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# It's your nature



Photo: Dan Williams

Hunters and anglers provided the money to restore New Mexico's elk population from zero in the early 1900s to about 90,000 today.

## Thank hunters, anglers for wildlife recovery

*It was a close call. So close it makes you catch your breath. By 1862, 32 million Americans had hopped aboard a runaway train barreling toward a natural resources disaster — and most of them didn't even know it. While they were busy creating the richest and most powerful nation in the world, they also were laying waste to its very foundation: 4 million square miles of some of the richest fish and wildlife habitat on Earth.*



By the time the transcontinental railway system broke open the West in 1869, vast herds of 100 million bison and 40 million pronghorn antelope had vanished. An estimated 60 million beavers had been reduced to 100,000. Waterfowl populations had plummeted. Swamps had been drained, prime habitat converted to agriculture, and market hunting continued unabated. Women in America and in Europe were parading the street in hats festooned with the feathers of egrets, herons, and 40 varieties of native birds. We were plucking America bare.

**Buy a hunting license, even if you don't hunt. Buy a fishing license, not because you fish, but as an affirmation of what is worth saving in this great country.**

Nevertheless, most Americans at the time were not

parading the streets with placards demanding conservation reform from their legislatures. Rather, they were toasting their good fortune built on the wealth of their land's rich soil, their free access to the silver and gold veins, and the seemingly limitless forests hiding a treasure of wildlife. America was just too vast, too abundant a landscape to succumb to the pinprick of mere mortals — or so we believed. We couldn't have been more wrong.

It was a matter of taking too much with too little knowledge of the consequences—and far

... continued on Page 10





Photo: Dan Williams

Little girls and archery go together like bread and butter, especially when they get to use lightweight compound bows designed especially for youngsters. The archery range at this year’s New Mexico Outdoor Expo was one of the most popular hands-on educational stations.

# Outdoor Expo draws record crowd

ALBUQUERQUE – The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and 3,682 of its closest friends got together at the Department’s Outdoor Expo Aug. 17-19 at the Albuquerque Shooting Range Park. It was a record crowd for the 10th annual event.

The Expo started Friday, Aug. 17, with 39 students from Albuquerque Public Schools being taken on a tour of the venues. The tour was part of a National Guard outreach program. The Expo venues included firing shotguns, .22-caliber pistols, .22-caliber rifles, muzzleloaders, archery, casting, and fishing for catfish.

The event also introduced participants to the outdoor skills of kayaking, rock climbing and use of the atlatl -- a hunting tool used in New Mexico during prehistoric times.

The Department stressed conservation messages throughout the event, illustrating how money generated by hunting, fishing and trapping license fees was used to re-establish elk, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, bears, cougars and other wildlife in the state. Many populations were depleted before New Mexico became a state in 1912.

Ninety-seven volunteers and 54

Department staff members worked to make the event a success. The Albuquerque Fire Department and the Community Emergency Response Team were available to assist with public or staff emergencies, although there were no injuries or accidents.

“I am very proud of the effort my staff and volunteers put forth to make this event successful,” said Director Jim Lane. “The hunters, trappers and anglers of New Mexico should be proud of the role they play in funding wildlife conservation for all the citizens of this state. The users pay, and everyone benefits.”

# Department expands CWD control areas

SANTA FE – Chronic wasting disease in deer and elk in southern New Mexico has prompted the Department of Game and Fish to expand areas where hunters must observe special rules pertaining to the handling and transportation of animal carcasses.

The Department has designated the entire Game Management Units 34, 28 and 19 as Chronic Wasting Disease Control Areas. Previously, only portions of some units were designated as control areas.

Department rules allows hunters who take a deer or elk within a control area to transport only certain portions of the carcass outside the boundaries of the Game Management Unit from which it was taken. Those portions include:

- Meat that is cut and wrapped, either commercially or privately.
- Quarters or other portions of meat

with no part of the spinal column or head attached.

- Meat that has been boned out.
- Hides with no heads attached.
- Clean skull plates with antlers attached. Clean is defined as having been immersed in a bath of at least one part chlorine bleach and two parts water, with no meat or tissue attached.
- Antlers, with or without velvet, attached to skull plate with no meat or tissue attached.
- Upper canine teeth, also known as “buglers,” whistlers,” or “ivories.”
- Finished taxidermied heads.

Chronic wasting disease is a fatal neurological disease found in deer, elk and moose. It belongs to a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies or prion diseases. The disease attacks the brains of infected deer, elk and moose, causing the animals to become emaciated, display abnormal

behavior and incoordination, and eventually die.

To date, ongoing investigations by state and federal public health officials have shown no causal relationship between CWD and human health problems.

Hunters can assist the Department in its chronic wasting disease research and tracking efforts by submitting deer or elk heads for testing within 48 hours of harvest at a field-testing station within a control area. Hunters who harvest deer or elk outside a control area can submit heads for testing at any Department office. Participating hunters will be entered into a special drawing for transferrable elk or oryx licenses.

For more information about chronic wasting disease, the drawing, or a field-testing station location, please call the Department at (505) 476-8080.



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Please visit our website,  
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Photo courtesy of Marcos Mata

Marcos Mata shows off his state-record, 50.5-inch, 38-pound, 2-ounce tiger muskie.

# Bluewater churning out state-record tiger muskies

BLUEWATER LAKE – New Mexico’s big-fish story of the year just keeps getting bigger.

This time, Marcos Mata of Albuquerque owns the bragging rights with a 50.5-inch, 38-pound, 2-ounce tiger muskie, the latest in a string of state-record fish caught at Bluewater Lake. Mata’s monster muskie topped the previous state record by more than six pounds. It is the fourth time the state record has changed hands in the past year and a half.

Mata caught the record fish July 23 on a two-inch Silver Minnow lure. Previous state record muskies included a 31-pound, 14-ounce fish caught by Justin Easley of Edgewood; an 18-pound, .05-ounce muskie caught by Steve Roen of Truth or Consequences; and a 17-pound, 8-ounce muskie caught by Anastasia Alfaro of Albuquerque.

New Mexico fishing regulations allow anglers to keep one tiger muskie

at least 40 inches long. Anglers are urged to handle all muskies with care, especially this time of year when water temperatures are high and the fish can become stressed when caught. Releasing fish quickly after they are hooked and keeping them in the water at all times will greatly increase their odds of survival.

The Department of Game and Fish began stocking tiger muskie fry and fingerlings in Bluewater and Quemado lakes in 2003, in hopes the nonbreeding, aggressive predators would help control growing populations of goldfish and white suckers. Since then, almost 267,000 muskies have been stocked in Bluewater Lake and more than 120,000 have been stocked in Quemado Lake.

Anglers who catch a fish they believe is worthy of the record books can find record applications and more information on the Department website, [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us).

# Department stresses safety for OHV riders of all ages

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish wants to remind riders to be safe when riding. Safety is the primary goal of the state’s off-highway vehicle (OHV) laws.

Safety equipment is mandatory for OHV riders younger than 18, and it is recommended for all riders.

“No matter your OHV skill level, slow down and enjoy the view when venturing out into new terrain,” said Desi Ortiz, OHV law enforcement coordinator for the Department of Game and Fish. “Speeding, being unaware of your surroundings, and lacking proper safety equipment are major factors in many OHV accidents and deaths.”

## OHV riders younger than 18 must:

- Wear a helmet and eye protection.
- Have a safety training permit and carry it with them. Safety training permits are available to students who pass one of the OHV training courses available at [b4uride.com](http://b4uride.com).

- Have adult supervision while riding if they do not have a driver’s license.
- Never carry passengers.
- Register their OHV with the New Mexico Motor Vehicle Division or have a nonresident permit.

## Riders of all ages must:

- Never ride on a paved road. It is illegal to drive an OHV on paved surfaces, regardless of registration.
- Register their OHV with the New Mexico Motor Vehicle Division or have a nonresident permit.
- Have a U.S. Forest Service-approved spark arrester and an engine that produces fewer than 96 decibels.
- Never ride on private property without permission.

If you are unfamiliar with New Mexico’s OHV laws, please spend a few moments on the Department’s websites, [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us) or [www.b4uride.com](http://www.b4uride.com); or call the New Mexico Off-Highway Vehicle Program at (505) 321-0858.

## Get involved

Many organizations in New Mexico are dedicated to wildlife conservation, habitat improvement and wildlife-related recreation. Whether you are interested in birding, wildlife watching, hunting, fishing or trapping, chances are there is an outfit you’ll deem worth supporting. Here are some of them:

**New Mexico Quail, Inc.:** A conservation organization of more than 140 members from southwestern New Mexico, with goals to improve wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities primarily for upland birds. John Moen, (575) 644-3936.

**Ducks Unlimited, New Mexico:** More than 1,500 members support the organization’s mission to restore and manage wetlands and habitats for North American waterfowl. Cindy Wolfe, [cjwolfe@gilanet.com](mailto:cjwolfe@gilanet.com), (575) 854-3365.

**New Mexico Chapter, Wild Sheep Foundation:** The organization’s goal is “putting more sheep on the mountain.” Members work with the Department of Game and Fish to increase populations of desert and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in New Mexico. Lanny Rominger, (505) 821-5064.

**New Mexico Trout:** Dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of trout fishing in New Mexico’s waters through protection and restoration of riparian habitats and through educating the public about trout fishing and the ecological and social value of trout habitats. [newmexicotrout@gmail.com](mailto:newmexicotrout@gmail.com), [www.newmexicotrout.org](http://www.newmexicotrout.org).

**The Nature Conservancy:** A national organization dedicated to the preservation of plants, animals and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. In New Mexico, it has worked to preserve 1.4 million acres of landscapes and waterways. [www.nature.org/newmexico](http://www.nature.org/newmexico).

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

**Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation:** A large national organization dedicated to ensuring the future of elk, other wildlife and their habitat. The organization actively supports efforts to protect and enhance elk country, conservation education and to restore elk herds. New Mexico information: (505) 892-1250, [www.rmef.org](http://www.rmef.org).

**Sportsmen for Fish & Wildlife:** A conservation organization organized to promote the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat, wildlife management programs and America’s family heritage of hunting and fishing. (505) 486-4921.

**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. (505) 470-4878, [www.newmexicotu.org](http://www.newmexicotu.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>.

**New Mexico Muskies, Inc.:** A group of anglers interested in fishing for tiger muskies in Bluewater and Quemado lakes formed this organization in 2008 as a chapter of Muskies, Inc. Information: Matt Pelletier, (505) 264-2999, [www.newmexicomuskiesinc.org](http://www.newmexicomuskiesinc.org).

**Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge:** An organization of about 1,000 members supporting the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge and promoting appreciation and conservation of wildlife and habitat through environmental education. (575) 878-2320, [www.friendsofthebosque.org](http://www.friendsofthebosque.org).

**Albuquerque Wildlife Federation:** A volunteer organization focused on New Mexico’s wildlife and habitat resources. It offers monthly meetings with guest speakers, in-the-field habitat restoration projects and a monthly newsletter. (505) 281-4609, <http://abq.nmwildlife.org>.

**Southwest Environmental Center:** Works to reverse the accelerating loss of species worldwide by protecting and restoring native wildlife and their habitats in the Southwestern borderlands, through grassroots advocacy, public education and on-the-ground restoration projects. (575) 522-5552, [www.wildmesquite.org](http://www.wildmesquite.org).

**Southwest Consolidated Sportsmen:** An organization representing at least 15 sporting and conservation groups of diverse interests. The group’s objectives are to “disseminate wildlife and habitat information, participate in habitat projects, and review proposals involving wildlife habitat.” (575) 526-5056.

**New Mexico Wild Turkey Federation:** Supports scientific wildlife management on public, private and corporate lands as well as wild turkey hunting as a traditional North American sport. (505) 869-3837, [www.nwtf.org](http://www.nwtf.org).

**Safari Club International:** Promotes wildlife conservation worldwide while protecting the hunting heritage and supporting many education and humanitarian projects. Southern New Mexico Chapter: LTC R.A. “Pancho” Maples, [pancho1@plateautel.net](mailto:pancho1@plateautel.net). Northern New Mexico Chapter: Brian Payne, [b\\_payne10@msn.com](mailto:b_payne10@msn.com).

**Southeast New Mexico Wildlife, Inc.:** A conservation organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing wildlife habitat, especially quail habitat, in southeastern New Mexico. (575) 393-2895.

**New Mexico Trappers Association:** Promotes and protects trapping and wild furbearers native to New Mexico. Works with agencies and groups to advance scientifically based management protocols, and educates trappers and the public about ethical trapping equipment and practices. (505) 897-0719, [www.newmexicotrappers.com](http://www.newmexicotrappers.com).

# Burns could be hunting hot spots as deer, elk seek out new growth

By Ross Morgan

Every year we see several fires in our forests, but they haven't been quite as intense as the past two years. Fire is a very important management tool when

it comes to the management of wildlife habitats and the ecosystem as a whole. However, fires such as the Las Conchas Fire in the Jemez Mountains also can damage habitat by causing erosion problems.



Photo: Blake Swanson

A mule deer munches on aspen sprouts in an area burned by the Las Conchas Fire in the Jemez Mountains.

Last year's Las Conchas fire burned more than 155,000 acres, but that doesn't mean the whole area was reduced to a wasteland. In fact, as soon as the fire was contained the Burned Area Emergency Response team was reseeding about 5,200 acres with a mixture of grasses to help stabilize the soil.

Hunters may think the reseeded areas are the best places to scout and hunt, but that's not always the case. Although these reseeded areas will hold wildlife once they are re-established, the areas where the fire moved through a little slower and cooler will be more desirable areas to hunt, as they tend to support more deer and elk. This is mainly due to the quicker recovery time for grasses and forbs because the fire didn't burn hot enough to make the ground sterile.

One species of tree will provide good forage for deer and elk, even though deer are mainly browsers and elk grazers. Following a timber harvest or fire, deer and elk will gather to feed on the new shoots of quaking aspen growing along the root system of a parent tree.

Hunters in fire areas need to pay close attention to burned trees and ground stability. Trees can fall with a breath of wind, sometimes without warning. Fires also can create unseen cavities in



Ross Morgan

the ground by burning root systems. A hunter's or firefighter's weight can be all it takes to make the ground collapse underneath them.

If you were lucky enough to draw an elk or deer license in the Jemez Mountains or another part of the state where a fire might have moved through, don't be discouraged. Use the burn areas as a starting point when you head out on a scouting or hunting trip. Just because an area was burned doesn't mean the deer and elk left the area. Even if they left during the fire, they most likely returned once the fire was gone. Those areas may even attract more wildlife seeking out the new plants as the forest regenerates.

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

# Summer rain helps southwestern deer, elk

By Richard McDonald

Fall is in the air, and hunting season is under way for some New Mexico hunters. Others are beginning to gather their gear and plan their quest for a deer, elk, turkey or bear.

The hunting forecast looks very good in southwestern New Mexico this year. The region experienced some good winter moisture along with summer rains that resulted in plenty of food for wildlife. Here's some advice from Department of Game and Fish experts:

## Elk

Magdalena District Officer Storm Usery says Unit 13 elk hunters should focus on the northwest portion of the unit in the BLM country that borders the reservation. Hunters also may find good hunting in the Cibola National Forest, focusing either in the Datil, Gallinas, or Bear Mountains north of Magdalena.

Antler growth is back to Gila standards this year, and recent fires have

concentrated elk in some areas. Look at the fringes of the burns for elk feeding on the new growth. Don't forget to look at scrapes, rubs, and wallows.

In unit 17, hunters should look for bulls in the high country with tougher terrain. Usery suggests the Whittington and Apache Kid wilderness areas.

## Deer

Unit 13 deer hunters should get away from roads and look to water sources for pockets of deer. Still hunting and glassing can be productive in the unit.

Deer hunters in the Gila should focus on burn fringes and low-lying areas with good cover and browse. Look for heavily used trails leading to water sources and mountain mahogany and oak. Good areas include Turkey Creek, Indian Creek, Cherry Creek, Lookout Mountain, Little Walnut and Spring Canyon.

Unit 17 deer hunters should look to the Magdalena Mountains and areas including Jordan Canyon, Garcia Canyon, Mill Canyon and Hardy Ridge. Hunters also can find good concentrations of deer on the south end of the San Mateo Mountains, Springtime Canyon, Vicks Peak, Whitetail Canyon, Luna Park, San Mateo, and Pine and Post Canyons.

Unit 20 has some good deer habitat including rolling sand hills, mesquite covered draws, and let's not forget about the Caballo Mountains. Hunters should focus on brushy draws and fingers coming off of the Caballos. Hunters should consider working large pockets of mesquite adjacent to water sources in the flat areas.

Unit 21 had good winter moisture along with early summer rains. Antler growth and body size should be good. Hunters should focus on Tierra Blanca Canyon

and Forest Road 157 from the forest boundary down toward Hermosa. Try still hunting as pressure increases in this unit.

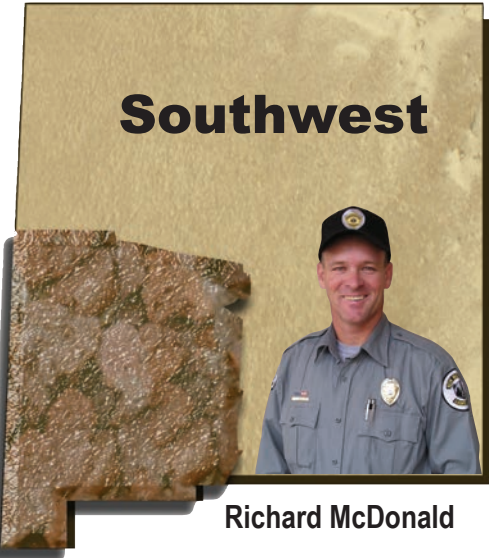
## Bear

Bear hunters should concentrate on water tanks or canyon bottoms with bear sign close by. Look for rich stands of juniper berries and areas with good acorn crops. Hunters using hounds tend to be effective for large bears. Spot and stalk hunting, along with sitting dirt tanks can also prove to be beneficial.

## Turkey

Remember fall turkey season has changed to Nov. 1-30 to provide more hunters an opportunity to harvest a Thanksgiving turkey. The bag limit is any one turkey. If you hunted during the September 1-30 bow-only season and were unsuccessful, you can still hunt in November with any legal sporting arm.

Richard McDonald is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Southwest Area. He can be reached in Las Cruces at (575) 532-2100 or richard.mcdonald@state.nm.us.



Richard McDonald



Photo: Dan Williams

Mule deer in southwestern New Mexico are looking healthy this year thanks to good winter and summer moisture.



# NE hunting: spotty as the weather

By Clint Henson

Because New Mexico wildlife relies so greatly on precipitation and available food sources, this year we can expect the wildlife to be as scattered as the rain storms. With New Mexico and most of the United States struggling with continued drought, most areas have had below normal rainfall amounts. However, there are a few areas that have received near normal moisture.

The north central Sangre de Cristo Mountains have had many afternoon thunderstorms and after a short fire restriction period, the Carson National Forest returned to “no ban” conditions. Portions of the northeast plains have had some spotty rain activity and the occasional green patches are apparent as you drive from Raton to Clayton.

Antelope fawns are running with the herds and the recent antelope hunters had good success during the late-August season. Horn size did not seem to be affected by the dry conditions.

New Mexico Game and Fish biologists have been studying elk fawn recruitment in the Valle Vidal for the past couple years and have found that bears have played a larger role in their decline than the weather. Elk hunting forecasts in the north central Sangre de Cristo Mountains are looking good for the fall. Hunters should expect to find herds concentrated around water sources.

Bear hunting quotas in the northeast zones are filling quickly this year and most bears look in fair to good condition when tagged by conservation officers. Statewide mast crops are very good and should provide plenty of food for bears looking to put on lots of weight before denning this winter.

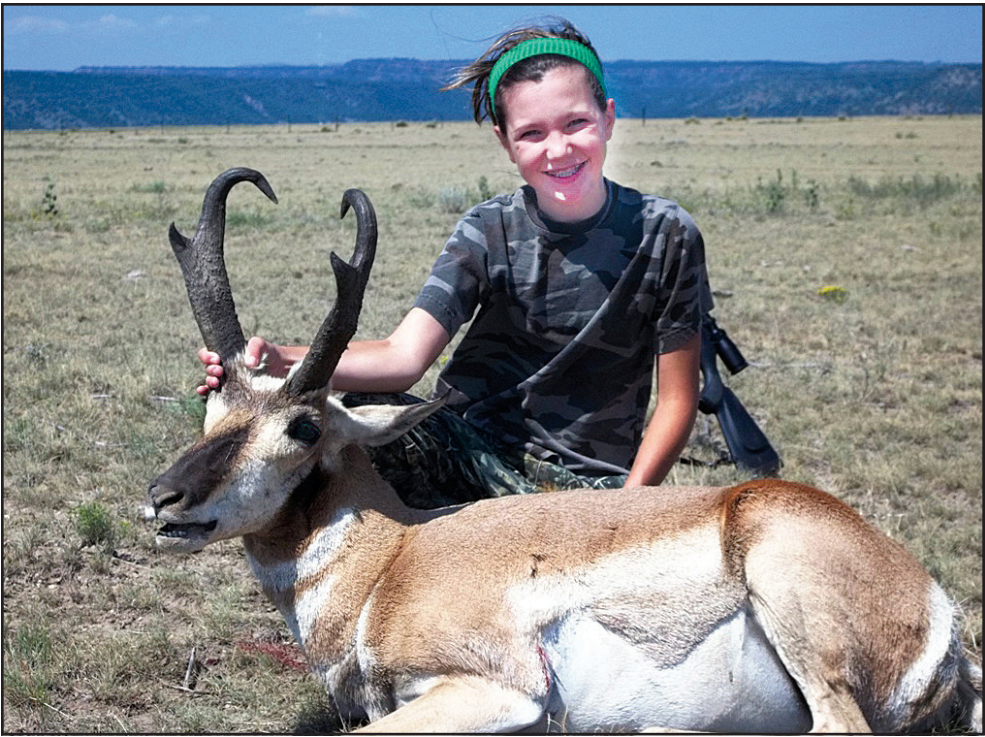


Photo: John Weisdorfer

Jaidyn Swartz-Weisdorfer is all smiles with her nice 2012 pronghorn.

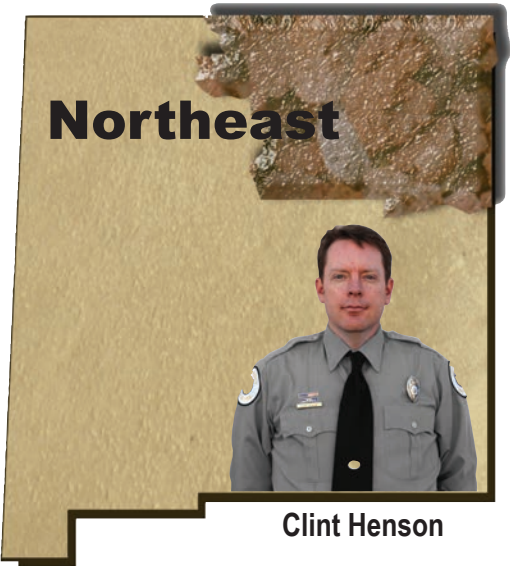
Ryan Walker, northeast area game manager, says, “Overall, wildlife in northeastern New Mexico have been more prolific and are in better body condition this year than last. Some winter and spring moisture, combined with earlier warm temperatures, resulted in early green-up in many areas that provided favorable conditions for producing offspring. Although the summer months have been dry in most areas, we have seen good fat reserves in harvested animals.”

While most terrestrial wildlife in northeast New Mexico seem to be weathering the drought, some popular fishing spots are seeing significant reductions in water levels. After several years of low rainfall, many lakes cannot

keep up with evaporation and are continuing to drop.

“Almost every lake and pond in the region is low, some worse than others, such as the Shuree Ponds and the Maxwell Lakes”, explains Eric Frey, northeast area fisheries biologist. “We could not stock trout in Shuree Ponds throughout the summer due to low levels and warm water temperatures. Even Eagle Nest Lake, which is known for its cool, clean water, was at the threshold for most of the summer.”

Overall, hunters in northeast New Mexico should have good conditions this fall. But please continue to be careful with fires and be safe! Review the Big Game Rules and Information Booklet. A few things



have changed from last year, such as the change to Unit 51, which is now split into Unit 51A and 51B. Also, the legal shooting hours have been extended to one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

Please review the tagging requirements on page 10. The best way to tag your game is to put it into a plastic sandwich bag and then securely tape it to the animal. It is much easier for an officer to check the tag if it is in a plastic bag.

If you use an off-highway vehicle for hunting on public land, make sure it is properly registered and you are riding it on roads that allow those vehicles.

If you have any questions about an upcoming hunt, please call a New Mexico Game and Fish office or contact your local conservation officer. If you see a violation in the field, write down as much information as possible, such as a license plate on a vehicle, personal descriptions and call Operation Game Thief at 1-800-432-GAME (4263).

Clint Henson is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Northeast Area. He can be contacted at (575) 445-2311 or [clint.henson@state.nm.us](mailto:clint.henson@state.nm.us).

# Safari Club helps bring water to wildlife

By Mark Madsen

The Southern New Mexico chapter of Safari Club International (SCI) approached the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish several months ago with a proposal to provide water to benefit wildlife in southern New Mexico. One of the criteria was that hunters would be able to access and hunt around any watering units funded by the chapter. After many discussions, it was determined that building new and repairing existing watering units on the Department’s prairie chicken areas would accomplish both goals.

In 1940, the Department bought the 1,280 acre North Bluit property near Milnesand with the intent of establishing prairie chicken wildlife management areas. The Department continued purchasing property over the years and now owns more than 20,000 acres of land scattered throughout Lea, Roosevelt, and Chaves counties in southeastern New Mexico. Those properties have been designated prairie chicken management areas.

The main reason for establishing the areas was to allow sportsmen and women the opportunity to observe prairie chickens during their spring mating season when the males dance and “boom” trying to attract hens. The areas also provide refuges for prairie chickens to raise their young. Historically, the areas offered hunters opportunities to hunt prairie chickens in the fall. Unfortunately, because of declining numbers, hunting for prairie chickens is no longer allowed.

Prairie chicken habitat consists of loose



Photo: Mark Madsen

Water catchment basins bought by the Southern New Mexico Chapter of Safari Club International will benefit lesser prairie chickens and all other wildlife that use the Department of Game and Fish Prairie Chicken Areas in southeastern New Mexico.

sand and shinnery oak found primarily in the plains of southeastern New Mexico. Prairie chickens also like areas of mixed shinnery oak and tall grasses. Given the lack of perennial water in southeastern New Mexico, the Department constructed numerous watering units on the prairie chicken areas. Over time, many of those water improvements have become unusable, some beyond repair.

Department personnel gathered

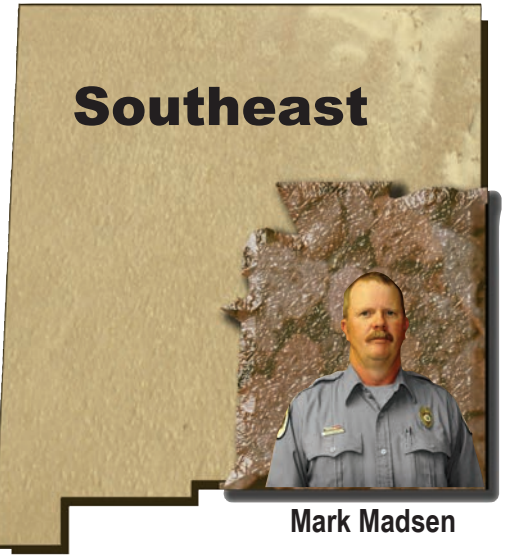
information about watering units on the areas and then prioritized the need for new watering units or necessary repairs to existing units. It was determined that five chicken areas and the associated wildlife would benefit most by installing new watering units. SCI donated \$26,000 for materials to construct four new rainwater catchments and install new storage tanks. The materials included pipe, metal paneling and new fiberglass drinker tubs. The

Department provided the personnel and labor to construct the catchments.

Once installed, the new wildlife drinker storage tanks will provide water y for prairie chickens along with mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, javelina, quail, dove, song birds and many other species of wildlife.

The Southern New Mexico Chapter of Safari Club International is a huge supporter of wildlife conservation in New Mexico and has partnered with the Department on numerous wildlife projects throughout the state.

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



# Snag on for salmon!

## Anglers hustle to northern lakes for fall bounty

By Karl Moffatt

When the temperatures begin to dip and the snow threatens to fly, many New Mexico anglers know it's getting to be salmon-snagging time.

"I can't think of a better way to spend a fall day than down on the lake, snagging salmon," says Richard Hansen, coldwater fisheries biologist for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

The special snagging season allows anglers to harvest a bounty of the delicious, colorful fish to fill their freezers for the upcoming year.

"And it's a blast," says Joe Carrillo, 36, of Chama who enjoys making a "midnight run" out to Heron Lake on opening night so he can get a jump on the fishing.

"There's usually a bunch of us out here lined up shoulder to shoulder, combat style," he says. "It's a great time."

Carrillo, who works for the state Forestry Division in his hometown of Chama, says it's a tradition he enjoys every year.

But salmon snagging isn't for the faint of heart.

There's little finesse required, just a stout line mounted on a hefty rod and a bunch of heavily weighted treble hooks. Then the angler has to find where the salmon are running, but that's usually pretty easy. The crowd of other anglers is a good indication.

The angler then heaves his or her hook into the water and repeatedly rips and reels in an attempt to snag a fish from the school. Unlike a fish caught in the mouth, salmon snagged in the body feel much heavier. They are difficult to reel in and can give an angler a good workout.

Snagging is an effective method for harvesting a great deal of the fish that are good eating if caught early in the snagging season when their flesh is firmer. Many fillet the salmon and then cook them in a smoker, while others prefer to can the meat for later use in dishes such as fried salmon cakes.

New Mexico's salmon are stocked, landlocked, sockeye salmon that upon reaching sexual maturity, usually at the age of about 4 years old, will mass in schools during the fall in a futile effort to spawn. Because salmon typically need a river and other proper conditions under which to reproduce, these spawning fish will not enjoy much success in New Mexico's lakes.

Then they'll begin to die.

That's why the department created a special snagging season to allow anglers to catch and



keep up to 12 salmon a day. A fishing license is still required and any other species of fish inadvertently snagged must be returned to the water.

The season began Oct. 1 at Navajo, El Vado, Abiquiu and Eagle Nest lakes and lasts through Dec. 31. At Heron Lake, where the Department collects milt and eggs from the salmon to send to hatcheries, the season is Nov. 9-Dec. 31.

Many anglers like to head over to Eagle Nest where the snagging starts earlier due to the cooler temps found in the high country, says Sue Finley of Eagle Nest Marina. Anglers like to congregate on the south side of the lake at the boat ramp and along the shoreline near the new campground and visitor center at Eagle Nest Lake State park, says Marshall Garcia, superintendent and 30-year veteran of the state agency.

Anglers can camp at the state park until Dec. 1 at any one of the park's 19 sites featuring shelters, picnic tables and campfire rings. There are no utilities available other than a communal water spigot and outhouse.

After snagging their limit of salmon for the day, anglers at Eagle Nest Lake will find plenty of other fishing to keep them entertained, says Mark Stewart of Dos Amigos Anglers in downtown Eagle's Nest. Big trout are known to stalk spawning salmon schools and feed off the eggs that float about, he says.

One of the traditional uses of salmon during the spawning season is to collect their eggs to use in "roe sacks" for trout bait, Stewart says. Anglers will bundle some eggs and a small marshmallow for flotation inside a small square of old pantyhose. Wrapped around a treble hook, the home-made bait is deadly to trout, he says.

The same method can also be used to snare pike, Stewart says.

Steve Chase of Laguna shows off a colorful male kokanee salmon that he harvested during last year's snagging season at Navajo Lake. Below, anglers line up along the shoreline at daybreak to get first shot at the spawning kokanee at Heron Lake. This year's snagging season at Navajo Lake will run from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31. At Heron Lake, snagging season is Nov. 9 through Dec. 31.

Photos: Above, Karl Moffatt; below, Department file.



## Know the rules

Fishing rules and bag limits change for anglers fishing for kokanee salmon during the fall spawning season. The landlocked fish don't feed and they die soon after their futile spawning attempts in New Mexico's lakes. The different rules allow anglers to harvest and enjoy the fish before they go to waste.

### Snagging seasons:

- Oct. 1 through Dec. 31 at Navajo, El Vado, Eagle Nest and Abiquiu lakes, the Chama River from El Vado Lake to the west boundary of the Rio Chama Wildlife Area, and the Pine River feeding Navajo Lake.
- Nov. 9 through Dec. 31 at Heron Lake and Willow Creek. Heron Lake and Willow Creek are closed to salmon snagging from Oct. 1 through Nov. 8.

**Snagging season bag limits:** 12 salmon a day, 24 in possession. Other species of fish caught by snagging must be returned to the water immediately.

**Regular season bag limits:** 5 salmon a day, 10 in possession.

Notoriously predatory pike have been illegally stocked into Eagle Nest Lake and now their population has grown at an alarming rate. Some pike are being found in the 30-inch range.

The Department of Game and Fish has responded by lifting the bag limit on pike and requiring anglers to keep any and all pike they catch from the lake. The department wants to eliminate as many of the predatory fish as possible to limit the damage they are inflicting on the popular trout and salmon fishery.

Stewart says bagging a pike would not only be a great catch but also be a good way to help the lake.

For anglers like Carrillo, the salmon-snagging season at Heron Lake doesn't start until the second Friday of November. That's to give department personnel time to trap and milk spawning salmon of their eggs and milt.



Photo: Karl Moffatt

**Hundreds of mature kokanee salmon swim in a trap used by the Department of Game and Fish to collect eggs and milt to be sent to a hatchery. The department stocked approximately 1.5 million salmon in New Mexico lakes this year.**

The collected eggs are fertilized, sorted and then reared at the department's nearby Los Ojos Fish Hatchery so they can be used to restock the state's deep-water lakes with the popular sport fish.

The state has been stocking salmon since 1963, with its first planting at Navajo Dam.

Today, anglers can enjoy salmon snagging in just shorts and a T-shirt due to the mild fall weather found at the lake in northwestern New Mexico.

New Mexico's salmon stocking program today is entirely dependent upon the annual salmon milking operation at Heron Dam, says Hansen, the department's salmon stocking program coordinator.

Hansen is a 16-year veteran of the department who holds a bachelor's degree in wildlife science from New Mexico State University and master's degree in wildlife management from South Dakota State University. He says the salmon stocking program continues to explore options in an effort to increase efficiency of the operation.

Most recently, the department adopted the use of a floating trap that can be anchored in around 10 feet of water about 100 feet offshore. The trap uses a system of nets to corral schools of spawning salmon.

Once salmon are in the trap, department personnel can easily do their work from atop the floating rig, where they squeeze eggs from the females and add sperm milked from the males before shipping the eggs to the hatchery.

At the Los Ojos Hatchery in Parkview, the eggs are disinfected, sorted and placed in stacks of trays fed by a constant flow of cold water. In time, they will hatch into fry and then fingerlings that can be stocked in lakes.

In 2011 the department collected an estimated 4.6 million eggs for the hatchery, which produced about 1.5 million stockable salmon, said Peter Thompson, the department's new manager at the hatchery. Thompson, who hails from the state of Maine and has extensive experience in the commercial fish farming industry, says he hopes

to improve the program's efficiency, productivity and quality while he's with the department.

Commercial fishing guide Don Wolfley of Heron Lake Guide Services says he can't complain about the department's efforts. He says the department has done a good job of keeping Heron Lake well-stocked and fishing for the elusive and tasty salmon remains very popular among anglers.

Wolfley says he stays busy all summer showing anglers how to fish for salmon in Heron Lake's deep waters, where special equipment such as downriggers and trolling rods and lures are used to catch them.

*Karl Moffatt is a longtime New Mexico journalist and avid outdoorsman whose many stories and photos can be found at [www.outdoorsnewmexico.com](http://www.outdoorsnewmexico.com).*



Photo: Karl Moffatt

**Shaun Green, fisheries biologist with the Department of Game and Fish, collects eggs from a female kokanee salmon.**

Large nets suspended over salt blocks are used to capture Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep so they can be moved to other ranges. This past August, the Department of Game and Fish trapped 31 bighorns near Wheeler Peak and moved them to the Manzano Mountains.

Photo: Ryan Walker



# Rocky Mountain rebound

## August transplants reflect successful bighorn recovery

By Clint Henson

In August 2012, the New Mexico Game and Fish trapped and transplanted 31 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep from near Wheeler Peak to the Manzano Mountains south of Albuquerque. The trap continued a long conservation tradition to create a stable, widespread bighorn sheep population in New Mexico's rugged mountain ranges.

For three days, a crew of biologists, officers and a veterinarian, led by the bighorn sheep biologists Eric Rominger and Elise Goldstein, made the pre-dawn climb to the trap site at an elevation of well over 12,000 feet. A huge net tent stretched above the rocky ground with a little salt under it -- irresistible to the bighorns.

The sheep come under the trap with little fear. Bighorns have very few predators at that elevation and they often are comfortable enough to search a hiker's backpack and steal lunch.

The crew sets up about 50 yards from the trap and prepares their gear: hobbles and blindfolds for the sheep, knee pads for themselves. There are many tense moments waiting for Rominger to pull the trap release. How many sheep will come under the trap? Will the trap work properly? Will the weather hold out so the helicopter can safely pick up the sheep?

### In the net

Finally, with quick pull of the rope, the net falls. This next two minutes is referred to by the trappers as "bighorn popcorn." The sheep desperately try to free themselves from the netting by jumping and running. The crew sprints 50 yards to reach the sheep and begin controlling them and putting on blindfolds. Any exertion at 12,000 feet is immediately apparent, but it becomes overwhelming after a dead run and a two-minute wrestling match with a very upset bighorn sheep.

Within seconds of putting on a blindfold, the sheep relax. It will take the next 10 minutes to hobble each sheep and get them out of the tangled net. Blood is drawn from each sheep, antibiotics are injected, and radio tracking collars are put on. The sheep's temperatures are carefully monitored and water is poured on any sheep that shows signs of overheating.

Each sheep is put into a sling bag with the laces



Photo: Clint Henson

**A Rocky Mountain bighorn ewe has no problem getting up close and personal with often treat-bearing visitors to New Mexico's high country.**

tied tight. They are then carried to a high spot away from the trap where they are attached to a long cable. Again, trappers struggle to catch their breath as the exertion continues.

More tense moments pass as the crew waits for the sound of rotor blades. The crew uses tarps to shade the sheep and keep them as cool as possible. Rominger now holds a radio and talks to the helicopter pilot about how many sheep are on the cable. Each load weight must be estimated as closely as possible to make sure that the helicopter can lift it in the very thin air.

Supplies are dropped off the long line, and then Rominger wrangles the large hook on the end of the line and attaches it to the cable. Rominger signals the pilot to start slowly lifting the load. He adjusts each sheep as they are lifted into the air, and soon they are airborne. It must be a very strange sensation for the sheep, blindfolded and wrapped up tight, swinging under a very loud flying creature.

The crew watches as the helicopter fades away into the early morning light, a long cable and sheep dangling below.

The crew is already busy resetting the net as the sound of the rotor blades fades away. It will be another half hour of very hard work getting the net set up again.

At the bottom of Wheeler Peak, another crew of workers listens for the sound of the rotor blades. Kerry Mower leads this crew that is staged in a large parking lot at Taos Ski Valley. The crew consists of another 25 people, mostly Game and Fish employees, but they are joined on this day by a group from Taos Pueblo. Sylvia Rains Dennis is the director of the Pueblo Ecology Program and has brought some of her crew. The Game and Fish is always happy to work cooperatively with groups such as Taos Pueblo, and this trap gives the group a hands-on opportunity to work with wildlife and to build a foundation of experience that may lead them into careers as wildlife biologists.

### Welcome wagon

As the sound of the rotor blades gets louder, the crew squints against the morning sun to watch the helicopter descend. Slowly, gently, the sheep are brought back to Earth and the hook is released. The crew quietly places each sheep on a gurney and carries them to a weigh station. Another veterinarian keeps a close watch on each sheep, monitoring their temperature. It is imperative to keep them cool and that is easily done with another bath of water.

As each sheep is ready to be loaded, Mower sorts them into different trailers. Young rams are separated from ewes and lambs. Workers start by unlacing the sling bag, and then they unbuckle the hobbles. The blindfold is left for last, and the sheep are lifted into the trailer. Workers pull the blindfold and block the door so other sheep don't escape. The work goes off without a hitch.

Twelve sheep from the day's first net drop are safely loaded into the trailers and driven 180 miles to Abo Canyon, south of Albuquerque. The sheep are released the same day, although, no doubt, a long day for them.

Rocky Mountain Bighorns have been released at Abo Canyon south of the Manzano Mountains since 1977. The Manzano Mountains are not typical high-mountain bighorn sheep habitat, but it is historic, low elevation range with a constant water source.

Along with many other wildlife species, including mule deer and bears, the area is frequented by trains. An average of 80 trains a day run through Abo Canyon. There have been a minimum of 23 bighorn sheep struck by the train since 1998, so in 2005 a cooperative project was undertaken with Game and Fish and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF).



Photo: Ryan Walker

**Bighorn Sheep Biologist Eric Rominger directs the helicopter as it lifts captured bighorn sheep from a ridge in the Pecos Wilderness. The sheep were carried to a crew below for a health check before the sheep were moved to a new range.**

During the construction of a secondary track bed, BNSF constructed an eight-foot high fence designed to keep wildlife and livestock off the tracks. Approximately 8.5 miles of fence was erected at a cost of nearly \$450,000. Seven large trestles allow bighorn sheep and other wildlife to move under the tracks and provide connectivity from Abo Canyon to the Los Pinos Mountains.

**No more train strikes**

Sheep from the recent Wheeler trap have been found in Abo Canyon, Sand Canyon and Priest Canyon. According to Lewis Ruder, construction engineer for BNSF, there have been no train-wildlife collisions since the fence was completed. Ruder said a few sheep got inside the fence and modifications have been made that should solve the problem.

So after nearly 80 years of intense conservation management to return bighorn sheep to New Mexico, what is left to do?

Goldstein says that most of the available sheep habitat in New Mexico now has bighorns. Remaining areas such as White Rock Canyon near Los Alamos could hold bighorns, but there are challenges with current land ownership. Goldstein would like to see bighorns back on the Sandia Mountains, but habitat

conditions are poor and it is one of the most visited mountains in the state by hikers and dogs, usually unleashed. This high use conflict would make it very difficult to have a sustainable sheep herd in the Sandias.

Recent fires in the Gila Wilderness, north of Silver City, may have created bighorn sheep habitat by creating open ridges that allow bighorns to escape predators. Biologists will evaluate the burned areas to determine if bighorns could survive there. Another possible transplant would augment the Turkey Creek and San Francisco herds that have struggled recently with disease transmitted from nearby domestic sheep.

Goldstein says that hunting ewes has become a management tool to keep the population below carrying capacity on Latir Peak. However, hunting ewes is not allowed in the Pecos Wilderness at this time due to lower populations. The bighorns on Wheeler Peak will be used as a transplant herd for the time being if there is a location that needs them and the population remains stable.

*Clint Henson is the Department of Game and Fish public information officer for the Northeast Area. He can be reached in Raton at (575) 445-2311 or [clint.henson@state.nm.us](mailto:clint.henson@state.nm.us).*

**Meet New Mexico’s bighorn sheep biologists**

Elise Goldstein has been a bighorn sheep biologist with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish for the past 11 years. In that capacity, she has worked toward maintaining healthy populations of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and recovering state-listed desert bighorn sheep. She has a master’s degree in wildlife sciences from the University of Washington, where she researched causes of Rocky Mountain bighorn lamb mortality, and a bachelor’s degree in forestry and wildlife management from the University of California, Berkeley. She is a technical staff member of the Desert Bighorn Sheep Council, past treasurer of the New Mexico Wildlife Society, a member of the National Wildlife Society, New Mexico, the National Chapters of the Wild Sheep Foundation, and the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council.



**Elise Goldstein**

Eric M. Rominger Ph.D., has worked on bighorn sheep in New Mexico since 1996 and currently is a bighorn sheep biologist for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Much of his work has dealt with mountain lion predation on state-threatened desert bighorn sheep. Before that, he worked for 11 years on federally-endangered Selkirk woodland caribou in Idaho, Washington, and British Columbia as a wildlife biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and subsequently as a doctoral candidate in Zoology at Washington State University. He has bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Wildlife Biology from the University of Arizona and Colorado State University. Rominger holds adjunct faculty positions at the University of New Mexico, New Mexico State University and New Mexico Highlands University.



**Eric Rominger**

## Bighorn recovery

**Early 1900s:** Extirpation of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in New Mexico due to market hunting, competition from livestock and livestock disease.

**1932:** First transplant attempt from Banff National Park, Canada, to the Sandia Mountains with six bighorn sheep was unsuccessful.

**1940:** First successful transplant of three bighorn sheep in the Sandia Mountains from Banff National Park,, Canada.

**1964:** Successful transplant of 16 bighorn sheep to Turkey Creek and San Francisco River from the Sandia Mountains. Estimated population: 150.

**1965-66:** 24 bighorn sheep are established in the Pecos Wilderness from Banff National Park, Canada, and the Sandia herd.

**1968:** Failed attempt to transplant 10 bighorn sheep into the Wheeler Peak Wilderness from Banff National Park, Canada.

**1970:** Failed attempt to transplant 19 bighorn sheep into the Wheeler Peak Wilderness from Dubois, Wyo. Estimated population: 350.

**1977:** Successful transplant of 16 bighorn sheep in the Manzano Mountains.

**1978:** Unsuccessful transplant of bighorn sheep to Fort Wingate, Latir Wilderness and Cimarron Canyon. Estimated population: 580.

**1993:** Successful transplant of 33 bighorn sheep from Pecos Wilderness to Wheeler Peak Wilderness.

**2001:** Successful transplant of 56 bghorn sheep from Pecos Wilderness to Latir Wilderness. Estimated population: 735.

**2003:** Successful transplant of 32 bighorn sheep from Wheeler Peak and Pecos Wilderness to Arizona.

**2004:** Successful transplant of 30 bighorn sheep from Wheeler Peak to South Dakota.

**2007:** Successful transplant of 25 bighorn sheep from the Pecos Wilderness to the Rio Grande Gorge near Taos.

**2007:** Successful transplant of 34 bighorn sheep from the Pecos Wilderness to the Dry Cimarron in northeastern New Mexico. Estimated population: 930.

**2008:** Successful transplant of 27 bighorn sheep from Wheeler Peak to the Dry Cimarron.

**2012:** Successful transplant of 31 bighorn sheep from Wheeler Peak to the Manzano Mountains. Estimated population: 850.



Photo: Don MacCarter

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish invented the wing trap, a key tool in trapping and transplanting operations that have helped restore the state's pronghorn antelope herds.

# It's your nature

... continued from Page 1

too little restraint. From New York to California, from North Dakota to Florida, we all were to blame. But as history has proved so often, it would be the incremental steps of the few, committed for a lifetime, to wake the conservation consciousness of a slumbering nation. And it would take 75 years — nearly a century — to secure the restoration and future of America's fish and wildlife.

Awakening America to the need for conservation was a painfully slow process, with a monumental learning curve. We simply did not understand the intricate workings of the natural systems we were destroying. We did not understand predator/prey relationships, or habitat or range requirements. We did not understand the interrelatedness of all living things.

Nevertheless, by the late 1800s and early 1900s, a handful of unorthodox and strong-minded free-thinkers emerged with the political will and commitment to save what they recognized as America's greatest treasure. They were, by and large, America's sportsmen.

In the first half of the 20th century, near total responsibility for natural resources fell directly on the shoulders of hunters and anglers. State hunting and fishing license revenue was the only stable funding source to protect, restore, and manage fish and wildlife resources. With the creation of state fish and game agencies in the early 20th century, fish and wildlife were given a legislative voice — and a bank account. But it was not enough.

Underfunded, understaffed, and prone to political interference, these fledgling wildlife agencies often confronted frustration and failure. The science of fish and wildlife management simply did not exist. Law enforcement was slipshod and ineffective, often the work of ill-equipped political appointees.

The problem of developing an effective program to restore our failing fish and wildlife populations not only was ecologically complex, it also was politically complicated. Unlike our European counterparts, the United States had claimed our wildlife heritage as a public treasure, not a private one. Our unique North American Model of Wildlife Conservation designated the country's wildlife legacy a public responsibility owned by all, not by the few. But ... if America's wildlife belonged to the people, and not to the landowners on whose land it might be found, then under whose jurisdiction did fish and wildlife governance fall? Was it a state or federal responsibility? And who should foot the bill?

From 1900 to 1937, those questions were addressed and the world's most effective program of fish and wildlife conservation emerged. Teddy Roo-

sevelt gave the program a presidential jumpstart when he entered the White House in 1901. Emergency protective measures secured great swathes of land as refuges for wildlife. By 1913, the federal government had claimed custody of the nation's migratory birds, establishing waterfowl hunting seasons in every state. State fish and game agencies assumed responsibility for virtually all nonmigratory fish and wildlife.

The only thing missing was money to make it happen. But that was about to change.

In 1936, sportsmen groups and other conservationists saw an opportunity to divert an existing 10 percent excise tax on sporting guns and ammunition to the states to use for wildlife restoration projects. The idea was to match each state's license revenue 3 to 1.

Carl Shoemaker, former chief of the Oregon Department of Fish and Game, drafted the legislation and enlisted Nevada Sen. Key Pittman to introduce it in the Senate. When Shoemaker approached Rep. A.

Willis Robertson to sponsor the bill in the House, Robertson penciled in 29 words that proved to be key to the bill's success:

"...and which shall include a prohibition against the diversion of license fees paid by hunters for any other purpose than the administration of said State fish and game department."

With those words, Robertson secured the future of our fish and wildlife legacy. Robertson was aware how capricious state legislatures could be with its income, and he wanted to make sure that the science of fish and wildlife management was taken out of the political arena. If a state wanted federal money to help them restore their wildlife, they had to guarantee their fish and game department's right to use every dime of hunting and fishing license revenue to support it. Period.

The Pittman-Robertson (P-R) Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act sailed through Congress. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill into law Sept. 2, 1937, turning a deaf ear to protests from his budget office insisting that earmarking funds from excise taxes were not in the country's best interest. Today, on its 75th anniversary, the program has proved without a doubt that it has been in the very best of its country's interest. Its success has been nothing short of astounding.

From the outset, approved P-R projects included the purchase of land for wildlife restoration, improvement of land for wildlife, and research directed at solving wildlife restoration problems.

New Mexico used the funds to purchase more than 180,000 of land designated as Wildlife Management Areas that provide habitat for deer, elk, upland birds and migrating waterfowl. They also provide hunting and fishing opportunities for the sportsmen and women who paid for them. The state Department of Game and Fish also used the funds to restore species that had been extirpated or nearly extirpated in the early 1900s, including elk, bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope.

Today, thanks to P-R funds, approximately 90,000 elk roam New Mexico's mountains and plains. The pronghorn population has grown from a couple thousand in 1916 to around 40,000; and the statewide bighorn population now stands at about 2,400.

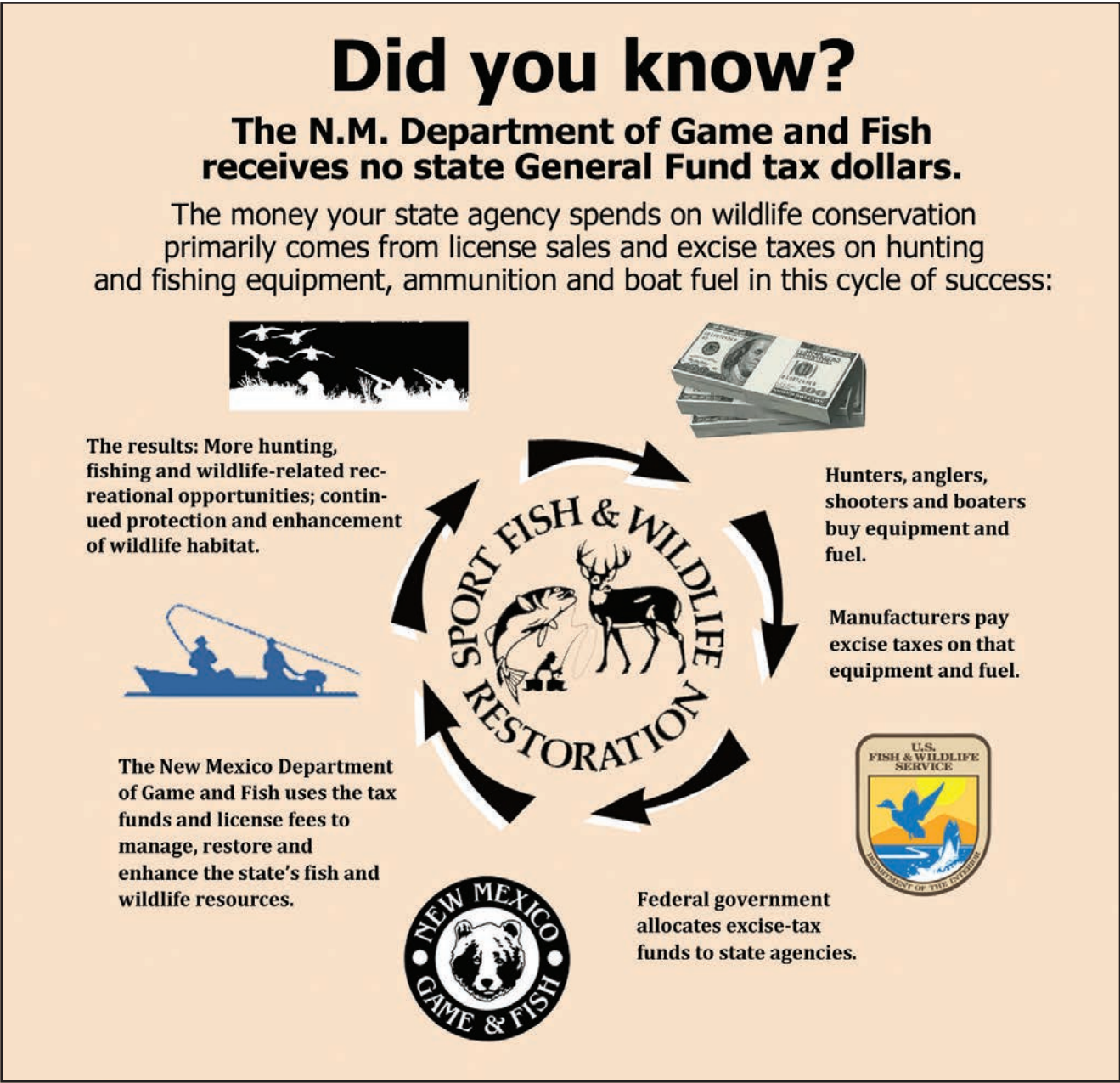




Photo: Dan Williams

**Funds from hunters and anglers have helped restore many wildlife species in New Mexico, including the river otter.**

Nationwide, the P-R program’s list of accomplishments goes on and on. The program instigated scientific wildlife management, and always has focused on “can-do” projects that benefit wildlife and sportsmen. It has made partnering with sportsmen’s groups like the National Wild Turkey Federation and Ducks Unlimited a priority. Such partnerships provide matching funds and support for research projects that embody the North American Model’s philosophy of “public responsibility” for wildlife.

Since 1937, more than \$6.4 billion has been invested in wildlife restoration through the P-R program. It has turned into one of the most successful federal-state-conservationist-sportsmen partnerships in history.

Passage of the P-R Act paved the way for similar legislation to impose a 10 percent manufacturers’ excise tax to support restoration of state fisheries resources. After two failed attempts and a delay during World War II, Congress passed the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act in 1950. Called the Dingell-Johnson Act after its sponsors, Rep. John Dingell of Michigan and Sen. Edwin Johnson of Colorado, the act was the genesis of a funding source that has generated more than \$5.4 billion for fisheries research, habitat restoration, boating access, fish hatcheries, and aquatic education.

Hunters and anglers, through excise taxes and license fees, have contributed more than \$12 billion to fish and wildlife conservation. They also provide more than 80 percent of the funding for most state fish and wildlife agencies. In New Mexico, the federal programs, together known as the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) programs, account for one-third of the Department of Game and Fish annual \$38 million budget.

While America’s hunters, shooters, anglers and boaters have shouldered wildlife restoration for 75 years, the federal program is not the exclusive club of the sporting community. Aldo Leopold, one of our country’s greatest conservationists reminds us: “One cannot divorce esthetics from utility, quality from quantity, present from future, either in deciding what is done to or for soil, or in educating the persons delegated to do it. All land-uses and land-users are interdependent, and the forces which connect them follow channels still largely unknown.”

So, buy a hunting license, even if you don’t hunt. Buy a fishing license, not because you fish, but as an affirmation of what is worth saving in this great country. WSFR is an American legacy, fought for by sportsmen, supported by sportsmen, but open to all.

And if you are hunter, shooter, angler or boater? A. Willis Robertson might suggest that you stop everything and march out into the great outdoors. In 1932, he wrote, “... I feel that the high tension at which the average man has been living is wrecking entirely too many nervous systems. Hunting and fishing is the best nerve tonic I know, and I believe that a greater opportunity for the average citizen to engage in this type of outdoor recreation would greatly promote both the health and happiness of our people.”

“It’s your nature,” Robertson would say, to help preserve our nation’s wildlife resources.

# Wildlife conservation benefits all New Mexicans

By Governor Susana Martinez

New Mexico is home to many wonderful traditions and activities that are part of our state’s storied history and legacy. Those of us who are truly lucky enough to call this state home know the importance of New Mexico’s unique diversity – not only when it comes to our people and our culture, but also the rich offerings of outdoor life and activities in every corner of the Land of Enchantment.

Wildlife in New Mexico is truly exceptional. Our state is blessed with a wide natural array that is nothing short of spectacular -- and the conservation efforts of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish have made remarkable accomplishments in keeping fish and wildlife abundant and healthy across our state.

Hunters, anglers and trappers were some of the first people to recognize the need for conservation programs for fish and wildlife in order to ensure that New Mexico’s vibrant outdoor environment is here for future generations to enjoy, and to ensure healthy and sustainable resources for all New Mexicans - from casual sportsmen to those who depend on those resources as a way of life. All species of wildlife benefit from these programs that improve and protect New Mexico’s natural habitats.

In 1921, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish was mandated to provide public recreation and to protect and maintain an adequate supply of game and fish within New Mexico. Over the past nine decades, the role of the department has evolved to include conservation efforts that have helped make New Mexico one of the best places in the world to hunt, fish, or simply enjoy wildlife.

These programs have been responsible for the improvement of wildlife habitat, the increase of wildlife populations, and improvements in the quality of game available to New Mexico hunters and anglers -- all done without dipping into the state’s general fund. Money used for wildlife conservation in New Mexico comes from hunters, anglers, trappers and shooters through license fees and federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment and boat fuel. Excise taxes collected from sportsmen help New Mexico stock over a million trout a year in our streams, ponds and lakes.

Not only have the Department of Game and Fish conservation efforts made a substantial and positive impact on our wildlife populations statewide, but the agency’s innovative methods of self-funding means that more money is available for other important programs and initiatives that help to make life in our state better for all New Mexicans. On behalf of taxpayers, I applaud these efforts and hope that we can



New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez

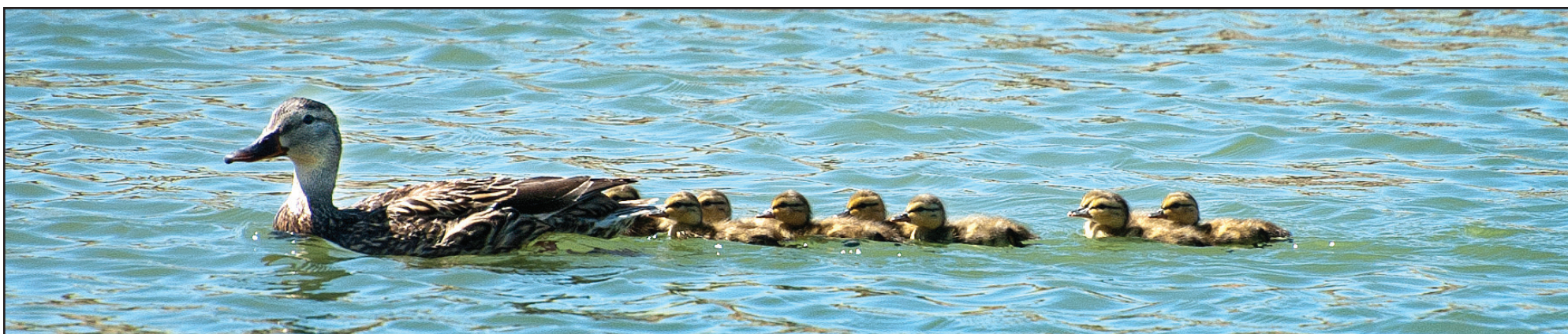
use them as a model to make other sectors of state government more self-sufficient.

Other major contributors to New Mexico’s conservation efforts are the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs, which have contributed \$13 billion to state fish and wildlife agencies across the country since their creation in 1939. Their contributions have led to the restoration of numerous species, such as deer, elk and native trout for outdoors enthusiasts to enjoy.

Hunting, fishing and wildlife watching are responsible for major annual contributions to New Mexico’s economy, making the industry vital to local small businesses that count on these outdoor activities to succeed.

Conservation efforts funded by hunters and anglers through 75 years of license sales and excise taxes on equipment and fuel have spawned many success stories in New Mexico. Recently, the Gila trout was downlisted to threatened status on the federal endangered species list, enabling angling for the species for the first time in nearly 40 years. Desert bighorn sheep recently were removed from the state endangered species list. Hunters and anglers are now able to responsibly hunt and fish these species, all while ensuring the steady growth of populations.

I applaud the conservation efforts of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish in conjunction with the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration programs. It is a partnership that keeps New Mexico’s wildlife enchanting. As we celebrate our state’s momentous Centennial anniversary, I’m proud to say that New Mexico’s conservation efforts have set the stage for another hundred years of vibrant wildlife that will be appreciated by New Mexicans and visitors from around the world.



## Wet & wild



### New pond brings wealth of wildlife to dry landscape

Story by Colleen Welch  
Photos by Dan Williams

"If you build it, they will come."

The quote may sound familiar; it is from a movie about baseball. It also describes the Department of Game and Fish pond and stream that were built at the main office southwest of Santa Fe.

The new wetland brought a lush green habitat for wildlife to what was a mostly dry landscape. It also provided a wonderful place for staff, visitors and school groups to view aquatic wildlife and enjoy a shaded picnic or lunch break.

The small pond and gurgling stream took two years to build. They were filled with water in the spring of 2010. The treated effluent water is piped from an older pond at the Marty Sanchez Golf Course. Two large aerators circulate the pond water and keep oxygen moving through the water. Aerators are also used in fish aquariums to help aquatic life.

"We wanted to offer a place where visitors to the main headquarters could enjoy a wetland ecology and learn about wildlife conservation," said Tom Sansom, Department pilot and coordinator of the pond project. "It's amazing how the pond has transformed the area."

#### Prolific plants

By the end of the first summer, young cattails, willows and aquatic grasses known as rushes and sedges were growing along the pond's sloped border. These plants thrive in water-



**The 2-year-old pond at the Department of Game and Fish Headquarters in Santa Fe has become a haven for many wildlife species.**

saturated soils. Some wetland plants actually live in the water with their roots or parts of their stems under water. These are called floating-leaf plants. Duckweeds and different types of pondweed are examples of free-floating plants. Wetland plants that grow in soil that is saturated, wet or spongy are called emergent plants. Cattails, sedges and rushes are emergent pond plants.

How did the plants get a foothold so quickly? It is likely that some plant seeds flowed through the pipe from the older pond. Also, birds move plant seeds around. The birds eat the aquatic plant seeds and then deposit them in new areas when they poop.

From the start, the pond water began to attract migratory

waterfowl and other wildlife. Great blue herons and ducks use the pond as a resting spot where they could find salamanders, minnows and insects to eat. Coyotes stopped by for a drink, and great horned owls built a nest nearby.

#### Dancers, darners and skimmers

Do these names sound intriguing? They are common names of damselflies and dragonflies that visit the pond. Sixteen species of dragonflies and seven species of damselflies have been identified zipping and darting about the pond and laying their eggs in the water. The larvae that hatched from these eggs as well as other aquatic critters can be collected from the pond and observed at the nearby covered shelter.

Now in its second summer, the pond has a diverse population of aquatic invertebrates (without backbones). This aquatic food web includes scuds, water boatmen, backswimmers, whirligig beetles and larval stages of dragonflies and damselflies. They have fun names, but life in the pond is serious survival business. Some of these invertebrates eat pond weed. Dragonfly larvae eat other invertebrates. Small fish eat invertebrates.

Today's pond is rich in aquatic plants, with aquatic grasses up to three feet tall and willows up to five feet tall. The plants help support the invertebrates and other wildlife.

This summer, red-wing black birds and American coots nested in the cattails and raised their young. The coots raised eight ducklings that enjoyed their favorite food -- duckweed.

The Department's Conservation Education Section provides educational pond programs and field investigations for school groups. Anyone interested may contact Colleen Welch, (505)-476-8119, or Kevin Holladay, (505) 476-8095.

**A red-winged blackbird stands guard over its nest among the cattails bordering the new pond at the Department of Game and Fish Headquarters in Santa Fe.**

Inset photo: Jim Stuart

