

OUTDOOR REPORTER

New Mexico Wildlife Federation

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A Word from our Executive Director

Fall is the time of year when many of us on staff at the New Mexico Wildlife Federation spend the most time enjoying the very lands we work tirelessly to protect.

In a recent podcast discussion with Brad Brooks and Kara Matsumoto from The Wilderness Society, NMWF Deputy Director Adrian Angulo asked Brad to define “protect.” Brad provided an excellent explanation which contrasted the difference between protecting land from people and protecting land for people.

Clearly, we at the NMWF are focused on ensuring that our state’s wildlife has ample habitat so their populations can flourish. Robust wildlife populations are critical to provide hunting and fishing opportunities. Also critical to hunters and anglers is access to our public resources.

Together with others from the NMWF, I was very pleased to be present on Aug. 12 as our current New Mexico State Game Commission [consisting of just five members because two seats are still vacant] voted to reject the five pending applications to certify sections of our public waters as non-navigable. Had those applications been approved, those five sections of water would have been closed to the public.

The NMWF and other groups are still awaiting a ruling from the New Mexico Supreme Court regarding the constitutionality of the game commission’s existing non-navigable certification process. In the meantime, this commission vote is a huge win for all New Mexicans who enjoy recreating in the public waters of our state.

Another huge win for public access was the recent addition to the Sabinoso Wilderness. In July 2021, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland accepted the largest private land donation to wilderness in the history of the United States. If you haven’t seen the NMWF documentary “El Hermoso Sabinoso” you should definitely check it out. In the film we cover the fact that this new addition will soon provide a second public access point into this amazing oasis of public land in northeastern New Mexico.

Our work to improve access is ongoing. We are very hopeful that before rifle deer season opens, there will be a new road built across the Diamond A Ranch to provide access to the northern portion of the Peloncillo Mountains in the Coronado National Forest. I genuinely appreciate all the hunters and public land users who took the time to write to the New Mexico State Land Office to comment in support of this project. Our land commissioner has done a great job providing the public with ample opportunity to weigh in on this issue.

It’s the end of August as I write this and the first green chile harvests have already hit the roasters. Mature bull elk are shedding their velvet. A late evening or early morning bugle is only barely surprising. One month from now, the elk will be screaming and the aspen, oak and cottonwood trees will start changing colors.

I was very fortunate to draw an archery elk tag so I’ll be out among the elk as they embrace this magical time of year and pursue every opportunity to contribute to the future of their species. I’ll do my best to bring one home for the freezer, but the real trophy is to spend some time living outside with them.



I will also be thinking of all the New Mexicans who were not successful in the draw. I recognize that when it comes to hunting elk in New Mexico, there is a disparity between supply and demand. There is and will always be a much greater demand for elk tags than there are tags available to be distributed. This fact amplifies the frustration and disappointment I feel knowing that nearly half of the elk tags in this state never make it into the public draw.

Regardless of the land status where they reside, 100 percent of the wild elk in New Mexico belong to the people of New Mexico. The New Mexico Wildlife Federation’s fight for access to public resources goes beyond access to our lands and our waters. New Mexicans collectively own the wildlife in this state and we are much more deserving of equitable access to our wildlife than any wealthy non-resident with the financial resources to out-bid our local residents.

Hunting in New Mexico is an integral part of our culture and tradition. Our culture and tradition is not an auction item to be sold to the highest bidder. As we all enjoy our wildlife and wild places in this special season, we must know there is more work to be done to secure our traditions for future generations.

All of us at the New Mexico Wildlife Federation encourage each of you to make the most of the fall season. It’s time to cherish each precious day, whether we’re chasing elk, looking for grouse among the aspens, or casting to trout on our mountain streams. It’s the best time of year, so get out and enjoy our great state and all it has to offer.

--Jesse Deubel, NMWF Executive Director

RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT (RAWA)

By: Ben Neary, NMWF Conservation Director

Sen. Martin Heinrich, himself an avid hunter and outdoorsman, is pushing legislation that will change the face of wildlife management across the country.

Heinrich, a Democrat and New Mexico's senior U.S. senator, is teaming up with Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., in sponsoring the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). Parallel, bipartisan legislation is moving in the U.S. House under the sponsorship of Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich., and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb.

The legislation would direct an average of \$1.3 billion a year into permanent funding for state and tribal wildlife management agencies. In New Mexico, it would increase funding from its present level of roughly \$1 million a year up to roughly \$28 million a year.

"I think it's necessary because wildlife is in crisis in the United States and around the world," Heinrich said in a recent interview with NMWF.

"In a state like New Mexico, it would mean about \$28 million every year that Game and Fish could count on to do projects with our public land agencies, and both on public and private land to recover whatever species are in need," Heinrich said. "It would really benefit everything from bumble bees to buffalo."

The increased funding would be a game-changer for wildlife management in New Mexico and around the country, Heinrich said. It would provide agencies with funding for programs to prevent species from becoming threatened and endangered in the first place, and thus prevent the expense and difficulty of having them listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act.

"There are lots of species of wildlife that don't directly benefit from the current funding sources in the North American Model," Heinrich said. "So if your wildlife is unlucky enough not to be a game species, there's just a lot of wildlife in decline right now. And this would create a funding mechanism to restore species, to prevent them from ever becoming endangered in the first place. It would really give states a powerful tool to do wildlife conservation, and to have a predictable funding stream year over year of about \$1.3 billion or so nationwide that would all go toward wildlife recovery and restoration."



Funding for the program would come from fines imposed on industrial polluters for events such as oil spills. Heinrich, who served as natural resources trustee for New Mexico before entering the Senate, said the \$1.3 billion funding for the program is a rolling average of the amount of fines the federal government currently collects and said the figure is rising.

"The trend for that is actually up over time, so it looks like a pretty predictable and stable source of funding for this, a stable way to pay for it," Heinrich said.

Heinrich's legislation would supplement the two main existing federal programs that currently help states pay for wildlife management.

The Pittman-Robertson Act imposes an 11-percent tax on long guns and ammunition and a 10-percent tax on handguns with revenues earmarked for wildlife restoration, hunter education programs and construction of shooting ranges. Funding tends to be directed primarily toward increasing hunting opportunities.

The Dingell-Johnson Act imposes a 10-percent tax on fishing and boating equipment to fund fishing and boating programs.

"Just like, we have Pittman-Robertson and we have Dingell-Johnson that fund sport fisheries, that fund game species, this would be a stable way to fund all those other species that in many ways I just took for granted when I was growing up," Heinrich said of RAWA.

“You see so many fewer box turtles today, so many fewer monarch butterflies,” Heinrich said. “So there are a lot of species that aren’t listed as threatened or endangered that have been in decline. Grassland birds across the entire United States. We just don’t see as many nighthawks and meadowlarks as we used to. This would be a way to benefit all of those species.”

Heinrich is accustomed to tackling big-picture conservation issues in the Senate. He was a sponsor of the Great American Outdoors Act, which former President Donald Trump signed into law in 2020. That legislation fully funded the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, putting more than \$900 million a year from off-shore energy production into land acquisition programs nationwide.

Currently, each state writes its own state wildlife action plan spelling out the conservation needs of particular species. New Mexico’s current plan specifies 235 species of greatest conservation need and suggests areas where conservation actions could have the greatest benefit.

Each state’s wildlife action plan reflects its own priorities, Heinrich said. “So the state of New Mexico’s plan might look very different from the state of Missouri, for example, because we have very different needs,” he said. “They might be focusing on hellbender salamanders and the state of New Mexico might be focusing on lesser prairie chickens, for example.”

Passing RAWA will give the states the necessary resources to address their individual priorities, Heinrich said. “This is meant to be the tool that gets used directly with respect to wildlife management,” he said. “So the Great American Outdoors Act, this is meant to do for wildlife what the Great American Outdoors Act did for public land.”

Matt Wunder, Ph.D., is chief of the Ecological and Environmental Planning Division of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. He said passing the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act would open vast new possibilities for wildlife conservation efforts in the state.

“It would really make a big difference in wildlife management and conservation in New Mexico and around the country,” Wunder said.

Getting a dedicated funding source of more than \$20 million a year would allow the NMDGF to address long-standing needs for a range of wildlife species, Wunder said.

“If the bill were permanent, with dedicated funding, it would really enable the department to do some longer-term planning and address a lot of those species that we don’t have money for otherwise, certainly not at the scale that this bill would provide,” Wunder said.

In addition to increasing funding for the NMDGF, Heinrich emphasized that the legislation would bring roughly \$97.5 million to American Indian tribes nationwide, including each one in New Mexico, to support their wildlife programs.

“That would be a ground-breaking source of revenue for tribes,” Heinrich said. “Right now, there are a number of tribes that are trying to get their wildlife and conservation programs up and running and this would give them a predictable income stream they could use to manage their wildlife resources.”

Jesse Deubel, executive director of the NMWF, said the organization strongly supports passage of RAWA.

“These are tough times for New Mexico wildlife,” Deubel said. “We’re seeing low river flows around the state, increasing development disrupting migration corridors and ever-increasing public demand for hunting opportunities.”

“Our wildlife managers need this reliable, long-term source of funding to represent all the wildlife species that make up our complex ecosystems,” Deubel said. “It’s not enough anymore merely to raise and release those species that hunters like to hunt or the fish that anglers like to catch.”

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SABINOSO EXPANSION

By: Ben Neary, NMWF Conservation Director



U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland surveys Cañon Ciruela (Plum Canyon) at a July 17 event to celebrate the Trust for Public Lands' donation of the area to expand the Sabinoso Wilderness. (Photos by Dave Cox.)

Years of effort by the Trust for Public Lands, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation and others paid off this July when U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland accepted a donation of nearly 10,000 acres to expand the Sabinoso Wilderness, east of Las Vegas.

Haaland as well as several members of New Mexico's congressional delegation traveled to Sabinoso on July 17 for a celebration of the event. The donation stands as the largest private donation of land to the federal government under the Wilderness Act.

The donation by the Trust for Public Land brings the Sabinoso Wilderness to nearly 30,000 acres. It also offers a new entry point into the area, which promises to be popular with elk hunters, bird watchers and others.

The original area was designated wilderness in 2009, but remained landlocked until 2017 when the Wilderness Land Trust donated about 3,600 acres that allowed public access.

The Sabinoso Wilderness and the newly donated lands, known as Cañon Ciruela (Plum Canyon) both feature dramatic, steep canyons that fall away from the surrounding plains. The area hasn't seen livestock grazing in many years and supports thick populations of elk and other wildlife. Springs and seeps in the canyon bottoms sustain marshy areas. No future cattle grazing will be allowed.

Haaland, along with New Mexico Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez, spoke at a ceremony that the Trust for Public Land organized on the newly donated lands.

“Today we recognize the value and beauty of our public lands and open spaces and commit to preserving them,” Haaland said. “Areas like the Sabinoso Wilderness are an important piece of the puzzle as we work to preserve, connect and restore 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 through the President’s America the Beautiful Initiative.”

Greg Hiner, with the Trust for Public Land in Santa Fe, worked for years on the acquisition and donation of the land. C. Starr Woods, a conservation fellow at TPL, worked closely with him on the project.

Speaking at the July 17 event, Melanie Barnes, acting New Mexico state director of the BLM, said the public may enter the land from the existing trailhead on the original Sabinoso Wilderness. She said the new trailhead into the Cañon Ciruela wouldn’t be open until some additional work is completed and that the agency would announce when the new trailhead opens.

Sen. Heinrich credited Hiner as well as conservation groups, elected officials, agency staffers and others for coming together to make the donation a reality.

“New Mexico makes public land history, and we have for many many decades,” Heinrich said. “One of our senators was critical to the passage of the Wilderness Act, and today we set another record with the largest wilderness donation in our nation’s history – presided over by a secretary of interior from New Mexico.”



Sen. Lujan credited work that had been done on the expansion by former Sen. Tom Udall, as well as others in the state’s congressional delegation. “It’s an honor to be part of a family that understands our responsibility and this is just the beginning of more work that’s yet to come,” he said.

Leger Fernandez emphasized that the new donation of lands will allow new access to the Sabinoso Wilderness. She credited collaboration among the different peoples and entities in the state. “Collaboration is in our heart, we don’t know another way of doing it in New Mexico,” she said.

Sarah Cottrell Propst, secretary of the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, said she conveyed a message of thanks and congratulations from Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham to everyone who made the donation possible.

The New Mexico Wildlife Federation worked with the Trust for Public Lands on the expansion project. The NMWF contacted local officials to garner support for the project and recently led a volunteer effort to remove old barbed wire fences from the new lands to make them acceptable for wilderness designation.

“Expanding the Sabinoso Wilderness was one of the first projects I started working on when I started at the federation nearly three years ago,” said Jesse Deubel, NMWF executive director.

“I’m thrilled to see this become a reality,” Deubel said. “The expansion of the Sabinoso Wilderness will benefit future generations of New Mexicans and all Americans by preserving this beautiful landscape and the wild things that live here.”



**Look for our full length
video on the Sabinoso on our
website at
www.nmwildlife.org and on
Vimeo using the search word
“Sabinoso”**



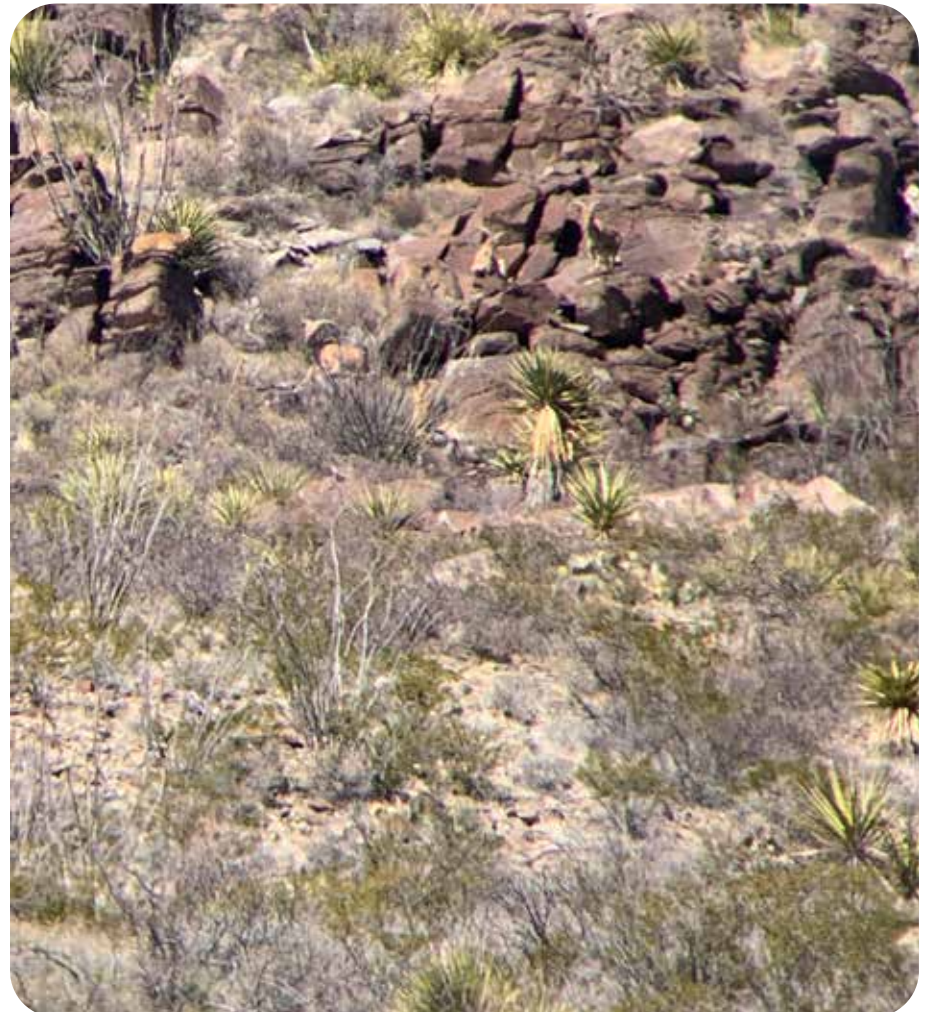
OTERO MESA

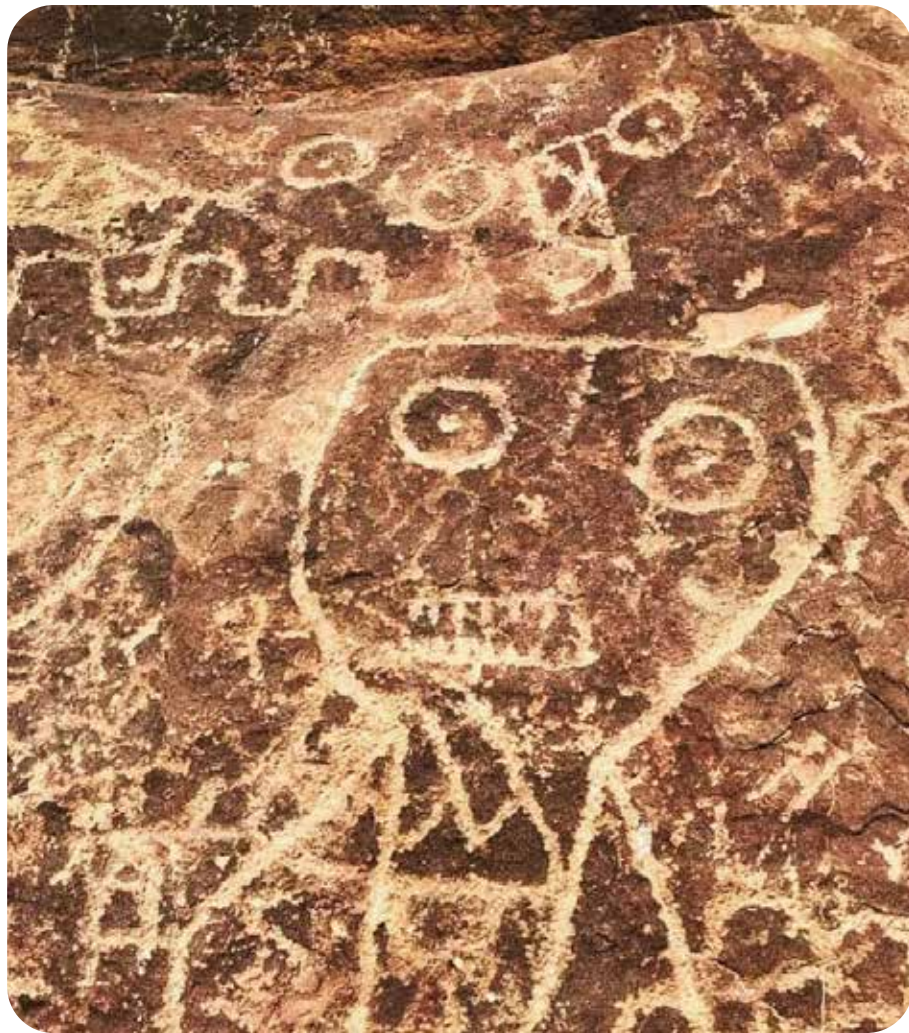
Federal land managers are kicking off a new round of planning looking at possible energy development on Otero Mesa, a 1.2 million acre area of southeastern New Mexico that's home to one of the largest remaining areas of Chihuahuan Desert grasslands and a wide range of wildlife.



The U.S. Bureau of Land Management has eyed Otero Mesa for decades as a possible source of natural gas production. Conservation groups including the New Mexico Wildlife Federation say the area deserves permanent environmental protections.

Otero Mesa provides critical habitat for a wide variety of wildlife and plants, and also holds culturally significant petroglyphs and ancestral sites..





“Otero Mesa is a special place, and one that deserves protection,” said Ray Trejo, Southern New Mexico outreach coordinator for the NMWF. The area holds important herds of antelope, in addition to rare species including the aplomado falcon.

“Otero Mesa offers outstanding hunting and wildlife-viewing opportunities,” Trejo said. “But beyond that, its vast expanses of land offers all Americans a rare place where we can still feel what it’s like to be in the natural world, a place that hasn’t been disturbed. That’s increasingly valuable these days and it’s something we have an obligation to pass down to our kids.”

Past proposals for energy development in the area have called for grading hundreds of miles of new roads. The BLM planning effort essentially has been on standby for the past few years but is gearing up again. The NMWF will monitor the process and keep its membership informed.



OTERO MESA

“Permanent protections for Otero Mesa would fit well with President (Joe) Biden’s call to preserve 30 percent of America’s lands and waters by 2030,” said Jesse Deubel, NMWF executive director. “This is a special place and the relatively small amount of gas and possibly other energy it would produce isn’t worth the cost in loss of wildlife habitat.”



Recovering America's Wildlife Act

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Heinrich said that the bill is being received well in the Senate so far. Noting that co-sponsor Blunt is from Missouri, Heinrich said, "The Missouri Department of Conservation is really one of the premier state conservation agencies in the country and they're really excited about this," he said.


More than 40 state game and fish agencies nationwide are advocating for the legislation, Heinrich said. He said he expects universal support among Senate Democrats, and said the grassroots support among game management agencies should help to bring along more Republicans.

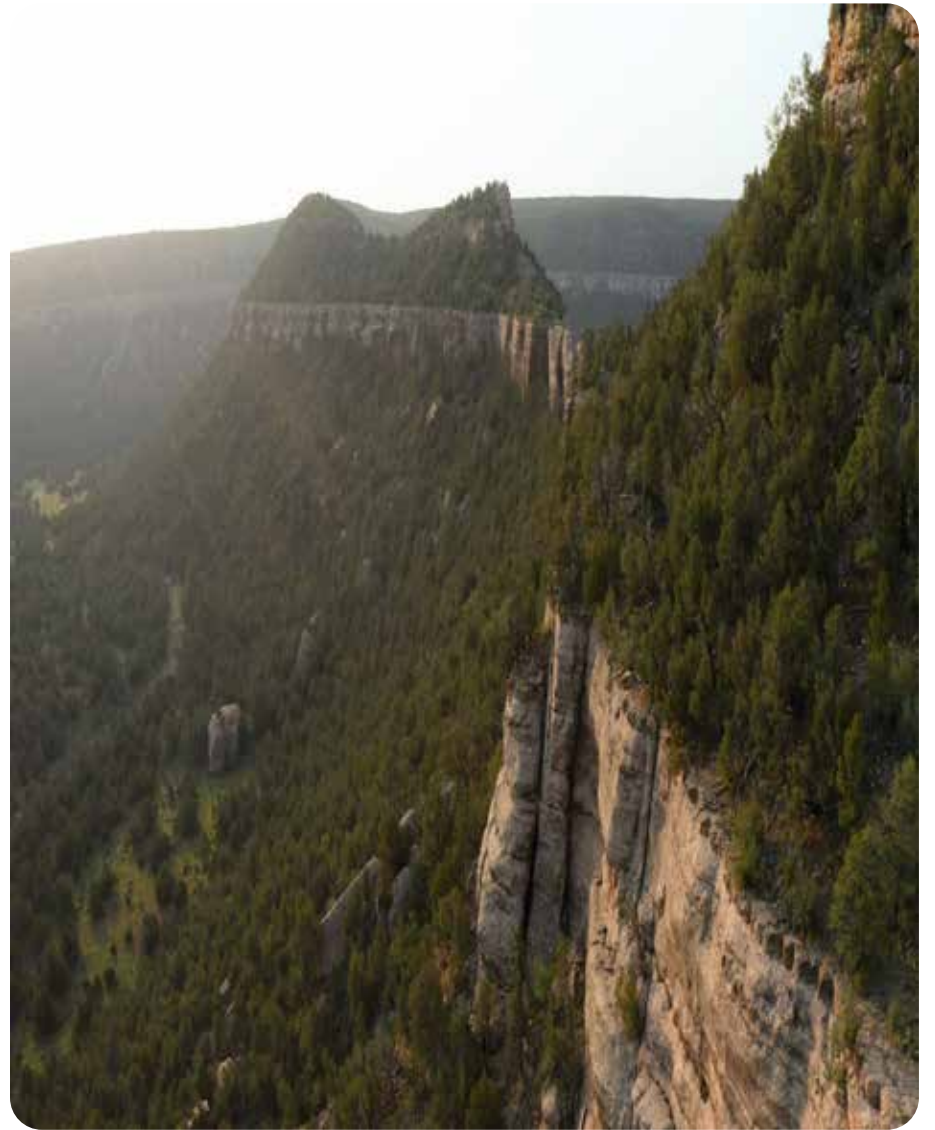
While some ground-breaking pieces of conservation legislation may take several sessions of Congress to pass, Heinrich said that's not his plan with RAWA. "The goal is to move as quickly as I can and I'm going to keep working my colleagues until we hit the numbers we need," he said.

"This is a time when so many issues are incredibly divided and divisive," Heinrich said. "And we've proven time and time again that wildlife, conservation, public lands -- these are things that we can come together around."

Enacting RAWA also promises to help economic development in New Mexico, where the state's growing outdoor recreation economy. Officials with the state's Outdoor Recreation Division report that the industry contributes roughly \$2.4 billion a year to the state's gross domestic product.

"One of the things that people love to do in the outdoors, one of the most popular activities, is to be able to go and see wildlife in their native habitat," Heinrich said. "If you're not taking care of those species, then people aren't traveling to do that, and visiting rural communities and going to our wildlife management areas. So this will only increase our ability to grow that recreation economy."

"You know, when you're floating down the Rio Grande through the Racecourse or the Box, and you have an opportunity to fish for trout, to see otters in their native habitat, those are things that people will remember and associate with our great state for generations to come," Heinrich said. 



Deming Fishing Event

Ray Trejo, Southern New Mexico outreach coordinator at the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, goes out of his way to introduce new generations to the joys of hunting and fishing.

Trejo, a former educator and passionate bird hunter, organized the federation's first annual kid's fishing event at Tree's Lake in Deming on July 17. More than 150 kids turned out.

The NMWF gave Zebco fishing rods to the first 100 participants. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish hosted a casting station for children to learn how to cast. The department also had a chart so kids could identify the fish they caught.

A mariachi band provided entertainment throughout the event and the s'mores station was a big success. The event ended with several kids receiving fishing awards in numerous categories and hot dogs and snacks were served for everybody.

The event was sponsored by the NMWF, the City of Deming, Luna County, Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project, Hispanic Access



Foundation, Friends of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, Latino Outdoors, HECHO, Mesilla Valley Flyfishers, Trout Unlimited New Mexico Council and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

Trejo organized the event as part of the federation's recognition of Latino Conservation Week. He said he especially appreciates the volunteers who assisted the many first-time anglers.



NATURE NIÑOS UPDATES

By: Sarah Candelaria, Nature Niños Youth Program Director

“Children more than ever, need opportunities to be in their bodies in the world – jumping rope, bicycling, stream hopping and fort building. It’s this engagement between limbs of the body and bones of the earth where true balance and centeredness emerge,” -- David Sobel.

David Sobel was a guest speaker for Nature Niño’s WONDER-lings Nature-based Early Childhood Training & Certification in the spring of 2020 where we discussed the biological need for children to spend time in nature from a very young age.

COVID has changed how children spend the majority of their time throughout the day, much of which is now spent behind a screen. Nature Niños New Mexico, the youth programming department of New Mexico Wildlife Federation, has stepped up as a leader in the community to ensure that our youth in New Mexico are provided with equitable and accessible opportunities to engage in meaningful and inspiring activities outdoors.

Our **WONDER-lings Nature-based Early Childhood Training & Certification** would like to congratulate our first cohorts of Nature Niños Mentors throughout the state of New Mexico. The participants -- educators, parents and community leaders -- have spent the last year meeting monthly to dive deeper into the idea of nature being the third teacher while spending time in the outdoors or bringing nature in with young children. Congratulations class of 2021!

As a recipient of a 2021 Outdoor Equity Fund grant, NMWF and Nature Niños New Mexico plan to launch our **Niños Heritage Project**. This project will provide the opportunity for Latin, Hispanic and Native American families who have never been camping or spent time outdoors to attend an overnight cultural excursion that will introduce them to a variety of opportunities such as hiking, fishing, archery, sustainable eating & camp cooking technique. It will also connect them to conservation literature that can be explored through the lens of a family. The project will help to build a community of families and partners that care about our land, water and wildlife and will ensure that our youth have the chance to pass along these traditions and ideas to their children in years to come.

This fall, Nature Niños New Mexico is providing a variety of programming and engagement opportunities for New Mexico’s schools, youth and families.



Tiny Trees is a program designed for our youngest of niños in New Mexico. Kids ages 3- 8 years old are using nature as their teacher to learn about trees, animals and weather (just to name a few subjects) while they make friendships and connections with other kids their age.

Investigating the Outdoors steps it up a notch with our youth ages 9- 17 years old. In this program, kids are linked up with a variety of our community partners such as: BEMP: Bosque Environmental Monitoring Program, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area and New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, to explore the different career paths and areas of interest that are available in the world of conservation.

Family Day Hikes are open to the community to allow families to attend guided hikes where they will participate in a scavenger hunt that encourages the identification of local New Mexican plantlife, foraging, wildlife, tracks, scat and much more.

Identifying, classifying and documenting wildlife (and plantlife) provide the opportunity for youth to learn, explore and most importantly wonder about the world that we live in. With every wonder comes the chance for investigation and with each investigation brings a deeper connection to our earth and its land, water and wildlife.



Mushroom Foraging Adventures

By: Audrey Moon Lufkin,
Nature Niños Participant



On a sunny day in August, my family and I went on a mushroom-foraging class with Nature Niños in the Sangre De Cristo Mountains.

I came into this class with no real expectation of what knowledge or experience I would come out with. I thought that maybe we would walk around a little and the mushroom guide would point out what was and wasn't edible. I was also nervous that maybe I wouldn't understand what he was talking about.

I couldn't have been more wrong! Mushrooming is way more fun and engaging than pointing and saying 'yes' or 'no'. Foraging is about observing the different patterns, how it looks, where it grows, and why it might be there. It also means understanding the mushroom and its habitat.

Under the damp dirt in every forest is an intense network of mycelium connecting trees and fungi inside it. In fact, trees and fungi will use this mycelium network to talk to one another and transfer resources like water, carbon, and nitrogen. You should think twice before you kick over a mushroom for no reason. It took a lot of energy just to grow that one cap.

With the sun overhead and a light breeze rustling the leaves, everyone was ready to learn. Kids were running around in excitement finding mushrooms for the Mushroom Guy -- Garrett VeneKlasen, northern conservation director for New Mexico Wilderness Alliance -- to identify.

Parents were writing down notes, and dogs were sniffing everything. Just like the sponge under the King Porcini's cap, we wanted to absorb all the information we were showered with. The more we walked, the more I spotted mushrooms hiding under trees or growing on fallen logs. Even with the short hike we learned so much about the vegetation growing around us!

In this incredible class we learned a great deal of information about the mushrooms in our area, where to find them, and a bit of their long history. In fact, some fossil fungi date back to about 545 million years ago! I'm really excited to learn more about mushrooming in the future, and I hope that after reading this, you will too.



NMWF WORK AT BOSQUE DEL APACHE

By: Ben Neary, NMWF Conservation Director

Alan Hamilton, a veteran conservationist, continues to work to enhance conditions for waterfowl along the Middle Rio Grande.

Waterfowl from a wide range of northern breeding grounds funnel through the Middle Rio Grande on their migration routes to winter at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge and other areas.

But while the Rio Grande Bosque is critical to the survival of many bird species, it's also been suffering loss of habitat to development and increasingly dry conditions in recent decades.

Hamilton has worked for years to improve conditions for birds along the Rio Grande. Since 2013, he has served as project officer for three federal grants totaling \$3 million under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). Combined, the grants are protecting and enhancing over 5,000 acres of wetlands in the Middle Rio Grande.



Hamilton began landing the highly competitive grants during his five years as conservation director at the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, which continues to administer grant funding. More recently, he's worked as the state wetlands coordinator through the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and Ducks Unlimited. Hamilton is founding director and president of Rio Grande Return.

Over the past year, Hamilton has completed more critical projects on the Bosque del Apache. He's overseen the construction of roughly a mile of concrete-lined, half-mile long ditches that will allow flooding of hundreds of acres of what had been dry fields at the northern end of the refuge to benefit waterfowl. The ditches are 10 feet wide at the top and have 40-inch sloping walls.

The exact acreage of newly irrigated land will depend on available water but could approach 1,000 acres between the two lengths of newly lined ditch. The new irrigation will provide habitat for hundreds of thousands of "duck use days" during the fall and winter months. The project cost over \$500,000.

Bernard Lujan, assistant refuge manager, worked closely with Hamilton in getting the ditch projects done. "I enjoy this kind of thing because I farm at home," Lujan said. "So for me, it's kind of a natural."

In another recent project on the Bosque del Apache, Hamilton himself ran an excavator for two months as part of a project to clear 360 acres of salt cedar. The project cost about \$250,000.



Alan Hamilton with Bernard Lujan, assistant refuge manager



“It was a real pleasure being out here for two months working every day when the birds were here,” Hamilton said of the salt cedar removal project.

Hamilton said the projects on the Bosque del Apache competed for funding with other applications from around the country. He said his projects have received funding because the area is so critical to supporting waterfowl.

“It’s hard to get that much money in New Mexico, and we’ve gotten \$3 million now,” Hamilton said.

“For anyone who’s been up and hunted anywhere in the Prairie Pothole Region, up in the Dakotas and all the way up into Saskatchewan and Canada, it really puts into perspective how it’s part of a bigger system that the Middle Rio Grande is really a critical part of,” Hamilton said.

“It’s the nesting habitat there, and it’s phenomenal how many birds nest and are hatched up there,” Hamilton said of the northern areas. “And when they migrate, a lot of them end up in the Middle Rio Grande wintering. And how well they winter is really key to how well they nest the next year. And so for anyone who hunts anywhere in the central flyway, it’s important to protect what few wetlands we have left in the Middle Rio Grande, because that keeps the nesting populations high up in the Pothole Region.”



THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION, EDITED BY SHANE P. MAHONEY & VALERIUS GEIST

Review by Lew Carpenter

To begin, it seems best to articulate the focus of the book. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is “an evolved and shared system of conservation laws, principles, institutions, and policies that has enabled the successes of Canada and the United States in the recovery, management, and protection of wildlife and brought them global recognition,” write Shane P. Mahoney, Valerius Geist and Paul R. Krausman.

And, like many of you, I am most familiar with the seven principles associated with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (the Model):

1. Maintaining wildlife as a public trust resource, entrusted to the state to manage.
2. Prohibiting deleterious commerce in dead wildlife products.
3. Regulating and defining appropriate wildlife use by law.
4. Ensuring wildlife can only be killed for legitimate purpose.
5. Recognizing and managing wildlife as an international resource.
6. Utilizing and safeguarding science as the appropriate basis for wildlife policy.
7. Protecting the democratic allocation of citizen opportunity to harvest wildlife.

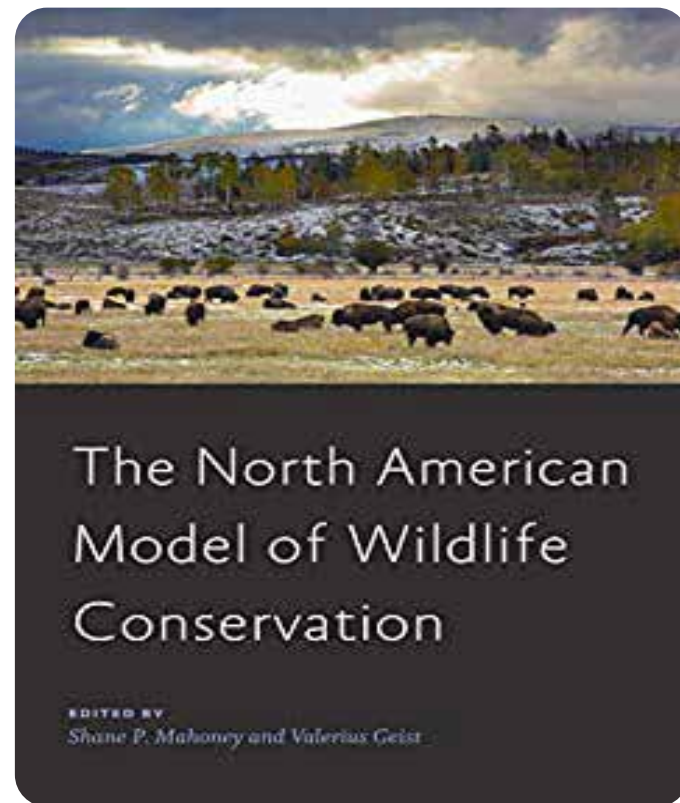
As hunters and conservationists we invoke the Model when advocating for our collective heritage. It is the philosophical foundation of our beloved sport and the significant implementation of how we engage with wildlife and the world around us in a respectful and scientific manner.

This essay is less a book review than an endorsement, a nudge and a hope that you will expand your knowledge of the Model by making this book a well-engaged member of your nightstand or bookshelf.

Many people, and rightly so, believe that the Model came into existence as a fully formed concept. After all, it is often presented as such. But creation, evolution and structure came long before it was named, as you will find within the pages of this book.

It may come as a surprise to many that this is the first and remains the only book to ever address the Model. Author Shane Mahoney tells us that, “Given this pedigree it was designed first and foremost to be the most complete presentation of not only the Model’s history and structure (principles) but also the urgent context in which it arose (massive over-exploitation), the pre-conditions which gave rise to it (the ecological conditions of the continent as shaped by Native Americans and the influence of European ideals and perspectives) and which help explain its particular personality, and the characteristics of the Model which leave it open to challenge and reflection.”

There is no doubt that the authors of the various chapters seek to inspire an advancement in thought and creation for the next iteration of the Model. The book illustrates more than once the evolution of the Model and how we got to where we are today. And, through this gentle discourse, both strengths and weaknesses beg collective work and a desperate need to adapt and improve upon what has become the greatest system of sustainable wildlife management on the planet.



“The hope is that the book will encourage debate, incite deeper investigation of the Model’s assumptions and will force upon its proponents and detractors alike challenging truths that demand reflection and address,” says Mahoney. “While the book is meant to celebrate the Model’s successes and clarify the desperate plight of wildlife in late nineteenth century North America, it also contains an unequivocal recognition of what I perceive as the greatest misfortune in the Model’s origins and constitution.... the complete absence of the perspectives and unparalleled natural history and landscape management knowledge of Native American cultures. If the book achieved nothing else, I would see bringing this to broader attention as a success.”

The format of the book is well designed as each chapter is self-contained, with Mahoney bringing it all home in conclusion. You can start with “A Comparison of the North American Model to Other Conservation Approaches” and jump to “The Great Early Champions” with ease. We are taken by many routes and a variety of voices to places of much deeper understanding about wildlife management, history, conservation and the critical role each of us plays in past and future success.

The historical context is compelling and emerges naturally from the beginning of the book. I simply had no real idea of the history of North American wildlife and its complicated path to being managed today. For example, Geist and Mahoney write, “...in the context of wildlife management and nature conservation in North America, it is important to note that the entry of modern humans at the beginning of the Bølling-Allerød Interstadial some 14,000 years ago marked the last time the continent’s biota and landscapes were natural.” Geist and Mahoney’s history lessons “...examine what is natural, and whether North America’s objectives for wildlife reflect realistic interpretations of the continent’s past and hopes for its future.”

Closer to home, James L. Cummins’ accessible essay on critical legislation explains how laws like Pittman-Robertson, Dingell-Johnson and Wallop-Breaux became key conservation funding cornerstones. As well, Cummins highlights other important conservation Acts, like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act (Duck Stamp).

But the history of how we got to be where we are today doesn’t stop with the examples above, as the significant past comes up time and time again in additional chapters. “There are many insightful passages that explain lesser known facts, such as how knowledgeably first North American cultures worked to manage landscapes and how they impacted wildlife, how diverse the personalities and intense the debates were amongst early conservation advocates, how complex our institutions are today and how farsighted founding thinkers were in creating international treaties more than a century ago,” says Mahoney.

And every hunter should read the chapter on “Hunting and Vested Interests as the Spine of the North American Model,” by James R. Heffelfinger and Mahoney, which clearly illustrates the core role of the North American hunter. It further details how the

idea of seeking incentives for successful conservation program implementation was intuitively “baked” into the Model by self interest of the North American hunter.

As well, in Heffelfinger’s discussion of non-game species and their absence from the hunter-incentive paradigm, he rightly makes the case - without naming the effort - for the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (RAWA), which would provide funding relief to state game and fish agencies for all species under their care. As of this writing, RAWA is pending in Congress.

Challenges to the Model

The honesty of the book both celebrates the vast successes of the Model, building a case for its continued relevance, as well as points a finger at its current weaknesses. With seven highly articulated challenges, we also find an “Incomplete Historical Narrative” that fails to recognize important contributors to the Model’s success. Brennan, Hewitt and Mahoney write, “To its detriment the traditional narrative also fails to address how prevalent social inequalities between genders, races, and classes during the development of the Model negatively impacted its practical inclusivity.”

Acknowledging the weaknesses of the Model, Mahoney makes the case for an enlightened upgrade, one we should all demand - rather than deny in retreat. “Without commitment to fundamental change, we must accept that current trends in conservation will continue and that the North American Model will inevitably weaken as its foundational principles prove outdated to both nature’s requirements and society’s tolerances and values.” He goes on to emphasize that we should all be leaders of the change - heroes and mobilizers of knowledge.

Mahoney explains that, “Ultimately, of course, the hope for this book is that it contributes to the vital debate over wildlife’s future, reminds us of the cultural ties and community identities that abide within its nexus of historicity and self-awareness, and forces upon the reader the ultimate question: if not this Model, then what alternative is reasonably and realistically proposed. Wildlife, not the Model, is the crucial reality to be, above all else, defended, safeguarded and preserved.”

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with this book. As a hunter and conservationist I’ll be reaching for it time and time again as I advocate for its principles, as well as seek resolution to its current challenges. And, to be clear, the book is not just for the North American hunter, it is for all who seek to engage, protect and support wildlife and habitat.

Mahoney says it best in his final conclusion: “Wild nature cannot speak for itself. We must. The greatest question facing North American society today is whether we will.”



Lew Carpenter is Director of Conservation Partnerships for the National Wildlife Federation.

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