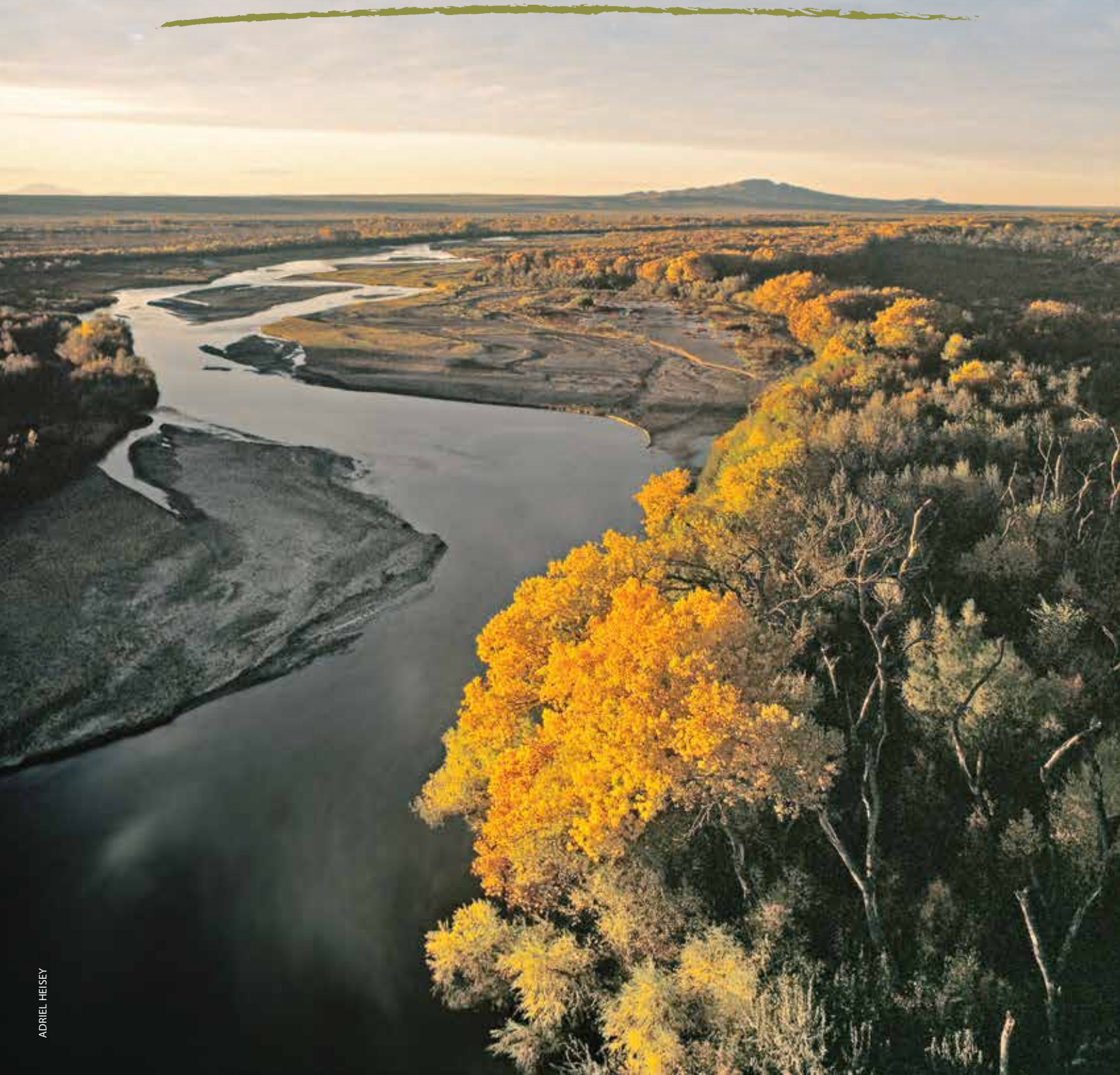


WILDLIFE AND PUBLIC LANDS

Priorities for New Mexico



542
OF THE 914
BIRD SPECIES
known to exist in the
United States
can be found within
NEW MEXICO

Our river systems
SUPPORT

163
fish species

In a day's drive, one can travel from the alpine peaks of the Southern Rockies in Rio Arriba County to the playas of the Chihuahuan Desert in Eddy County, covering eight distinct ecoregions in between. New Mexico is the only state home to both subarctic species like the lynx, and subtropic species like the jaguar. 542 of the 914 bird species known to exist in the United States can be found within our borders. Our diverse landscape supports iconic North American mammals like bighorn sheep, pronghorn, black bear and the critically imperiled Mexican gray wolf. Our rich soils support over 4,000 species of plants, making New Mexico the fourth most diverse plant community in the country. We truly are the Land of Enchantment.

The natural splendor of our home is what has sustained us for generations and keeps our families here. 76% of New Mexicans identify as conservationists and we are the guardians of one of the most ecologically rich and unique states in the union. It is our duty to protect and restore our wild places, wild rivers, wildlife, and climate for the next generation. Indeed, 62% of us believe we need to be working harder to do so.

Our river systems support 163 fish species including iconic species such as the Gila trout, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, and the Rio Grande silvery minnow. Our crown jewel, the Rio Grande, is the fourth longest river in the United States and the anchor for hundreds of New Mexican communities.

Decades of mismanagement and exploitation have dried the Rio Grande and almost exterminated the Mexican wolf. Human-caused climate change is already impacting our most vulnerable ecosystems. 78% percent of New Mexicans believe that loss of habitat for fish and wildlife is a serious issue.

The political leadership in New Mexico has failed to adequately protect our natural resources and adequately update our retrograde wildlife policies. The next decade is critical if New Mexico is to become a leader in conservation policy. Our next Governor should work to honor New Mexicans' pride and love for our state by safeguarding our natural resources, ensuring sound, science-based wildlife management policies and making our ecosystems resilient in the face of climate change.

We look forward to working with you to advance protections for the state's tremendous natural heritage. What follows is a list of the most pressing conservation problems, and opportunities, for the state and proposed solutions.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Carey, Greater Gila Guardian
Christopher Smith, Southern Rockies Wildlife Advocate

PROBLEM: TRAPPING

MARY KATHERINE RAY



Trapping of wildlife in New Mexico is largely unregulated and imperils our public lands, wildlife, people, and companion animals.

Trapping is cruel and indiscriminate. It threatens public safety and companion animals. Trapping harms endangered and protected species (including the Mexican gray wolf). It also commercializes a public trust resource. Trappers sell pelts from animals trapped on our public lands to the international fur market. They are not

required to pay gross receipts taxes.¹² Neighboring states have effectively banned public lands trapping. Importantly, as of 2005, 63% of New Mexicans were opposed to trapping on our public lands.¹³ That number is likely higher as attitudes change and more New Mexicans are using our public lands for non-consumptive recreation. Several recent very high-profile trapping incidents near Placitas,¹⁴ in the Jemez,¹⁵ and on the Cibola National Forest have turned even more critical attention to this archaic, cruel practice. The Albuquerque Journal recently editorialized on the matter calling for a statewide ban.¹⁶

ISSUE AREA: WILDLIFE POLICY

**As of 2005,
63% of New
Mexicans were
opposed to
trapping on our
public lands.**

SOLUTIONS:

1. Ban trapping on New Mexico's public lands. Legislation that would significantly restrict public lands trapping (but has exemptions for circumstances such as necessary scientific research) has been introduced in each of the last three long sessions. These bills have enjoyed widespread public support but died in committee.

SOLUTION TYPE: LEGISLATIVE

2. An executive order could pave the way for a legislative ban by indicating the Governor's support and drawing the legislature's attention if the legislature is unable to put a bill on the Governor's desk in 2019. Governor Richardson signed an executive order banning trapping in the Gila National Forest (Governor Martinez rescinded the order). The precedent exists.

SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE



WILDEARTH GUARDIANS

**Transparency
and
accountability
would dictate
that a new
Commission is
not made up of
political insiders
and campaign
donors.**

PROBLEM: GAME COMMISSION

New Mexico's Game Commission is not representative of the state's wildlife stakeholders. Neither scientific credentials nor expertise related to wildlife issues are required to be on New Mexico's Game Commission. The Commission's current makeup furthers political entrenchment: commissioners are often appointed by the Governor as a reward for campaign contributions or political favors. The Commission is currently dominated by hunting, oil and gas, and agricultural interests. Conservationists, non-consumptive recreationists, and scientists should also be represented on the Commission. The Commission is so out of balance, that the current "conservation" representative is an oil and gas attorney whose conservation bona fides is her Safari Club International membership. (Safari Club International is an organization that promotes trophy hunting, often under the guise of wildlife conservation, and is frequently hostile to native species and sound science.¹⁷ It has advocated for exporting trophies from elephant hunts in Africa,¹⁸ works to weaken the Endangered Species Act,¹⁹ encourages the hunting of captive animals,²⁰ and facilitates the killing of endangered and threatened species across the globe.²¹) **ISSUE AREA: GOVERNANCE**

SOLUTIONS:

1. Appoint a Game Commission that is qualified, educated in relevant fields, and represents the diversity of wildlife stakeholders in New Mexico.

New Mexico has no shortage of qualified citizens who bring experience from a variety of backgrounds and are willing to serve on the Commission. Transparency and accountability would dictate that a new Commission is not made up of political insiders and campaign donors. Qualifications that would greatly improve the commission include degrees in conservation biology, wildlife ecology, conservation social science, wildlife science, environmental biology, ecology & systematics, biological sciences, environmental science, zoology, wildlife health & health policy, environmental law, climate science, and population biology. Integral associations include the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Society for Conservation Biology, the Ecological Society of America, and the International Association for Society and Natural Resources. Reducing direct conflict of interest on the commission is critical, as is ensuring that the commission represents the diversity of New Mexico in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and age.

SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE

2. Sign into law legislation that requires balance on the commission and protects the stability of the commission from political swings.

There is a precedent for this kind of legislation. One example is 2017 HB 254, which represented an attempt to move some Game Commission appointments from the executive branch, outline a

more equitable dispersal of interests represented, and ensure stability of some appointments. It died in the House Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee, which has significant ranching and resource extraction representation. Legislation that also has experience, representation, and qualification requirements would be welcome.

SOLUTION TYPE: LEGISLATIVE

PROBLEM: REVENUE FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF GAME & FISH

The New Mexico Department of Game & Fish is funded primarily by **consumptive user fees and related taxes**,²² making the agency especially beholden to those interests and limiting capacity for work on other key wildlife issues. The Department should be a leader in ensuring the health of all of New Mexico's native wildlife species, not just those valued by hunters and anglers. The vast majority of New Mexicans value wildlife for reasons apart from fishing and hunting and are keen to see funding for conservation work. This inequitable system constrains the Department's budget and elevates hunting and fishing interests over other wildlife interest groups. It is also likely not a viable budget structure and one that will not serve New Mexico in the long-term. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service data shows that the number of Americans involved in hunting is declining while wildlife watching expenditures are larger than hunting and angling expenditures combined.²³ New Mexico trends are similar.²⁴ **ISSUE AREA: FUNDING**

The Department should be a leader in ensuring the health of all of New Mexico's native wildlife species.

SOLUTION:

1. Advocate for a diversified funding base for the Department. Ensure that decision-making and services meet the needs of all New Mexicans and enable essential conservation activities and studies. Providing funding to the Department that is not tied to consumptive use will prevent the Department from justifying its focus on hunting and fishing at the expense of other interests and help encourage it to serve other stakeholders. Precedent exists for this funding. From FY1996 through FY2010 funds were commonly earmarked for the Conservation Services Division.

SOLUTION TYPE: LEGISLATIVE



MICHAEL J. HEITMAN

PROBLEM: STATE GOVERNMENT IS HOSTILE TO WOLVES

U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE



New Mexico lawmakers and agencies have undermined the recovery of the Mexican gray wolf. Recent U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) efforts to recover this critically imperiled species were significantly hindered by the Department of Game & Fish, the Game Commission, and Governor Martinez. In 2011, New Mexico backed out of the Mexican Wolf Recovery program. In 2015, Governor Martinez signed onto a letter to USFWS and the Interior Department essentially opposing recovery efforts.²⁵ In 2017 New Mexico sued USFWS to try to block the release of captive wolves in the state.²⁶ The Mexican wolf faces significant human-caused mortalities, limited habitat, and a genetic crisis.²⁷ The population (114 in 2018, an increase of only one wolf from 2017) does not need more obstacles as it struggles to survive. Polling indicates that New Mexicans overwhelmingly favor wolf restoration efforts. 87% of New Mexican voters agree that “wolves are a vital part of America’s wilderness and natural heritage.”²⁸ Predators, including wolves, are crucial to ecological systems, controlling disease,²⁹ balancing other native plant and wildlife populations,³⁰ and restoring and protecting riparian and aquatic habitat.³¹ **ISSUE AREA: WILDLIFE POLICY**

87% of New Mexican voters agree that “wolves are a vital part of America’s wilderness and natural heritage.”

SOLUTIONS:

1. Install Game Commissioners (and agency leadership) who understand the biological and ecological importance of native carnivores on New Mexico’s landscape. The current Commissioners are all seemingly opposed to wolf recovery and most recently attempted to put roadblocks in front of USFWS’s modest recovery efforts.³²
SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE

2. Formally withdraw the November, 2015 letter to the USFWS stating that New Mexico opposes “the expansion, release, and occupancy” of Mexican wolves.

3. Assume a leadership role advocating for science-based conservation at the Western Governors Association. **SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE**

4. Direct the Department of Game & Fish to allow for and encourage USFWS to release adult Mexican wolves along with current cross-fostering efforts. Current recovery efforts are focused on cross-fostering pups. Since cross-fostering began in

2014, only 1/3 of pups have survived and only two cross-fostered wolves are known to have successfully reproduced in four years. A more effective method of recovery is the release of appropriate adult packs. Only four captive-born adults have been released since 2008.

SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE

5. Direct the Department of Game & Fish to develop meaningful ways to protect Mexican wolves from human-caused mortality in New Mexico. Human-caused mortality is the largest threat to the species' recovery. The Department has an opportunity to take real steps in reducing wolf deaths from poaching by implementing evidence-based best practices, fladry, and guard dogs which are far more effective than lethal control.³³ Eliminating trapping on public lands will also aid in the recovery of imperiled lobos.

SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE

PROBLEM: COYOTE KILLING CONTESTS

Coyote Killing Contests—a brutal bloodsport with no demonstrable positive environmental impact—take place in New Mexico. These events are cruel and violent massacres of a native, keystone species. That New Mexico allows this practice is barbaric and indicative of our retrograde formal attitudes toward wildlife. Lethal control of carnivores like coyotes results in creating chaos in their social structure and can potentially increase conflict with livestock.³⁴ When indiscriminately killed, coyotes respond with compensatory breeding: more females may reproduce and litter sizes increase.³⁵ Carnivore populations that are not hunted become stable, with older, more experienced individuals helping young individuals learn to hunt native prey. The Albuquerque City Council has recently taken the lead on this issue, unanimously adopted a resolution condemning Coyote Killing Contests and urging state lawmakers to ban the practice. **ISSUE AREA: WILDLIFE POLICY**

**The Albuquerque
City Council
has unanimously
adopted a resolution
CONDEMNING
Coyote Killing
CONTESTS**

SOLUTIONS:

1. Sign into law legislation banning Coyote Killing Contests in New Mexico. **SOLUTION TYPE: LEGISLATIVE**

2. An executive order banning killing contests is the next best option if legislation does not reach the Governor's desk. **SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE**



SAM PARKS



The Gila National Forest, the heart of the Bioregion, is home to more species than Yellowstone National Park.

PROBLEM: GILA IS UNDER-PROTECTED

The Greater Gila Bioregion is under threat and under-protected. The Greater Gila, a 10-million-acre area in southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona, is the landscape that inspired the wilderness ideal and to this day it remains one of the wildest American landscapes.³⁶ The bioregion is quite literally covered with cultural items from the Mogollon, Mimbres, and Apache peoples, including numerous cliff dwellings outside of the Gila Cliff Dwelling National Monument. The Gila National Forest, the heart of the Bioregion, is home to more species than Yellowstone National Park and, if protected at that scale, could become a similar economic force for southwestern New Mexico.³⁷ Unfortunately, the Gila faces a number of threats, including decades of overgrazing, a proposed diversion on the iconic Gila river, military overflights, new hard rock mining, and climate change. Given its biodiversity, cultural significance, looming threats, and potential economic importance to rural New Mexico, the Gila warrants greater protection. **ISSUE AREA: PUBLIC LANDS**

SOLUTIONS:

1. Request the Secretary of the Interior designate the Gila and San Francisco as Wild and Scenic Rivers. Per section 2 (a)(ii) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, a Governor can apply to the Secretary of the Interior for inclusion of rivers within their

state in the National System. This request will demonstrate to the Department the state's commitment to preserve its last free-flowing rivers and support a parallel strategy to achieve protection via Congressional action. **SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE**

2. Issue an Executive Order to study the economic and environmental impact of a Yellowstone-scale protected area in the Greater Gila. In the new American West, eco- and recreational tourism play an increasingly important role in supporting rural communities.³⁸ A multitude of studies suggest that protected federal lands are a boon for rural counties,³⁹ but no studies specific to the Greater Gila Bioregion exist yet.⁴⁰
SOLUTION TYPE: ADMINISTRATIVE

PROBLEM: RIPARIAN RESTORATION IS UNDER-FUNDED IN NEW MEXICO

Our riparian areas are damaged by overuse and lack of adequate protections. Poorly managed use by the cattle industry, road construction, urbanization, and increased diversion for residential, commercial, and agricultural uses has degraded our riparian areas. Healthy riverside ecosystems provide clean water and important wildlife habitat and are key to ensuring ecosystems are resilient in the face of climate change. **ISSUE AREA: FUNDING**

SOLUTION:

1. Continued and increased funding for Governor Richardson's "Riparian Ecosystem Restoration Initiative," (known as the "River Stewardship" program under Governor Martinez) to protect watershed health, water quality, and wildlife habitat. These programs fund restoration of riparian areas and create jobs in rural communities.

SOLUTION TYPE: LEGISLATIVE



JESS ALFORD

In the new American West, eco- and recreational tourism plan an increasingly important role in supporting rural communities

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TOM TALBOTT, FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS



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MISSION

WILDEARTH GUARDIANS protects and restores the wildlife,
wild places, wild rivers, and health of the American West.



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