

OUTDOOR REPORTER

New Mexico Wildlife Federation

www.nmwildlife.org

Summer, 2021



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A Word from our Executive Director

Throughout my youth, I was distraught about the dates the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish designated for spring turkey season.

During those years, turkey season started very near the end of spring break for Albuquerque Public Schools. I have many memories spending time with my dad in the Gila listening to gobblers as they strutted for hens days before the season opened. Generally, we would get to hunt gobblers for only the last one or two days of the trip.

Now, decades later, I recognize that the timing of turkey season could not be better. Turkey season now provides the perfect opportunity to retreat into the wilds following our New Mexico legislative session.

The 2021 session was especially challenging. SB312, “The New Mexico Wildlife Heritage Act,” was possibly the largest wildlife bill ever to be introduced in New Mexico. It’s often said, “Go big or go home!” Well, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation went big -- and we stayed home. Due to the pandemic, this was a crazy session filled with Zoom meetings and virtual votes.

Although the NMWF gave it our best effort, SB312 failed to pass, and that’s a shame. Among many other things, the bill would have repealed the current law that sets aside 10 percent of the big game tags from our draw pool to hunters -- many of them nonresidents -- who can afford to retain an outfitter. Not surprisingly, outfitters vociferously opposed the effort to get them off the gravy train. We’ll keep working to change that system by educating our resident hunters that the current system increasingly is cheating them and their kids out of hunting opportunities.

I was deep in the wilderness, still recovering from two months of politics, when the New Mexico draw results were released. After crawling my way out of the scarily dry Gila, I learned about my outcomes. I was ecstatic with my fortune in drawing elk and deer tags even though I did not draw for javelina, which I normally do.

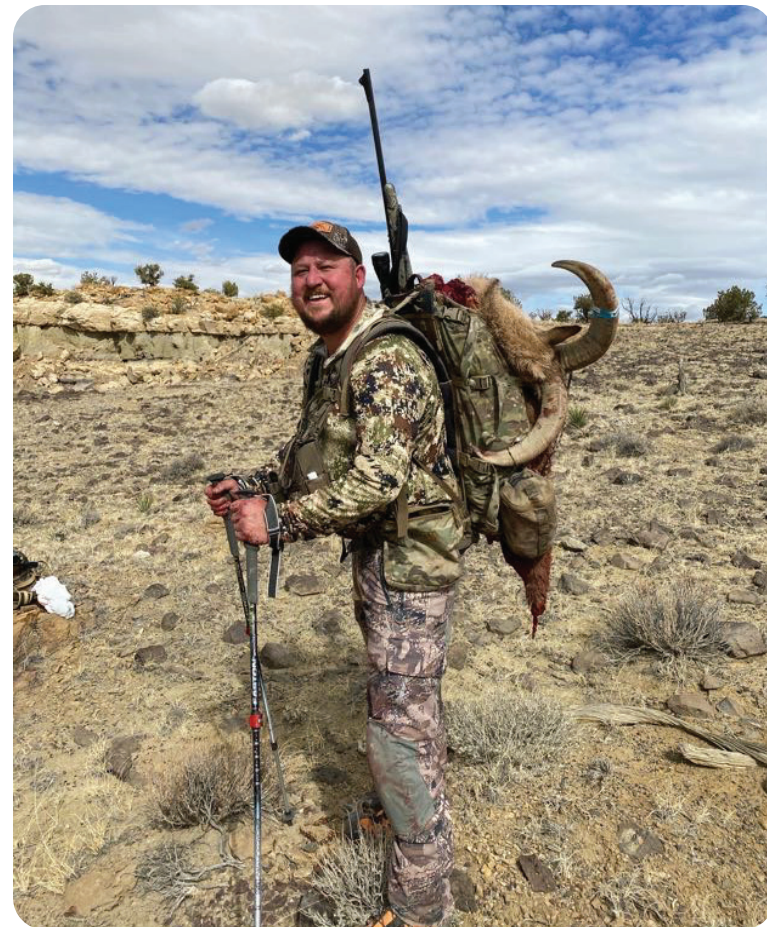
I am convinced this was due to karma. I drew for javelina last year, but the legislative session occupied my schedule so severely that I never was able to make it out for a single day of hunting. I deprived a hunter who could have used that tag from hunting and this was my payback.

Speaking of payback, NMWF is pleased to see our habitat stamp now costs \$10 instead of \$5. Price increases are rarely celebrated by purchasers, but when NM wildlife habitat benefits, New Mexico’s hunters made clear that this increase was overwhelmingly supported.

Rain [or the lack of] seems to be the dominant topic of wildlife habitat discussions currently. Natural ponds and sections of creeks that normally hold water are dry. Even man-made tanks designed to catch run-off are dry. Water is of critical importance to New Mexico’s people and wildlife.

Many of those who drew coveted elk tags in this year’s big game draw are crossing their fingers hoping for rain to promote antler growth. I’m hoping for rain because without it, we will start seeing wildlife populations decline.

Recently, most of our hunted species in New Mexico have seen stable or upward population trends. This is great and worth celebrating. Hunters have and continue to contribute to the recovery of the wildlife species we hunt. But of all the wildlife species that exist in North America, only a tiny little fraction are actually hunted. Unfortunately, the United Nations reports that globally around 1 million species are at risk of becoming extinct in the coming decades.



The New Mexico Wildlife Federation is optimistic that Congress will pass the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act [RAWA]. This bill will provide up to \$27 million annually to New Mexico to work on wildlife species that are not classified as “game” species.

What is a “game” species anyway? An internet search found a result by Online Etymology that says, “Game or quarry is any animal hunted for its meat or sport. The term game arises in medieval hunting terminology by the late 13th century and is particular to English, the word derived from the generic Old English gamen (Germanic *gamanan) “joy, amusement, sport, merriment”.

Hunting is not a game nor do most hunters consider their quarry any part of any game. In New Mexico, hunting is our heritage. I also believe that hunters care deeply about all wildlife and not just those species we hunt. For these reasons, it seems appropriate to ditch 13th century semantics and ensure that our state wildlife agency has the necessary resources to be a leader in wildlife conservation today and into the future.

The New Mexico Wildlife Heritage Act [SB312] would have changed the name of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to the New Mexico Department of Wildlife Conservation. Based on the results of the past legislative session, many people in New Mexico aren’t ready for that. For my part, I’m not ready to see 1 million species become extinct.

Recognizing the challenges our wildlife are enduring due to extended drought, we all need to continue to be mindful of our impact as we enjoy our wild places. Whether you drew any opportunities to hunt through the big game draw or not, the reasons to be outside on our public lands are endless. Pick a reason, get out there and find a special spot and let’s work together to conserve it.

- Jesse Deubel

NMWF, Executive Director

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LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

By Adrian Angulo

NMWF Deputy Director

Lawmakers gather every year in Santa Fe to consider new laws. Every year, for more than a century, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation (NMWF) has been there to represent the interests of public land users, hunters and anglers.

This year, around the clock, NMWF monitored and organized around bills impacting hunters, anglers, public lands and waters. We won some and lost some, but the fight will continue.

SB312 | Game & Fish & Wildlife Changes | NMWF Supported | Failed

We tried to go big this year. Partnering with a diverse coalition of over 30 New Mexico hunting, angling, conservation, and recreation groups, we pushed landmark legislation to attempt to modernize wildlife management in our state with SB312 - The New Mexico Wildlife Heritage Act.

New Mexico is one of only 11 states that still operates under a 'Game & Fish' wildlife management structure. The bill would have changed the agency's name to the "Department of Wildlife Conservation."

That simple change, which would require rewriting state statutes wherever the agency name occurs, resulted in a bill that was over 240 pages long. The sheer length of the bill presented immediate issues and distracted from its true merits. It would have given New Mexican residents better draw odds for big game, updated the wanton waste statute to ensure hunters are good stewards of the wildlife we hunt, and changed a law that allows landowners to slaughter entire herds of elk, deer, and antelope.

NMWF remains committed to addressing the gross inequity in our state's big game draw tag allocations. Predictably, many New Mexico guides -- profiting from their current tag subsidy -- opposed increasing resident odds and claimed they would go out of business if they weren't allowed to continue to cut to the front of the line.

Outfitters in other states in the West thrive without any subsidy. No other state provides such a large share of limited big game licenses to nonresidents, while denying that opportunity to tens of thousands of its own residents. The NMWF will continue to work to address this critical issue.

HB200 | Gila Diversion and Water Trust Board | NMWF Supported | Signed by Governor

The NMWF was thrilled to see the Legislature and governor take action to end the threat of diverting water from the Gila River. The federation supports federal protections for the river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

For years, the N.M. Central Arizona Project Entity has tried and failed to come up with a practical and economical plan to divert water from the Gila River. The entity has spent 16 years and more than \$15 million in federal funds in the failed effort. HB 200 puts an end to this process and directs the remaining federal funds to community water projects in southwestern New Mexico.

HB 200 establishes the Water Trust Board to advise the Interstate Stream Commission to determine how the remaining \$80 million in N.M. Unit Fund dollars are allocated to water projects in southwest New Mexico (Grant, Luna, Hidalgo and Catron counties). The bill prohibits further N.M. Unit Funds from being used for a Gila River diversion project.

HB57 | Prescribed Burning Act | NMWF Supported | Signed by Governor

The bill helps private landowners with certification, training, and support to conduct controlled burns on their property. The goal is to protect communities, water sources, and wildlife habitat by reducing the risk of severe wildfires and improving forest health.

HB78 | Tierra Amarilla Land Grant Transfer | NMWF Opposed | Died

The bill sought to transfer the Edward Sargent, William A. Humphries, and Rio Chama wildlife management areas (WMA), a combined area of over 44,000 acres, to the Land Grant-Merced de los Pueblos de Tierra Amarilla. The WMAs were purchased with proceeds from hunting and fishing license dollars and matching federal funds and managed by the N.M. Department of Game & Fish to conserve wildlife habitat and provide hunting, fishing, and other recreational opportunities for the public. Transferring the properties would endanger future federal wildlife funding for the state and deprive New Mexicans statewide of precious hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities.

HJR5 and HJR8 | Right to Hunt and Fish | NMWF Opposed | Died

The proposed constitutional amendments seemed innocuous but would have carried severe impacts for public stream access, currently protected by N.M. Constitution. In HJR5, there was language stating

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FREE RANGE Aoudad Offer Challenging Hunt

By Brandon Butler

Driftwood Outdoors

Every once in a while, Lady Luck lays her hand on your shoulder and serves up an unexpected success. Such was the case for me on a recent aoudad hunt in New Mexico with my good friend Jesse Deubel, the executive director of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation.

Aoudad, which are actually Barbary sheep, are native to North Africa. They survive where other species can't, in some of the roughest, rockiest, harshest environments on our planet. Much like West Texas and parts of New Mexico, where they were introduced as a hunting species on private property around 1900, but have long since spread onto public lands.

These sandy-brown sheep weigh up to 300 pounds, but can get by without liquid water. They actually obtain their water through food. So you can't count on hunting them at waterholes, making



Aoudad are native to North Africa but inhabit desolate regions of West Texas and New Mexico

the pursuit very challenging in some of the most desolate locales you can find a living creature.

New Mexico offers over-the-counter, free range licenses for aoudad that are good for 365 days a year. Meaning, there is no closed season. Even with this much opportunity, Jesse told me the success rate on these units remains low.

Wanting to see the country and spend time with Jesse was enough for me to spend the nearly \$500 in license fees it costs to hunt an aoudad as a non-resident. However, this trip also afforded me the opportunity to meet with United States Senator Martin Heinrich to discuss renewable energy. Senator Heinrich is a Missouri native and fellow graduate of the University of Missouri. He's also a dedicated conservationist and hunter, who cares deeply about ecology and wildlife. So the aoudad hunt was on.

Jesse rented us a house in the middle of nowhere about an hour and a half from Albuquerque. From the back porch, the views of the mountains were stunning. But just looking at the sheer cliffs made my legs hurt. I knew we were going to have to hike dozens of miles to just hopefully see a sheep, let alone kill one.



EATING UNICORN & DRINKING BOURBON

By Jesse Deubel

NMWF Executive Director

It's hard when you're young to know what you want from life. I once had a mentor who said, "Decide the life you want and then identify five people who live that life today. Spend as much time as you can with those five people."

One person who lived a life I always dreamed of was my grandfather. He was an incredible man who achieved enormous success by any definition of the word. He was a general building contractor, and so am I.

As a contractor, I once stood on the east slope of the Sandia Mountains working to place a custom home on a lot with a new customer.

"Yep, right here and facing this direction," the customer said as he pointed to the horizon and gestured to explain his expectation of the planned home's placement. Near the edge of the proposed building site stood a vibrant and healthy alligator juniper that was easily over 500 years old.

I suggested, "If we shift your home over by 20 feet we can preserve this tree."

The customer responded, "I don't care about that tree. It's awfully big, but I'm fine paying the extra expense to remove it. Looks like it'll be quite the job. Put the house where I told you."

I tried again. "Expense aside, this tree is a historic marvel," I said. "The view will be just as good if we shift the home over a bit."

The customer responded, "This is my land, my home and I told you what I want. Hug trees somewhere else."

I had an executed contract with the customer and had a responsibility to carry out my obligation to build the house. But that moment, I also made a decision: I was going to depart from the business of tearing down trees and become a full-time conservationist.

After applying for a job with NMWF I contacted Brandon Butler who, at the time, was the executive director of the Conservation Federation of Missouri. We had a great conversation. In that discussion he mentioned that he was working on a book that would be titled, "50 in 50 by 50." Brandon intends to write about harvesting 50 game animals in the 50 states by the time he turns 50. I suggested to him that I would be happy to host him when he chose to mark New Mexico off his list.

About two and a half years later, Brandon experienced a terrible tragedy wherein his hunting cabin in Shannon County, Missouri, burned to the ground. As we talked on the phone following the unthinkable loss, we decided that it was time for him to travel to New Mexico to take a break.

We decided to pursue Barbary sheep on public land in one of New Mexico's over-the-counter units. Recognizing the serious challenge of this hunt and the very low success rate, our main goal was to enjoy each other's company and our public lands and just have a great time.



Brandon Butler

About a week prior to Brandon's arrival in New Mexico, I texted him to work on our food/drink menu. Regarding the food he said, "No bell peppers." I asked, "Are you good with chile?" Brandon said, "Yeah, but not too hot. Keep in mind I'm from the Midwest."

As it turns out, "not too hot" is interpreted VERY differently by a life-long New Mexican like me than it is by someone from Indiana. As far as his drink of choice Brandon was dialed in. Bourbon: Weller, Buffalo Trace and Bulliet...in that order.

When my grandfather died in 2002, I was 22 years old. He was a collector of many things including wines and spirits. Along with my siblings and my cousins, I was afforded the opportunity to visit his cellar and divide up the treasure trove of bottles of unique and antique wines and spirits. I kept my share of those precious possessions, expecting to enjoy the opportunity to partake in them as opportunities arise.

It just so happened that I had a couple of old bottles of Weller from Grandpa's collection. I went to the far back of the pantry and fetched a bottle. I took a couple photos and texted them to Brandon asking if it would suffice. Further discussion and research showed the old bottle was a rare collector's item, worth somewhere in the range of \$1,500.

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Hard Country: A Lesser Prairie-Chicken Final Frontier

By Lew Carpenter; Reprint Courtesy North American Grouse Partnership

Images by Kyle Weaver

Thirty years of drought has been tough on lesser prairie-chickens in eastern New Mexico. The hardscrabble country leaves little opportunity for a bird that once exploded skyward by the hundreds throughout the landscape on any given day. And, while lesser prairie-chicken numbers have recently ticked up – offering hope that proper wildlife management and private landowner incentives will ultimately save this prince of the grasslands – so much still must be done.

Jim Weaver left his work – 18 years at Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology, Department of Ecology and Systematics where he focused on endangered species – to raise both a family and cattle on an eastern New Mexico ranch; plus to engage his passion, hunting with a falcon. Drought and the inherent logistics of the remote ranch got the better of the cattle operation, but the lesser prairie-chickens are still there; not in the great numbers of the mid 70s, but with respectable populations that would not exist without landowner passion and respect for the habitat.

“It’s not what people think about when they think of a beautiful New Mexico ranch. We are out on the eastern side where the country has been beat up for so long it’s hard to find a place that easily fits the travel brochure,” Weaver said.

The Weaver Ranch is on the High Plains where it’s nearly all been farmed at one time or another. The redeeming thing for Weaver is that this was where all the prairie chickens were, which means at least from that standpoint everything was looking pretty good.

“We started off buying a couple of sections down here and it was \$40-an-acre-land if that puts things in perspective – so at that point a couple of sections wasn’t that big of a deal for someone still holding down a university job,” he said. “Over time other pieces and properties came together and we ended up with roughly 30,000 acres of this kind of country over the past 30 or 40 years.”

When Weaver put together a cattle operation, he did things a little differently than others. He started out with some Mashona cattle, a tribal breed of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, that he learned about when he was doing bird research in Africa. He brought the breed to the U.S. through an independent USDA import protocol in 1995.

“That was more-or-less a success and it was great having the breed here. But we sold out of those cattle probably six or seven years ago,” he said. “We’d had a couple of exceptionally dry years, even for the overall drought, and we could no longer make that pencil out on a normal kind of cattle operation, so we sold out and went back to just worrying about prairie chickens, and continuing to improve the land and get it back in shape where we thought it was optimal lesser prairie-chicken habitat.”



Habitat on the ranch has been improved during the years and, along with the deep sand and hard flats, it has more than a hundred pastures of various sizes with some irrigated pastures running organic alfalfa. The improvements have been good for the chickens, keeping them alive by providing access to water and insects in those pastures.

“In the beginning, for a period of three or four years in the early to mid-70s, you could easily see a thousand chickens in a day,” Weaver said. “I was hunting chickens back then, and other game birds, with a falcon. And we would use pointing dogs, too. We were camping down here in those days and we were out there every day. Many, many times we would see three or four hundred fly right over the top of our camp.”

It’s hard to say what the total population was at the time since there was no real effort to figure it out, according to Weaver. If the birds were gone folks would just say they’ll be back like they always have, but it has taken a lot longer than anyone anticipated.

“I’ve always been one of the people that’s been against the listing of the birds,” he said. “All management and control of a species rests with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service once they are federally listed as Threatened or Endangered. But there just isn’t any money to do anything if they are listed. And this goes back to my time at Cornell years ago with endangered species. It’s just the worst thing in the world when you start inhibiting people’s ability to work with wildlife – at least from a wildlife management standpoint – if you can’t get in there quick and get your hands on something to make a difference then you’re pretty much dead in the water.”



However, in Weaver’s mind there’s always hope. It really depends on whether the remaining habitat can be optimized with such little suitable habitat left in New Mexico – just two or three counties still have appropriate habitat, and very small portions of those counties. In addition, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) payments in the area have been cut to the lowest amount in the country making it difficult to convince farmers to get on board. “They don’t even pay them enough now to cover their expenses,” Weaver said. “And then they cut out the mid-management contract and cost sharing and so on. So the farmers’ incentive is to plow it back up and we’ve seen a couple of leks plowed out of expired CRP. In this area it’s mostly classified as Highly Erodible Soil that has suffered by wind erosion since the Dust Bowl days. That’s one of the saddest things about it. Private landowners are willing to help, but they need to get paid.”

Mesquite and shinnery oak were Weaver’s biggest problems on the ranch when he arrived. And they still are a problem today, sucking what little moisture the landscape receives, preventing the grass from growing. Lesser prairie-chickens need residual grass for nesting habitat, but you can’t have residual grass unless you have grass in the first place. “The shinnery oak prevents the grass from becoming dominant again in the way it used to be back in pre-European times, and you’re up against that battle all the time,” Weaver said. “Mesquite is another big problem because chickens avoid places where the mesquite is more than three or four feet tall, so you’ve got to get rid of the mesquite.”

Weaver thinks the chickens could probably survive on a managed, million-acre complex. It doesn’t all have to be adjacent parcels, but they need to be close enough – not blocked by a wind farm or high-tension wires, or something else that further breaks up the habitat that is available.

“It’s really all they have left,” he said. “There’s really no place else for them to go. It’s absolutely the end of the line for the New Mexico lesser prairie-chicken if people don’t really start paying attention.”



LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

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hunting and fishing rights “...shall not be construed to impair laws established to prohibit trespass or to protect property rights.” In HJR8, “The provisions of this section do not affect [the] laws pertaining to trespass or property rights.” As written, both proposed amendments would have made public stream access rights subordinate to private property rights and trespass laws, potentially leading to privatization of stretches of river throughout the state where those waters run through privately owned land.

SB32 | Wildlife Conservation & Public Safety Act | NMWF Opposed | Signed by Governor

The act prohibits the use of traps on all public lands in New Mexico, including Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management properties. The New Mexico State Game Commission had already enacted new trapping regulations last year that limited trapping equipment and methods, mandated trapper education classes, and prohibited trapping in popular recreation areas near the state’s population centers and also near trailheads. NMWF, and over 1,100 members, contacted legislators and the governor urging them to oppose SB32.

SB103 | Neonicotinoid Pesticides | NMWF Supported | Died

The bill would have changed the Pesticide Control Act to restrict the use of neonicotinoid class of pesticides in household use. Such pesticides threaten bee, butterfly and pollinator populations that are critical for biodiversity and food systems.

SB180 | The Reforestation Act | NMWF Supported | Died

The act would have created the New Mexico Reforestation Center to increase capacity of the Forestry Division and mitigate the impacts of climate change and drought on the state’s forests.

SB419 | Landowner Takings and Waste of Game | NMWF Supported | Died

The act would have amended the state’s so-called Jennings’ Law so that landowners have to work closely with NMDGF to address nuisances caused by game species. The bill also would have required hunters to take the edible portions of javelina, bear, and cougar from the field.



HARD COUNTRY

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New Mexico Game and Fish has been great. They’ve got chicken areas all over the place, but they lack management money. We’ve lined up some of those places for the Game and Fish to buy and it’s worked out great, and we’ve got a charitable foundation that buys acres when they become available to try to hold them for conservation-minded people that may want to buy them later, whether that be private folks, New Mexico Game and Fish or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – whoever might come along when they are solvent enough to want to make these kinds of conservation investments.”

Opportunities for the million acres of lesser prairie-chicken habitat could include Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. The BLM assets in this area aren’t all the best chicken habitat, but they do own some of it, and the BLM has made positive strides, according to Weaver. “They’ve changed some of their grazing regimes around, which has been pretty unpopular for them in the ranching community, but it was the right thing to do to reestablish and maintain good habitat. There’s been no subsoil moisture here to speak of for almost 30 years. That moisture regime has to be returned and the brush has to be controlled and we might come back to a reasonable diversity of grasslands that will sustain these birds.”

Currently, there are about 17 leks on Weaver’s ranch up from three to four at the lowest point. He saw a good year last year, with almost a tripling of numbers of birds on lek in just that one season. He’s optimistic that there are plenty of people coming along that want to conserve the country, and with good wildlife management and private landowner incentives something significant could be done.

“We’ve worked closely over the years with groups or agencies that offer grant or cost-share assistance for conservation work. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Partners for Fish and Wildlife, the NRCS Grasslands Reserve Program, Farm Services Agency EQIP and CRP programs, Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico State Land Office, and Center of Excellence have all cooperated at some point. Folks want to do the best thing they can for the land and the wildlife and the habitat,” he said. “And they are proud of what they have to show for it when they do fix things up for game birds and for wildlife in general, which leads to better biodiversity overall.”





NEW MEXICO WILDLIFE FEDERATION SADDENED BY DEATH OF NM GAME COMMISSIONER DAVID SOULES

The staff of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation is saddened by the March 26 death of David Soules, a member of the New Mexico State Game Commission.

Soules, of Las Cruces, was a lifelong sportsman and served as the at-large member of the commission since 2019, representing the statewide conservation interests.

“Commissioner Soules was a passionate hunter and knew firsthand the issues that face the New Mexico public and our wildlife,” said NMWF Executive Director Jesse Deubel. “David cared deeply about public access and worked hard to represent state residents on the commission. He will be deeply missed.”

Before joining the commission, Soules worked on the creation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. He served on the board of directors of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.

In an August 2019 interview with the Las Cruces Bulletin, Soules said he was honored to be on the game commission. “I’ve come to recognize that sportsmen are one of, if not the first, advocates of sustainability,” he said. “For the past 150 years, hunters and anglers have led the crusade for wildlife conservation.”

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish reports that Soules is survived by his wife Nancy; his son Kevin and wife Robyn; his son Keith and wife Lauren; his brother State Sen. Bill Soules and other relatives.

NMWF WELCOMES APPOINTMENT OF DEB HAALAND AS U.S. INTERIOR SECRETARY



The NMWF is pleased with the recent Senate confirmation of former New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland as U.S. secretary of interior.

Haaland, the first Native American to serve as interior secretary, showed a strong commitment to preserving wildlife and natural resources during her time representing New Mexico in Congress.

“Haaland has demonstrated true commitment to the West,” said Jesse Deubel, NMWF executive director. “As vice-chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, she played a critical role in the passage last summer of the Great American Outdoors Act and has worked hard protect our natural resources.”

The GAOA, which President Donald Trump signed into law last summer, secured permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The law commits some \$900 million a year for acquisition of important conservation properties while also directing billions more in coming years to address deferred maintenance at federal facilities.

“We’re at a crisis point in New Mexico and the West in terms of the effects of drought and short-sighted resource management on our wildlife and public lands,” Deubel said. “We’re confident that Secretary Haaland, with her heritage, and life experience in New Mexico and commitment to protecting our natural resources for future generations, will provide the leadership we need.”

OUTSTANDING WATERS STATUS WILL BENEFIT OUR JEMEZ STREAMS

By Ron Loehman

As an angler and landowner in the Jemez watershed, the streams in the Jemez Mountains are special places for me. I first encountered them soon after moving to New Mexico in the early 1980s. With my young family, I spent many weekends hiking and camping along streams in the Santa Fe National Forest. We enjoyed their cool, clear water and the lush vegetation that frequently grew along their banks, all of which were an extreme contrast to the dry, high desert terrain of much of New Mexico. Later, I started carrying a pack rod on my hikes and, after discovering how limited were my fly fishing skills, I joined New Mexico Trout and started attending their meetings and workshops. As my skills developed, I began to explore less accessible waters that offered more solitude and the opportunity to cast my fly to less wary trout. Sometimes the desire to explore new waters was so strong that I just hiked the stream without ever rigging up my fly rod. I called that virtual flyfishing, as I spotted places in the stream that I thought held trout and imagined the fly and presentation I would use as I continued walking past.

To me, fly fishing is a solitary or almost solitary activity. It puts a premium on silence, stealth, and quiet observation and analysis of the water and its surroundings. The social part of fly fishing is in club activities such as meetings, workshops, and especially in volunteer conservation projects they sponsor. Those activities have kept me involved in New Mexico Trout for more than twenty-five years. New Mexico Trout is an all-volunteer, local, nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the sport of fly fishing, to educate the public on the value of cold, clear streams and waterways, and to support restoration of those waters through donations and volunteer work. For example, we have donated money for supplies and provided volunteer labor for many of the barriers along USFS roads that prevent vehicles from driving down to sensitive riparian areas along the Rio Guadalupe and Rio Cebolla. We do an annual trash pickup along the Rio Guadalupe from the Gilman Tunnels to Porter's Landing. We have cleaned up and restored dispersed campsites in riparian areas all along the Rio Guadalupe and Rio Cebolla. We helped rebuild the eroding access trail to a part of the East Fork of the Jemez that is very heavily used by picnickers and waders. These are just a few examples of the many ways we promote our mission to preserve and restore coldwater streams and their riparian areas in New Mexico.

Over the years I have become very familiar with most of the streams in the Jemez Mountains through hiking, fishing, and participating in volunteer restoration and monitoring projects. The Jemez streams being considered for Outstanding Waters status by New Mexico's Outdoor Recreation Division are particular favorites. I have hiked and fished the entire Rio San Antonio from its origin in the Valles Caldera National Preserve to where it passes under NM Highway 126. I have likewise hiked and fished the East Fork of the Rio Jemez from its origin in the Valle Grande all the way to where it joins the Rio San Antonio at Battleship Rock. The Rio Guadalupe and its Rio Cebolla tributary are in my backyard. For many years, I have hiked, fished, and done restoration projects on them from their headwaters down to the southern SFNF boundary where I and my wife own property that we are privately restoring. I know the importance of these streams as places of refuge, solace, and recreation and I care very deeply about them.

These Jemez streams are delightful places where visitors can go to refresh their minds and bodies. The waters are clear and cool, the surrounding vegetation is green, and the sounds of civilization are distant. Whether for a few hours, a weekend, or longer visitors will go away feeling better and



Ron Loehman

knowing that they want to come back. But all of New Mexico's coldwater streams are at risk. The climate in the Southwest is doing exactly what scientists have been predicting for more than thirty years. New Mexico is getting hotter, drier and with less winter snow that melts earlier. Stream flows are decreasing, and runoff levels get ever lower. Water temperatures are too high on parts of some streams to support trout and other coldwater species. People depend on these streams for recreation, for irrigation, for watering their livestock, and indirectly for drinking water. Because of our warming climate we increasingly have less and lower quality water.

Outstanding Waters status, a state-level designation intended to preserve water quality, will provide an extra level of protection to these Jemez streams that are so important to us. New activities that degrade water quality will be prohibited, but already existing activities in a watershed, such as grazing or acequia use, can continue as before. This point needs emphasis. Existing activities, as well as private property rights, will not be impacted by Outstanding Waters designation. In fact, existing uses will benefit from the continued delivery of clean water that these



protections require. The state rules establishing the Outstanding Waters program explicitly states that Outstanding Waters status protects all existing uses and rights, such as those of acequias, grazing, wood collecting, bird watching, hiking, and gathering of traditional plants and herbs. Landowners, local residents, and people living in the Jemez corridor will be blessed with cleaner water and healthier waterways, not increased regulation.

Favorable publicity in the Jemez watershed prompted by Outstanding Waters status may bring additional resources to improve stream health and to address community concerns about water quality. People may say, “because this stream is so special, let’s do more to improve it!”

Finally, we need to recognize that the New Mexico Environment Department already manages water quality on all of the state’s surface waters. Outstanding Waters designation doesn’t bring increased bureaucratic oversight or undermine local interests, but it does mean managing for a higher water quality standard, something that is increasingly important in light of the previous national administration’s rollback of protections for most of the Jemez watershed’s surface waters.

New Mexico Trout welcomes new Outstanding Waters designations to prevent activities that threaten our treasured coldwater streams and will therefore help keep our public waters clean and pure for those who come after us. And as longtime angler and a landowner in the Jemez watershed, I strongly support Outstanding Waters designation for Rio San Antonio and the East Fork of the Rio Jemez, as does New Mexico Trout. These designations will benefit all of us who rely on these waters, be it for recreation, agriculture, or cultural practices, and it will help ensure clean water flows through our communities in the years ahead.



LEAD-FREE HUNTING

By Ben Neary
NMWF Conservation Director

The New Mexico Wildlife Federation has signed on as a member of the North American Non-Lead Partnership, an organization that encourages hunters to choose non-lead ammunition to prevent poisoning wildlife.

The partnership works to minimize unintentional impacts on wildlife health from lead ammunition. It also works to protect the public image of hunting with an emphasis on the benefits that hunting provides to conservation and wildlife habitat.

Other partnership members include the Arizona and Montana wildlife federations, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, several state wildlife management agencies and other groups nationwide.

Jesse Deubel, executive director of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, said the partnership emphasizes the importance of hunters voluntarily making the move from conventional lead-core ammunition for hunting to non-lead ammunition. Avoiding lead ammunition in the field may well prove critical if hunters and shooters in general are to avoid a possible government ban, he said.

“Lead-core bullets fragment on impact and those tiny fragments commonly scatter throughout the animal’s body,” Deubel said. “There’s very often lead left behind in gut piles where birds and other animals can eat it.”

The federal government started phasing in the requirement to use non-lead ammunition for waterfowl hunting in the late 1980s and it became required nationwide in 1991. The state of California imposed a requirement in 2019 that hunters use non-lead ammunition for taking any wildlife.

Deubel noted that the vast majority of ammunition contains lead and is expended in plinking and target practice.

“The best thing we hunters can do to avoid government restrictions that we don’t like is to be proactive,” Deubel said. “While I generally hunt with a bow, I’ve used non-lead ammunition in the past few years to take caribou, elk and other animals. It works, and it protects birds and other wildlife that feed on the gut piles that hunters leave behind.”

The North American Non-Lead Partnership was formed in 2017 by the Oregon Zoo, the Peregrine Fund and the Institute for Wildlife Studies.

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NMWF/Artemis First Annual All Women's Quail Hunt

By Ben Neary
NMWF Conservation Director

Six women from around New Mexico participated in the NMWF/Artemis First Annual All Women's Quail Hunt this February and several said the experience gave them confidence to undertake more hunting adventures in the future.

The hunt happened in New Mexico's Bootheel country in partnership with the Artemis Sportswoman's group. It focused on introducing women to hunting and included instructional talks about quail species, firearms safety and the importance of choosing non-lead ammunition in the field.

Several experienced bird dog trainers participated, helping the hunters look for Montezuma quail and other species. The hunters said they were excited to have an opportunity to hunt in a place they said they wouldn't have tried to hunt or explore on their own.

"It was 100 percent for me," participant Tammy Bone of Bernalillo said of her decision to apply for the hunt. "I do so many things that are about my family, my husband, my kids, with joy. But when this opportunity came up, it felt like an opportunity to just do something for me in a field that both I was getting some familiarity with and yet really stretched me."

Bone said she's gone on hunting trips with her son previously. "So this felt like the next step for me to do something for myself, but in a way that I could," she said. "Meaning that I could never load myself up, drive out to some no-man's land, go out on a hunt. I don't yet have the skills, the knowledge, the confidence. I don't have a dog, I'm not there yet. So this felt like a way I could go do that, because there was that support in place to make it doable."

Starting the last day of the hunt, Bone had yet to kill a quail, but said that was fine with her

"However, I've had enough experience with this that harvesting or not does not make or break the trip at all," she said. "It adds a dimension, for sure, but it's a blast either way."

Bone said had hunted the day before with Angel Montoya, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist and bird dog handler who helped with the hunt.

"Yesterday with Angel, we saw six species of birds of prey, which was super exciting," Bone said. "And I love birds of prey and he's knowledgeable, so he was able to identify them. That was fun. We saw a roadrunner, always cool. We saw six javelina, I'd never seen javelina. Including a baby. We saw lots of deer, and we saw a Gould's turkey, I'd never seen a Gould's. So it was great."

As a result of her experience on the hunt, Bone said, "I am much more committed, invested and interested in hunting. I wasn't really interested, except for with my son. But it occurred to me yesterday, 'why not put in for some tags? Why not do that?' so when I get back I'm going to evaluate what those tag



options are that I think we can manage. And I'm going to put in."

The hunt also fired Bone's desire to continue as a bird hunter. "We definitely wanted a bird dog already, that was already on our horizon, but I'm recommitted to that idea," she said. "And it won't be soon, but hopefully in the next one to three years."

Jaime Gloschay of Native Women Lead works in Albuquerque as a consultant in economic development and community organizing. She said she went on the hunt in part because she's friends with hunt organizer Kamilia Elsie, communications and education outreach coordinator with the NMWF.

"I've also wanted to be able to live off the land, and learn about sustenance lifestyle, should I be put in that position to have to live that," Gloschay said. "Also, it was reconnection to the land and community and the natural elements. I've been holed up because of the pandemic, and I really needed to be on the earth, outside."

Gloschay said the hunt also allowed her to learn more about guns.

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FREE RANGE Aoudad Offer Challenging Hunt

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On the first morning, two miles into our hike, we found a lone aoudad on the side of a mountain and it was a good one. Jesse couldn't believe it. By observing the loner, we quickly realized it was injured. It had a broken leg. Instead of taking a long shot, I climbed the mountain and closed the distance to about 20 yards. Before the sun was even overhead, my longshot of a hunt was finished. And I saved the creature from a painful and gruesome death at the hands of a predator.

Fred Bear once said sheep meat was his favorite. I'd never had it before. But after we cooked fresh Barbary sheep backstrap that night, I now understand. It's fabulous. I have shared this harvest with a number of friends who have never tasted it before, and every one of them has loved it.

I asked Jesse to expound on aoudad hunting in New Mexico. Here are a few questions and his answers about this special species.

1. Why is aoudad hunting a special opportunity?

Less than 1 percent of all hunters in the United States will ever have the opportunity to pursue a wild, free-ranging, bighorn sheep. That experience is highly coveted. Although not native to New Mexico, the extremely cagey and resilient wild sheep from the Barbary Coast of Africa are every bit as challenging to hunt as the native Rocky Mountain or Desert Bighorn Sheep that call New Mexico home.

Aoudad inhabit very remote and rugged terrain on public land in New Mexico. Often referred to as a "working man's sheep hunt" the opportunity to hunt these beautiful, resilient and elusive creatures is available to anybody with the intestinal fortitude to accept the challenge.

2. How do you feel about having aoudad on New Mexico's landscape?

I don't consider them invasive as they didn't invade our landscape. They are certainly non-native. I refer to them as exotic, because they were purposely brought to this area. In the same way brown trout are stocked on our rivers. The word invasive is a bit unfair in my opinion. Yet, I do recognize the potential of these animals having a negative impact on native species.

I support the recovery and enhancement of our native sheep populations as a great priority, and hunt aoudad in areas where native sheep are not present. Even so, it is probable that aoudad could have an adverse impact on other native wildlife such as mule deer. But from my personal observations, I would suggest that the aoudad I pursue are inhabiting terrain that mule deer would consider inhospitable.

I am not a wildlife biologist. I trust the experts at the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to make the appropriate decisions. Considering the tags for these sheep where I hunt them are unlimited and sold over-the-counter, I would suggest the department is doing a great job of managing the population. The fact that they are often referred to as unicorns suggests that their population is not growing to a damaging size.

3. Tell me about the challenge of an over the counter, free range aoudad hunt?

Aoudad are very nomadic. Hunters can effectively scout for many species and identify areas that hold huntable populations. In my experience, aoudad are not a species that can be patterned with any degree of predictability. It's often said, "These animals are where you find them."

Aoudad are colored in such a way that they are impeccably matched to the landscape in which they live. They truly are the mammalian version of chameleons as they disappear in their habitat. Their eyesight could be compared to that of a pronghorn, but they have the advantage of living on strategically elevated vantage points. Couple all of this information with the fact that they are hunted 365 days a year, by anybody and everybody willing to purchase an over-the-counter tag and it's easy to recognize why this hunt is one of the most challenging in all of North America.

See you down the trail...

For more Driftwood Outdoors, check out the podcast on www.driftwoodoutdoors.com or anywhere podcasts are streamed.

Brandon Butler and Nathan "Shags" McLeod talked with Jesse Deubel Executive Director of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, about this sheep hunt and other issues on the following Driftwood Outdoors podcast: bit.ly/NMWFIntheArena



Women's Quail Hunt

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Cody McNeil of Las Cruces, one of the volunteer dog handlers, gave a detailed instructional talk about gun safety. In addition to the essentials of muzzle-control and other factors, he emphasized the importance of not shooting low-flying quail because of the possibility a dog could jump into the line of fire. McNeil said that in his opinion, there's a special place in hell for anyone who would shoot a quail on the ground.

Gloshay said that before the hunt, she was nervous around guns because she had never been taught to use them.

"I really wanted to at least learn about them in some way, and I was able to do that this time," Gloshay said. "I shot a 12-gauge, 20-gauge and I think a 28-gauge too. And it's just helped increase that knowledge base as well as like the reverence for those weapons. It's also increased my curiosity for uses for each type of gun as it relates to what kind of hunting you do with it."

Gloshay is White Mountain Apache, Navajo and Kiowa, and shared that her children are also part Athabaskan from Alaska.

"Women don't traditionally hunt all the time in our culture," Gloshay said. "It seemed like a male-dominated thing. But, like the pandemic has shown, there's a need to be self-sustaining. And for me, should anything ever happen, or I find myself in a position where I have to be in my homelands, or I have to live off the lands, I want to have that skill-set and knowledge base. And also, I want to give that to my children too, if they ever have to be in that position. So for me, it was about empowering myself, and definitely something out of my comfort zone."

Gloshay said she intends to pass along what she learned on the hunt to her children.

"I felt like it would be really neat to give them this knowledge, just because they come from so many territories and landscapes," Gloshay said. "As they get older, and they go back to our homeland, I want them to feel empowered and safe."

Gloshay said she would have loved to have the hunting experience to harvest mule deer that her daughters could use in upcoming ceremonies. "For me, this is like a reconnection to ancestral knowledge and medicine, but also reclaiming that for myself," she said.

Kristina Roybal of Rio Rancho said she was eager to go on the hunt because she was interested in hunting and knew the dog trainers would impart a lot of knowledge.

Roybal said she enjoyed being on the hunt, in the field. "That's where I learned the most, I think and seeing the process was really cool," she said.

"I'm more comfortable being out in the middle of open country, in the middle of nowhere alone," Roybal said of her experience on the hunt. "And it's like a really good skill that I don't think I could learn if I didn't come to something like this. I do plan to use the knowledge that I learned here, and try to expand on that once I get home."

Dave Cox, creative director at Mountain Media, produced a video about the NMWF/Artemis Quail Hunt. See it here: bit.ly/NMWFArtemisQuail



YOUTH HUNTING EXPERIENCE

By Kristina Roybal

Our sons Nashoba, 10, and Kade, 8, participated in New Mexico's youth-only turkey hunt this spring. Hunting was a new adventure for our family and the boys were excited with their first experience in the field.

My husband Nakoma and I are members of NWF and are active in the Nature Niños New Mexico family. We were pleased to see our sons learn that there's much more to hunting than just the harvest.

The first morning, our sons heard a gobbler respond to a crow call. The boys quickly learned that communicating with nature is a wonderful and addicting feeling. My husband and I were thrilled to be there for the boys' experience.

As the day went on, the brothers helped each other, encouraged each other, and they pushed each other. They hiked a lot, sat a lot and heard a few gobblers. They saw some hens and even saw a tom. They saw many tracks and other signs that turkey were in the area.

As our family was on our way off the mountain, Nashoba stopped in his tracks and said he saw a turkey. Sure enough, there he was. For a moment, they found themselves just staring in awe. Then they got down and set up to start calling, but they couldn't get him to come in.

Even though they didn't bring home a turkey, this weekend was still an incredible experience for our family. We let the boys lead us most of the way. This was their hunt and we wanted them to make the decisions. That gave the young men a sense of ownership and responsibility for the weekend.

Although we came home without a turkey, we didn't come home empty-handed. We treasure the life lessons that hunting provided the boys and the whole family. They practiced patience and they spent some days unplugged and in the outdoors. The next adventure is just around the corner.

"I want to hunt because I want to be outdoors and learn about tracking animals," Nashoba said. "Hunting gave me a great experience and time outside with my family. Hunting is the word fun."

Kade enjoyed himself, too, and can't wait to go back. "Hunting is fun because you get to hang out with your family, hide, track the animals and eat one if you get it," he said. "It gives you time to use your senses and spend time in nature."



LEAD-FREE HUNTING

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Biologist Chris Parish, director of global conservation at the Peregrine Fund, started working on condor recovery projects with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. These days, he travels around the West demonstrating the difference between how lead-core and non-lead ammunition perform.

The Peregrine Fund has been instrumental in bringing condors back from the brink of extinction. In 1982, there were only 22 of the huge birds left alive, but through conservation and captive breeding efforts, there are now hundreds of the birds in the wild.

Parish recently gave a demonstration in New Mexico's Bootheel country, showing a group of people on a quail hunt organized by the NMWF. He fired both conventional lead-core ammunition as well as solid-copper rounds into a specially configured water tank that allowed him to capture the spent bullets and any particles they shed during expansion.

The conventional bullets expanded, but in doing so they shed countless tiny fragments of lead into the water. The solid copper



bullets, meanwhile, held together. The copper bullets shed no small pieces but sometimes dropped large petals of metal off the sides where they mushroomed at the tip.

"People say that copper bullets don't fragment. That's not true," Parish said. However, he pointed out that copper isn't as toxic as lead because it's not easily digested by wildlife. In addition, because the copper bullets only shed a few large fragments, they give fewer opportunities for exposure to birds or other wildlife that may eat from a gut pile in the field.

Non-lead ammunition also has a place in upland bird hunting, Parish said. Even when lead pellets pass entirely through a bird, they can leave a smearing of lead on the meat which then can be ingested by other wildlife if the hunter doesn't recover the bird, he said.

In addition, wounded upland birds can result in lead poisoning for other creatures, Parish said.

"If you wound a bird, and it has a pellet in it and it's flying funny, which one do you think that young raptor who's just learning how to hunt is going to eat?" Parish said. "We're talking about potential exposure, we're not saying that every time you shoot a lead-based load you're going to poison an animal."

Condors are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning from bullet fragments because they only feed on dead animals, Parish said.

"So they're uniquely positioned in the whole framework of that ecosystem to get a lot of potential exposure," Parish said of condors. "Whereas a golden eagle is an opportunistic scavenger, where they may scavenge



when times are hard, but usually they're out there killing their prey. So the numbers of meals they get that might have lead are obviously fewer."

More than half of the condor deaths that the Condor Project has tracked over the past 25 years have been confirmed as lead poisoning, Parish said. The second-leading cause of death is predation. He said there have been 42 condor deaths confirmed from lead poisoning compared with 17 deaths from predators.

Parish said some groups have taken his research on lead mortality in condors and misused it to argue that all hunting should be prohibited. He said that's why it's so important for hunters to take the initiative and police their own ranks to prevent possible future ammunition restrictions.

"The second leading cause of death is less than half of the leading cause of death," Parish said of condors. "And the beauty of it is, for me as an optimist, the leading cause of death we can do something about, should we choose to. And that's a hell of an opportunity for us as hunters to lead with conservation, and that's what I'm most passionate about."

Jennifer Black of Rio Rancho worked with the NMWF and the Non-Lead Partnership to produce a video about the importance of using non-lead ammunition in the field. See it here: bit.ly/NMWFNon-Lead



EATING UNICORN & DRINKING BOURBON

Continued from Page 7

Brandon suggested I hold on to that bottle and we could find another locally that was plenty worthy of drinking. I couldn't think of a better occasion to crack this bottle than on this hunt. When Brandon's cabin burned down his grandfather's Folds of Honor Flag burned with it. I suggested we take the bottle and when we opened it, our first toast would be to our grandfathers.

While unpacking our gear and settling in before the first morning of our hunt, I set the bottle of bourbon on the counter of the house we had rented.

Brandon picked it up and said, "Man....you sure you want to open this?" he examined the bottle like the curator at an art museum might examine a fine painting.

"For sure!" I replied.

Brandon continued his examination as he suggested, "I'll tell you what. We will only open this bottle if I get a sheep. If we find one of these unicorns and I successfully harvest it, we'll open this bottle."

It was a deal.

The time we spent together during that trip was magnificent. We had serious conversations about conservation and about all things life throws at us. We compared hunting stories and childhood memories. We shared personal challenges and offered each other support. We had some uncontrollable laughs and some somber moments. We marveled at how similar our paths through life had been and how similar our personalities are.

And, not least, after a few hours of hunting, Brandon got his sheep. That night, true to our word, we enjoyed a delectable meal and toasted our grandfathers while savoring that \$1,500 bottle of bourbon.

The following morning, we recorded a podcast so you can hear all about it. The podcast can be found at: bit.ly/NMWFIntheArena



"Manzano Madness" turkey calls made by Gary Roybal are available at the NMWF Store. <https://shop.nmwildlife.org/>. Roybal, who lives in Isleta Pueblo, crafts his calls out of alligator juniper.



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