



ALBUQUERQUE WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Founded by Aldo Leopold in 1914 to protect and perpetuate our wildlife and natural resources

AWF Newsletter

MARCH 2012

MONTHLY MEETING

Thursday, March 8, 2012 – 7:30 pm
Manzano Mesa Center (map p4)

Flycatcher and Cuckoo – Dwindling Species

Guest Speaker: Vicky Ryan, Bureau of Reclamation

During the past 80 years, the population of Yellow-billed Cuckoos has declined dramatically due to habitat loss and modification as well as a reduction of food resources due to pesticides. The Rio Grande is considered one of the important strongholds for the species, and historically Cuckoos were “fairly common” along sections of the river. Based on recent survey results, it appears the San Marcial reach of the Middle Rio Grande currently supports one of the largest remaining Yellow-billed Cuckoo populations in the Southwestern United States. Another bird, the southwestern willow flycatcher, has suffered more than a century of steady decline. Livestock grazing, dams, water withdrawal, and sprawl have robbed this sentinel-like songbird of more than 90 percent of its riparian habitat — and left it all the more vulnerable to other birds that prey on its eggs or use its nests to incubate their own eggs.



Yellow-billed Cuckoo

This month's Guest Speaker, Vicky Ryan, is the ornithologist for the Bureau of Reclamation, Albuquerque Area office. She will provide an update on the Bureau's involvement with the willow flycatcher and Yellow-billed cuckoo. Learn about the results of monitoring studies that compare historical ranges for these species with their current distribution across the Western United States.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Scial will be back with a President's Message in next month's newsletter. He's off to travel the Gila River in Arizona with two friends in inflatable kayaks...doesn't that sound like great fun?

Jim Hubert's

Notable Quote of the Month

"If I tell my regular buddies where I grew up in Ohio that I want to save the whooping crane, they laugh at me. If I show them whooping cranes and how majestic they are, they say, 'We've got to save them.'"

– Author and historian Doug Brinkley,
at a July 2011 National Wildlife Conference

NM Wildlife Federation News

Habitat Stamp Funding Goes in New Direction

The State Game Commission approved a major overhaul of the Habitat Stamp Program at its recent meeting in Hobbs, revising the way some \$800,000 a year are spent on habitat improvement efforts.

The Habitat Stamp overhaul had been two years in the making. The Department of Game and Fish takes in roughly \$800,000 a year in Habitat Stamp fees and spends about that much on habitat improvements on lands managed by the BLM and US Forest Service. But the formula for splitting up the funding was out of date, prompting the three agencies to seek revisions to the allocation formula. Sportsmen, particularly in southern New Mexico, objected to earlier overhaul plans that diminished or eliminated the role of regional citizen advisory committees, and the Game Commission repeatedly asked Game and Fish to keep working on it.

A new plan finally found broad support. It splits half the annual Habitat Stamp budget equally among five regions so the BLM and Forest Service have a base amount for such things as maintenance of existing habitat projects. That funding is allocated by acreage. The remaining funding is also distributed regionally, but according to the percentage of BLM and Forest Service lands in New Mexico that lie in that region.

Within each region, funds are awarded on a competitive, project-by-project basis selected by the Citizen Advisory Committees. Any unused funds – and every year there are some – go into a pot that can be tapped for landscape-scale projects. The upshot is that southwest New Mexico will see an increase in Habitat Stamp project funds and the other regions will see either *status quo* funding or slight decreases.

Youth Emphasized in New NMDG&F Programs

Department staff unveiled two new projects aimed at youths, including establishing a Families Afield program in New Mexico. Families Afield is a national program that has been adopted in more than 30 states. The basic premise is that families can decide when their kids are old enough to hunt. The youngster is allowed to hunt at least one season alongside a designated mentor before attending a certified hunter education class. Department Hunter Education Coordinator Jennifer Morgan said the idea is to get kids hooked on hunting before having to complete hunter's education, rather than have kids possibly lose interest in hunting if they can't get into a class.

It will take two years to implement the Families Afield program here. The department plans to run a bill in the Legislature next year that paves the way, and the first mentored hunts would begin in 2014. Commissioners unanimously approved the Families Afield concept and urged the department to continue.

In a related effort, department staff explained a new educational curriculum they hope to see adopted in fifth-grade classes all over New Mexico as soon as this spring. The Conservation Education Curriculum would provide teachers with educational materials on the importance of sound scientific wildlife management and the role of traditional land uses such as hunting, fishing and trapping.

The goal, said project coordinator Lance Cherry, is to teach 10- and 11-year-olds such things as the difference between wildlife and domestic animals, the critical importance of habitat to wildlife survival, a little about wildlife population dynamics and about the value of wildlife, hunting and fishing. The program has been developed in-house, with advice from professional educators.

– Joel Gay, NMWF

River Otter Reintroduction

Gila Otter Plan Gets Some Breathing Room

Members of the State Game Commission voted recently to **keep the door open for reintroducing river otters in the Gila River drainage**, stepping back from a January announcement by Game and Fish officials that the state no longer supported the reintroduction plan. In 2006, the commission approved otter reintroduction in both the Rio Grande and the Gila drainages. The Gila release has been postponed numerous times.

When Game and Fish Director Lane informed reintroduction supporters that the state no longer supported the plan, he cited concerns from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arizona Department of Game and Fish, but provided no documentation backing up the state's decision. **That left sportsmen in the dark** about whether otters might actually help species like the Gila trout by eating invasive, nonnative species like crayfish and carp, or whether the otters would further damage Gila trout stocks.

NMWF and Trout Unlimited both told the commission they **could support reintroduction if it was scientifically justified and if the otters could be removed if they started reducing trout stocks**. Other groups argued that otters reintroduced in other states have reduced nonnative and invasive species with little effect or positive effects on native fish.

Commissioner Bill Montoya asked for an amendment – that the department **continue to study the pros and cons of reintroduction**. There are too many questions about the effect otters might have on threatened and endangered species, he said. **“Let's continue to get those answers we need** so that if this comes to pass we have some legitimate data and answers to give to either side,” he said. Otter advocates were happy with the decision. “The Commission's decision to take another look at the evidence is encouraging,” said Rachel Conn with Amigos Bravos. “We've had great success with the release into the upper Rio Grande.”

– Joel Gay, NMWF

Mexican Gray Wolf

Good News: Mexican Wolf Numbers Increased from 50 to 58

The number of endangered Mexican gray wolves in New Mexico and Arizona continues to rise. State and federal biologists found at least 58 wolves in their latest count, up from 50 the previous year and 42 in 2009.

Arizona State University biology professor Philip Hedrick calls the increase good news, but says the best news is that the number of breeding pairs has risen from two to six.

“If you think about it, that’s only 12 animals that are contributing to the next generation for this year, so that’s not a huge number – even though it’s a lot better than just two, last year.”

The total wolf count needs to be much larger in order to produce a long-term stable and sustainable population – perhaps four times as many wolves, Hedrick explains. That increase would not sit well with ranchers in western New Mexico and eastern Arizona, who have long complained that the wolves kill cattle and sheep.

Kim McCreery, a staff scientist for the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, says a few pairs of breeding wolves are not enough for genetic diversity, which means reduced litter size and an increase in pup mortality. McCreery adds that what is needed for a healthier population is more wolves on the ground. She suspects that politics may be getting in the way.

“We need a rule change. We need U.S. Fish and Wildlife to change a rule saying that captive-bred wolves can only be released in the primary recovery zone, which is in Arizona.”

– Source: New Mexico Wilderness Alliance -- AP – February 20, 2012

Legislative Actions in New Mexico

House Memorial 3

Ample outdoor opportunities for children – Passed; does not require the governor’s signature. The memorial supports the idea that every New Mexico child should have ample outdoor opportunities using existing resources, and encourages state agencies, including the Department of Game and Fish, to develop and advertise outdoor programs for children, including opportunities on New Mexico state-owned lands.

HB 115

Hunting license refunds for forest fires – Passed and sent to governor. Allows Game and Fish to authorize a refund for the amount of a hunting license fee if a hunt is canceled due to a forest fire or other natural disaster.

Project 1

Cedro Creek in the East Mountains Saturday, March 17 – 9:00 am

It’s almost spring...so it must be time to pull on the work boots and gloves and head to the East Mountains for the first project of the 2012 Season. We will be led by Bill Zeedyk on a one-day project on Cedro Creek, a perennial favorite of AWF volunteers. It’s in the nearby Cibola National Forest, it’s only for a few hours, and we can accomplish much with many hands.

The project will be on Saturday, March 17, with a start time of 9:00 am.

Sign up now by contacting Project Chair Michael Scialdone (“Scial”) at rioscial@gmail.com. Plan to meet at the Sandia District Ranger Station on Route 337 (Old South 14) a short distance south from the I-40 exit in Tijeras, on the east side of the highway.

Once you’re on the sign-up list, Scial will be in contact with you to fill in the details of what to bring and what the project will involve.

2012 PROJECT SCHEDULE

March 17	Cedro Creek – East Mountains
April 20-22	Cebolla Canyon
May 18-20	Cebolla Canyon
June 15-17	Rio de las Vacas
July 20-22	Valles Caldera
August 17-19	Valles Caldera
Sept 14-16	Limestone Canyon
Oct 20	Sandia Ranger District

Praise for Open Space Division from ABQ Mayor Richard Berry

In the spring of 2011 the City of Albuquerque's Open Space Division (OSD) submitted a project to the "International Awards for Liveable Communities" (LivCom Awards) in Berkshire, England. Albuquerque's submission was "Glass Gardens" Environmental Restoration and Habitat Enhancement. This year the LivCom Awards committee announced that the City of Albuquerque was one of only a few cities in the United States chosen as a finalist for the Project Awards. Congratulations are due to the City's Open Space Division for receiving this important recognition.

The Glass Gardens, located near the National Hispanic Cultural Center, is an area of the Rio Grande's bosque that is slowly but surely being transformed from a neglected parcel to a natural refuge through the efforts of local organizations and citizen volunteers.

After fires burned the Glass Gardens area in 2003 and 2010, the City of Albuquerque, in partnership with several private and public entities, took the opportunity to restore Glass Gardens to a more natural state, making it a place for the public to reconnect with the river. Through the course of the project, volunteers planted a variety of native vegetation.

Since the 2010 fire, literally hundreds of community members have participated in work days. National and local businesses, City and State agencies, varied community groups and clubs, and local schools have all joined the OSD to reforest the area with native vegetation and to improve recreational trails. Recent improvements made to the Glass Gardens site such as new pedestrian bridges and an improved trail system have also contributed to enhanced recreational opportunities.

Thank You

MEMBERSHIPS

RENEWED MEMBERS
 Kurt Nolte & Bronwyn Wilson
plus Cailin and Averill Nolte
 Larry & Mariane Miller
 Dan Ginter and Chris Hannum
 Larry & Mathew Blair
 Toby Rosenblatt

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ALBUQUERQUE WILDLIFE FEDERATION
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 abq.nmwildlife.org

AWF MEETING LOCATION
 Manzano Mesa Multigenerational Center
 501 Elizabeth SE at Southern

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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