deer's former home is a major concern for translocated mule deer. Most of the deer appear to have remained within five miles of the release sites, with only a few movements up to 20 miles. No deer have returned to their release sites.

The department hopes to conduct more trapping and transplanting operations in the future, both to supplement declining populations in some areas of the state and to help alleviate urban deer problems such as the one in Silver City.

"Urban deer are a growing concern nationwide, and the problem will continue to grow as we see more movement of humans into deer habitat," Darr said. "If we can solve two problems at one time, it's the best a biologist can hope for."



Fishing the drought

... continued from Page 1

The good news is that walleye is a very adaptive species. Many of New Mexico’s populations have decreased, but there are still lakes that offer great walleye fishing. In fact, walleye populations in lakes such as Ute, Conchas and Sumner have increased.

The Department of Game and Fish will continue to stock walleye at appropriate rates for future fishing opportunities.

Trout troubles

Another challenge is drought effects on our rainbow trout stocking program.

Every year, the department stocks more than 1.3 million catchable-size rainbow trout into hundreds of lakes and streams. With current drought conditions, the water quality in many lakes and streams no longer meets conditions required to support trout. Rainbow trout require cold, clean water to survive. They start showing signs of stress at 65 degrees and typically die when water gets over 70 degrees. In 2013, we saw this temperature threshold exceeded earlier and in more waters. Even Eagle Nest Lake, which sits at 8,100 feet elevation, exceeded this threshold for a short time in July last year.

The plot thickens.

For the past decade, department hatcheries have been mitigating issues with whirling disease. Many of hatcheries were renovated, some even temporary closed, to deal with this devastating disease. In recent years, after solving whirling disease issues, all six hatcheries are fully operational and producing trout at near 100 percent capacity.

That’s great news, but with drought conditions we have lost the ability to stock some of our streams and lakes. Fish continue to grow and must be stocked out or we run out of space at the hatchery. They can’t be just “banked” away until drought conditions recede.

How do we address this issue? With have two solutions. The first is to stock extra fish in the spring before water temperatures get too warm. This will provide some great spring



Cool mountain lakes such as Morphy Lake, above, and Eagle Nest Lake, left, receive generous stockings of rainbow trout during times of drought, when some streams and lower altitude waters are too low or too warm to support cold-water fish.

Photos: Clint Henson, above; Dan Williams, left.

fishing throughout New Mexico. The second solution is to divert trout to waters that will support them throughout the year. This includes most of the mountain streams and large cold-water reservoirs in northern New Mexico.

Our message to anglers is please don’t get frustrated that we are not stocking every traditional stream or lake. We will stock waters that are in close proximity and still have conditions that will support trout. So, our stocking locations may be limited, but waters that will be stocked will provide some excellent trout fishing opportunities.

These are just two of many fish species that will be affected by drought conditions.

Some advice for anglers during times of drought:

- If you plan to practice catch-and-release, don’t play fish to exhaustion. Warm water temperatures and exhaustion can result in fish death.
- If you harvest wild fish, be selective. Remember: The larger adult fish produce the future’s catch.

Following these two pieces of advice will help reduce the impacts to your fish populations. If you need more advice on some great fishing locations that are not impacted by the drought conditions please call one of our offices.

Eric Frey is the Sport Fish Program manager for the Department of Game and Fish. He can be contacted at eric.frey@state.nm.us.

The trophy trout waters of the San Juan River below Navajo Dam provide anglers with consistent, quality fishing because of cold water temperatures and plenty of food for the fish. Recent trout habitat projects by the Department of Game and Fish have made fishing the San Juan better than ever.

Photo: Dan Williams



By Dan Williams

A prolonged drought can be mighty tough on anglers and fish. Without a decent snowpack and runoff, water gets scarce, shallow and warm. Fish stop biting and sometimes die from algae blooms that deplete dissolved oxygen. Storm runoff after forest fires sent torrents of ash and silt downstream, killing aquatic life for miles.

So what are anglers to do during these dry periods?

"Right now everyone's hoping for a good monsoon season," says Richard Hansen, cold-water fisheries supervisor for the Department of Game and Fish. "The best thing anglers can do is seek out higher, cooler lakes and streams – and hope for the best."

Kevin Gardner, the department's warm-water fisheries supervisor, says southern New Mexico lakes are likely to be low and warm again this year. By mid-summer, irrigation demands will have severely impacted all waters.

"It's going to be bad again, but probably not as bad as last year," Gardner said.

Here's a region-by-region outlook for this summer for major fishing destinations according to the department's fisheries biologists:

San Juan River: The trophy trout waters below Navajo Dam always are the best bet for anglers looking for consistency and large trout. The flow from the bottom of the dam is always cold and provides a plentiful supply of food for the fish. Recent trout habitat improvements by the department will make the world-famous fishery even better.

Heron Lake: The lake is still low and expected to get lower because of water demands downstream. Trout and kokanee salmon fishing is likely to slow as the water warms, and then pick up again in the fall.

Mountain lakes: Canjilon, Fenton, Aztec and Laguna del Campo lakes should remain cool enough to provide decent trout fishing through the summer. As a bonus, the department plans to stock these lakes with large trout as hatcheries allow fish to grow when they can't be stocked in warmer lakes or low streams.

Chama River: Expect water to be low and warm through the summer. The best bet for fishing will be below El Vado and Abiquiu lakes.

Tingley Beach: The department plans generous stockings of good-sized channel catfish through the summer to provide Albuquerque anglers some action.

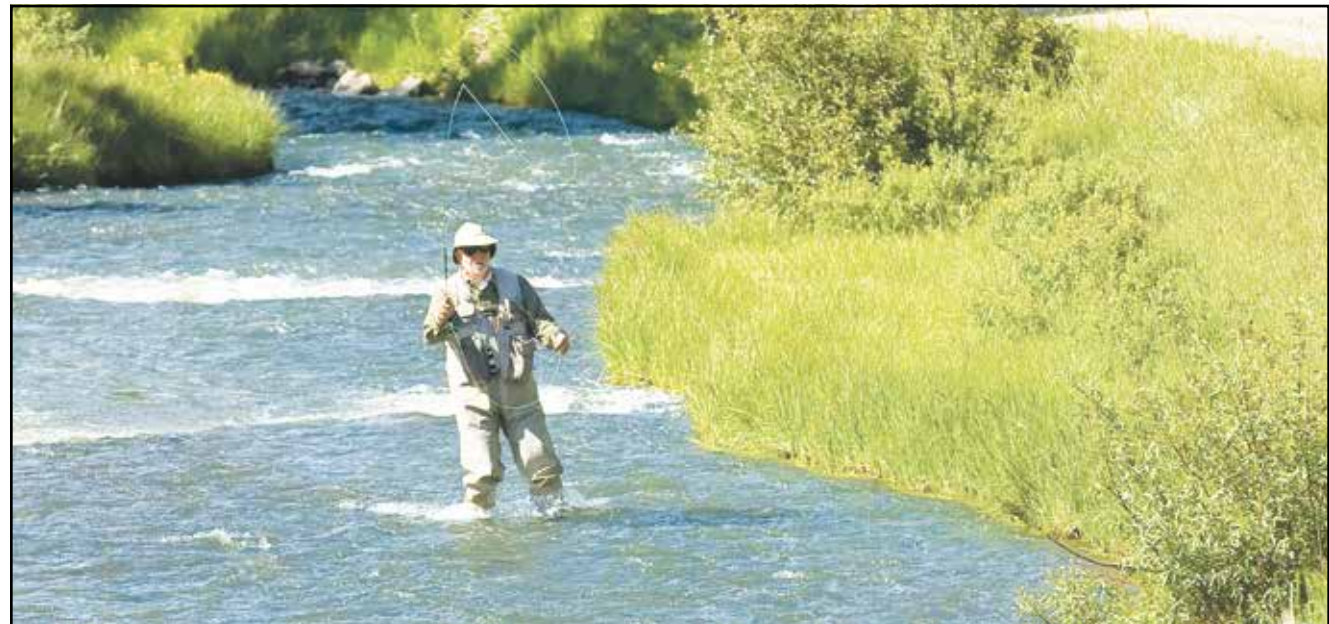


Photo: Dan Williams

The Rio Costilla in Northern New Mexico is likely to experience lower flows this summer, but still remain one of the state's most popular spots to catch native Rio Grande Cutthroat trout.



Photo: Dan Williams

Fenton Lake in the Jemez Mountains is one of New Mexico's top fishing destinations because of its high altitude and generous stockings of trout. Anglers can expect the lake to receive more trout than usual this year because of its ability to sustain trout year-round.

Lake Maloya: This small lake nestled in Sugarite Canyon State Park near Raton has been one of the hottest trout fishing lakes in the state this year. It's likely to slow down as the water warms, but should remain a good spot to take the family.

Ute and Conchas reservoirs: The northeast received decent amounts of moisture last September and this spring, raising lake levels and keeping fishing for walleye and bass very good. Ute is always a good destination when other lakes are low. Conchas is higher than last year but will need a good monsoon season to stay that way.

Eagle Nest: High altitude helps keep the water temperature cooler for the trout, perch and northern pike. The department is able to stock trout in the lake through the summer, and it will be a prime destination for many of the large trout raised at Los Ojos Hatchery. Pike fishing should be good throughout the year and well into the future as the illegally introduced fish reproduce and grow.

Clayton: The water level is higher than last year and fishing has been good. This lake is being managed as a trophy bass and walleye fishery, and it also is regularly stocked with trout except during the warmer summer months.

Rio Grande, Red River: Both rivers get warmer and shallower as the summer progresses, but turn around and become prime trout waters during the fall.

Valle Vidal waters: Costilla Creek should provide good fishing through the summer thanks to some decent winter moisture. A good monsoon would make it much better. Suree ponds are

likely to be low again this summer and high water temperatures may make fishing difficult.

Small community lakes: Lake Van, Oasis, Green Meadows, Roswell Kids Pond and other community lakes will receive generous stockings of large channel catfish this summer, which should provide plenty of recreation for local anglers. Winter trout fishing will start again in these lakes when the water temperatures go down.

Grindstone: The lake in Ruidoso has received more stocked trout than usual because of the demise of Bonito lake after the Little Bear Fire. It should provide good fishing until the water warms up and the city begins treating it with copper sulfate to combat algae.

Santa Rosa Lake: Although the lake received a huge influx of new water last year, fishing reports have all been bad. Lake levels fluctuate widely because of downstream irrigation demands.

Sumner Lake: Fluctuating water levels due to irrigation demands have negative impacts on fishing, although it may have received many of the fish from Santa Rosa last year.

Elephant Butte: The lake was 19 feet higher than last year going into irrigation season, but water demands are likely to reduce it's size substantially by summer's end. That's not bad news for anglers, however, as water – and fish – are concentrated into smaller areas. Watch for crappie fishing to continue to improve.

Caballo Lake: Because it is so shallow, the lake temperature will increase to the point where the fish stop feeding.

Bear Canyon: Fishing should be decent for catfish and largemouth bass until the end of August, when it typically gets an algae bloom and turns over, sometimes resulting in a fish kill. One tip for anglers, especially if they are going for catfish: When the water is warm, most of the oxygen is in the top four to five feet, and that's where the fish will be.

Quemado Lake: Trout fishing should be OK until lake June, when warm water causes the fish to stop feeding. Fishing for tiger musky should remain good, although the lake does not have the density muskies as Bluewater Lake.

Gila River: Expect the river to be very low this year because of a nonexistent runoff. Monsoon rains could make matters worse, sending torrents downstream because of the Whitewater Baldy Fire.

Cooper’s hawks thriving in Albuquerque

Urban raptors can be ultra-protective parents during nesting season

By Dan Williams

The phones usually start ringing in early June. “Hello, I’d like to report a big bird that’s dive-bombing our children when we go to play in the park.”

It’s all in a day’s work for Kristin Madden and Brian Millsap. They are bird biologists who specialize in urban raptors. Most of the calls are about Cooper’s hawks protecting their young, and the majority are from Albuquerque.

“Albuquerque has the highest recorded density of Cooper’s hawks anywhere, with about two nests per square mile,” says Madden, bird program manager for the Department of Game and Fish.



Cooper’s hawks are known to get a bit crabby with visitors who come too close to their nests just after their eggs hatch. Usually the birds just loudly curse would-be

intruders, warning them to stay away. Occasionally, however, they get more aggressive, sometimes swooping close to a person or pet, or in rare cases, taking a swipe with their talons.

“Only about 5 percent or less are actually physically aggressive,” Madden says. “Of course we always hear about those. We see them on the news and everyone starts talking about how aggressive the birds are. In reality, most people don’t even know the hawks are in the neighborhood.”

Madden recommends steering clear of aggressive birds’ nesting trees if possible. The parents mellow out after their young learn to fly – 4 to 5 weeks after they hatch. If the nesting trees cannot be avoided, she recommends wearing a hat or better



Photos: Dan Williams

A male Cooper’s hawk lets intruders know he’s not pleased they are so near his nest.

yet, using an umbrella to protect yourself.

Madden and Millsap, the National Raptor Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque, estimate there are more than 500 Cooper’s hawks in Albuquerque. They hang out anywhere there are mature trees, preying mostly on pigeons and doves, which are plentiful in the city. In fact, the prey is so plentiful that the hawk population is growing about 20 percent a year, according to the biologists’ banding and radio-tracking research.

When Millsap and Madden get reports of especially aggressive hawks, they often show up with a net, a great-horned owl and a calling device, which they use to capture, band and sometimes attach radios

to the hawks. Cooper’s hawks hate owls near their nests, so the biologists use a live, tethered owl to entice the hawks to swoop down aggressively and get caught in the hard-to-see mist net.

Neither owl nor hawk is injured in the process.

The biologists have banded 120 adult Cooper’s hawks and radio-tagged 44 fledglings since 2011. They’ve found that at least half the hawks live in and around Albuquerque year-round. Others have been tracked to the East Mountains, Los Lunas, Cochiti and as far as the Mexican border.

“The birds that were born here tend to stay here,” Madden says. “It’s hard to say where all the others go, but we think they’re probably going south to Mexico.”

Eurasian wigeon makes rare visit to Santa Fe County

By Kevin Holladay

A wigeon is not a widget or a thingama-jigger. It’s a dabbling. But it’s not the dabbling who plays around with a hobby or sport. It’s a duck that is a regular winter visitor to New Mexico.

Dabbling ducks include our most familiar ducks of inland marshes and ponds, such as mallards, teals and pintails. They are the ducks you may see with their tails up in the air as they feed on plants under the water’s surface.

The Eurasian wigeon is the Old World counterpart to our own native American wigeon. Although American wigeons are common winter visitors to New Mexico, the Eurasian species is a rare find. It is almost always found with American wigeons, singly in winter flocks.

Although Eurasian wigeons are rare but regular visitors to New Mexico, one never had been seen before in Santa Fe County until this winter, when an adult male was spotted on the ponds at the Santa Fe Country Club golf course. It stuck around for several weeks and was seen by hundreds of bird-watchers. The staff at the golf course was excited about hosting this rare dabbling duck and was



Eurasian wigeons had never been reported in Santa Fe County until one paid a visit to the Santa Fe Country Club this past winter. At left, an adult male Eurasian wigeon, background, is seen taking flight next to an American wigeon.

Photo: Dan Williams

quite willing to direct visiting birders from around the state to the most recent spot it was seen.

Even though it is a rare duck to see in New Mexico, Eurasian wigeons are beginning to appear more frequently and in more locations throughout the state. However, it is still rare enough that the New Mexico Bird Records Committee evaluates every record.

If anyone wants to find a Eurasian wigeon in their

county, golf courses are a great place to look because both wigeon species graze on grasses during the winter. Most Eurasian wigeons are found by looking over large flocks of American wigeons, in hopes of turning up a Eurasian.

In the last few years the best place to spot Eurasian wigeons in winter has been at the Clovis sewage treatment plant. Volunteer bird-watchers on the Clovis Christmas Bird Count have been finding one or two there in the past few years.



The A B C Ds of fish guts

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the air inside the swim bladder, keeping the fish from sinking. With air in the swim bladder, a trout can float as though it has a life preserver inside it. When a trout burps out some air it can sink deeper into the water. As you dissect your fish and follow the swim bladder toward the head, you'll find the gill slits. Trout breathe through their gills.

Capillaries and Circulation

Trout gills are located in slits along the throat. If you look inside the trout's mouth, you can see the gill arches. Gills draw oxygen out of the water sort of like human lungs draw oxygen out of the air. Gills also release carbon dioxide into the water. Human lungs release it into the air. When fish swim, the water flows through the mouth and over the gills, where oxygen from the water enters tiny blood vessels called capillaries. The heart pumps blood to move oxygen through the body. The heart can be found just behind the gills on the belly side.



Photo: John Wright

A student at Rio Grande School in Santa Fe dissects a rainbow trout during a recent classroom lesson about fish anatomy.

If you catch a fish and decide not to keep it for eating, you will need to release it quickly back into the water. Releasing a fish while gently holding it in the water until it wiggles, then letting go of it, will allow the fish to swim away without injury.

Digestion

After discovering the gills, use scissors or a scalpel to cut the fish open. Parents and teachers can do this part for you, but at streamside, many young anglers will cut their fish open with help from adults. It is fun to observe the placement of the fish guts before you remove anything.

The kidney of the fish is found just under the backbone. It is easiest to see this by putting the fish on its back. Trout kidneys are thin, dark in color and run the whole length of the body opening. Kidneys help filter wastes from the body. Food that trout eat makes its way from the mouth to the stomach. The liver, located in front of the stomach, helps digest fats. The intestines are below the stomach and run toward the anus. Food is broken down in the intestines and nutrients are absorbed, keeping fish healthy. Waste is eliminated through the anus. Human digestion works in much the same way.



Gills enable fish to breathe under water.

More can be learned about fish guts by attending a Department sponsored Free Fishing Day clinic. Saturday, June 7, 2014, is Free Fishing Day in New Mexico. Free fishing clinics for kids will be conducted around the state. Locations will be listed on the department website, www.wildlife.state.nm.us. We hope you can join us for lessons on casting, catching fish, gutting fish and more.

Practice fish gutting and dissection with an online game. Use this link: <http://www.portlandfreeschool.org/dissect-a-salmon.html>.

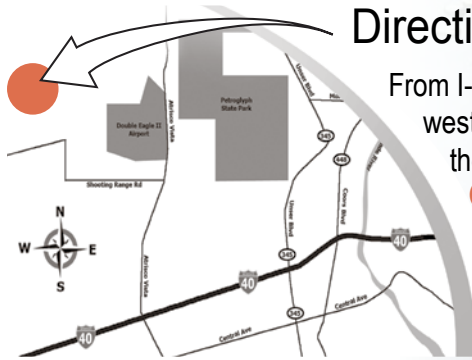
Colleen Welch is co-coordinator for conservation education for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. She can be reached at (505) 476-8119 or colleen.welch@state.nm.us.

New Mexico Outdoor Expo

City of ABQ Shooting Range Park
August 16–17, 2014

Fun for the Entire Family

Free events include catfish pond, firearm and archery target shooting, casting and fly tying, climbing wall, kayak instruction, exhibits and much more. Learn from experts how to improve your fishing, shooting and outdoor skills. For more information visit: www.wildlife.state.nm.us.



Directions

- From I-25 and I-40: 1 Take I-40 westbound, toward Gallup; 2 Exit at the Atrisco Vista off-ramp (Exit 149); 3 Turn right onto Atrisco Vista Blvd.; 4 Continue north 4.2 miles; 5 Turn left onto Shooting Range Road; 6 Continue west 2.6 miles to the park entrance.



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish www.wildlife.state.nm.us
Hunters and Anglers Pay for Wildlife Conservation





The A B C Ds of fish guts

By Colleen Welch

Fishing is exciting and catching a fish is even more fun. But once you catch your fish, what's next?

If you want to keep your trout and have it for dinner, you will need to clean and gut it. That means you have to dissect or cut out the insides of the fish. Gutting a fish streamside is a little different than a classroom dissection, but discovering fish guts happens either way. Learning about fish guts is just about the same for a sunfish, perch or trout that you might catch. Trout dissection is a fun learning experience and can be done in a classroom with Department of Game and Fish educators.

Anatomy

Anatomy is all about fish bodies. The body of a trout is just right for life under water: It is fusiform, or torpedo-shaped, to move quickly through the water. This is especially true for rainbow trout that are stocked in New Mexico's waters.

Touching your fish, you'll feel the slime. Fish slime is a mucous that helps the fish glide through the water and also helps protect the fish from bacteria that cause diseases.



Ear stones, or otoliths, give fish very good hearing.

Bony rays support trout fins, and you can count the rays on each fin. Fish fins also help with swimming. The tail fin pushes the fish through the water, helping it turn left or right. The large dorsal fin on the trout's back and the small anal fin on its belly near the tail, keep the trout from rolling over in the water. Two pectoral fins act as brakes when the trout needs to stop in a hurry. Behind the pectoral fins, two pelvic fins help trout move quickly upward through the water.

Trout have an eighth fin, the adipose fin, just behind the dorsal fin. The department's Rio Grande cutthroat trout biologist, Bryan Bakevich, says, "Although we don't completely understand the purpose of the adipose fin, many scientists think it's a sensory organ that helps fish swim better in rough water."

Trout have very good eyesight, but they do not have eyelids. Trout can hear well, although there are no external openings like an ear. The inner ear contains pebble-like parts called otoliths, or ear stones. In class-



Students from Rio Grande School in Santa Fe got some hands-on experience with fish guts during a recent clinic with teachers from the Department and Game and Fish and Trout Unlimited.

Photos: John Wright

room fish dissections, students discover the eye, the nostrils and the ears close-up.

Another sensory organ is the lateral line that is visible along both sides of the fish from its head – near its inner ears – all the way to the tail fin. The lateral line is full of nerves that help the fish sense vibrations in the water.

Bones, Bladder and Breathing

The backbone is made of several small pieces of bone called vertebrae. Just below the backbone is the swim bladder. The swim bladder is a long sack-shaped organ that is connected to the throat by a narrow tube. When the fish is alive, it will swim to the surface to gulp in air that fills the swim bladder like a tiny balloon. Trout can shut the tube to hold

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