



MONTHLY MEETING

Thursday, November 11, 2010 — 7:30 pm
Manzano Mesa Center (map p4)

Prairie Dogs: A Keystone Species

Guest Speaker: Andrea Chavez, BLM



Some people like them. Some people hate them. Attitudes notwithstanding, estimates show prairie dog population numbers have declined by approximately 98% of their historical range. Sylvatic plague, habitat loss, and their reputation as range and agricultural pests have led to this decline. Prairie dogs have long been controlled on Federal, Tribal, State and private land without any regard for their inherent ecological value as a keystone species. This decline in prairie dogs has been correlated with declines in other species such as the endangered Black-footed Ferret.

The BLM has a specific interest in prairie dogs due to the agency's obligation to protect habitat for special status species. In an effort to enhance habitat for possible future reintroduction of the endangered black-footed ferret onto public lands, the Rio Puerco Field Office has begun a prairie dog population augmentation project in El Malpais National Conservation Area. The black-footed ferret is an obligate species to the prairie dog and depends wholly on prairie dog colony structure for its habitat and prairie dogs as its primary source of nutrition.

Our guest speaker, Andrea Chavez, will discuss the role of prairie dogs (specifically Gunnison's prairie dog) as a keystone species, their importance to recovery efforts of the black-footed ferret, and the BLM's effort to conserve these species on public land.

Andrea has been with the BLM for almost two years and runs the wildlife, riparian and special status species programs for the Rio Puerco Field Office. Her previous experience consists of scientific research during her undergraduate years at the University of New Mexico. Some of her research includes phylogenetic analysis of the Mexican vole, *Microtus mexicanus*, at UNM and activity level analysis with respect to temperature and elevation on the American pika, *Ochotona princeps*, at the Rocky Mountain Biological Lab in Gothic, CO.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I'm not a political person. Politics seems to compromise good people and empower the devious. Fortunately, this being election day, the campaigns which probably weary us all are over for this round.

But politics enters into so many aspects of life in a round-about manner. Influence counts. In ways that I don't understand (I'm pretty naïve about this stuff) but nonetheless perceive, politics enters into decisions made by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) and the State Game Commission.

NMDGF solicits public comments on the statutes they formulate for legislative sponsorship (e.g., the depredation or "Jennings" law) and the rules they propose for commission approval (e.g., recent changes to bear and cougar hunt limits and A-PLUS antelope permit allocation).

And they do receive comments—from individuals, loose coalitions, structured groups. The Albuquerque Wildlife Federation's Wildlife Issues Committee, chaired by Larry Dwyer, and other AWF Board members have attended meetings and offered

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Jim Hubert's

Notable Quote of the Month

"Bill's accomplishments could fill a book....and probably should. To me, he's New Mexico's Aldo Leopold."

— Spoken at the memorial service for Bill Huey in Santa Fe, September 18, 2010, by Dale Jones (former director of fisheries and wildlife for the US Forest Service, and former President of AWF)

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comments regarding each of the cited examples. Oddly, each decision ultimately made—by the State Legislature, the Game Commission, or NMDGF—isn't the option we supported.

What clout do individuals and *ad hoc* coalitions have against structured groups that have money and power to influence these decisions? It just may be possible that politicians' votes are swayed by promises of campaign support (or perhaps withholding thereof).

Changes to New Mexico's unusual depredation statute, which presently allows ranchers to kill game animals for poaching grass, may seem logical to many rational individuals, but the structured group that represents cattle growers steadfastly refuses to give up this "right" to protect their property—apparently oblivious to the fact that the wildlife they claim the right to kill are the public's property. AWF supported the NMDGF's last two efforts to modify the depredation statute. Neither of these efforts succeeded in the NM legislature. Who's got the political influence there?

In the case of the A-PLUS antelope permit allocation system, NMDGF and the Game Commission are not serving the public hunter. A decision by the commission has again been postponed (*see article on page 4*), despite the fact that New Mexico Wildlife Federation delivered petitions and letters signed by over 6,000 of the state's sportsmen asking for substantial improvement to the current lopsided allocation of hunting licenses. Who benefits from the status quo? Landowners and ranchers and outfitters, not the public hunter. Just follow the money and the political clout.

And then there's the situation with the state's bear and cougar hunts (*see article at right*). Despite impassioned efforts by concerned citizens such as Jan Hayes of Sandia Mountain BearWatch and Craig McClure of the Black Bear Bureau, watchdog groups such as Animal Protection of New Mexico, and public reaction which has been overwhelmingly "opposed" to the higher limits, the commission just approved NMDGF's request for increased kill numbers for black bear and cougar. A recent *Albuquerque Journal* editorial states, "As expected, hunters, outfitters and ranchers are in favor. It is, after all, an economic issue for them."

It seems we can't prevail. Kinda makes me wonder why we bother.

Glenda Muirhead

LEGAL VICTORIES FOR PRAIRIE DOGS

A federal judge ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) violated the Endangered Species Act when requested in 2003 to increase the Utah prairie dog's legal shields. Two days later, another federal judge told the Service that it violated the law by refusing to safeguard all Gunnison's prairie dogs as requested in 2004.

These decisions compel the agency to step up for these imperiled, keystone species. These court victories mean the Service must go back to the drawing board on deciding whether to increase safeguards to the Utah prairie dog by listing it as endangered under the Endangered Species Act and to list the currently unprotected Gunnison's prairie dog under the law as well.

These legal lifelines can't come too soon: just 12,000 adult Utah prairie dogs are alive today from a population that once numbered close to 100,000. Gunnison's prairie dogs have declined by more than 98 percent across their four-state range.

Both types of prairie dogs are besieged by an array of threats, including killing; rampant destruction of their habitat by livestock grazing, crop agriculture, and urban sprawl; a devastating non-native disease; drought; and other perils.

Source: WildEarth Guardians

NEW HUNTING RULES FOR BEAR & COUGAR

— From an article by Susan Montoya Bryan, *Associated Press*, Oct. 28, 2010

The New Mexico Game Commission decided Thursday [Oct. 28] to allow more bears and cougars to be hunted next year, despite the concerns of conservationists who are worried that higher kill limits will devastate bear and cougar populations.

The commission voted to approve the hunting rules after making some changes during a meeting in Mescalero. The rules had been the subject of more than a dozen contentious public meetings attended by sportsmen, landowners and conservationists. The proposals also resulted in thousands of letters and e-mails to the commission and the state Game and Fish Department.

The higher hunting limits will address depredation and safety issues in many areas, while still leaving New Mexico with sustainable populations, department officials said.

The department had proposed more than doubling the number of cougars that could be killed to 996 and raising the bear limit by about two-thirds to 686. The commission approved an overall increase in the harvest, but it was less than what the department had proposed.

Despite the commission's amendments, conservationists said the kill limits have the potential to harm bear and cougar populations. [Said one interested observer,] "It's not based on any science. It's just purely political."

...The commission reduced the harvest limit for bears in the Sandia and Manzano Mountain ranges, but [Jan Hayes of Sandia Mountain BearWatch] said she is fearful the population will still be wiped out in about two years. "This is all done on purpose to reduce this population, to eliminate it," Hayes said. "I think this is just a problem species for them and they don't want to have to manage it."

Project Recap

CEDRO CREEK in October

With our Cedro Creek event on October 16, AWF officially closed its 2010 project season. And it was a very successful conclusion to a productive and enjoyable year. Not only did we welcome a few dozen participants to the project experience of planting trees, building one rock dams and zuni bowls, and removing non-native growth—we also celebrated with a bountiful potluck meal following the project, at the nearby Pine Flat Picnic Ground.

Our USFS partners Beverly deGruyter (and Zack and Matt) provided tools, materials, and oversight for the tree tasks, while AWF's Bill Zeedyk, master of stream restoration, laid out a whole slew of rock structures for completion, with able guidance to new participants supplied by Phil Carter, Kristina Fisher, Hamish Thomson, Jodey Kougioulis, and Michael Scialdone. We were very pleased to have Bill with us here and at Cebolla Canyon in September, after some health issues that kept him away for much of the summer. Welcome back, Bill!

And we were delighted to be joined once again by scouts and parents from Cub Pack 185, led by Nancy Pianka. The youngsters and adults put in a fine morning of work, learning to appreciate such citizen efforts to improve the environment.

The weather cooperated perfectly for the project and for the shared meal afterwards. The group area at Pine Flat was a great setting for Scial's grilling wizardry, and, once the buns, plates, and cutlery arrived on scene, everyone enjoyed the burgers, dogs, salads, and desserts in abundance. Thanks to all for your presence and contributions to the meal—and to the entire day. It was so fun maybe we'll do it again next year!

CEDRO CREEK Participants

- Lyle Aufdemauer
- Abe Aufdemauer
- Kate Brown
- Gail Baker
- John Canaris
- Phil Carter
- John Dickel
- Kristina Fisher
- Cloud Hall
- Amy Holmen
- Mark Holmen
- Doreen Jameson
- Sandra Jameson
- Tina & Lulu Kachele
- Jodey Kougioulis
- Christine Laudadio
- Laurie Marnell
- Trudi Martinez
- Dennis Muirhead
- Glenda Muirhead
- Robert Riefel
- John Rudmin
- Michael Scialdone
- Jackie Shane
- Jesse Slocum
- Jim Swetnam
- Marilynn Szydlowski
- Hamish Thomson
- Shannon Van de Riet
- Bill Zeedyk
- Adam Zipkin

- Cubs Scouts and Parents**
- Ernie, Cody & Alison Valdez
 - Steve & Liam Fogarty
 - Barbara Williams
 - John & Anton Pieniazek
 - Ed, Nancy & Bradley Pianka
 - Jacquelyn & Tyler Condit



PHOTOS BY JOHN RUDMIN
Thank you, John!



AWF IN SEARCH OF A SECRETARY

As AWF's Annual Meeting approaches (December 9) and we prepare an election slate for 2011, we are looking for someone willing to serve on the Board of Directors as SECRETARY.

Duties include taking minutes at AWF monthly Board meetings and transcribing and distributing them to Board members.

Please consider being the one to step forward and offer your services! Contact Glenda Muirhead at g.muirhead@usfamily.net or 505-281-2925.

COMMISSION POSTPONES ANTELOPE DECISION *Again*

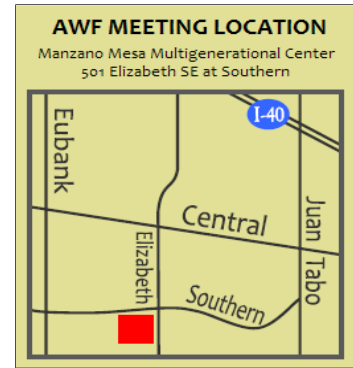
The New Mexico State Game Commission postponed a decision on the controversial A-PLUS system at its Ruidoso meeting last week. The commission will take up the issue again Thursday, December 9, in Clovis.

The A-PLUS system is the main reason that New Mexico has one of the lowest percentages of antelope hunting opportunity going to residents of any western state. Few sportsmen attended the Thursday meeting, but **New Mexico Wildlife Federation delivered petitions and letters signed by over 6,000 New Mexico sportsmen like you asking for substantial improvement to the lopsided allocation of hunting licenses.** NMWF asked commissioners to reject the only option presented to the commission because it did little to improve resident hunting opportunity and also took two important steps backward from the status quo.

The option presented on Thursday would have changed antelope hunting for the worse in two ways:

- First, the proposal would have changed all transferable "landowner" authorizations from ranch-only licenses to unit-wide licenses after the first hunt day, creating a new monetary incentive for landowners without good hunting opportunity to enroll in the A-PLUS program: The valuable unit-wide licenses could be used on any public land after the first day of the hunt.
- Second, the proposal would have changed trespass rules for antelope so that antelope hunters could be cited as poachers for accidentally crossing an unmarked, unfenced boundary—and would have also created a confusing and inconsistent system of determining whether access roads are public or private.

— Joel Gay, New Mexico Wildlife Federation



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ALBUQUERQUE WILDLIFE FEDERATION
 PO Box 1234 ■ Albuquerque, NM 87103
<http://abq.nmwildlife.org>

RENEWED MEMBERS

Gail Baker - Sustaining
 Jim Hickerson - Sustaining

Thank You!

Membership Application

ALBUQUERQUE WILDLIFE FEDERATION - PO BOX 1234 - ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87103
 An affiliate of New Mexico Wildlife Federation

I'd like to belong to AWF ONLY or I'd like to belong to AWF + NMWF: *Designate NMWF member(s)* _____

name(s) _____

address _____

city, state, zip _____

phone _____ email _____

Gift membership from: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

<input type="checkbox"/> Student [under 18]	\$10	◀ AWF Membership Only
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$35	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	\$50-\$99	
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$100	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime	\$500	◀ One-time Payment

Dues \$ _____
 Contribution \$ _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____