

# kidtracks

## Birds In Blue

By Rob Yaksich

There are birds that are blue, and then there are bluebirds. But not every blue bird is a bluebird. There are also blue jays, but not every jay that is blue is a blue jay.

Huh?

When you're out and about in New Mexico, you probably will see many kinds of blue birds. Some of them may be entirely blue, like the color of a New Mexico sky. Others may have only a little blue here or there. Whatever the case, blue is a popular color not only among people, but also with birds.



Photo: Don MacCarter

Scrub jay

### Blue jays and jays that are blue

New Mexico is home to six different kinds of jays, five of which are blue. It's easy to call them all blue jays, but only one is actually named the blue jay. Found mostly in the eastern half of the United States, blue jays also occur in scattered places across eastern New Mexico. This far west, you're much more likely to encounter scrub jays and Steller's jays.

Scrub jays live in small family flocks in areas where piñon pines, junipers, and scrub oaks are common. Steller's jays, which are close cousins to blue jays, live at higher elevations in the mountains, especially where ponderosa pines are abundant.



Photo: Don MacCarter

Piñon jay

If you live near piñon forests, you may find large flocks of noisy piñon jays, which look like smaller, all-blue versions of their close relative, the crow. They travel widely, moving like a feathered tidal wave, seeking and storing piñon nuts. Some of the piñon nuts they bury are never recovered and may eventually sprout into new trees. In this way, piñon jays are feathered foresters!

Look for scrub jays at the Randall Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe. Steller's jays can be found at Fenton Lake State Park in



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Photo: Jim Stuart

Western bluebird

### Will the real bluebirds please stand up?

Just like all blue jays aren't blue jays, not all blue birds are bluebirds. But there really are blue birds called bluebirds, and New Mexico has all three bluebird species found in North America.

Eastern bluebirds, are found in scattered locations in New Mexico. But you are much more likely to see western bluebirds here, especially in the middle to high altitudes

Go higher and you'll find mountain bluebirds. This turquoise-blue bird likes to nest in old woodpecker holes in aspen or pine snags (standing dead or dying trees) near large meadows.

You might encounter all three bluebird species at Sugarite Canyon State Park near Raton. See mountain and western bluebirds at the Sargent Wildlife Area near Chama, and eastern bluebirds at the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park in Albuquerque.

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Photo: Mark Watson

Mountain bluebird

## Beating the bluebird blues

Not long ago, bluebirds were in serious danger. Their preferred habitat (open fields near woodlands) was being turned into farms or cities, and their favorite nesting sites – snags with old woodpecker holes or rotted-out cavities – were being removed. To make things worse, house sparrows and European starlings, both non-native species brought to America from Europe, were kicking bluebirds out of what nesting places they could find.

Concerned citizens took action and began to erect birdhouses in remaining bluebird habitat. Today, hundreds of thousands of bluebird houses, some of which are part of miles-long bluebird "trails," have helped bluebirds across the continent, including right here in New Mexico. But they need help, especially as growing cities turn habitat into shopping centers and new neighborhoods bring free-roaming house

cats, house sparrows and starlings into native habitat. What will you do to help New Mexico's bluebirds and blue birds?

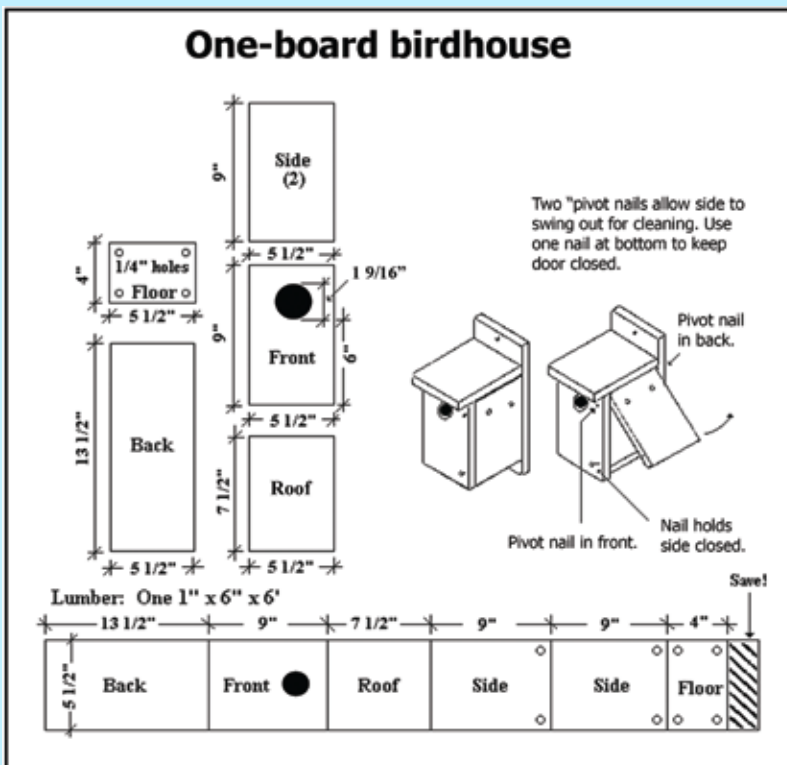


Photo: Dan Williams

### Values

What price do we place on New Mexico's fish and wildlife?

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##### Birds in blue

Check out New Mexico's jays, buntings and bluebirds.

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# Gaining Access Into Nature



Photo: Dan Williams

## Growing program opens more wildlife areas

By Dan Williams

From hunting and fishing to bird watching and photography, wildlife-associated recreation has never been so good in New Mexico.

This spring, thousands of acres of the state's wildlife areas opened to activities other than hunting and fishing for the first time with the expansion of the Department of Game and Fish Gaining Access Into Nature Program. For a modest fee, visitors now can enjoy activities such as hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding in some of New Mexico's finest wildlife areas.

The idea behind GAIN is to allow more people to enjoy and support properties across the state that were purchased specifically for wildlife using funds provided through excise taxes on hunting and fishing gear. GAIN opens gates to these areas while allowing all visitors to help fund wildlife research, habitat improvement, maintenance, development and operations.

The foundation of GAIN emerged from Governor Bill Richardson's Summit on Wildlife-Associated Recreation in August 2004. That foundation was later set in statute by action of the 2005 Legislature

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Photos: LuAnn Tafoya, above; Dan Williams, right

**New Mexico's wildlife takes center stage in the Department of Game and Fish program, Gaining Access Into Nature, which opens thousands of acres of land to wildlife-associated recreation. GAIN activities range from self-guided hiking, biking and horseback riding to special tours of wolf country and chances to participate in surveys, bighorn sheep trapping operations and guided elk-bugling trips.**





# Department gains White Peak area access

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish has signed a lease agreement with the ABC Land and Cattle Company to allow hunters to cross private land to access State Trust Lands in the Aspen Hill area of Game Management Unit 48, part of the area commonly known as White Peak.

The Department annually leases the rights for hunter, trapper and angler access to State Trust Lands from the State Land Office. The agreement with ABC Land and Cattle Company provides vehicular access to approximately 26 sections of State Trust Land that would not otherwise be accessible by vehicle. Entry to the area from N.M. 120 is near mile marker 5.

The access road crosses approximately one-half mile of private land and all users must stay on the roadway. Access to the private lands off the road is not allowed.

The agreement signed March 12 allows licensed hunters and up to two guests access to the area from April 15, 2008, through May 10, 2008, for spring turkey season, and from Aug. 15, 2008, through March 15, 2009, for bear and all other big game seasons.

The White Peak area now can be accessed via the Red Hill Road and the ABC gate from N.M. 120. Other access points will need written permission from the private property owner.

The lease agreement was funded by the Department's Open Gate Program, in which landowners can lease hunting areas or access to closed areas. Landowners who are interested in the Open Gate Program are encouraged to call a Department office in Raton, Albuquerque, Las Cruces or Roswell.

Funding for the program comes from the Habitat, Access and Management Validations that all hunters and anglers are required to purchase.

If you have questions about hunting, fishing or trapping in New Mexico, please contact the Department of Game and Fish at (505) 476-8000 or visit [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us).

## Be bear aware at home, in camp this summer, fall

Summer and fall in New Mexico usually means bears are on the move and looking for food in the mountains, foothills and bordering communities throughout New Mexico. Often, young bears away from their mothers for the first time are looking for new territory -- and food.

Residents and visitors in bear country statewide are reminded to take appropriate precautions to protect themselves, their property, and the bears.

The Department of Game and Fish publishes a booklet, "Living with Large Predators," which is available on the Department website, [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us), or by calling (505) 476-8000.

If you see a bear and consider it a safety threat, please contact your local Department of Game and Fish conservation officer, police or sheriff's office. You also can call the Department office in Santa Fe at (505) 476-8000, or area offices in Albuquerque, Raton, Roswell and Las Cruces, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Here are some suggestions about safely coexisting with bears:

### If you live or camp in bear country:

- Keep garbage in airtight containers inside your garage or storage area.
- Place garbage outside in the morning just before pickup, not the night before.
- Occasionally clean cans with ammonia or bleach.
- Remove bird feeders. Bears see them as sweet treats, and often they will look for other food sources nearby.
- Don't leave pet food or food dishes outdoors at night.
- Clean and store outdoor grills after use.
- Never feed bears to attract them for viewing. If you feed a bear -- intentionally

## Don't miss Department exhibit at 2008 State Fair in Albuquerque

Live game fish, raptors, shooting games and information about New Mexico's wealth of wildlife-related recreational opportunities will be featured at the Department of Game and Fish displays Sept. 5-21 at the New Mexico State Fair in Albuquerque.

The Department's always-popular exhibit will be in its familiar spot in the Natural Resources Building at Expo New Mexico, along with State Forestry, Mining and Minerals, and State Parks divisions of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department.



Photo: Dan Williams

or unintentionally-- and the bear becomes a nuisance, you could be cited and fined up to \$500 -- and the bear eventually may have to be killed.

- Keep your camp clean, and store food and garbage properly at all times. Use bear-proof containers when available. If not, suspend food, coolers and garbage from a tree at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet out from the tree trunk.
  - Keep your tent and sleeping bag free of all food smells. Store the clothes you wore while cooking or eating with your food.
  - Sleep a good distance from your cooking area or food storage site.
- Store toiletries with your food.

### If you see a bear:

- Stop, and back away slowly while facing the bear. Avoid direct eye contact, as the bear may consider that a threat.
  - Never get between a mother bear and her cubs.
  - If the bear has not seen you, stay calm and slowly move away, making noise so the bear knows you are there.
  - Do not run. Make yourself appear large by holding out your jacket. If you have small children, pick them up so they don't run.
  - Give the bear plenty of room to escape, so it doesn't feel threatened or trapped. If you are on a trail, step off on the downhill side and slowly move away.
  - If a bear attacks you, fight back using anything at your disposal, such as rocks, sticks, binoculars or even your bare hands.
- Aim for the bear's nose and eyes.

consificated illegally killed wildlife mounts.

- Aquatic Education Day. Visitors will be invited to learn to tie fishing flies, make Japanese-style fish art prints and inspect aquatic insects through macroscopes.
- Wildlife Adventure Day. The Department's Gaining Access Into Nature (GAIN) program and how you can apply for special wildlife viewing opportunities will be highlighted.

For more information and updates, please visit the New Mexico State Fair website, <http://exponm.com/fair/>.

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[www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us)



# GAIN activities on Wildlife Management Areas

Property	Wildlife viewing, photography, hiking, biking, skiing	Horseback riding	Camping	Fishing *	Hunting *
<b>Pecos Complex (Clancy, Mora, Terrero, Koch)</b>	Year-round. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Allowed, but opportunities are extremely limited.	Year-round. Koch area: Primitive camping only in designated area.	Year-round. Special trout and regular waters.	No hunting opportunities.
<b>Charette Lakes</b>	March 1-Oct. 31. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Allowed but opportunities are extremely limited.	March 1-Oct. 31	March 1-Oct. 31	Waterfowl during season, October-January.
<b>Colin Neblett</b>	Tolby and Maverick trails open year-round except closed May 15-July 31. Clear Creek Trail open year-round. Bicycling prohibited on all trails.	Tolby and Maverick trails closed May 15-July 31. Clear Creek closed year-round.	Only licensed deer and elk hunters may camp in designated areas during their hunt.	Year-round. Regular fishing regulations.	Bear, deer, elk, turkey and small game.
<b>Elliott Barker</b>	April 1-May 14 and Aug. 1-Dec. 14. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	April 1-May 14 and Aug. 1 - Dec. 14.	Only licensed hunters may camp in designated areas only during hunt.	Allowed, but limited opportunities because of previous forest fire.	Bear, deer, elk, turkey, and small game.
<b>McAllister Lake</b>	March 1-Oct. 31. Access allowed only Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays during waterfowl hunting seasons (October-January). Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Allowed, but opportunities are extremely limited.	Not allowed.	March 1-Oct. 31. Regular trout waters.	Waterfowl during season, October-January.
<b>Rio de los Pinos</b>	Year-round. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Year-round.	Year-round.	Year-round. Special trout and regular trout waters.	Access to BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands.
<b>Urraca</b>	July 1 - Dec. 14 and April 1 - May 14. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	July 1 - Dec. 14 and April 1 - May 14.	Only licensed hunters may camp in designated areas only during hunt.	No fishing opportunities.	Deer, elk, and small game.
<b>Wagon Mound</b>	Year-round. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Year-round.	Not allowed.	No fishing opportunities.	Waterfowl during season, October-January.
<b>Bluebird Mesa</b>	Year-round, but subject to U.S. Forest Service winter road closure. Bicycling not allowed.	Year-round.	Not allowed.	No fishing opportunities.	Bear, deer, elk, turkey, and small game.
<b>Edward Sargent</b>	Year-round. Bicycling allowed only on established roads. All users restricted to designated areas from May 15 - June 30, and during elk hunts in September and November. Please see specific area restrictions on map posted at area entrance.	Year-round. Restricted to designated areas May 15 - June 30 and during elk hunts in September and November. Licensed hunters may ride during their hunt.	Allowed only in designated areas from July 1 - Nov. 15. Licensed hunters may camp only in designated areas during their hunt.	Year-round. Special trout waters. Fishing limited to designated areas from May 15 - June 30.	Bear, deer, elk, turkey, and small game.
<b>Jackson Lake</b>	Year-round. Access restricted to property west of Highway 170. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Allowed, but opportunities are extremely limited.	Not allowed.	Year-round. Regular fishing regulations.	Waterfowl during season, October-January.
<b>Ladd S. Gordon Waterfowl Complex (Bernardo)</b>	Access restricted to auto tour route, trails, and viewing sites. Visitors do not need a GAIN permit or HMAV. Tour route closed Dec. 29, Dec. 31, Jan. 19 and Jan. 21. Bicycling not allowed.	Not allowed.	Not allowed.	April 1 - Aug. 31. Regular fishing regulations.	September teal hunting in season. Waterfowl in season, October-March.
<b>Ladd S. Gordon Waterfowl Complex (La Joya)</b>	March 15 - Aug. 31. Users of open roads do not need a GAIN permit or HMAV. Users off open roads need a GAIN permit and HMAV.	March 15 - Aug. 31. Riders off open roads need a GAIN permit and HMAV.	Not allowed.	April 1 - Aug. 31. Regular fishing regulations.	September teal hunting in season, October-March.
<b>Rio Chama</b>	Memorial Day weekend through Nov. 15, except during deer and elk hunts. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Memorial Day weekend - Nov. 15, except during deer and elk hunts. Licensed hunters may ride during their hunts.	Designated areas Memorial Day weekend - Nov. 15. Licensed hunters may camp during hunts.	Year-round. Special trout waters. Some seasonal access restrictions.	Deer, elk, turkey, small game, September teal.
<b>Water Canyon</b>	Year-round, except during deer and elk hunts. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Year-round, except during elk, deer hunts. Licensed hunters may ride during their hunts.	Not allowed, except licensed hunters may camp during their hunt.	No fishing opportunities.	Deer, elk, bear, turkey, rabbits. Himalayan tahr Jan.-March (no dogs).
<b>William Humphries</b>	Memorial Day weekend through Nov. 15, except during deer and elk hunts. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Memorial Day weekend - Nov. 15, except during deer and elk hunts. Licensed hunters may ride during their hunts.	Designated areas Memorial Day weekend - Nov. 15. Licensed hunters may camp during hunts.	No fishing opportunities.	Deer, elk, bear, turkey, and small game.
<b>Bear Canyon</b>	Year-round. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Allowed, but opportunities are extremely limited.	Year-round in designated areas.	Winter trout waters and warmwater fishing.	No hunting opportunities.
<b>Bill Evans Lake</b>	Year-round. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Allowed, but opportunities are extremely limited.	Year-round in designated areas.	Regular fishing regulations. Winter trout water.	No hunting opportunities.
<b>Heart Bar</b>	Year-round. Bicycling allowed only on established roads. North bank of the West Fork of the Gila River closed to all access March 1 through Aug. 31.	Year-round. North bank of the West Fork, Gila River closed March 1 through Aug. 31.	Year-round in designated areas.	Year-round. Special trout waters.	No hunting opportunities.
<b>Lake Roberts</b>	Year-round. Bicycling not allowed.	Allowed, but opportunities are extremely limited.	Not allowed on wildlife area, but allowed on adjacent U.S. forest lands.	Year-round. Special trout waters.	No hunting opportunities.
<b>Mimbres</b>	Year-round. Bicycling not allowed.	Allowed, but opportunities are extremely limited.	Not allowed.	Not allowed.	No hunting opportunities.
<b>Red Rock</b>	Year-round. Activities allowed in designated areas only. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	Year-round in designated areas only.	Not allowed.	Limited fishing opportunities.	No hunting opportunities.
<b>Socorro-Escondida.</b>	Year-round. Bicycling not allowed.	Year-round.	Not allowed.	Year-round. Regular fishing regulations.	Turkey, small game, and waterfowl.
<b>Brantley</b>	Year-round. Bicycling not allowed.	Not allowed.	Not allowed on wildlife area, but allowed in state park.	Year-round. Regular fishing regulations.	Deer, small game, waterfowl. Coyotes, rabbits year-round (no dogs).
<b>Lesser Prairie Chicken Areas</b>	Activities allowed June 30 - Feb. 15. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	June 30 - Feb. 15.	Not allowed.	No fishing opportunities.	Small game. Coyotes, rabbits Nov. 1 - Feb. 15 (no dogs).
<b>Sandhills Prairie</b>	Activities allowed June 30 - Feb. 15. Bicycling allowed only on established roads.	June 30 - Feb. 15.	Not allowed.	No fishing opportunities.	Coyotes, rabbits Nov. 1 - Feb. 15 (no dogs).
<b>Seven Rivers</b>	Year-round. Bicycling not allowed. Activities allowed only in designated areas. Please see specific area restrictions on map posted at wildlife area.	Not allowed.	Not allowed.	Year-round. Regular fishing regulations.	Small game, September teal, waterfowl, limited-draw deer, pheasants.
<b>William S. Huey</b>	Year-round. Bicycling not allowed. Activities allowed only in designated areas. Please see specific area restrictions on map posted at wildlife area.	Not allowed.	Not allowed.	Year-round. Regular fishing regulations.	Small game, waterfowl, limited-draw deer, pheasants, turkeys.

\* Please refer to Big-Game and Trapper, Small Game and Waterfowl, and Fishing Rules and Information booklets for specific season rules and dates. [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us)



and the governor’s approval of Senate Bill 145.

“The Department of Game and Fish is pleased and proud to be implementing GAIN in cooperation with communities statewide, to provide for additional, wholesome wildlife-associated recreational opportunities,” Department Director Bruce Thompson said. “These opportunities provide more quality family activities on state wildlife areas consistent with the habitat and wildlife purposes for which the areas were acquired.”

The GAIN program began in 2006 with a few special opportunities for winners in lottery-style drawings. Draw winners accompanied Department officers and staff experts in activities such as bighorn sheep trapping operations, elk-bugling tours and electrofishing projects. The most popular GAIN activity was in the Gila National Forest, where participants joined wildlife biologists as they tracked, listened and looked for signs of endangered Mexican wolves.

Those activities are expected to continue while the statewide access program expands to accommodate a growing public interest in wildlife viewing activities. Wildlife watchers spent \$45.7 billion pursuing their hobby in 2006, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. They also represent the fastest-growing segment of all wildlife-associated recreationists.

“The future of the GAIN program is to add further opportunities through cooperation among the Department of Game and Fish and other land managers, all of which have positive implications for local community economics,” Thompson said.

## GAIN at a glance

### What is GAIN?

Gaining Access Into Nature (GAIN) is a program offered by the Department of Game and Fish that opens many Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) to wildlife-associated recreation activities beyond hunting and fishing. Depending on the WMA, wildlife viewing and wildlife photography opportunities are accessible by hiking, bicycling, skiing, snowshoeing and horseback riding.

### Who needs a GAIN Permit?

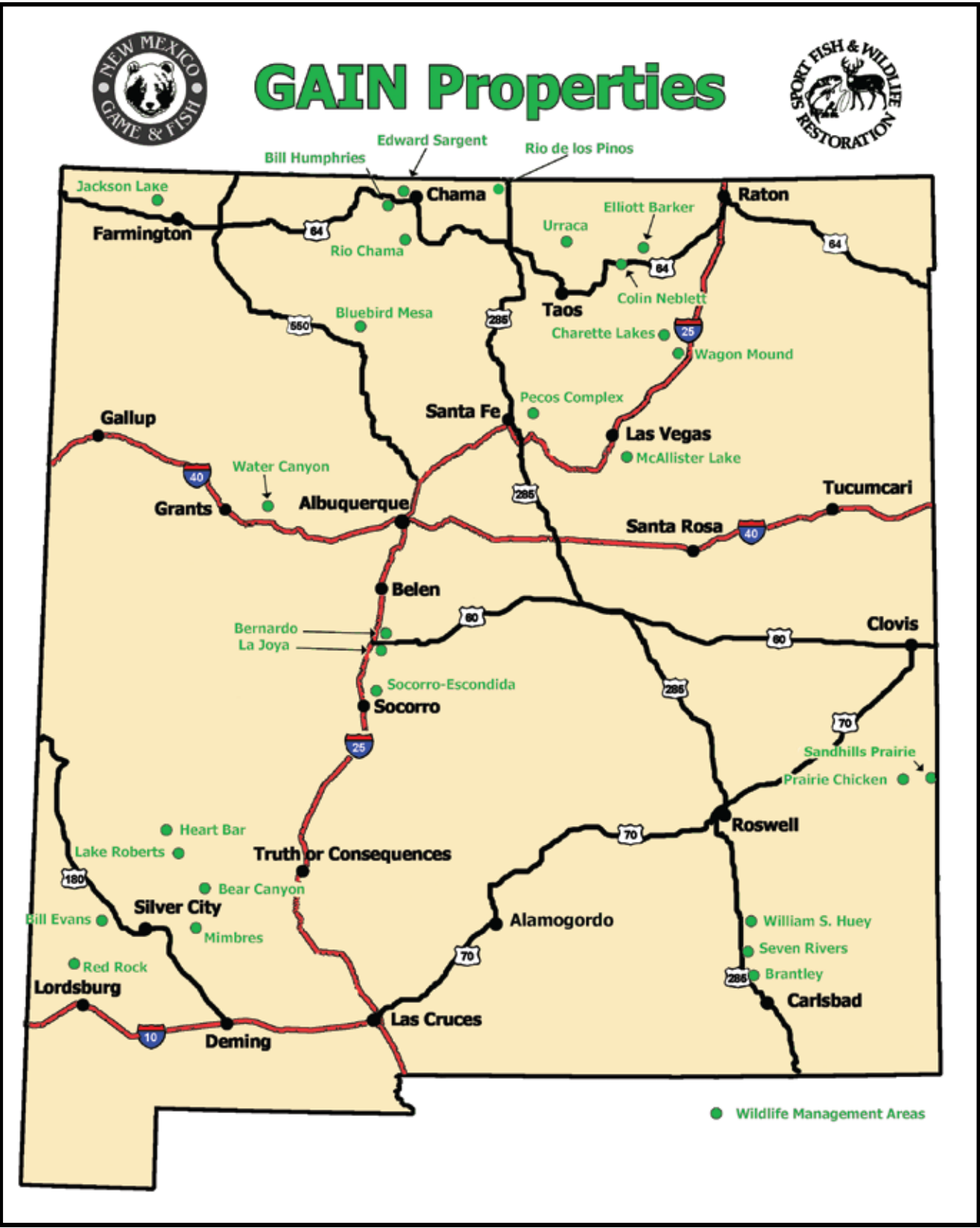
Anyone 18 years or older must purchase a GAIN Permit and a Habitat Management and Access Validation (HMAV) to access one of the WMAs open for GAIN activities. Persons younger than 18 do not need a permit.

### If I am hunting or fishing on a WMA, do I need a GAIN Permit?

No. A current New Mexico hunting or fishing license with a HMAV allows holders to hunt or fish on WMAs during any season for which they are legally licensed.

### If I have a current hunting or fishing license with a HMAV, can I hike, bicycle, ski, snowshoe or horseback ride on a WMA (if allowed) without purchasing a GAIN Permit?

No. Hunting licenses are for hunting; fishing licenses are for fishing and GAIN permits are for



GAIN activities permitted on each WMA. You must purchase a GAIN permit to hike, bicycle etc. The only exception to this is Colin Neblett where, through an agreement with New Mexico State Parks, a person is good to go for any allowable GAIN activity with a GAIN permit or a park permit or a hunting or fishing license, but only for the timeframe indicated on the hunting or fishing license.

### Where can I purchase a GAIN Permit?

From any Department office, license vendor, or through the Department’s online license system.

### How much are the fees?

Each person 18 years or older, must purchase a GAIN Permit and a HMAV to participate in any GAIN activity. Permits available include:

- Annual Permit, valid April 1-March 31, is \$15 + HMAV \$4 = \$19.
- A Temporary (5 consecutive days) GAIN Permit is \$4 + HMAV \$4 = \$8.
- A \$1 vendor fee may be charged if you purchase it from a license vendor.
- If you purchase it online, a \$4.95 vendor fee will be charged.
- Both types are valid statewide.

### What are “Special Opportunity Permits?”

These special GAIN Permits allow participants to become involved in Department-sponsored wildlife tours, bighorn sheep and turkey trapping and relocation efforts, prairie chicken and electro-fishing surveys, etc. Permits are available through a drawing. Please visit the Department website, [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us), for information and applications.

### What are LEGAL activities on a GAIN WMA?

Any person holding a valid GAIN permit and HMAV may, unless specifically prohibited:

- View and/or photograph wildlife.
- Hike, horseback ride, snowshoe, ski, or bicycle if specifically allowed at that WMA.
- Camp (if the WMA is open to camping) for no more than nine consecutive days. Licensed hunters and their guests may camp during their hunt.
- Have an open fire only if it is contained in a metal fireplace or charcoal grill.
- Pets, as long as they are leashed.

### What activities are ILLEGAL on a GAIN WMA?

- It is illegal for a person to:
- Operate any motorized vehicle or bicycle off established roads or on closed roads within a WMA.
  - Deface or remove any rocks, minerals, plants, firewood or man-made features from a WMA.
  - Excavate, injure, destroy, or remove any cultural resources or artifacts from a WMA.
  - Violate any of the provisions of signs posted on WMAs.
  - Use or possess any hay or feed that is not certified “weed free”.

### Where can I get more information?

Visit the Department’s website, [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us) or call (505) 476-8000.

# Warmwater hatchery open for business

By Dan Williams

The crew at Rock Lake Fish Hatchery has a message for a few hundred thousand largemouth bass in Colorado awaiting transport to the hatchery near Santa Rosa: “Come on in, the water’s fine.”

All 11 one-acre ponds are full at New Mexico’s new warmwater hatchery in Santa Rosa, and the Department of Game and Fish is expecting its first shipment of tiny bass fry this month.

“The construction process has been challenging, but it looks like we’re finally ready to go,” said Roddy Gallegos, recently promoted to assistant chief of fisheries from his position as manager at Rock Lake Hatchery. “This is an exciting time for the hatchery and New Mexico anglers who enjoy catching warmwater fish.”

The \$4 million first phase of the hatchery project was completed last fall. Since then, hatchery crews have been working to create pond environments suitable for raising bass, walleye, catfish and bluegill. Fish will be placed in the ponds once the water is producing enough phytoplankton and zooplankton the fish need for nourishment and growth.

Initially, the Department plans to raise bass, catfish and bluegill from fry to about 1-inch long, rotating species about every 28 days. Eventually, the operation will expand to include walleye and other warmwater fish species. Once the fish are raised to 1 inch or larger, they will be stocked in lakes around the state.

“The biggest challenge will be trying to

## Program brings archery to schools around New Mexico

By Clint Henson

Students across New Mexico are learning the basics of the sport of archery thanks to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the National Archery in the Schools Program.

Archery in the Schools is a cooperative program with state wildlife agencies to encourage interest in archery and other shooting sports. New Mexico was the 43rd state to join the program after its origination in Kentucky in 2002. The program quickly spread nationwide and overseas with programs in Canada, Australia and South Africa.

“The kids and the teachers love it,” said Brian Guzman, program coordinator and archery instructor. “When the students are finished shooting for PE class, then the teachers and instructors shoot after class. It’s hard to get the teachers to stop shooting!”

The equipment used in the program is simple, safe, and easily fits fourth-through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students and adults. Everyone uses the same arrows and bows are adjusted from 10- to 20-pound draw weight.

“It’s great to see a child who has never shot a bow and arrow to quickly find success in this program,” Guzman said. “It is presented in a very positive way, and it makes school a better learning environment. What other school sport appeals to such a wide range of participants?”

Students start the program with only

determine the ideal nutrient load in the ponds,” Gallegos said. “All fish-rearing facilities are different, so it will be a never-ending learning process for the hatchery staff.”

Each 1-acre pond is sloped to provide the fish with water depths from two to seven feet. Ideal water temperatures of 55 to 75 degrees for bass and 70 to 85 degrees for catfish will be maintained by adjusting water flows. For comparison, the ideal water temperature for raising rainbow trout is 50 to 60 degrees.



Wildlife Culturist Paul Sanchez gently pours a beaker full of walleye fry into a stocking tank destined for Conchas Lake. Rock Lake Hatchery raises about 20 million walleye a year, and soon will be raising largemouth bass, catfish and bluegill in 11 new warmwater fish-rearing ponds.

Photo: Mark Watson

The hatchery has the potential to raise three species a year to stockable sizes in each pond, and over time, anglers should notice a difference in the state’s lakes as the fish mature. Mike Sloane, chief of fisheries for the Department, said impacts of the new stockings first may be seen in smaller lakes around the state, followed by larger reservoirs.

With its constant flow of 3,500 to 4,000 gallons of cool, clear spring water per minute, Rock Lake Hatchery already is the state’s top producer of catchable-sized rainbow trout. Each year, the

hatchery produces about 300,000 trout in its 18 raceways for stocking in the state’s streams and lakes. The hatchery also raises about 20 million walleye every year, about half of them from eggs collected from Conchas and Ute reservoirs.

Funding for the first phase of the warmwater portion of the hatchery included \$2.5 million from the state Game Protection Fund, which comes from hunting and fishing license sales; \$900,000 in federal grants; and \$300,000 from the state’s General Fund,

authorized by the 2004 Legislature.

Phase two of the warmwater hatchery project, to begin when funding becomes available, will include seven more ponds, a hatchery building and an educational center.

In operation since 1964, Rock Lake Hatchery welcomes visitors at its facilities two miles south of Santa Rosa along the Pecos River. The hatchery complex is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day.

For more information, please call (575) 472-3690.

## Get involved

Many organizations in New Mexico are dedicated to wildlife conservation, habitat improvement and wildlife-related recreation. Here are a few of them:

**New Mexico Wildlife Federation:** Founded by Aldo Leopold in 1914, the diverse organization is “dedicated to protecting New Mexico’s wildlife, habitat and outdoor way of life.” (505) 299-5404, [www.nmwildlife.org](http://www.nmwildlife.org).

**Audubon New Mexico:** Devoted to the protection, preservation and enjoyment of the environment, with a particular emphasis on birds. The organization has chapters statewide, with headquarters at the Randall Davey Audubon Center in Santa Fe. (505) 983-4609, <http://nm.audubon.org>.

**Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation:** A large national organization dedicated to ensuring the future of elk, other wildlife and their habitat. Information: (505) 454-9390, [www.rmef.org](http://www.rmef.org).

**Southwest Consolidated Sportsmen:** An organization representing at least 15 sporting and conservation groups of diverse interests. (505) 526-5056.

**Trout Unlimited, New Mexico:** Dedicated to the restoration, protection and conservation of all coldwater fisheries, their tributaries and watersheds and the fish that inhabit them in New Mexico. (505) 470-4878, [www.newmexicotu.org](http://www.newmexicotu.org).



# Southeast landowners open gates

## Hunters anglers gain access, opportunities on private lands

Story and photos  
by Mark Madsen

Looking for a place to chase quail while listening to the breeze blow through the grass and shinnery oak? How about a nice quiet spot to wet a fly in a tranquil babbling brook?

Sometimes those places can be difficult to find, but more are becoming accessible through the Department of Game and Fish Open Gate program, in which landowners earn money through access leases that allow hunting and fishing on their property.

Southeastern New Mexico leads the way in numbers of properties participating in Open Gate. Eight properties currently are signed up, opening more than 32,806 acres of private land to public hunters and anglers. Additional access to more than 23,128 acres of public land also has been secured through the program.

Open Gate properties in the southeast represent a wide variety of habitat and terrain. Some properties south of Portales in the eastern plains consist of open grasslands interspersed with areas of sand dunes dominated by shinnery oak. It's not unusual to see pronghorns or even a lesser prairie chicken or two on these properties. Another property north of Clovis includes part of the "caprock," along with brushy arroyos, grasslands and mesquite flats. Several other properties are along the Pecos River in the Fort Sumner and Roswell areas. These properties contain terrains ranging from small canyons and ridges to extensive wetlands and marshes along the river.

Most of the southeastern Open Gate properties offer ample opportunities for upland game-bird hunting, primarily scaled and bobwhite quail. Many of the same properties also have stock tanks that provide good dove hunting opportunities. Properties along the Pecos River near Roswell offer good hunting for waterfowl and even sandhill cranes.

Fishing access for warm and cool-water species in the Pecos River is available on a couple Open Gate properties. The property just off of the caprock north of Clovis offers hunters the chance of harvesting a Rio Grande turkey. Another Open Gate property offers trout anglers access to the Ruidoso River near Hondo. This property receives regular stockings of rainbow trout and even holds a few small brown trout.

Here are brief descriptions of Open Gate properties in southeastern New Mexico:

- **Billy Pat Barnes:** 280 acres of grassland and a dirt tank approximately ½-mile east of Crossroads on N.M. 508. The property is open for dove and quail hunting during the established seasons.

**Alfonzo Caballero:** Five separate parcels east of Roswell and north of U.S. 380. Public hunting and



Caballero property along the Pecos River



The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Open Gate program has opened properties statewide to fishing and hunting by offering lease incentives to private landowners.

angling access has been granted for approximately 4,000 acres of private land and access has been gained to approximately 22,000 acres of State Trust lands. The first parcel is along the Pecos River north of the highway. This parcel is dominated by salt cedar, Indian rice grass, willows and wetlands along the river. The other parcels are farther east and north of the highway and are primarily open grasslands, mesquite and some brushy arroyos. The property is open for dove, quail, waterfowl and sandhill crane hunting during established seasons. The Pecos River parcel is also open for fishing.

- **Anna Crooks property:** 960 acres of deeded property along with two dirt water tanks. The property is located just east and south of Crossroads, NM and consists of open grasslands. Dove and quail hunting are allowed during established seasons.

- **Elliott McMaster property:** 700 acres of marsh and wetlands just south of Bottomless Lakes State Park east of Roswell. The property adjoins the Overflow Wetlands special management area. The property is open for quail and waterfowl hunting during established seasons.

- **Frank Rusk property:** Approximately 7,426 acres of private land with access to 1,128 acres of State Trust land. The terrain consists of the caprock, brushy arroyos, open grasslands and mesquite flats. Dove and quail hunting are allowed during established seasons along with the opportunity to harvest a Rio Grande turkey in the spring and fall. To enter this Open Gate property start at Bard and drive south on Quay Road M for approximately nine miles and then turn left onto Quay Road 51. Proceed approximately ½ mile, where you will cross a cattle guard entering the Rusk Ranch.

- **Wortheim Ranch:** Approximately 18,000 acres of private land north of U.S. 60 west of Fort Sumner. Access to the ranch is by way of Beargrass or Big Sky Roads. Terrain varies from the broken topography along the Pecos River and the river bottom to mixed grasslands. The property is open for dove and quail hunting during established seasons.

- **Lance Corporal Steven Chavez Fishing Area:** This property is along the Ruidoso River a few miles west of Hondo. The landowner, Walt Limacher, allows public angler access to approximately 1 ½ miles of the Ruidoso River. The property is open for year-round fishing. The Department stocks this stretch of river with rainbow trout. It also contains a few



McMaster property east of Roswell

brown trout. To access the Lance Corporal Steven Chavez Fishing Area, turn south off U.S. 70 at mile marker 283, and then turn left at the dead end and drive across a white cattle guard. Parking is allowed anywhere along the road from the cattle guard to the bridge over the river. Anglers can fish upstream and downstream until they reach the posted water gaps crossing the river.

For more information about Open Gate properties or the Open Gate program in southeastern New Mexico, please contact George Farmer or Mark Madsen at (575) 624-6135.

*Mark Madsen is the public information officer for the Department of Game and Fish Southeast Area. He can be reached in Roswell at (575) 624-6135 or mark.madsen@state.nm.us.*

Southeast

# Kids ‘N Parks

## Program puts students in ‘outdoor classrooms’

By Marti Niman

“We’re doing all kinds of ‘unrangerly’ things today, like cutting tree branches and starting fires,” said Regional Interpreter Sarah Wood to her sixth-grade charges, “but it’s all for the greater good of education.”

The things Wood described were part of an outdoor classroom program on fire ecology at Hyde Memorial State Park for Gonzales Elementary students from Santa Fe. Students were confronted with several large tin pans filled with a variety of wood fuels – including some freshly-cut juniper sprigs – and the problem of what container was likely to burn and why. Wood stood ready with a bladder pump to quickly douse any stray sparks and also experiment with the effect of “rain” on combustion.

“The hands-on opportunities outdoors and being in the environment brings it closer to home,” said Contessa Serna, sixth-grade teacher at Gonzales.

Hands-on in this case meant the students got to “play with matches” by trying to light the different kinds of wood – a more challenging task than it would appear. Only one of the fuel pans actually caught fire enough to provide a little heat on a blustery day in May, sending up a cheer and a cluster of hands around the makeshift campfire.

“Kids are always told, ‘Don’t do this, don’t touch that,’” Wood said. “This is a chance for them to experience their environment first-hand.”

First-hand experience with the environment is one of the key components of State Parks’ Outdoor Classroom Programs. Studies show that hands-on, outdoor education experiences can improve student academic achievement, increase test scores, build resource stewardship ethics, and increase teacher job satisfaction. One of the biggest challenges to the outdoor experience is getting kids there. Enter Kids ‘N Parks, a State Parks initiative that pays transportation costs for student field trips to parks, zoos and other outdoor classroom areas.

The “Kids ‘N Parks” program is funded by taxpayers who make voluntary contributions on the annual New Mexico Personal Income Tax form (PIT-D) and also appropriated funds from the Legislature. The funds are distributed through a first-come, first-serve grant application process. Students must participate in a curriculum-based program at the outdoor classroom location and teachers must evaluate the effectiveness of the experience.

“It’s great for the kids to learn from the rangers and benefit from their expertise,” said Kari Jensen, sixth-grade teacher at Gonzales Elementary. “They’re starving for that sort of thing.”

May 8, several state officials watched Kids ‘N Parks outdoor classes in action at the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park in Albuquerque. Lt. Governor Diane Denish, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department Secretary Joanna Prukop, Assistant Secretary of Public Education Department Mary Rose C de Baca and State Sen. Dede Feldman of Albuquerque braved the dock at the park’s

“It’s more fun if it’s hands-on, and we learn more if it’s fun.”



Photo: Marti Niman

Students from Gonzales Elementary School in Santa Fe learned about the dynamics of fire during their hands-on outdoor classroom experience at Hyde Memorial State Park.

Discovery Pond while Park Ranger Karen Herzenberg coached a clutch of kindergarten kids. More than 100 students from Georgia O’Keeffe Elementary in Albuquerque took turns swarming around the pond, gathering green stuff in nets and peering at organisms under microscopes. One youngster poked a glob of green stuff chopstick-style with an eyedropper and proudly proclaimed, “It’s not slime, it’s algae!”

Meanwhile on the Bosque Loop Trail, another Kids ‘N Parks class of sophomores from Ramah High School strolled among the giant cottonwoods. They used journaling and reading as a springboard for English studies, species survival and biodiversity as some of their benchmarks.

The students at Hyde Park had their trip paid by a different funding source than the Kids ‘N Parks program. The Friends of Hyde State



Photo: Marti Niman

Algae and other slimy outdoor things are always popular with younger students.

While some students are unable to visit outdoor areas as part of their studies, others never get to wild areas under any circumstances. Parent classroom aide Melynn Schuyler is the director of YouthWorks, a non-profit organization serving at-risk youth in Santa Fe.

“Some of these kids have no experience with the outdoors,” she said. “They get so excited when they come here and say, ‘I’m going to tell my parents about this place.’ Some have never been on a hike and have to learn to carry a water bottle, for example.”

That reality was driven home by one student’s comment after a visit to the Hyde Park waterfall: “I learned how to tell if something is a rock or a deer or a bear,” she said.

The state Legislature has provided nearly \$500,000 for the first two pilot years of the Outdoor Classroom Program and the May 8 official visit to the Nature Center was part of the program’s progress review. Students statewide will benefit in 2008-2009 as New Mexico plays a leading role in efforts to connect outdoor learning with academic achievement and increase “children and nature” programs of all kinds. Other components of the Outdoor Classroom Program besides the Kids ‘N Parks transportation grants include rural service learning projects and teacher training; online teacher resources, evaluation and assessment materials and locally-relevant curriculum development.

The benefits of all these programs can best be summed up in the words of one sixth-grader: “I love it here,” said Katie Frybarger. “It’s more fun if it’s hands-on, and we learn more if it’s fun.”





# Cache ... and don't carry

## Geocaching Challenge offers fun, high-tech outdoor treasure hunt

By Marti Niman

Do you want some free “swag?” Is a travel bug another term for wanderlust, Montezuma’s revenge or something else? The answers are found in a search where the hunt is more fun than the quarry during State Parks Geocaching Challenge – part of the 75<sup>th</sup> Diamond Anniversary celebration in 2008.

State Parks invites the public to join the growing cadre of outdoor techno-wizards combing the mountains and arroyos with coordinates and electronic devices in hand, searching for hidden treasures and a chance to win special awards.

Geocaching is an outdoor treasure-hunt adventure game in which participants use Global Positioning System, or GPS units, to track treasures. The caches are waterproof containers of various sizes that contain a logbook and usually some small treasures, called “swag.” Each New Mexico state park has one cache in a camouflage ammo can placed by a different cache team.

“The geocache team and park manager decide on a location for the cache, take a reading on a handheld GPS to get the longitude and latitude,” said Wrennee Reynolds of New Mexico Geocachers, who helped organize the Challenge.

The Lum family of Los Alamos stashed its cache in a secret tree on a popular trail at Hyde Memorial State Park near Santa Fe.

“The search is the fun part, I really like the hunt,” said Ethan Lum, as he consulted the GPS unit coordinates with his dad Russell. “I like finding different animals, like plastic dinosaurs, in the caches.”

The five Lums and their dog – named Cache, of course – huff their way up the short, steep trail near the visitor center, periodically perusing their GPS coordinates. Although they were the original cachers at this site, they still need clues to track it down. Is it under that flat rock? No, maybe inside that log? Check those fallen tree roots. There it is! The whole family plays collective sleuth.

“We tend to place hiking caches,” said Russell Lum. “It gets a lot of people out to the woods who normally would just go to the caches around town.”

Each cache team has its own style and everyone gets to know who hides the urban ones, who hides ammo cans versus nano cans and who hides what signature caches – like Ethan’s penny experiments or the Reynolds’ barbed-wire prizes. Cachers may trade some of the treasures they find and replace them with their own goodies. Some treasures are called travel bugs and have a bar code with a tracking number to show where they have been. Geocaches can be found near a house in a city park or on a 10- to 20-mile hike into the mountains. The national web page, Geocaching.com, ranks different caches on difficulty of terrain and finding the cache, with a five-star terrain offering a rock scramble for the more energetic and nimble-footed.

“It’s a good family activity and also educational,” said Katrina Lum, who home-



Photos: Marti Niman

**Above, Taylor, Zoe and Ethan Lum check out a cache they found along a trail at Hyde Memorial State Park above Santa Fe. Below, the youngsters and their father, Russell, consult a GPS unit.**

schools their three children, Taylor, Ethan and Zoe. “We print out information from the web on each cache location and it becomes part of their social studies.”

Caches may be inside ammo cans like those in the state parks or encased in tackle boxes, plastic tubes or even nano caches smaller than a thimble. Caches are hidden but not buried to minimize the impact on the area. Some caches such as tubes are wedged into a rock crevasse or a tree, forcing the cacher to search above ground level.

“We come back and come back and come back looking for them,” Taylor Lum said.

The sport of geocaching is limited only by the participants’ imaginations and, given that

much of its lingo is based on the Harry Potter series, could prove infinite. There are multi-caches with their coordinates stacked up like electronic Russian dolls – the first cache holding coordinates for the next cache and so on. Puzzle caches hide coordinates inside a text somewhat like an anagram. Some of the more elaborate GPS units have geocache software with games, sightseeing tours or role-playing scenarios with tasks to perform.

Cachers are a social bunch and watch out for one another’s caches, replacing treasures or fixing caches if they get wet or damaged. They often have get-togethers with barbecues, campouts and separate kids’ events. Cachers watch the online site for new cache postings and there’s friendly competition to be “FTF” – first to find.

“We did one at midnight,” Ethan Lum said. “It was fun; we had our headlamps on and it was really dark!”

The State Parks Geocaching Challenge encourages cachers to visit each state park to find hidden treasures and learn more about parks in the state. Visitors who locate all 34 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary geocaches by Dec. 31, 2008, will receive a free State Park Annual Day Use pass and will qualify to win a State Park Annual Camping Pass.

Geocachers observe guidelines and ethics to ensure safety and minimal impact on natural areas. These include practicing CITO – Cache In Trash Out – and leaving the area as undisturbed as possible. Caches are never buried and are plainly marked. Caches do not have food, which might attract animals; or potentially dangerous items, such as knives or lighters. Once a cache is found, the cacher logs his visit in the logbook inside the cache and also logs the visit and a photo of the park online at [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com). New cachers will need to register free online to play the game.

Where are the caches? Curious adventurers can find a list of coordinates for caches in each of the 34 state parks, as well as general information about the State Parks Geocaching Challenge and the sport of geocaching, at [www.nmparks.com](http://www.nmparks.com) or [www.nmgeocaching.com](http://www.nmgeocaching.com), or by heading for a nearby state park.



### Northwest



Photo: Ross Morgan

**The Open Gate program provides access to 160 acres of private land for dove hunting near Belen.**

## Hunting comes closer to home

By Ross Morgan

If you’re looking for a good spot to go dove hunting relatively close to Albuquerque, Belen and Los Lunas, check out the Johnny Chavez property, one of several properties statewide enrolled in the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Open Gate program.

As a participant in Open Gate, Chavez leases access to his property to hunters. Chavez is paid for the lease through the \$4 Habitat Management and Access Validation Access and Validation that is required for all buyers of hunting and fishing licenses. Since it’s inception in 2006-2007, Open Gate has provided access to thousands of acres of private lands statewide.

“The property owned by Mr. Chavez has been part of our Open Gate program for several years now”, said Donald Jaramillo, conservation officer for the Belen District. “With its proximity to Albuquerque, Belen, and Los Lunas, it provides a good place for hunters to come out for the day and do a little bird hunting.”

The property is 160 acres that surrounds three separate water tanks and allows access to 33,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management and State Trust Lands that are open to hunting as well.

Most of the roads that access the property are county

maintained roads that are graded periodically and usually are in good condition. However, these roads can become very muddy and slippery after a good rain. Although a lot of the property is flat, there are several areas of rolling hills with some deep arroyos that can a fill with fast-flowing water after a good rain.

To reach the Johnny Chavez property, drive south on I-25 to its junction with U.S. 60 at Bernardo. Exit at U.S. 60 and head west to a cattle guard, then head southwest, then northwest on County Road B-12, staying on the main road for exactly 4 miles until you hit County Road B-57. Turn right on County Road B-57 and stay on the main road until you reach the first water tank (windmill). From there, follow the road north to a “T” intersection. Turn left and drive to water tanks No. 2 and No. 3. All three tanks are on the Johnny Chavez property enrolled in Open Gate program.

For more information on hunting this property or any other Open Gate property, please visit [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us), click on the hunt tab and scroll down to Open Gate hunting and fishing access. Information also is available by calling the Albuquerque office of the Department of Game and Fish at (505) 222-4700.

Ross Morgan is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Northwest Area. He can be reached at (505) 222-4707 or [ross.morgan@state.nm.us](mailto:ross.morgan@state.nm.us).



## License validation pays off for hunters

By LuAnn Tafoya

Hunters and anglers in southwestern New Mexico have a few more places to hunt and fish, thanks to the Department of Game and Fish Open Gate program and the \$4 Habitat Management and Access Validation required on all licenses.

Every time a hunter or angler buys a license, \$1 of the \$4 validation fee goes toward Open Gate, a program that encourages landowners to lease access to their property for hunting or fishing. The other \$3 from the validation fee is used for habitat improvements around the state.

Three landowners signed up for Open Gate for the 2008-2009 season, providing access for dove and quail hunting. The Department, along with the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, hope to increase participation next year and beyond.

“The Wildlife Federation is 100 percent behind this program,” said Leon Fager, a wildlife biologist recently hired by the 6,000-member federation to help recruit Open Gate participants. He has been touring the state, talking with landowners who might be interested in the program.

Here are brief descriptions of properties currently enrolled in Open Gate in southwestern New Mexico. All enrolled properties will be marked with “Open Gate” signs:

- Johnny Mounyo property: access to 160 acres of private land and 43,114 acres of public land. Private land contains two water tanks and is



### Southwest



Photo: LuAnn Tafoya

accessible during dove season and quail season. To get to the Mounyo property, drive eight miles east of San Antonio on U.S. 380. Turn right at the Fite sign, then drive 14 miles south to the Harriet sign and turn left. Drive another 12 miles to the Harriet sign and turn right. It will be three miles to the Mounyo Ranch house.

- Hurt Cattle Co. property: Three windmills with tanks and access to 2,341 acres of private and approximately 6,000 acres of public land in Unit 21B. There are several access points to the property northeast of Deming off N.M. 26. This property should provide some great bird hunting.

- Leonard Besinger property: Three water tanks and access to 4,000 acres of private land and more than 27,000 acres of public land in Unit 26. This property is approximately eight miles southwest of Hachita. Take N.M. 9 west for 2.2 miles to Little Hatchet Mountain Road. Look for the cattle guard on the south side of N.M. 9. Drive south approximately six miles to a green gate with a cattle guard. The property is open during dove and quail seasons.

Hunters are urged to respect private property when using Open Gate lands. Enrollment by landowners is strictly voluntary and their experiences with hunters will determine their decision to sign up again next year. Access is limited to walk-in, unless a landowner-approved road is listed on the property map. Please leave fences and gates as you found them and do not litter.

Landowners interested in participating in Open Gate are encouraged to contact their local Department conservation officer or the Southwest Area Office in Las Cruces at (575) 532-2100. The area will be evaluated and monetary compensation will be based on the type of access being leased and water sources available.

For more information about Open Gate properties and maps to the areas, please visit the Department website, [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us) or call the Southwest Area Office, (575) 532-2100.

*LuAnn Tafoya is the public information officer for the Department of Game and Fish Southwest Area Office in Las Cruces. She can be reached at (575) 532-2106 or [luann.tafoya@state.nm.us](mailto:luann.tafoya@state.nm.us).*



# Too close for comfort

## Aquatic aliens poised to invade New Mexico

By Reese Brand Phillips

For centuries humans have transported plants and animals around the globe, moving species from their native lands and introducing them to new areas. Many of these “alien” species have been intentional introductions, such as wheat, cattle and roses, while others are hitchhikers, stowing away on our ships and in our cargo.

Most alien species have caused no discernable harm, and many are beneficial, providing food, clothing and enjoyment for humans. Yet a small percentage of these alien species become invasive, spreading rampantly and causing great economic and ecological harm. Researchers at Cornell University in a study in 2000 estimated that 50,000 alien species in the United States caused losses totaling \$137 billion a year.

Aquatic invasive species are a particularly injurious subset of invaders because of their impacts on our hydrologic systems and aquatic habitats. They alone account for \$9 billion of losses annually.

New Mexico has not escaped these invaders, but so far the state’s arid environment and relative isolation have protected it from most of the impacts of aquatic invasive species. Consider Florida, which has 49 aquatic alien plant species, compared to New Mexico’s seven species. One single aquatic weed, hydrilla, costs Florida almost \$15 million annually to control it in ponds and waterways. Fortunately, hydrilla has not invaded New Mexico yet, but several rivers in Texas are infested with it, and many of those rivers originate in our state.

New Mexico has been invaded by several aquatic weeds and algae, and we are



Photos courtesy Michigan Sea Grant



**Zebra and quagga mussels cause billions of dollars of damage and economic losses a year by clogging water system pipes and clinging to boats and other watercraft. First discovered in the Great Lakes region, the thumbnail-sized aquatic invasive species now have spread as close as Colorado and Arizona.**

the state in the 1980s and is found in the lower Pecos River and several reservoirs on this drainage. Though not dangerous to humans, golden alga produces a toxin that kills gill-breathing animals and has recently caused the death of thousands of fish in McAllister, Bataan, Brantley, and Carlsbad Municipal reservoirs.

beginning to feel their effects.

- Eurasian water-milfoil is found in several river systems, including the Rio Grande, Rio Chama and the Gila.
- Golden alga is another aquatic invasive species found in New Mexico. It invaded

- Whirling disease is another recent invader to New Mexico. First detected in the state in 1998, it is now found in many of our rivers. This parasite infects young trout, eventually crippling them. In Montana, whirling disease has caused a 90 percent decline in trout populations in some rivers.

## You can help

Please follow these simple steps to help prevent alien mussels from invading New Mexico:

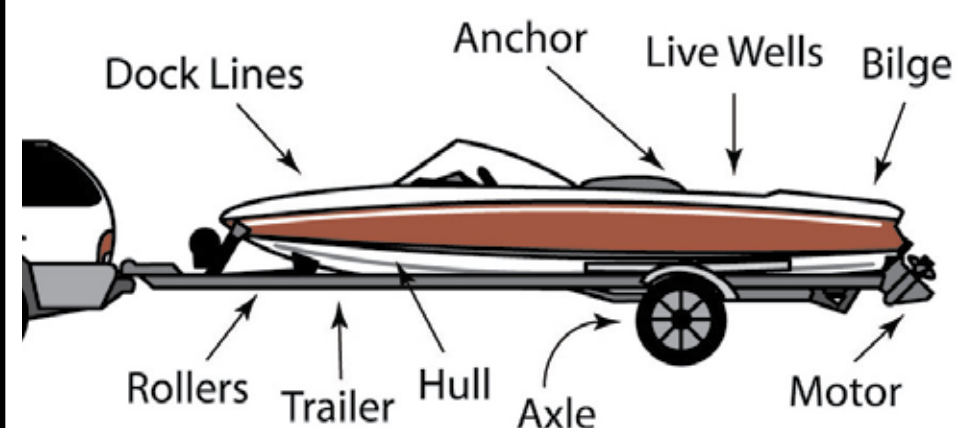
- Remove visible mud, plants, fish or other debris before transporting equipment.
- Eliminate all water from your boat and equipment before transporting it anywhere.
- Clean and dry everything that came in contact with water, including boats, trailer, equipment, clothing, waders, dogs, etc.
- Never release plants, fish or

other animals into a body of water unless they came from that same body of water.

For more information about aquatic invasive species, please contact Brian Lang with the Department of Game and Fish at (505) 476-8108 or [brian.lang@state.nm.us](mailto:brian.lang@state.nm.us) or visit these internet sites:

- [www.fws.gov/answest](http://www.fws.gov/answest)
- [www.protectyourwaters.net](http://www.protectyourwaters.net)
- [www.anstaskforce.gov/default.php](http://www.anstaskforce.gov/default.php)
- <http://invasivespecies.nbi.gov/index.html>

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# Minnows and more



## Revived channel brings new life to urban bosque

By Marti Niman

Water now flows through a winding channel beneath an arc of giant cottonwood trees at Rio Grande Nature Center State Park in the heart of Albuquerque.

Once a dry gulch, the channel is now home to waterfowl, beavers and fish – most significantly, the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow. Maligned by some, exalted by others, this tiny, unobtrusive little fish has been at the core of many a western water war and has come to symbolize much that is wrong with human manipulation of water sources in the Desert Southwest.

A collaborative effort among several state and federal agencies, the new water channel was excavated in March by the Army Corps of Engineers and runs 3,000 feet long and about 20 feet wide. Its primary purpose is to serve as nursery habitat for the silvery minnow, but it also will provide interpretive and educational opportunities at the Nature Center.

“It will help us teach how humans have changed the Rio Grande and how the damming of the river has changed its natural regime,” Park Superintendent Beth Dillingham said. “Now we’re trying to change it back again to recreate the natural habitat.”

The project was born in 2003 when staff from New Mexico State Parks, the Army Corps of Engineers, City of Albuquerque Open Space, Bureau of Reclamation and University of New Mexico discussed what could be done for the minnow, said Ondrea Hummel, senior biologist for the Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps submitted a proposal to the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program, which provided funding in late 2004. Environmental assessments, planning, project design and removal of non-native plants followed and the channel was opened this spring. The project will recreate the historic oxbow-like flows for the endangered silvery minnow spawn.

“When we opened up the channel in March and the water came rushing in, that was pretty exciting,” Hummel said.

Because the channel was denuded of vegetation following excavation, staff members from the Army Corps, New Mexico State Parks and the City of Albuquerque Open Space helped volunteers and students from Rio Grande High School and the Rio Rancho High School Environmental Society plant trees in April.

“We’re out of school today so were doing this on our own time,” William Wadsworth said. “They announced it at school and we volunteered. I’ll continue to be involved with



Photos: Marti Niman

**A 3,000-foot long, 20-foot wide channel now carries water through Rio Grande Nature Center State Park in Albuquerque to help the endangered Silvery Minnow. Students from Rio Grande High School, left, used an auger to make holes for new cottonwood trees and willows along the channel that will benefit a variety of wildlife.**

things like this for the environment.”

“We were looking for community work at either the Albuquerque BioPark or the Nature Center,” said teacher Silda Mason from Rio Grande High School. “I biked over here after work one day and the planting idea just kicked into gear.”

Students from Rio Grande High School made their volunteer day at the park a totally “green” one by borrowing bikes from the Bicycle Recycling Center to pedal over rather than take a bus.

Albuquerque Open Space provided the trees, which are native Rio Grande cottonwood, Gooding and coyote willow. The plants will provide cool shade and shelter for wildlife and help slow water evaporation from the channel.

Some wildlife attracted to the channel can become problems. Young tree shoots beckon resident beavers with their salad-like delicacy.

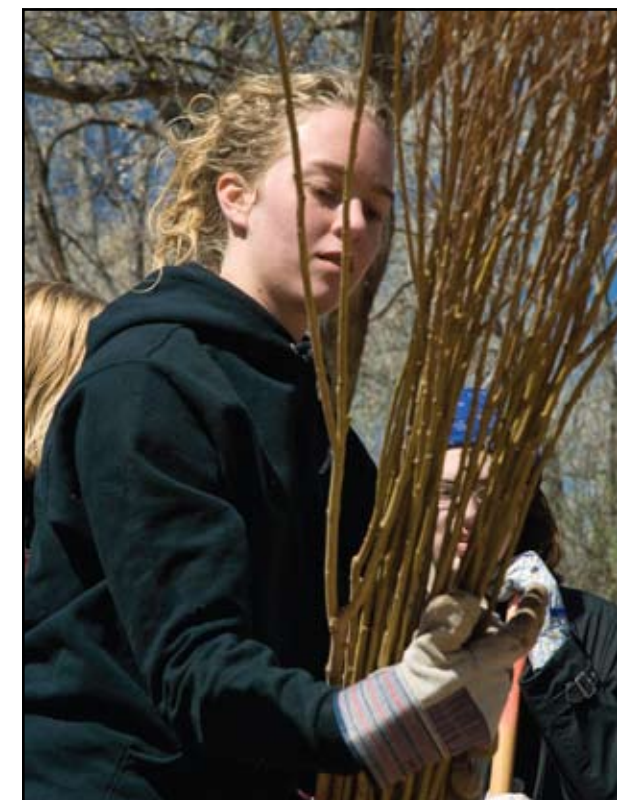


Photo: Marti Niman

**Newly planted willows will provide shade and shelter for wildlife, and slow evaporation from the new park channel.**

Open Space crews have replaced plastic wrap with chicken wire on the trunks of trees gnawed by a beaver. Some trees have fallen into the channel and are growing algae on them – providing more fish food.

The Rio Grande silvery minnow is a federal- and state-listed endangered species that once populated 3,000 miles of the Rio Grande from Colorado to Texas. Flood control and channelization projects that began in the 1940s have altered the river’s natural flow and restricted the minnow to isolated reaches of the Rio Grande. This project helps to recreate the insulated oxbows and shallow pools favorable to the reproductive success of the silvery minnow, which spawns in concert with the spring runoff.

“Silvery minnows need inundated areas to get their eggs to hatch, get the young fish feeding and out into the river,” said Dr. Michael Porter, fisheries biologist with the Army Corps of Engineers. “The first two days after hatching are a critical period for young fish, when they spend the first day or two finding food and eating before the yolk sac reserves are used up.”

The new channel replicates the natural flow of the river by flooding vegetated areas, where the water creates a lot of fish food through microbial action. Porter notes that the silvery minnow populations have increased since 2004, after the snowmelt runoff inundated point bars on islands, and increased again by 40-fold in 2005. Warm water provides more food because it breaks down vegetation into nutrients for the fish. Corps biologists will monitor the new channel twice a month from May through September, using kick nets to catch young fish and determine minnow reproduction and survival.

Located on the Central Rio Grande flyway, Rio Grande Nature Center State Park is a winter home to Canada geese, sandhill cranes, ducks and other waterfowl. For more information or to volunteer for the project, please call (505) 344-7240 or visit [www.nmparks.com](http://www.nmparks.com).

*Marti Niman is the public information officer for New Mexico State Parks. She can be reached at (505) 827-1474 or [marti.niman@state.nm.us](mailto:marti.niman@state.nm.us).*



## A man wearing a dark baseball cap and a light-colored vest over a dark shirt stands on a dirt road. He is holding a shotgun, pointing it towards the right. The background features a dramatic sunset sky with orange, yellow, and purple clouds. A line of trees and a small building are visible in the distance on the right.

# How do we measure the value of New Mexico's fish and wildlife?

For \$219.99 you, too, can dress up the den or cabin to make folks think you are a hunter.

The ad states you don't need to spend "thousands of dollars" on a hunt to "bring the spirit of the woods to your home, camp, or cabin."

## Economic impact

Those people who apply are the ones who want to gaze at a set of antlers on the wall and remember their days in the Gila National Forest, or a pack trip into the Pecos Wilderness. Those people who are willing to pay both physically and financially for their outdoor adventures and treasures also make very real contributions to New Mexico's

License revenue accounts for about \$20 million annually, and the other \$12 million come from excise taxes charged on firearms and ammunition, fishing tackle, yachts and boating fuels. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service distributes the excise taxes to the states in the form of aid to Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration.

That money comes from the approximately 249,000 anglers, 96,000 hunters and 480,000 wildlife watchers who live in or visit New Mexico. Those are the folks with a real wildlife heritage, not one made of plastic. They buy rifles, shotguns, binoculars, motorhomes, cabins, sleeping bags, gas, meals in restaurants, groceries, gum, more gas, knives, trailers, hay, boots, clothing, gloves, socks and hats. Don't forget the ammo, a box for the range and box for the hunt itself. They don't just visit sporting goods stores, they camp out there.

The Fish and Wildlife survey tells us that approximately 39 percent of New Mexico's residents participated in wildlife activities during 2006. The Fish and Wildlife Service also reports that the survey only reflects individuals who actually participated in these activities, and that many folks who consider themselves hunters, anglers and

wildlife watchers don't get to participate every year.

After you look at the dollars and cents, what does this mean to you and me? Are we better off because 14 percent of New Mexicans choose to go hunting and fishing? Of course we are.

The money they generate pays for officers to trap and relocate bears when they become regular visitors to your back yard. The money also enables the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to grow corn and other crops at waterfowl management areas up and down our river valleys to feed all those geese and cranes that spend the winter here. Those state-produced crops keep the birds spread out through the valley and reduce the potential for deadly diseases.

Several of the properties purchased for fishing access or wildlife areas are managed for camping by New Mexico State Parks, a part of the Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Department. Those include Cimarron Canyon State Park, Clayton Lake State Park, and Fenton Lake State Park. Those properties, especially Cimarron and Clayton, are very popular with visitors from other states, and therefore contribute economically to the welfare of communities such as Clayton, Eagle Nest and Angel Fire.

The Sport Fish Restoration Act was passed in 1950 and one of the first things the Department did was build dams. During the ensuing decades, countless children have grown up fishing and playing at Lake Roberts, Snow Lake, Quemado, Charette, and Hopewell Lakes. Today, water in those lakes also plays a critical role in fighting forest fires and protecting communities.

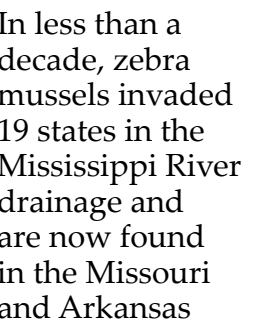
In addition to these economic contributions, fish and wildlife has vastly improved the quality of life for many New Mexicans for many decades. Making jerky from deer and elk is a time-honored tradition that lives on to this day in many families. Catching trout for dinner or breakfast is another.

For many of us, the opportunity to fish high in the mountains for trout during the summer, and chase quail in the desert grasslands in January is what it means to be a New Mexican. Those activities and opportunities are part of our core values, traditions we hope to carry on for generations to come.

So, how much is the “spirit of the woods” really worth? That depends on how much land, water and wildlife you want to see. But for most of us, it’s a lot more than \$219.99, excluding shipping and handling.

*Martin Frentzel is chief of Public Information and Outreach for the Department of Game and Fish. He can be contacted at (505) 476-8013 or [martin.frentzel@state.nm.us](mailto:martin.frentzel@state.nm.us).*

Although these invaders threaten our wildlife and waterways, potentially greater, more insidious threats, zebra and quagga mussels, are at our borders, poised to invade. Native to Eurasia, these fingernail-sized mussels were first discovered in the United States in the late 1980s in the Great Lakes region. Both likely arrived via ballast water in ships arriving from the Black Sea.



Rivers. Quagga mussels are less widespread, found primarily in the Great Lakes region. But in 2007, after a decade of efforts to contain the infestation to the Midwest and eastern United States, quagga mussels were discovered in lakes Mead, Havasu and Mojave on the lower Colorado River.

In November 2007, zebra mussels were found in Colorado's Pueblo Reservoir, less than 90 miles from the New Mexico border, and in January 2008 they were reported in central California's San Justo Reservoir.

Under natural conditions, quagga and zebra mussels colonize new areas by dispersing larvae (veligers) via the currents in rivers and lakes. But, these three new introductions into our western waters demonstrate the mussels' ability to colonize new areas by overland routes. Larvae and adults can survive for days out of the water on trailered boats. Safe haven for larvae and adults is provided by vegetation clinging on boat hulls and motors, as do live wells, bait buckets and engine cooling systems of boats.

If quagga mussels can survive the almost 1,400-mile trip from the nearest infested waters of the Mississippi River, how safe is New Mexico from an invasion from western Arizona? Zebra mussels made a similar journey from the Midwest to California and are now knocking on Raton's door.

If you are an angler, boater, farmer, environmentalist, or if you use water in any way, then letting quagga or zebra mussels into our waterways will affect you. Where present, these mussels usually occur in enormous numbers. They produce millions microscopic larvae that float freely on currents and attach to any object or substrate,

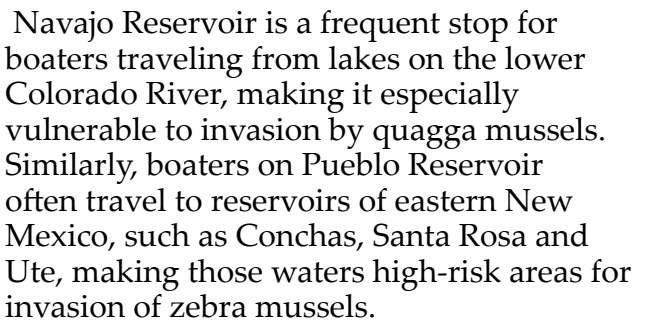


including boat hulls, buoys, pipes, even other animals such as crayfish and turtles. In one area of the Great Lakes, zebra mussels reached densities of 700,000 individuals for every square meter.

Both species impact municipalities by clogging water-supply pipes to water treatment and hydroelectric plants and industrial facilities, costing millions annually in prevention and maintenance. Boaters are affected as well, experiencing high fuel cost from increased drag on their hulls. Small mussels also can enter engine cooling systems, causing damage. A 2003 study found that both species cost \$1 billion annually in control costs in the United States.

Impacts from the invasive species are not restricted to economic costs. Quagga and zebra mussels filter the water, feeding on phytoplankton-microscopic plants. Due to their huge numbers, they remove enormous quantities of phytoplankton and other particulates, initially clearing the water. Unfortunately, this apparent benefit has significant drawbacks. The increased water clarity allows aquatic plants to proliferate, and the plants eventually die and wash ashore. Homeowners in the Midwest and Great Lakes region complain of rotting, stinking masses of dead vegetation on their shorelines.

Quagga and zebra mussels also impact native wildlife. They compete with native mussels by reducing their food supply and smother them by attaching to their shells. Fish populations may also be affected, as quagga and zebra mussels compete with bait fish such as minnows and shad for food. This in turn may impact game fish, such as bass and trout.



It is critical to keep the Rio Grande free of alien mussels. The river traverses the entire state and is the physical life blood of New Mexico. If quagga or zebra mussels invade any portion of the river, they could invade the entire drainage.

New Mexico's Department of Game and Fish and the State Parks Division are working with other agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to keep the invaders out of the state. But our enforcement agencies are limited in their ability to keep alien species out of our waters. They need your help to prevent these alien species from invading our waters and threatening our economy and natural resources.

*Reese Brand Phillips, an invasive species biologist, is a PhD candidate at the University of New Mexico Department of Biology. He can be contacted at [rbrand@unm.edu](mailto:rbrand@unm.edu).*





# Native Gila trout inspire anglers old and new

By M.H. “Dutch” Salmon

It would seem a stretch of logic that there are trout here at all.

The Gila River mountains of southwest New Mexico are isolated and surrounded by desert. How did they come to raise their own unique salmonid, the Gila trout (*Oncorhynchus gilae*)?

Well, many millennia ago the climate was cooler and the water more ample. The Gila ran all the way to the Colorado back then, within the historical range of the rainbow trout, including the west-coast mountains and their rivers that drained to the Pacific. Our Gila trout must have shared some ancestry with these rainbows as even today they will readily interbreed and produce fertile offspring.

But the climate changed. Waters receded, became warmer, and the fish that would become known as Gila trout was left isolated in the remaining cool waters of the Gila mountains. There, over many millennia, they would take on their own “look” and behavioral traits sufficient that biologists declared them a separate species.

But before the biologists, there were the anecdotal jottings of settlers who variously called these fish “speckled” or “mountain” trout. One of these was an erstwhile British officer turned frontier rancher named Captain William French.

French was a rare gem among frontiersman in that he was literate and left a very readable memoir of the times: “Recollections of a Western Ranchman.” In the 1880s he made an extended jaunt into the upper West Fork of the Gila River, where he documented two species that were already in trouble, though in the case of the trout the captain could hardly be expected to know it. His first encounter was with the rare Merriam’s elk.

To this day in southwest New Mexico there are locals who will tell you that the idea of elk in the historic Gila is a hoax. Some say the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduction of elk into the region put “exotic” big game where they were never meant to be. French remembered differently.

“The next day,” he wrote, “we went on to Elk Mountain and actually ran into the herd of elk. There were eleven head of them. From what I could see of them, they appeared to be all does or cow elk which I believe is more correct. This was the only bunch of wild elk I ever saw in New Mexico. A few years later they were all killed by prospectors and others. I never heard of any heads or antlers being preserved.

“From there we drifted over to the West Fork of the Gila where we camped for several days. It was there that we found use for our fishing tackle, for it was swarming with mountain trout.”

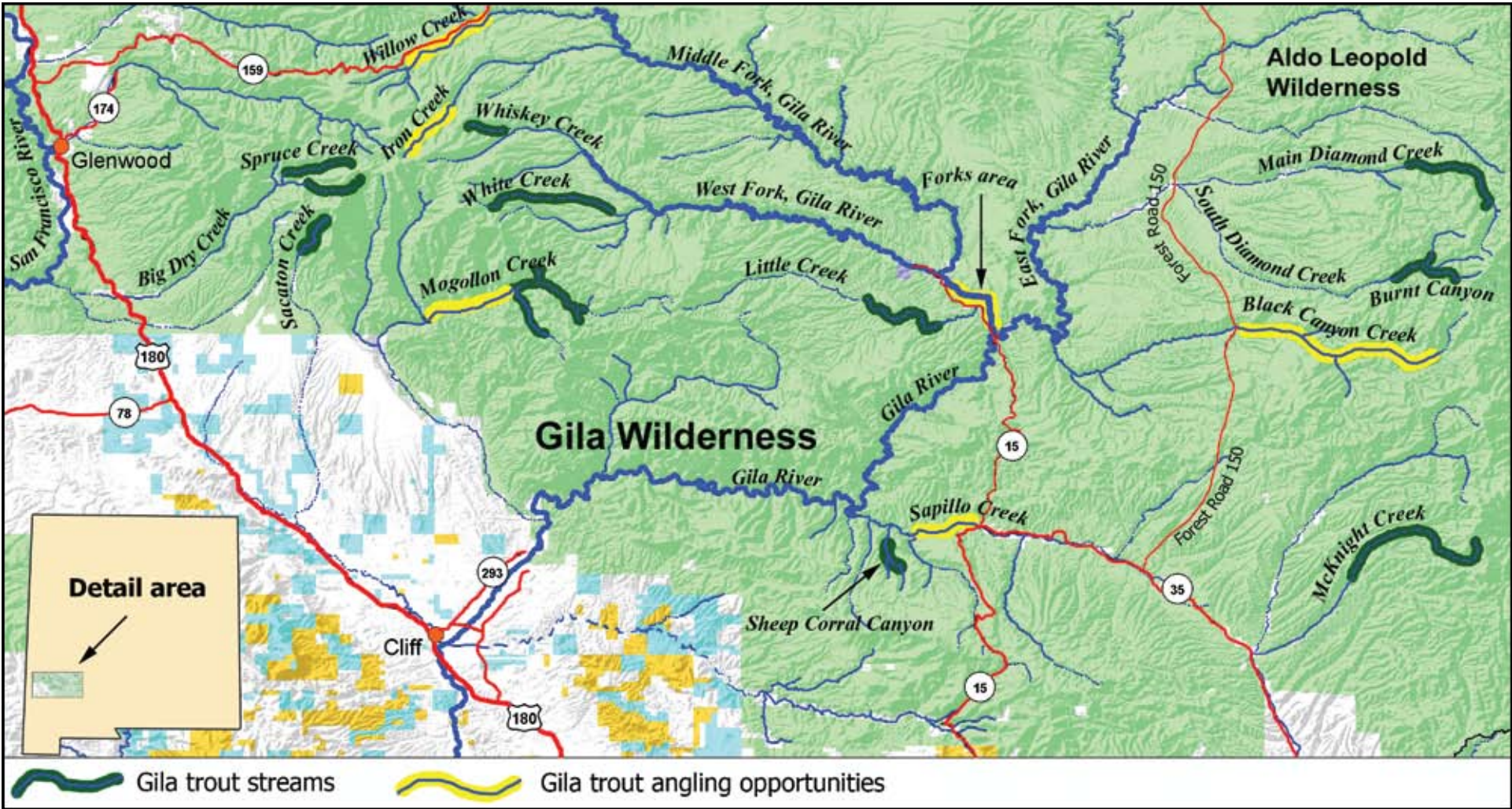
French reports that they caught their dinner with “tackle” and using grasshoppers for bait (as Hemingway would do, famously, in another story) but he and his partner, Ed Erway, soon came up with a better plan.

“The water was very low and we herded them into a pool which was several feet deep. We then blocked the entrance, so they could not get out. They were so numerous we succeeded in scooping them out with our hats. It would have been more successful if we could only have kept them in our hats till we secured them. Most of them jumped out and finally most of the rocks were so slippery we both slipped into about five feet of water and got thoroughly soaked.”

Great sport, that! French could not know that within 15 years these isolate native gems would face the beginnings of steady stockings of rainbow trout by individuals and agencies. The rainbows would crossbreed and “genetically swamp” the native species to virtual extinction. By the 1950s identifiable Gila trout were reduced to at best a half-dozen seminal streams and no more than 20 miles of water. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, with help from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Gila National Forest, began a restoration program that wasn’t always popular.



Catching a wild Gila trout requires stealth when approaching pools and cutbanks of Black Canyon Creek in the Gila National Forest of southwestern New Mexico.



Streams were closed to fishing as piscicides were used to eliminate non-native species, and some people complained about the loss of fish and angling opportunities. In the early 1990s, advancing DNA analysis revealed that Gila trout thought 100 percent pure were tainted with a few degrees of rainbow gene introgression and had to go.

Some anglers complained, including me. Ash flows from forest fires wiped out entire streams to the dismay of all. But the agencies were persistent and by 2006 some 60 miles of stream had been renovated and the species was downlisted from federally endangered to threatened. That allowed the State Game Commission to open a few streams to legal Gila trout fishing for the first time in decades.

In the summer of 2007, Greg McReynolds

and I journeyed to Black Canyon Creek to see if this “new” fish was worth all the fuss.

The day drizzled, the creek was low and clear. At the first good pool we could see the yellow-flanked trout fining beneath an undercut bank. Greg’s dry fly was ignored. Thinking them spooked, I nonetheless tossed in a beadhead nymph. As it drifted and sank a trout came casually out from cover and just as casually inhaled the fly. Once I tightened up, he went nuts. Lacking the discrimination of the cagey brown, or the leap of the rainbow, he was nonetheless the hardest fighting trout for his size (about 11 inches) I can recall, all the while flashing those yellow-bronze flanks, decorated with black speckles, in his lengthy, desperate, athletic attempt to shed the hook. In the end, I shed the hook for him. As he swam off, I felt he had vindicated his race and 50 years of species renovation conducted by fits and starts.

We only caught about six trout between us that day. They measured up to 13 inches long, but each gave meaning and substance to the fly fisher’s ultimate quest for “wild trout.” Naïve and unsophisticated, these trout all fought like freedom was in their blood and that capture was a disgrace to be avoided with every possible effort of muscle and fin.

Problems remain. More than 20 miles of the upper West Fork of the Gila have been treated multiple times to bring Gila trout range in New Mexico close to 100 stream miles. But removing all the non-native

browns is still incomplete, and even after a successful renovation of a stream, a few rainbows may slip back in by hook or by crook and compromise the 100 percent purity standard of the Gila stock.

We need about 150 miles of Gila trout stream habitat, including several Arizona streams, to achieve a delisting from “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act to return the fish to full state management. It won’t be easy, and there is no consensus among the public regarding either the methods or the goals.

Still, the Gila trout has earned some defenders now that a measure of legal fishing has been achieved. Overstocks of hatchery Gila trout are being released in The Forks area of the Gila, among other streams. If you can “swamp” a species close to oblivion, perhaps you can also “swamp” it back to prominence.

## Gila trout angling opportunities

Limited opportunities to fish for Gila trout are now available in select New Mexico streams. Some streams require a free Gila trout permit, available online at [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us) and over the counter at any Department of Game and Fish office.

Gila trout rules vary by water, so be sure to check the 2008-2009 Fishing Rules & Information Booklet for details. Streams open to Gila trout fishing include:

- **Black Canyon Creek and Mogollon Creek:** Open to fishing July 1-Oct. 31. Catch-and-release, artificial fly or lure, single barbless hook. Permit required.
- **Iron Creek:** Two Gila trout, any length. Artificial fly or lure; single barbless hook. Permit required.
- **Willow Creek and Gilita Creek:** Two Gila trout, any length. Unlimited brown trout. Any legal tackle or bait.
- **Sapillo Creek and Gila River forks area:** Occasional stockings of Gila trout when hatchery has surplus fish. Regular trout water rules: no tackle or bait restrictions, bag limit of five fish per day and no more than 10 in possession.

Starting July 1, 2008, a portion of Mogollon Creek will open to Gila trout fishing. Like Black Canyon, it will be strictly catch-and-release, artificials only, single barbless hooks, and you need to get the free Gila trout fishing permit. Check the Fishing Rules and Information Booklet for all the details.

I was certainly impressed with the Gila trout as a game fish; they were born and raised for pursuit with a No. 12 Prince nymph and about a 4-weight rod. As for herding them into a pool and scooping them out with your hat, I’d suggest you confine that pursuit of these speckled beauties to a reading of Captain French and his “Recollections!”

M.H. “Dutch” Salmon of Silver City is an accomplished outdoor writer, book author and editor, and vice-chairman of the State Game Commission.



Photos: Greg McReynolds



A stretch of Black Canyon Creek opened to catch-and-release fishing for Gila trout in 2007. Above, M.H. “Dutch” Salmon tries his luck on a rainy day in the Gila National Forest. At left, he displays his catch.