



ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, December 8, 2011 – 6:30 pm
Manzano Mesa Center (map p4)



It's time for the
AWF Annual Meeting and Holiday Party!

Every December, Albuquerque Wildlife Federation hosts a holiday potluck meal for our members and friends, and this year's event is coming up next week—on Thursday, December 8. We'll start this meeting earlier than usual, at 6:30 pm. Please plan to join us for the festivities, and bring along a dish of your choice – entree, salad, vegetable, dessert, etc – to add to the table. We expect, as usual, to have some interesting and yummy offerings from the hunters and fishermen among the group. These contributions always make for a uniquely AWF-style feast!

In addition to a delicious meal, the AWF Annual Meeting obliges us to elect officers and board members for the following year. Here is the slate of candidates: *(voting restricted to current AWF members only)*

BOARD:
Stephen Bohannon
Kurt Nolte
Dennis Muirhead
Luke Shelby
Bill Zeedyk
Toby Rosenblatt

President – Michael Scialdone
Vice President – Kristina Gray Fisher
Secretary/Treasurer – Glenda Muirhead

*Nominations from the floor are welcome,
and you may nominate yourself.*

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We were hiking this past Labor Day near the Gilman Railroad Tunnels in the Jemez Ranger District of the USFS. In many places along our walk the Ponderosa pines were thick dog hair stands. One cause for this growth form is suppression of natural fire. This reminded me once again that we continue to make the same mistakes in management of our environmental resources over and over again.

Another example of reoccurring mistakes is in public lands grazing management. Poor grazing management was evident at almost every AWF service project this year. The Valles Caldera project in late September was probably the most disappointing for me. AWF is proud to have done restoration work at the Caldera for the past five years. This September AWF returned to build rock structures on the Valle Santa Rosa to slow rain and snow runoff, allowing the capture of ash and sediment resulting from this past summer's Las Conchas wildfire.

continued on page 2

Jim Hubert's
Notable Quote of the Month
"It has been a revelation every day. There is a tremendous need for sunshine on the activities of the Land Office."
– Ray Powell, State of NM Land Commissioner, speaking before the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation on Nov 10, 2011, regarding the dysfunction of the State Land Office he recently inherited

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE continued from page 1

Las Conchas, considered a catastrophic fire, was unfortunate, but should have been expected and was probably unavoidable. Overgrazing and poor fire management are long standing and create vegetative conditions which make periodic large-area wildfire certain. However, only parts of the area are considered to be severely burned. Fire is a natural phenomenon which can restore decadent vegetation communities. Now recovery has begun.

Driving to the Valle Santa Rosa for the September project, I noticed a sign regarding New Mexico State University's High Elevation Livestock Grazing Study. A little further down the road, I had the opportunity to observe at least 20 elk crossing the valley. I was also interested in seeing the rock structures AWF built in the Valle Santa Rosa four years ago to heal a small gully which was forming. I was pleased to see that our labor has worked. But I was equally disappointed to see that a livestock trail had developed adjacent to our work. This trail will likely intercept and divert water flowing down the trail, starting a new gully.

On a final note, I just heard that New Mexico State University has started a study to assess whether livestock grazing could be used as a tool to prevent catastrophic wildfire. [Ed. Note: see article on page 3.] Cattle would be used to remove fine fuel in high elevation areas where cattle do not usually graze. This is confusing to me: I had been taught that removal of fine fuels is in part responsible for reducing the frequency of natural fires. As a result, more frequent small-area fires which clear understory and stimulated vegetation are reduced. As a consequence, herbaceous understory is out-competed for nutrients, space, water and sunlight by trees. As herbaceous vegetation is reduced, the regenerative ground fires are replaced by fires which burn in the crowns of trees. Crown fires are large and usually result in significant tree death, requiring a long time before trees become a healthy part of the landscape again.

AWF plans to return to the Valles Caldera again next year to continue our contribution to the restoration work. It is our duty to exercise ownership and demonstrate stewardship of our public lands.

Gene Tatum

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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President – Gene Tatum
Vice President – Michael Scialdone
Secretary – Patricia Hester
Treasurer – Glenda Muirhead

DIRECTORS

Stephen Bohannon Kurt Nolte
Larry Dwyer Linda Patterson
Brian Gleadle Luke Shelby
Dennis Muirhead Bill Zeedyk

ALBUQUERQUE WILDLIFE FEDERATION
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News from NM WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Salazar named to Valles Caldera board

President Obama has appointed former New Mexico Wildlife Federation President **Kent Salazar** to the Valles Caldera Trust. A lifelong New Mexico hunter and angler, Salazar will hold the seat designated for an expert in wildlife management. Salazar is also a former member of the State Game Commission and is currently an elected board member of NMWF and a regional representative to the National Wildlife Federation. "I'm honored to be appointed to the trust and I look forward to working hard on Valles Caldera issues, including improved public access for hunting and fishing," he said. Salazar said he supports the legislation introduced in Congress by Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall to transfer management of the preserve to the National Park Service. The legislation mandates that hunting and fishing activities be permitted, as they are in other national preserves managed by the Park Service.

Economics of outdoor recreation underscored

Northern New Mexico would see substantial economic benefit if the management of Valles Caldera National Preserve and Bandelier National Monument were consolidated and run by the National Park Service, a new economic study has found. The independent study, conducted by the Harbinger Consulting Group, underscores an earlier study by the Park Service that suggested it could manage the preserve more efficiently than under the current management strategy. The Harbinger study found the preserve, if managed by NPS, would provide more than \$1 million in additional sales to local businesses and nearly 50 more local jobs than if managed by the Forest Service with a similar operating budget and staff. Congress is considering a measure sponsored by Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall to transfer management of the preserve to NPS, with the express mandate that hunting and fishing continue.

Two projects in New Mexico are among the nation's most promising ways to reconnect Americans to the natural world, the U.S. Department of Interior announced recently. According to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, the projects represent some of the "best investments in the nation to support a healthy, active population, conserve wildlife and working lands, and create travel, tourism and outdoor-recreation jobs across the country." Both are part of the America's Great Outdoors Initiative. One is the **Middle Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge designation for the former Price's Dairy in Albuquerque's South Valley** – a so-called "urban national wildlife refuge" that would provide educational and economic opportunities in the area. "As one of the last undeveloped parcels along the Rio Grande, Price's Dairy is an important refuge and waypoint for migratory birds, like sandhill cranes, Arctic geese and varied duck species migrating along river from summer-breeding grounds in the North to wintering havens in the South," Salazar said in a release. The second project is a **pedestrian bridge over the Animas River** that would connect Aztec to the Aztec Ruins National Monument.

Targeted grazing could suppress wildfires

By Jay Rodman / NMSU News Service
Nov 28, 2011 – *Albuquerque Journal* BUSINESS OUTLOOK

NMSU and other researchers are investigating the possibility that implementing a targeted grazing strategy for range cattle could significantly reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires in certain ecosystems.

“Behavior of wildfires is affected by the abundance of what we call ‘fine fuels,’” NMSU rangeland expert Derek Bailey said. “Our assumption is that moderate levels of grazing can be used to strategically reduce the levels of fine fuels and correspondingly limit impacts and economic losses of wildfire, by reducing fire risk and rates of fire spread and allowing for the establishment of fire barriers.”

In some areas, the grasses that fueled normal and periodic low-intensity surface fires in the past have been replaced by densely packed trees and brush that fuel the raging prairie and forest fires seen in recent years, including record-setting 2011 fires in the Southwest.

...

The project is funded by a \$363,000 grant from the USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative. The study is based on the premise that cattle tend to graze unevenly. Their natural tendency is to stay close to water sources, which can lead to deterioration of riparian plant life while leaving an abundance of forage material in more rugged areas or areas away from water. In some cases, the neglected forage exacerbates fire danger.

The targeted grazing approach employed by Bailey and his colleagues at four locations in New Mexico and Arizona involves manually herding cattle into the more rugged and remote areas of fine fuel build-up and determining if the availability of forage, along with the strategic positioning of protein supplement blocks, encourages the animals to spend a higher percentage of their time away from the overgrazed areas around their water source.

GPS collars are being used to monitor where the cattle in both the control group situation and the experimental group situation spend their time. Where the cattle graze and wander is only one element in evaluating the targeted grazing strategy. Researchers need to determine the extent to which the fine fuels are actually being consumed by the cattle and then incorporate that data into what Bailey calls fuel load/fire behavior computer modeling.

To date, the project has been implemented at NMSU’s Corona Range and Livestock Research Center in central New Mexico and on a U.S. Forest Service grazing allotment in the Santa Rita Mountains of Arizona. According to Bailey, preliminary results suggest that the combination of herding and strategic supplement placement can effectively reduce biomass of fine fuels.

Grazing punted from federal study of land changes in West

Scientists Told to Not Consider Grazing Due to Fear of Lawsuits and Data Gaps

Washington, DC — The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is carrying out an ambitious plan to map ecological trends throughout the Western U.S. but has directed scientists to exclude livestock grazing as a possible factor in changing landscapes, according to a scientific integrity complaint filed today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). The complaint describes how one of the biggest scientific studies ever undertaken by BLM was fatally skewed from its inception by political pressure.

Funded with up to \$40 million of stimulus funds, BLM is conducting Rapid Ecoregional Assessments in each of the six main regions (such as the Colorado Plateau and the Northern Great Plains) covering the vast sagebrush West. A key task was choosing the “change agents” (such as fire or invasive species) which would be studied. Yet when the scientific teams were assembled at an August 2010 workshop, BLM managers informed them that grazing would not be studied due to anxiety from “stakeholders,” fear of litigation and, most perplexing of all, lack of available data on grazing impacts.

Exclusion of grazing was met with protests from the scientists. Livestock grazing is permitted on two-thirds of all BLM lands, with 21,000 grazing allotments covering 157 million acres across the West. As one participating scientist said, as quoted in workshop minutes: “We will be laughed out of the room if we don’t use grazing. If you have the other range of disturbances, you have to include grazing.”

In the face of this reaction, BLM initially deferred a decision but ultimately opted to:

- remove livestock grazing from all Ecoregional assessments, citing insufficient data. As a result, the assessments do not consider massive grazing impacts even though trivial disturbance factors such as rock hounding are included; and
- limit consideration of grazing-related information only when combined in an undifferentiated lump with other native and introduced ungulates (such as deer, elk, wild horses and feral donkeys).

“This is one of the screwiest things I have ever heard of. BLM is taking the peculiar position that it can no longer distinguish the landscape imprint of antelope from that of herds of cattle,” remarked PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, noting BLM has far more data on grazing than it does on other change agents, such as climate change or urban sprawl, that it chose to follow. “Grazing is one of the few ‘change agents’ within the agency’s mandate to manage, suggesting that BLM only wants analysis on what it cannot control.”

Earlier this year, the Interior Department, parent agency for BLM, adopted its first scientific integrity policies prohibiting political interference with, or manipulation of, scientific work. The PEER complaint charges that BLM officials improperly compromised the utility and validity of the Ecoregional assessments for reasons that lacked any technical merit and urges that responsible officials be disciplined.

“This is like the Weather Service saying it will no longer track storms because it lacks perfect information,” added Ruch, pointing out that an extensive formalized Land Health Assessment database, including range-wide assessments of livestock grazing across the sagebrush biome, has existed since at least 2008.

– From a Nov 30 news release of
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER)

Jim Lane chosen as New Director of NM Game and Fish Department

From a letter to Gov Susana Martinez from New Mexico BearWatch, dated Nov 11, 2011 prior to the selection of Jim Lane as Director

We ask that you hire a Director that has a PhD in Wildlife Biology with a background in wildlife conservation; a person that can represent and listen to the concerns of all the residents of New Mexico, not just hunters, outfitters, ranchers, trappers and anti-wildlife advocates which has been par for the course the past three years.

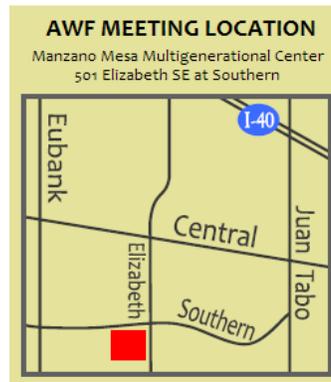
Unfortunately, there is not a single wildlife conservationist serving on your seven-member NM Game and Fish Commission. Most of these people have no background or knowledge of the biology of a single wild animal in New Mexico. And to make matters worse, Game Commission Chairman Jim McClintic has gone out of his way to embarrass and belittle wildlife conservationists that used to attend Commission meetings. We ask that you balance your Game Commission with knowledgeable and fair participants.

From an interview with Jim Lane in the Winter 2011-12 issue of NM Wildlife Federation's OUTDOOR REPORTER

NMWF: Do you have a general philosophy about wildlife management that will guide you as director?

LANE: It's really pretty simple. It starts with the cornerstone that the sportsmen and women of this state fund this agency. The agency also needs to understand our role and statutory responsibility to manage the wildlife in perpetuity for all New Mexicans. It's not so much a balancing act as that you just have to keep in mind the bigger picture—that you're managing the wildlife for everybody. Our agency is beholden to manage it for future generations...

...We need to recognize that some of the best lands in New Mexico and in this country are privately owned and they harbor a huge percentage of the state's wildlife, so collaboration with the private landowners is integral to our success as an agency.



A W F M E M B E R S H I P A P P L I C A T I O N

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An affiliate of New Mexico Wildlife Federation

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