

CIBOLA BEACON

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Earth Day Project - Cebolla Wetland Restoration

VOLUNTEERS COME FROM ACROSS THE STATE

By Beth Klotz
Beacon Contributing Columnist

CIBOLA COUNTY - Technically, I understand that forest fires do not acknowledge property lines.

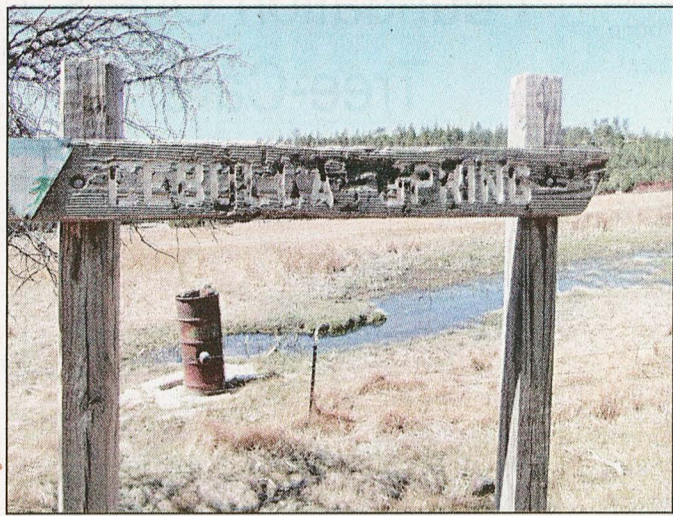
Pollution does not honor political boundaries.

The effects of global warming will not be limited to one less-inhabited area or to one of the "less-important" species.

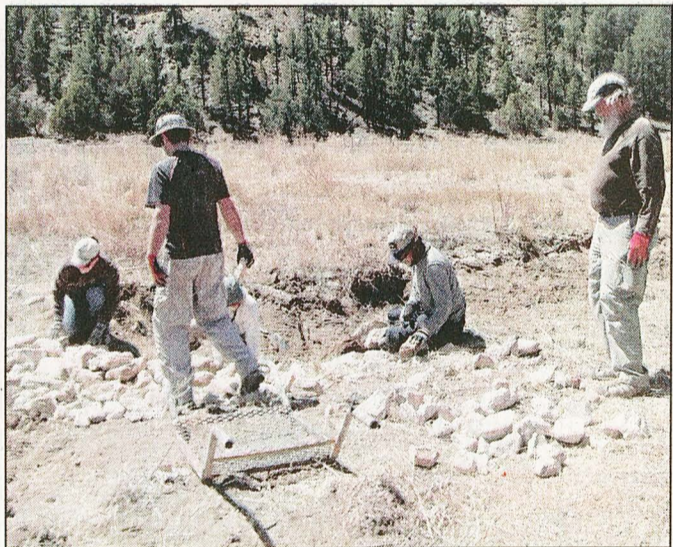
Still, I found myself being astonished at the amount of travel by and commitment of the people involved in restoring the health of our area's Cebolla Valley.

More than two dozen volunteers from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Vallecitos (north of Ojo Caliente) and Silver City set up an overnight camp and settled in for several days of hard labor, pleasant companionship April 19-21.

Their mission: ensuring a healthier natural environment.



Results from the labor of the previous twelve years are seen as standing water is now present at Cebolla Springs, which is just down from the current site of restoration.



Volunteers haul rocks and create a dam using litters, as no mechanized equipment can be used per the 1964 Wilderness Act. From left to right, are: Kristin Van Fleet, sitting; Stephen Bohannon, standing; Michael Scialdone, sitting; Bob Hasbrook, standing.

The event was an ongoing effort of the Cebolla Valley Restoration Project (CVRP).

The Cebolla Canyon is southeast of Grants, several miles east of New Mexico Highway 117.

Cebolla Valley was a riparian area, with a shallow water table and a rich and a diverse array of plants and animals until 80 years ago. The area was then homesteaded and farmed for several years, abandoned during World War II, and cattle have grazed there ever since. The hydrologic changes the homesteaders made were left in place, which has resulted in degradation of this riparian zone.

The restoration effort is an attempt to return Cebolla Valley from a barren-looking landscape that supports very little wildlife and almost no diversity back to its former, healthier self.

The CVRP has been a joint venture, according to Matt Schultz who is an Environmental Scientist-Specialist with the state's Surface Water Quality Bureau.

Major stakeholders include the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation (AWF), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), New Mexico Environmental Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and the Rio Puerco Alliance. Other volunteer groups have included the Acoma Conservation

Corps and the National Turkey Federation.

I caught Bill Zeedyk, one of the workers, putting sticks in the ground. He was kind enough to explain that these harvested willow shoots had a good chance of surviving next to the rock dam they had just built. The willow trees would eventually help secure the rocks with their roots, act as a barrier, and catch more soil and water for the dam function, serve as ground cover for birds, and provide forage for deer and elk.

Zeedyk, a former U.S. Forest Service research biologist, currently runs a private consulting business, and is an invaluable

resource for the project, according to participants.

Michael "Shel" Scialdone, current AWF president, explained the process of restoration. The hand-built dams and plantings of bulrushes and willows will eventually result in small, meandering water flows instead of just the "down-cutting" areas (deep slashes or arroyos) that currently preside.

The resulting scattered wetlands will support the

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original biodiversity of the canyon area.

And why were people hauling rocks, shoveling sand, and digging by hand, I wondered?

BLM Ranger Jennifer Cutillo explained that the Cebolla Valley area is covered by the 1964 Wilderness Act. By law, no mechanized equipment may be used except for vehicles on designated roads. The rock-hauling "wheelbarrows" were actually litters and looked like stretchers without wheels, requiring one person at the front and another at the back to carry rocks like an invalid patient.

Even with the challenging limita-

tions, the volunteers appeared to be a healthy, happy and focused lot. The group represented good biodiversity and seemed to have a large age range, diverse backgrounds, and points of origins.

Their shared meals were cooked on outdoor grills, and rest-periods often included games of disc golf and hacky-sack.

How does one get involved in such projects?

Santa Fe resident Tammy Crowley had originally helped with a cleanup project at Buckman Mesa near Santa Fe, a site near a river that had been over-cut for timber, and then was used as a garbage dump.

She met Scialdone while working at the Buckman site, learned about other AWF projects, and joined up.

Well, shoot. After meeting such

friendly, dedicated people, seeing the physical results of their efforts, and reading the terrific newsletter produced by AWF Vice-president Kristina Fisher, I will be joining.

Although I don't normally consider myself "a joiner," the activities, community, and long-term rewards are too tempting to pass up. And, I admit, a chance to acquire a beautiful long-sleeved T-shirt designed by Stephen Bohannon helped.

But beware; if you snoop on their website, I may see you soon at some restoration function, improving the health of the planet.

If your interest is piqued, check out their website at abq.nmwildlife.org, or email abqwildlifefederation@gmail.com for more information.