

Rio Grande Sierran

March / April 2000

News of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club

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Sierra Club Board of Directors Annual Election

Watch for the ballot which should be arriving soon in your mail for the National Board of Directors. The Board sets the priorities for direction and funding for the Club, so it is essential you exercise your rights as a member and vote!

Board Candidates E-Forum

Each candidate is only allowed a very brief statement which is mailed with your ballot. As a means of learning more about the candidates, you can get on a e-mail list server -- where the candidates are asked to respond to issues critical to the Club's future.

To sign up, or to see a list of candidates who are running, please refer to the article on page 5.

Collaboration and Court Action on the Rio Grande

By Letty Belin

New Mexico Counsel for the
Land and Water Fund of the Rockies

If you're someone who wants to see water and fish in the middle Rio Grande -- that is the stretch of the river between Cochiti and Elephant Butte -- there's a lot to worry about these days:

* There's the fact that there has been almost no precipitation since September and experts are predicting runoff to the river at well under 50% of average this spring.

* There's Albuquerque's "water strategy", whereby the City is planning eventually to take all 48,200 acre-feet of its San Juan-Chama water (which, by the way, is a substantial fraction of the river) which now goes down the river and use it for its water supply in place of pumping groundwater.

* Another idea now being contemplated by Albuquerque is the proposal to use some of the 60 million gallons per day of sewage effluent that it currently releases to the Rio

See *Collaboration* on Page 6

Lifting The Lobo Out Of Limbo

By Elizabeth Walsh

Wildlife Issues Co-Chair

Introduction

The Mexican grey wolf, or Lobo, *Canis lupus baileyi* has only recently been reintroduced into the wild (in 1998) after an absence of perhaps 20 years, during which time it only existed in zoos and captive breeding facilities. Originally covering a range that extended from roughly Mexico City up through the borderlands of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, the Lobo was becoming scarce in the 1950's in both the US and Mexico. By the 1960's it was for all practical and ecological purposes extinct, although a few last individuals were trapped along the Arizona-New Mexico border in the mid-1970's. As was the case with other large predators in the region, the Lobo owed its demise to the livestock industry, which zealously shot, trapped, and poisoned the wolves of the southwest until, at last, there were none.

See *Lobo Limbo* on Page 14

Santa Fe City Council Election -- March 7

By Susan Martin

Santa Fe Group Political Chair

The Sierra Club endorsed 4 candidates for the Santa Fe City Council election to take place on March 7, 2000. The candidates endorsed are the following:

District 1 Incumbent Patti J. Bushee

District 2 Karen Heldmeyer

District 3 David Coss

District 4 Matthew Ortiz

Please refer to details about each candidate on page 18.

A Trickle of Hope for the Rio Grande?

By Steve Harris

Rio Grande Restoration

Dry Forecast - With February 1 runoff forecasts calling for 10% of average flows at San Marcial, the year 2000 may well be one of the most critical for survival of the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow.

Even in "normal" water supply years, irrigation diversions and seepage from the stream channel conspire to de-water the river below San Acacia dam. This problem becomes increasingly critical as minnow populations cluster below the diversion dam, where the dry river phenomenon has become almost chronic.

Suddenly, the 10 foot high irrigation diversion at San Acacia becomes seen as a key threat to the minnow's continued survival. Minnow eggs and fry both drift on the currents for several days and, when they drift over the diversion dam, they become confined to the river segment below. Population studies made by Bureau of Reclamation scientists last summer and fall indicate that perhaps 90% of all remaining minnows are now isolated below San Acacia. Combined with the high frequency of river dewatering in this section,

See *Trickle* on Page 7

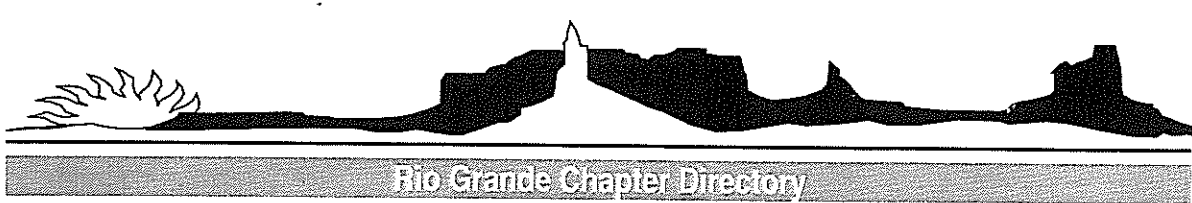


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Rio Grande Chapter Directory

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915 852-3011 TMeritg@aol.com

Marianne Thaeler, Southern Group
522-3421 marianne.thaeler@sierraclub.org

Sierra Club Structure

The Club has three structural levels. The National Board of Directors determines the overall direction of the Club. The National Organization is subdivided into Chapters, and each Chapter is further divided into Groups. One representative from each Chapter reports to the National Board through the Council of Club Leaders. The nearest full-time Club staffers are in Phoenix.

The Rio Grande Chapter hires a lobbyist full-time during the session of the New Mexico Legislature. The largest part of the Chapter's budget goes to the printing and mailing of this Newsletter, followed by the salary and expenses for the lobbyist.



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Regional and National Representatives

Southwest Region Conservation Committee (SWRCC)
Ted Mertig, Gwen Wardwell; Alternates: Elizabeth Walsh, Jennifer Johnson

Council of Club Leaders Delegate
Barbara Johnson; Norma McCallan (alternate)

Sierran

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All phone numbers area code 505 unless otherwise noted.

The Rio Grande Sierran is published six times a year by the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club as a benefit for Sierra Club members living in New Mexico and West Texas.

Make address changes by contacting Membership Services at 415 977-5649 or send member name and number to address.changes@sierraclub.org

Non-member subscriptions at \$10.00 per year are available. Send checks to Blair Brown, Treasurer; 2226B Wyoming NE, PMB 272, Albuquerque, NM 87112. Please allow 8 weeks for processing.

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Contributions are welcome from members. Email contributions preferred. Send to jbuchser@ni.net or mail to John Buchser, 223 N. Guadalupe PMB 419, Santa Fe, NM 87501. **All submissions MUST be received by the 10th of the month prior to publication.** (The Rio Grande Sierran is published in early January, March, May, July, September, and November.) Photos, artwork and poems are also welcome. Letters and articles are subject to abridgement.

The editorial policies adopted by the Grand Canyon Chapter will be used as guidelines for publication of future issues of the Rio Grande Sierran. Letters to the editor over 300 words will be edited for length or returned to the author for editing. Submissions of Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence over other submissions.

Content of Group pages are the responsibility of the editor for that group and any policies that are in place from the applicable Group.

Contact editor for advertising policy and rates.

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Save Our Planet

Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Wild Places of the Earth

By Jennifer Johnson

Conservation Chair

The Sierra Club was founded on May 28, 1892. Since that time the Club has grown from the 182 charter members who lived in the San Francisco Bay Area to a large organization with members who live throughout the United States and Canada. When it was founded, the members were chiefly interested in preserving the wild areas of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Today, the scope of interest has expanded to include protection for the earth, the air and water which surround it, and the wild beings who inhabit it.

From its earliest beginnings, the goals of the Sierra Club have been to:

- explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the Earth,
- practice and promote the responsible use of the Earth's ecosystems and resources,
- educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment, and to
- use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.

We have inherited this earth from two types of ancestors, those who lived off the earth's capital and those who spared the capital and lived off the interest. The battle to preserve that capital will never cease for there will always be those who want to spend it for their own benefit. We are now the ancestors, what kind of earth will our grandchildren inherit from us?

There are two sources of power in the political process, one is money and the other is people. Because we will never have the financial resources of our opponents, we must rely on people to reach the Club's goals. It is through organizations such as the Sierra Club that people can take power in the political process. In order to be more effective in defense of the environment we must have volunteers who have a desire to bequeath an environmentally sound and ecologically sustainable legacy to future generations.

The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club has approximately 6500 members who are responsible for that part of the earth which encompasses the State of New Mexico plus

El Paso, Texas. In terms of the earth, this is a very small piece, but in terms of the future of the earth it is integral. How many people in the Rio Grande Chapter actively work to promote the Club's goals? It is difficult to know exactly but a good indication is the number of names listed in the Chapter Directory.

A look at the Directory will also show you what issues the Chapter is attempting to address in New Mexico. If you see an issue that interests you give the "Chair" a call. But more importantly, if you don't see one that interests you, volunteer to "chair" a committee on that issue. New Mexico daily faces threats from air quality, toxic wastes, WIPP, population growth, solid waste...the list could go on and on, and there is nobody presently following any of these issues.

Come and be a part of the future. Attend your Group's general meeting and introduce yourself to the other people present. Call one of the Chapter's executive committee members and discuss your interests and concerns. Ask where you can help. Remember, this Club can't exist without you.

Acquisition of the Baca Ranch -- Land Transfer Concerns

By Ray Powell

New Mexico Land Commissioner

The Baca Ranch is an essential part of New Mexico's history and natural landscape. I strongly support the acquisition of the Baca Ranch. This is an investment in New Mexico's future.

Recreational opportunities, protection of irreplaceable wildlife habitat and preservation of large open spaces are but a few reasons why we cannot afford to lose this opportunity.

This is not a luxury or frivolous acquisition, as some would characterize it. In fact, the opposite is true. A 1994 study by the Institute for Southern Studies in Durham, N.C., concluded, "The states that do the most to protect their natural resources also wind up with the strongest economies and the best jobs."

Senator Jeff Bingaman has been fighting to acquire this land since he entered the U.S. Senate 18 years ago. Congressman Udall has also long been a strong supporter for acquisition of this priceless land. Both understand what a biologically irreplaceable site this is and they have fought hard to make it a state and national treasure.

Senator Domenici and Representative Wilson have both recently endorsed the acquisition of the Baca and have advanced proposals for its purchase and management. I commend all of them. However, the Domenici proposal could negatively affect the future protection of other important biologically sensitive and unique areas of New Mexico.

Specifically, Senator Domenici's bill contains a provision called the Disposal of Public Land Section. This calls for the disposal of over one million acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Land in New Mexico over the next ten years.

As significant as the Baca is to conservation in New Mexico, there is a larger picture to consider. If Domenici's

divestiture proposal passes, tens of thousands of acres of state land locked within BLM wilderness areas, known as "in-holdings," will be in danger of future development.

While the Domenici divestiture proposal would not affect the Baca purchase directly, it would have significant, undesirable effects on our efforts to protect wilderness areas throughout New Mexico via land exchanges.

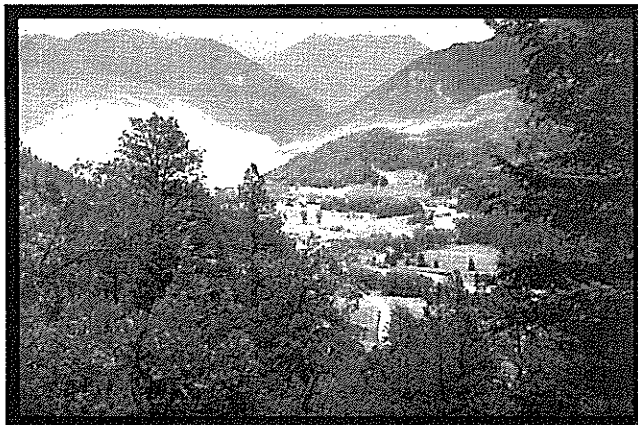
The New Mexico Land Office's exchange priorities are all in-holdings within existing national parks, monuments and wilderness areas. If BLM were forced to sell off a million acres of its land, the Land Office would lose much of the land available for possible trade. Furthermore, making the sale of lands a top priority for this already beleaguered agency would greatly hamper the critical day to day land management duties of the BLM.

guered agency would greatly hamper the critical day to day land management duties of the BLM.

Senator Domenici's land sale proposal would end our ability to trade Land Office in-holdings out of 13 wilderness study areas. The end result would be an inability to protect these sensitive areas and could eliminate them from being dedicated as permanent wilderness areas in the future.

Now is the time to make sure we get protection for both the Baca and for the wilderness areas throughout New Mexico through a deliberate, systematic series of land exchanges.

Please contact Senator Domenici and ask him to remove his requirement that one million acres of BLM land be sold in order to acquire the Baca Ranch.



East Fork of San Juan River (see article, next page)



Public Lands

Volunteering For Wilderness

By Edward Sullivan
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

Throughout New Mexico there are unique, enchanted parcels of land that to this day remain largely untouched. These are the last remaining wild lands in New Mexico. In an age of rampant habitat loss, watershed degradation and suburban sprawl, more and more development pressure is placed on what little wild country there is left in New Mexico.

That is why the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is organizing to protect these special places as Wilderness, and you can help.

Every year thousands of hunters, fishermen, hikers, campers, and outdoor lovers visit these incredible areas. Just the mere fact that so many people utilize our existing Wilderness areas demonstrates the need for more Wilderness. With the Wilderness legacy in New Mexico disappearing at an alarming rate, the time to protect them is now.

We go to the Wilderness to hunt and hike without the threat of ORVs ruining our experience. We go to fish placid streams in solitude. We go to pass on the legacy of a wild New Mexico to their kids. And now, we also go to dedicate our time to ensure the protection of these areas.

This spring season, please volunteer for the Wilderness. Take a weekend and join the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance for an outing to any one of our proposed Wilderness areas. They organize monthly trips to get out and perform critical fieldwork in proposed areas to assess their Wilderness suitability.

These car-camping weekends are filled with good hikes, good folks, and good times. No previous inventory is required and we will train new volunteers on site. The information collected on these weekends will eventually be used to make recommendations to Congress as to what areas should be included in a New Mexico Wilderness Bill.

Please call 255-5966, x106 and help us protect what little there is left of the Wild West.

March 24-26 Big Hatchets Wilderness-Inventory Weekend, Boot Heel Region Part of the Sky Islands region the Big Hatchets are known for their craggy soils and incredibly diverse animal populations. This area that was recently threatened by oil and gas drilling will be surveyed for roads/impacts and Wilderness characteristics.

April 14-16 Quebradas Area Wilderness Inventory Weekend, East of Socorro We had so much fun in this area last fall, we are headed back to finish inventorying the sinuous canyons, rocky cliffs and ancient rock art sites of these proposed Wilderness areas.

Luxury Resort Threatens Wild San Juan Valley

Mark Pearson
Rocky Mountain Chapter
Wilderness Chair

A private luxury club is the latest threat to one of San Juan's last, undeveloped valleys. Out-of-state developers propose an exclusive resort featuring memberships for \$500,000 apiece in the San Juan River's East Fork Valley. Called the Piano Creek Ranch, the proposed luxury club offers its 395 members a golf course, luxury bungalows, trophy homes, private ski runs, tennis courts, and other comforts in the privacy and seclusion of the last, best place in the San Juan Mountains.

Local residents and conservationists are appalled by the development plans. Rancher and long-time conservationist Betty Feazel fears the impact on wildlife. Pagosa Springs resident Kathryn Nelson believes the infusion of wealthy elites will greatly increase the cost-of-living and drive out average residents. Bayfield resident Dan Johnson compares the East Fork to Yosemite Valley before it was overrun by development.

The private club is slated for a 2,800-acre private inholding entirely surrounded by the San Juan National Forest, and is located on the north boundary of the South San Juan Wilderness Area. Currently accessible only a few months each year via a narrow dirt road, the East Fork Valley is a haven for wildlife and those pursuing primitive recreation. The valley's sweeping meadows and wetlands invites comparisons with Yellowstone's dramatic Lamar Valley. East Fork serves as the linchpin to a major elk migration corridor. The valley is the site of the last, wild lynx sighting in the San Juan Mountains ten years ago, prior to this past year's release of transplanted lynx from Canada. And the last grizzly bear in Southern Rockies was killed just a few miles south of the East Fork Valley in 1979.

The \$100 million development plans to turn this uninhabited valley into a year-round community. Developers propose to widen and straighten the dirt road, initiate avalanche control in winter, and plow it for year-round access. Converting this empty, uninhabited valley into a bustling center of human activity will devastate native wildlife.

Readers might recall the East Fork Valley was once the site of a massive proposed ski resort, owned in part by American Express's Balcort subsidiary. The ski resort prompted the Sierra Club to adopt a boycott of American Express. Since then, American Express sold its ownership interest to an investment group led by real estate developers from Southern California and Park City, Utah.

The developers have lined up an eclectic group of wealthy investors and members. Most notable among members is astronaut Neil Armstrong, first man on the moon. The developers tout Armstrong's involvement as a selling point, but opponents ask how someone so intimately familiar with the finite nature of Earth's resources can participate in the destruction of the last undeveloped valley in the San Juan Mountains. Surely Armstrong, of all people, realizes there are no more valleys like East Fork once all succumb to development.

Original investors in the ranch include Roger Penske of Penske auto racing, Jacqueline Mars Vogel, heiress to Mars Candy, Walter Cruttenon of on-line banker E*Offering, and other Silicon Valley entrepreneurs.

One of the founding investors in the resort is New Mexico sculptor Dave McGary of Ruidoso. Mr. McGary's bronze sculpture adorns the real estate office for Piano Creek Ranch in Pagosa Springs. Christie's Great Estates in Santa Fe is marketing the resort to high-rollers nationwide.

The Piano Creek Ranch developers tout their proposal as "saving" the valley from development because their club creates less impact than the previously proposed East Fork ski area. But opponents ask how a golf course, ten private ski runs, 100,000 square-foot lodge, fifteen trophy homes, dozens of condos, a 50-acre lake and employee housing seems like "saving" the valley from development? The club also includes plans for a private helicopter pad, sewage treatment plant, and natural gas co-generation electric plant.

Confounding the issue is the fact that most of the East Fork Valley once resided in public ownership! Until two land exchanges in 1933 and

Continued on next page

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Protect Wilderness -- New Mexico's Natural Heritage

Water and Public Lands

Continued from previous page

1943, the East Fork Valley was owned by the American public and managed as part of the San Juan National Forest. Opponents to Piano Creek Ranch club argue the valley should be returned to public ownership and forever spared devastating development.

The land exchanges reserved some rights for the public, including the use of public trails across the proposed Piano Creek Ranch as well as access for fishing along the East Fork river. Last summer, the developers attempted to block public use of these trails, and strung electric fence across the Quartz Ridge Trail. The Forest Service ultimately cited Piano Creek Ranch for illegally blocking public access and fined the developers. However, Piano Creek Ranch continues to deny public fishing access as required by the 1943 land exchange.

Fortunately, the proposed Piano Creek Ranch — named after some made-up cowboy story and not any local stream — is in the very beginning stages of development. It must obtain numerous permit approvals from the Forest Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Archuleta and Mineral Counties, Colorado state agencies, and others. This offers the public numerous opportunities for public comment. Here's how you can help stop the most destructive development in the San Juans:

1) East Fork Road: The developers want to widen and improve East Fork Road, plow it for year-round vehicle access, and increase traffic by hundreds of vehicles per day. The Forest Service is analyzing the potential impacts of this vastly improved road. Write to District Ranger Jo Bridges, P.O. Box 310, Pagosa Springs, CO 81147 (970) 264-2268, e-mail jbridges/r2_sanjuan@fs.fed.us,

and demand an Environmental Impact Statement to analyze the impacts on existing winter recreation, the impacts to wildlife like elk and lynx, and the impacts to the East Fork's water quality. 2) Contact investors and members of Piano Creek Ranch and urge them not to participate in destroying the last undeveloped valley in the San Juan Mountains. Encourage them to help safeguard the valley for all Americans. Addresses for some of the club members are:

Mr. Dave McGary
McGary Studios
P.O. Box 1310
Ruidoso, NM 88355
<http://www.davemcgary.com>

Mr. Roger Penske
Chairman, Detroit Diesel
13400 Outer Drive West
Detroit, MI 48239

Mr. Keith Fox
Cisco Systems
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San Jose, CA 95134

Neil A. Armstrong, Chairman
AIL Systems Inc.
455 Conmack Road
Deer Park, New York 11729-4591

For additional information about the proposed development, visit the web at www.sanjuancitizens.org.

Learn About the Board of Directors Candidates

By Steve Glazer
SWRCC Chair

The Club's Board of Directors will answer two questions each week. This week (2/10) candidates are responding to questions on grazing of public land and whether or not compromise is OK in achieving our objectives. The candidates this year are Chris Bedford (MD), Phil Berry (CA), Robbie Cox (NC), Ed Dobson (MT), Michael Dorsey (MI), Chad Hanson (CA), Roy Hengerson (MO), Rhea Jezer (NY), Alan Kuper (OH), Susan Patton (KY), Nancy Rauch (PA), Lisa Renstrom (NC), and Joan Willey (MD).

If you'd like copies of any previous postings, please contact one of your ExCom members.

If you would like to subscribe to the forum, you may do so by following these directions:

Any Club member may subscribe by sending the following message:

To: LISTGUARD@SIERRACLUB.ORG
Subject: <your 8-digit membership number>
Message text: SUB BOB-CANDIDATES-
FORUM YourFirstName YourLastName substituting your real name for "YourFirstName YourLastName"

Manuals And Lawsuits To Free The Rio Costilla

By Ernie Atencio
Formerly with Amigos Bravos

Nearly three years of legal and political pressure on the Costilla Creek Compact Commission have paid off with a Draft Costilla Creek Operations Manual — the first operations manual in the 55-year history of the Compact.

As a result of outdated management practices under the 1944 Costilla Creek Compact, questionable water right transfers, and habitual over-diversion, the Costilla has become a decimated river ecosystem. Immense diversion works just above the villages of Costilla, NM and Garcia, CO have reduced the lower Rio Costilla to little more than a trickle during most of the irrigation season, and the river and downstream parcientes struggle to survive. Management of the Costilla Reservoir in the upper end of the watershed has created conditions that can no longer support the native Rio Grande cutthroat trout fishery.

Amigos Bravos works with Reviva el Rio Costilla (RRC), a coalition of local residents, to press for more efficient, equitable and environmentally responsible management of the river.

At first glance, the Draft Operations Manual does not significantly change conventional management practices, but it at least provides the first concrete forum in which to address our concerns.

We are currently completing a thorough hydrological and legal analysis of the very complex Manual to prepare a response.

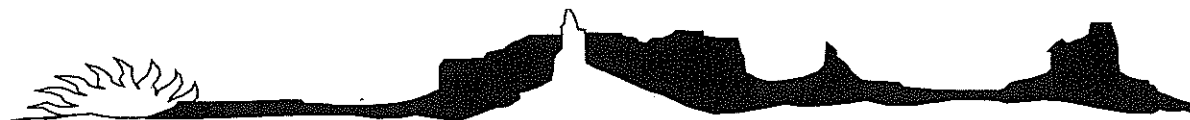
Amigos Bravos and RRC are prepared to pursue legal action if the Operations Manual does not resolve our concerns. We are also investigating legal action against EPA to address the pressing problem of excessive sediment from upstream, which severely alters natural flow dynamics in the Rio Costilla and affects the quality of the water that reaches irrigation headgates. This sediment comes primarily from erosion of poorly designed road cuts along the tributary Cordova Creek and denuded slopes at Ski Rio. It accumulates at a point above Costilla due to the on-and-off operation and occasional sluicing of the major diversion dam just upstream. This process has buried the natural stream channel and resulted in a critically aggraded, or raised, stream bed, which hinders the flow of what little water gets to that point.

EPA recently approved a TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) for Cordova Creek,

which recognizes sediment as a serious water quality impact, yet does nothing to clean it up. A TMDL is like a "budget" of allowable levels of pollutants that can be discharged into a stream without violating water quality standards. Despite the federal Clean Water Act, which requires the development of TMDLs, the original intent of the law to actually clean up water quality has apparently been forgotten. It has turned instead into a vacuous bureaucratic exercise that makes little noticeable difference. The Cordova Creek TMDL, for example, invites voluntary cleanup measures by those responsible, but does nothing to mandate or enforce cleanup. We intend to challenge that lack of mandated, enforceable measures in court.

We commend Ski Rio for taking the initiative to develop revegetation projects and other erosion control measures. Amigos Bravos has offered to coordinate volunteer labor to help with the work (please contact our office for more information). However, road cuts long the state highway leading up to the ski area are the primary erosional sources, and so far the State Highway Department has not come forth with any proposals to clean it up.

Refer to www.amigosbravos.org for additional information.



Rio Grande -- In Trouble?

Middle Rio from Page 1

Grande (making the sewage effluent the fifth largest tributary to the Rio Grande) for irrigation and nonpotable uses in the City rather than running it back to the river.

* There's the fact that the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow, the last of four related native fish species remaining in the middle Rio Grande, is hanging by a thread. 96% of the silvery minnow population is now in the 60-mile stretch of river between San Acacia and Elephant Butte, where the river most frequently dries up and where the minnow eggs can wash into the reservoir and disappear.

* There's the plan by the Bureau of Reclamation to restore and reoperate the Low Flow Conveyance Channel, the 60-mile long canal next to the Rio Grande between San Acacia and Elephant Butte that is designed to remove all water from the Rio Grande when the river is low and convey it "more efficiently" to Elephant Butte. This is precisely the stretch of river where almost all the silvery minnows are.

* There's the related plan by the Army Corps of Engineers to rebuild and expand the 60 miles of levee between the river and the Low Flow Conveyance Channel.

While the threats to the middle Rio Grande seem daunting, environmental groups have not been sitting idly by. They have, first of all, gotten organized and formed the Alliance for Rio Grande Heritage. The mission of the Alliance is to protect and restore the Rio Grande throughout New Mexico and west Texas. The Alliance includes a broad range of national and local environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, Rio Grande Restoration, New Mexico Audubon Council, Forest Guardians, Amigos Bravos, Southwest Environmental Center, Defenders of Wildlife, the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies, and National Audubon Society, among others.

A year and a half ago, the Alliance issued a "Green Paper" setting forth a concrete plan of action to restore long-term ecological health for the middle Rio Grande. The "Green Paper" considers the water use practices and legal constraints in the middle Rio Grande valley, and proposes ideas for keeping the river wet and restoring riparian ecosystems while providing sufficient water for the needs of agricultural irrigators and other water rights holders.

Since that time, the Alliance has been participating in a myriad of negotiations, collaborations, and meetings with water agencies and other stakeholders to attempt to promote the ideas in the Green Paper and the underlying principles of restoring the Rio Grande. Some good things have come of all these efforts and the efforts of others on the river. For example, Santa Ana, Isleta, and Sandia Pueblos teamed up with the Alliance and others to obtain \$2 million from Congress this

year for river restoration projects. We hope that this is only the beginning of this restoration project.

In a different vein, the Alliance last month joined agencies and others in signing a "Memorandum of Understanding Regarding a Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act Collaborative Program." The intent of this MOU is to develop a Cooperative Agreement to protect and promote the recovery of the Rio Grande silvery minnow while at the same time allowing other legal water uses. Others who have signed the MOU include: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Army Corps of Engineers, N.M. Interstate Stream Commission, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, N.M. Game and Fish Department, the City of Albuquerque, the N.M. Attorney General's office, and the National Association of Industrial and office properties. Members of the Alliance are somewhat skeptical that this process will result in any protection for the river or the silvery minnow. Nevertheless, the Alliance believes that a long-term solution for the river will ultimately require an agreement among all river stakeholders, such as the Cooperative Agreement envisioned here. For that reason, the Alliance signed the MOU. If the process gets co-opted by the water users or otherwise goes astray, the Alliance will decide at that time whether to leave the table.

At the same time that members of the Alliance are working with others in this array of work groups and negotiations, they are also taking legal action. As you may have read in the newspaper, some six or seven lawsuits have been filed against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over its designation of critical habitat for the silvery minnow. Most of these suits attempt to get the Service to cut back on its designation and limit its requirement that water be left in the Rio Grande for the minnow. But one of the lawsuits, filed by Forest Guardians, Defenders of Wildlife, and Southwest Environmental Center contends that Fish and Wildlife didn't designate enough critical habitat for the minnow. They point out that the designation left out several miles of river just above Elephant Butte where many of the minnows are now, and it didn't include stretches of any rivers other than the mainstem Rio Grande even though experts agree that the minnow must be reestablished in other locations in order to recover to non-endangered status. It will be many months before a court decision is issued in these lawsuits.

Six of the environmental groups in the Alliance for Rio Grande Heritage have also filed a lawsuit against the Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers, claiming that their management of the middle Rio Grande has violated the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act. One of the biggest problems that environmental groups have encountered is that the fed-

eral water agencies claim that their hands are completely tied by various laws and constraints imposed on them by others, such as the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, the Interstate Stream Commission, and the Rio Grande Compact Commission. The Bureau and the Corps say that even though they operate all the reservoirs and other facilities on the river, there is almost nothing they can do to improve the river ecosystem. All they can do, they say, is buy or lease any extra water to use for the river, and talk to everyone in hopes that everyone will agree to take some sort of action to help the river.

In their lawsuit, the environmental groups point out a number of actions that the federal agencies could consider taking to help the river. These include such things as stopping the Low Flow Conveyance Channel from draining lots of water out of the Rio Grande, changing the way they operate various reservoirs in order to provide more water in the river for the minnow, and changing the way agricultural diversions are managed. And the lawsuit claims that under the Endangered Species Act, the Bureau and the Corps should be consulting with the Fish and Wildlife Service about all these possible steps, in order to determine exactly what they should do to protect and promote the recovery of the silvery minnow and other endangered species such as the southwestern willow flycatcher.

The environmental plaintiffs will be trying to get some rulings from the court in time to help the river this spring and summer, when there is great risk of the river drying and killing off the few remaining silvery minnows. But the defendants, including the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, already are trying to slow the case down and prevent the court from ruling on the environmental claims.

In the meantime, the Fish and Wildlife Service has plans to capture silvery minnows and their eggs and place them in an aquarium this spring to ensure the minnow's survival throughout this dry year. It remains to be seen whether they can come up with the funding necessary to carry out this last-ditch minnow survival plan.

For people who want to get involved in the middle Rio Grande, there are lots of things you can do. There are a number of river restoration projects going on along the Rio Grande and its tributaries that can always use volunteer help. And there are lots of other things that need to be done to help the river. To find out more, you can call any of the organizations mentioned in this article, or call the Alliance for Rio Grande Heritage interim coordinator, Jeremy Kruger, at 242-8022 or the Alliance Chair, Steve Harris, at 751-1269.



Rio Grande

Harmonizing Rio Grande Management - the Water Operations Review

By Susan Gorman

Of course we all realize that the Rio Grande isn't the real, natural river it once was! Since well before the turn of the century, engineers, farmers and water managers have dammed, leveed, jetty jacked, diverted, and conveyed the waters of the Rio Grande with an amazing array of water control structures. Today, the operation of the existing structures is governed by rules and procedures under the jurisdiction of multiple agencies - including the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) and the US Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) and Irrigation Districts. The time has come, as the BOR, COE and ISC recently agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding, to explore what they can do under existing authorities to improve how they store and deliver water.

So, the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review was born! This review will examine the federal water operations activities in the Rio Grande Basin above Fort Quitman, Texas, mainly storage and release of water at 4 COE reservoirs, 3 BOR reservoirs and the operation of the BOR's Low Flow Conveyance Channel and Closed Basin Project. Together, these control structures are

major components of the plumbing system of our Great River and their operations play a large role in determining how much water flows when in the river.

Each agency operates under a separate mission and is governed by a separate set of rules. The COE is charged with flood loss reduction and sediment control. Initially, the BOR managed its projects to provide water for irrigation and as time went on, municipal, industrial, recreational and fish & wildlife were added as beneficiaries of its water operations. The ISC oversees compact deliveries and San Juan-Chama releases.

But of course, it's all the same river so actions taken by one agency affect actions of the others. When the time came for the operations review, the decision was made to consider development of an integrated plan so that hopefully the operation of the individual reservoirs and projects under lead agency control could be coordinated and still fulfill all the missions. Since we now know that there are more needs for water than there is wet water in the Rio Grande in an average year, working smart is an imperative so this effort to create a more integrated system with all of these water management agencies working together should be applauded and supported. In the past, a review such as this would

have been extremely difficult to accomplish. One of the tools under development that will make it possible is a computer based model called the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Model, URGWOM. A multi-entity committee is completing development of this model and its features and utilities will make it possible to run simulations of various water management scenarios.

The Water Ops Review will be conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared to document the process and insure that all of us are informed about the effects of any proposed actions on the environment. The EIS process will begin early this year with the publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register in late January followed by public scoping meetings in June and development and refining of alternatives later in the year. There will be opportunities for us to provide input about the alternatives, options and issues to be evaluated and those of us who care about the river and a sustainable water supply for the future should plan to participate.

Is there a silver bullet waiting to be discovered here? Is it really possible that operation of the Rio Grande can be improved?

Continued on next page

Trickle from Page 1

the barrier at San Acacia makes minnow recovery seem much more problematic.

Water Conservation? Environmentalists have become accustomed to blaming streamflow/habitat problems on the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, which annually diverts 600,000 acre feet to serve about 50,000 acres of farms. This computes to 4 million gallons of water for each acre of alfalfa and hay, the predominant crops here. A recent study by NMSU Agricultural Economist Tom McGuckin actually tagged MRGCD as the "sixth most inefficient irrigator" in the West.

There's evidence, however, that the minnow crisis has made both the Conservancy and the State Engineer/Interstate Stream Commission more sensitive to charges of water waste, so much so that a modern water measuring system for the district is well along the road to completion. Moreover, the state legislature may well approve funding for an in-depth look at the Conservancy's water delivery efficiency, which could ultimately lead to less water being diverted.

Water Project: Who needs it? Albuquerque's Surface Water Strategy has received little scrutiny from environmentalists, despite the fact that it proposes to deplete a lot of new water from the river. The City purchased almost 50,000 acre feet of water rights in the San Juan Chama interbasin di-

version project in 1964 and now proposes to begin using every drop, perhaps as early as 2004. Did you know this strategy is currently undergoing its NEPA analysis, with EPA and State Engineer permit applications coming in the near future?

Almost no one questions the city's need to implement this project. It's now well known that the water is being pumped from the aquifer at twice the rate at which it is being recharged. City officials have frequently boosted the project as "renewable" and "sustainable", concepts resonating with the modern urbanite. Unmistakably, reducing the "mining" of groundwater is a worthy goal. Less well-known is the fact that, if Albuquerque were to reduce its per capita water consumption (204 gpd) to the rate used in Tucson (144 gpd), the rate at which the City now mines the aquifer could be virtually cut in half.

Perhaps because of the fear of political reprisals, city fathers have failed to make the sort of water rate increases that might provide incentives for serious water conservation. Albuquerque's water rates continue to be among the lowest in the West. Low water rates do nothing to moderate Albuquerque's current explosive rate of population growth.

Bottom line is that, by setting ambitious but achievable conservation goals, the City might not need a new water project on

the scale or timetable proposed. By so doing, we might buy enough time to devise a strategy to avoid decimating the Rio Grande still further.

Positive Signs- An alliance of conservation groups are working on a comprehensive strategy to protect and restore the Rio Grande (see Letty Belin's story). The Alliance for Rio Grande Heritage includes Southwest Environmental Center, Rio Grande Restoration, Forest Guardians and Amigos Bravos, Sierra Club and Audubon chapters as well as other national and local groups.

Alliance members are cooperating to watchdog Endangered Species recovery processes, a major federal/state EIS over reservoir operations, developments in district and state water management and to catalyze positive change on behalf of the river.

You Can Get Involved:

- Attend the Water Assembly at UNM on March 25 - call Danny Hernandez 244-8391
- "Remove San Acacia Dam" on March 14 - call Forest Guardians 988-9126.
- Foster river restoration in the "Canalization Project" near El Paso/Las Cruces - call Southwest Environmental Center 522-5552.
- Rio Grande Restoration's new Albuquerque office will connect you to exciting local restoration projects - call 266-3609

Water

Participating in the Water Operations Review

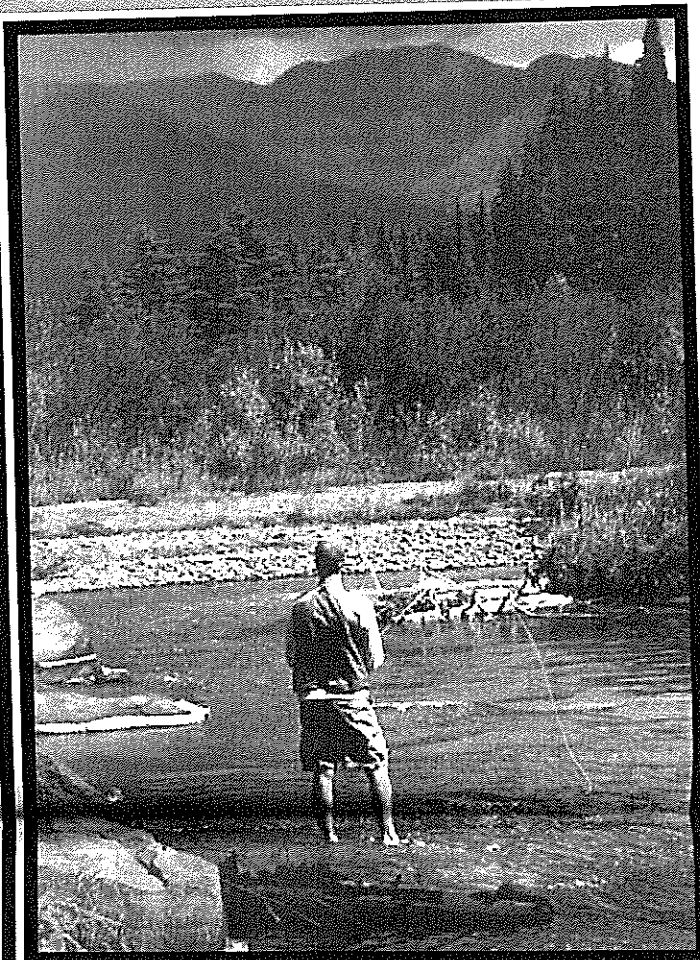
According to the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed on January 26, 2000, the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Review will consider the means available to exercise existing water operations authorities of the US Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) and the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) with respect to Upper Rio Grande Water Operations to:

1. Meet agricultural, domestic, municipal, industrial and environmental water needs, including water needs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species as required by law, consistent with the allocation of supplies and priority of water rights under state law;
2. Meet downstream water delivery requirements mandated by the Rio Grande Compact and international treaty;
3. Provide flood protection and sediment control;
4. Assure safe dam operations;
5. Support compliance with local, state, federal and tribal water quality regulations;
6. Increase system efficiency; and
7. Support compliance of BOR and COE with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for Upper Rio Grande Operations and activities and support compliance of all signatories with the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

For more information call Gail Stockton, COE, 505-342-3348, FAX 505-342-3195 Chris Gorbach, BOR, 505-248-5379, FAX 505-248-5308 Rolf Schmidt-Peterson, ISC, 505-841-9480, FAX 505-841-9485

Check the Internet:

www.spa.usace.army.millurgwops



Fly Fishing on the East Fork of the San Juan

Stream Health Assessment Class

Continued from previous page

grated system with all water management agencies working together can make more water? Emphatically not! But it is just possible that the process will discover ways, under existing authorities, to deliver the right amount of water to the right place at the right time so that there will be enough water for all needs more of the time. The coordination of water management authorities that can result from the Water Ops Review combined with other water management strategies such as conservation and efficiency measures and storing water in the aquifer during wet years will move us toward a sustainable future water supply and a living river.

Participating in the Water Ops Review process is one more way to take steps to create a future that is more what we want than what we'll get if we continue business as usual. To participate, watch for notices of public meetings and attend!

[Editor's note: this was previously printed in the Albuquerque Tribune on February 11 and is printed with the author's permission]

T-Walk "Stream Health Assessment" Short Course Corky Ohlander, Retired Regional Hydrologist, will conduct a T-Walk Stream Health Assessment Short Course from May 15 to 19, 2000 on the Santa Fe National Forest. The purpose of this short course is to develop or update field skills needed to make and document stream health assessments for both environmental documents and project monitoring. T-Walk stands for "Thalweg - Watershed Area Link." Course includes detailed discussions on the legal and science background that relates to stream health characteristics.

Location: La Cueva Lodge, 17 miles north of Jemez Springs, NM. Jemez Springs is located in the Jemez mountains in north central New Mexico. It is about 60 miles northwest of Albuquerque.

Lodging: La Cueva Lodge, 505-829-3814 (mention the Forest Service to get the gov't rate), Super 8 Motel (505-867-0766), 47 miles from La Cueva Lodge.

Tuition: \$200 payable to Corky Ohlander, 6048 So. Lakeview Street, Littleton CO 80120 or at the session. Tuition includes a training notebook with about 75 pages of color photographs.

What to bring: hip waders, insect repellent, calculator, and a sense of humor

Instruction: The course begins at 1 p.m., Monday, and concludes Friday noon; it consists of about 15 hours class and 9 hours field time. The work is a combination of lecture, class exercise, photograph review, and hands-on field practice.

Monday 1:00 -4:00 p.m. Class room: watershed reporting, project assessments, legal framework, best management practices.

Tuesday 8:30 a.m. Class room: stream health, thalweg depths; channel materials and pebble, Tarzwell Substrate Ratios 1:00-4:00 p.m. Field: equipment use, T-depth, Tarzwell Substrate Ratios, riffle insects.

Wednesday 8:30 a.m. Classroom: storm runoff control, vegetative buffers, bank stability, channel physics, site maps, diversity screen and interpretation. 1:00-4:00 p.m. Field: Reconvene at field site. T-Depth & Tarzwell Substrate Ratios, Diversity Screen & Interpretation, Storm Runoff Control.

Thursday 8:30 a.m. Classroom: stream health Assessment, restoration costs, stream recovery, remedial plans, monitoring plans. 1:00-4:00 p.m. Field: quick site study, putting it together: Tarzwell, restoration, expected limiting factor(s), remedial and monitoring plans.

Friday 8:30 a.m.-noon Restoration costs, stream recovery, remedial plans, monitoring plans, Questions: Steve McWilliams 505/438-7854; Chic Spann 505/842-3255; Corky 303/798-4821.



Letters to the Editor

Sprawl

I'm generally in favor of anti-sprawl initiatives, and I support the Sierra Club's activities in this area. But I must take exception to one aspect of the executive summary of "Sprawl Costs/Sprawl Solutions for New Mexico and El Paso", as reported in the January/February 2000 Sierran.

Quoting from the article: "Not all growth is sprawl, however. Growth can be a good thing when it represents a population increase, and especially an expansion of the economy." The first sentence is certainly true. The second sentence is disturbing, and at this point probably false in most parts of the world. It brushes aside several issues: 1. The ultimate driving force behind sprawl is population increase. There are better and worse solutions to the problem of population increase, but even the best place an additional burden on the environment. 2. Similarly, "expansion of the economy" can be handled in better or worse ways, but always results in an increased environmental burden. 3. Regardless of what level of population is considered "right", on a finite earth, that level must be finite. Most experts on the subject of population feel that the sustainable level of population for planet earth has already been reached or passed.

Thus saying unequivocally that growth is good if it represents population increase is a rash and misleading statement. It's time for the Sierra Club and other mainstream environmental groups to recognize that the ultimate cause of environmental problems is conflicts between humans and the environment. The more humans, the more conflicts. These conflicts can be minimized by wise policies, but not eliminated. Eventually, a point is reached where further growth in population is not sustainable. We need to face up to this fact and make it an input to all our policy development processes.

Dave Collins
Los Alamos, NM

The West Is Not A Place For Commercial Grazing

Regarding the letters "Herding one tool of many" and "Rangeland research provides a scientific basis for sustainable livestock grazing", herding and various management options is a very good idea for land that is suitable for grazing. The problem is, most of the west isn't suitable. It takes such a vast amount of land to provide the forage necessary in this arid overgrazed climate that ranchers can't adequately watch after their herd. A case in point is the bull killed by wolves on a public land grazing allotment in Catron County, discovered by someone other than the rancher a few days after it was killed. If it wasn't discovered by someone else, how long would it have been before the owner discovered it? Weeks? Months? Would he ever have found it? Since the owner wouldn't or couldn't afford to watch after his herd adequately, Defenders of Wildlife hired a cowboy to do the owners job of protecting his herd just so the wolf reintroduction project would be more palatable. Why is it that federal agencies and environmental groups feel it necessary to make our public lands safe for the cattle industry? Multiple use does not mean more than one cow, it means using our land for watershed protection, wildlife, hunting, fishing, birdwatching, backpacking and unfortunately, Grazing. Unfortunately, because grazing is at odds with all of the other valid uses of our lands.

Wolf reintroduction has been a disaster. Why? Conflicts with cattle. The question is, do we want public lands that are truly wild or do we want lands dominated by the politics of cattle. The livestock industry has a death grip on our public lands and they do whatever the hell they want. The Forest Service and BLM, who we entrust to manage our multiple use lands for the benefit of the public at large aren't doing their job. The only time we see any changes in destructive grazing policies is with lawsuits. The NEPA process is a total sham. We tell the agencies our concerns, we have the facts, we quote the laws, they ignore our concerns, obfuscate the issues and cover for the cattle industry. Some things never change....

If anyone doubts what I'm saying, try the NEPA process for yourself. Adopt a public land grazing allotment that is up for review. Write in your concerns. See if your concerns are incorporated into the planning process. See if they are addressed at all.

If you don't want to waste your time going through the NEPA process yourself (it will be a waste of

time unless you have a lawyer waiting in the wings to sue them when you're done exhausting your NEPA options and they've over-ruled your appeal), go into the Gila National Forest Main office and ask to see a copy of all public concerns on any of the recent Allotment Range Analyses, the final "Finding of no significant impact" (FONSI) for that allotment, the appeals by concerned citizens and the Regional Office's over-rule of your appeal. I guarantee you will be shocked at the total disregard of any and all of the public's concerns.

Last year, just before the Wilderness Anniversary in the Gila, I took photos of what should have been a pristine stream in Brannon Park in the grazed part of the Gila Wilderness. It was nothing more than a trench latrine for cattle. Mind you - this is state of the art current management in the nations first Wilderness one week before the Forest Chief was to arrive. One of my pictures and the story of it got front page coverage in a local paper on the day the "celebration" started.

So...herding and various management scenarios mean nothing on public lands (cattle numbers are more of an influence anyway). What we have needed is honest management, and that is obviously not possible. After one hundred years of laissez-faire management don't ever expect me to believe that "we'll do better next time".

With an estimated two billion dollars loaned out on mortgages with grazing permits attached, and the banks that hold those notes creating private property rights foundation PAC's that donate to Senators Domenici and Bingaman who have the ability to play with the Forest Service's budget, is it any wonder we never see good management and lower cattle numbers?

The only way we will ever see honest management as if wildlife, the watershed, our taxes, hunting, fishing and recreation matters, is when we stop grazing our public lands altogether. Management doesn't exist. It's not reality. And it never will be... until our lands are cattle free.

Michael Sauber
Gila Watch, Silver City

Economic Significance Of The Livestock Industry

Despite the multiple ecological impacts associated with livestock production on public rangelands, livestock grazing continues to be accepted as a necessity, in part, because of the public perception that ranching is essential to the West's rural economies. People are reluctant to criticize, much less phase out an economic activity that they perceive as critical to their own local economic interests. Yet, the overall economic importance of the livestock industry, particularly the part dependent upon public lands, is insignificant to all but the individual rancher. Indeed, even in most rural communities, government services, and transfer payments (retirement, royalties, and investments) account for the vast majority of all income sources. For the West as a whole—which is primarily urban—the dependency on agriculture, particularly ranching, is even less significant. Yet the myth that the West's economic backbone lies in ranching, is perpetuated by the livestock industry to maintain political control, power, and subsidies for a small subset of society—the West's welfare ranchers.

The myth of the western cowboy and ranch dependency is reinforced by several factors. One is simply the vast acreage under livestock production. When you leave the outskirts of almost any western community, you are almost immediately surrounded by ranching operations. The vast amount of land devoted to livestock production generates a false perception of its real economic contribution to western economies.

Furthermore, the ranchers themselves continuously reinforce this false sense of economic benefit, asserting that they are the backbone of the regional economy. This perception is echoed mindlessly by many publicly-supported institutions such as Agricultural Extension Services, universities and public lands managing agencies. Politicians (often ranchers) along with the media and even some environmental organizations (see Nature Conservancy Magazine, High Country News) are also culpable for this distortion as well, continuously exaggerating the overall economic value of livestock production, and thereby helping to maintain the political and economic hegemony enjoyed by the West's welfare ranchers. We continuously read or hear reports in the media about "ranching dependent communities", yet as documented by numerous studies, there are virtually no ranch dependent communities, much less entire ranching dependent state economies, anywhere in the West.

While there are hundreds of millions of acres devoted to growing cows, the amount of employment, income and economic activity that results is nearly insignificant. And since this activity is anything but benign, it often occurs at the expense of other western resources such as fisheries, wildlife, watersheds, recreation, scenery, biodiversity, and ecological processes—all of which have tremendous economic value well beyond the tiny contribution made by the livestock industry. In today's western amenity based economies, water diverted from a stream to grow hay to feed a cow is far more valuable if it remains in the stream to grow trout. Similarly grass cropped by a steer on public lands has greater economic value if left to feed an elk or bighorn sheep. Indeed, as University of Montana economic professor, Thomas Power argues, in the changing West of today, these quality of life resources are the engines that are driving modern economic activity.

There are several ploys used by livestock advocates to distort the value of public lands ranching to the West's economy. One method used to overstate the importance of public lands to the West's ranching industry is to count the total number of animals that graze on public lands, no matter how short a period of time, rather than the amount of forage contributed by those lands. Thus if a cow grazes on federal lands for even one day, it is counted as a public lands dependent grazing animal—even though the contribution of public lands forage to the annual production is small. Most public lands permittees use public lands forage seasonally, often for 1-3 months, although in some states like Arizona, year round grazing is more common. Thus the dependency upon public lands forage for any individual ranching operation varies tremendously, but few livestock operations are totally dependent upon public lands to meet all their forage needs. What is often overlooked is that even in the West, a substantial number of livestock (70%) are grazed exclusively on private lands most or all of the year. For example, only 10% of the forage for livestock in Montana, a state that possesses one of the largest cattle industries in the West, are derived from public lands.

If grazing on public lands were curtailed, western ranching operations would adapt by reducing their herds to fit their private lands acreage or by obtaining additional forage from other private sources. As you will see from below, most western ranching operations are not economically viable now, and should be more properly be considered "hobby" farms. Since economic viability isn't the reason most ranchers engage in livestock operations, a loss in public lands grazing privileges would not necessarily lead to the widespread abandonment of ranching in the West. Most ranchers engage in livestock production because it is a "lifestyle" choice. As a consequence, the overall number of western livestock operations that would be permanently put out of business by the closure of all federal lands grazing allotments would far less than the total number of western public lands livestock producers or even that subset that grazes on public lands. Nevertheless, the removal of all livestock from public lands would still have significant positive benefits for western wildlife, fisheries, watersheds, biodiversity and ecological processes.

The following statistics provide some point of reference on the issue.

- Number of total sheep and beef US livestock producers—1.1 million.
- Number of US beef producers—907,000
- Number of total sheep and beef livestock producers with public lands grazing permits—22,000 or 2%
- Percentage of US livestock produced on eastern private lands—81%
- Percentage of US livestock produced on western private lands—17%
- Percentage of US livestock produced on federal public lands—2%. In other words federal lands provide only 2% of the forage consumed by livestock in the US.
- Percentage of US livestock produced on state public lands—1%
- Percentage of western livestock operations with federal permits ranges from 49% of Nevada's (800) ranchers to 3% of Washington.

Furthermore, access to federal public lands is not equally distributed. Indeed, the majority of public lands forage is controlled by a small percentage of the larger land owning permittees. Like most federal subsidies, the larger operations reap significant and proportionately greater advantages.

For example, a 1992 GAO report found that the 500 largest BLM's permittees controlled 47% of all BLM allotment acreage. This was 76 million acres or an area nearly five times larger than the state of Maine. And the largest 2,000 (9% of permittees) out of more than 19,000 BLM permits, controlled 74 percent of BLM grazing allotment acreage. The top 20 largest permit holders (0.1% of permittees) controlled

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Letters to the Editor

Continued from previous page

a whopping 9.3 percent of all BLM forage or 20.7 million acres of public lands! This includes Idaho billionaire J.R. Simplot whose public lands allotments includes more than 2 million acres of public rangelands spread across several western states.

By contrast the smallest 500 allotments encompassed 13,000 acres or less than 0.01 percent of all BLM's total allotment acreage. And even the smallest 2,000 permits control less than 0.05 percent of all acres grazed on BLM lands.

Total federal and state acres devoted to livestock production equals 300 million acres or an area equal to the acreage of all the eastern seaboard states from Maine to Florida with Missouri thrown in.

According to the 1994 Dept. of Interior Rangeland Reform EIS, hardly an anti livestock document, eliminating all livestock use of federal lands would affect only 2.4 percent of the beef cattle inventory in the 17 western states.

Because livestock production is a relatively labor un-intensive industry—it doesn't take many people to run a cattle or sheep operation—the overall employment contributed by livestock production to the West's economy is relatively small, and for workers, the pay is near the bottom of the barrel.

To generate continued public acceptance of subsidies and tax benefits enjoyed by agricultural interests; industry proponents typically exaggerate the importance of agriculture's contribution to western economies through the use of dubious "economic multipliers." For example, one Utah State University study of the economic contribution of agriculture to Utah included waitresses and waiters among its "agriculture-dependent workers" because they served food and food was generated by agriculture.

Another study done by Montana State University Ag professors included the money spent managing public lands livestock as well as all the money spent on range developments to reduce grazing impacts as an added "benefit" to Montana's economy contributed by public lands grazing. There was no attempt by these authors to include the environmental damage caused by livestock grazing. For example, livestock grazing reduces production of fisheries, thus reduces income attributed to fishing? This is somewhat like counting the funds spent on the clean up of the Three Mile Island Nuclear accident or the Exxon Valdez spill as "economic benefits."

As Thomas Power, economic professor at the University of Montana, has noted, another common means of exaggerating the role of public lands to western livestock operations is to use a very low threshold as the minimum when determining whether a ranching operation is "dependent" upon public lands. For instance, one report produced by New Mexico State University included any ranch that received more than 5 percent of its total forage from public lands as "public lands dependent."

Another common ploy is to use the gross economic activity associated with livestock production as a measure of its relative importance to a local or regional economy. As any self-employed individual knows, the important measure is net income not total expenditures.

Industry apologists use many such hidden and flawed assumptions to deceive the public about the relative importance of the western livestock industry to the economic well being of the region.

Eliminating all livestock grazing on public lands would, according to Dept. of Interior's 1994 Rangeland Reform EIS, result in a total loss of 18,300 jobs in agriculture and related industries across the entire West, or approximately 0.1% of the total west-wide employment. This job loss would be spread across the entire West, thus have negligible negative economic effects on any individual state.

Indeed, the more dependent a state's cattle producers are upon public lands forage, typically the fewer ranchers involved due to aridity. For example in 1992 the GAO reported that there were only 854 BLM grazing allotments in the entire state (some ranchers control more than one allotment thus even fewer ranch operations are involved) covering an average of more than 56,541 acres. According to the state of Nevada, the number of people employed in ranching, indeed in all agriculture totals less than 2,200 people. Some of the larger casinos in Las Vegas often employ more people than all the ranching operations in the entire state of Nevada. Yet public policy in Nevada, as in the rest of the West, is severely skewed to favor these few ranching dependent individuals at the expense of the general public, and the land.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) did an assessment of Southwest BLM lands in 1992. According to this "Hot Deserts" report, the GAO found that eliminating

livestock grazing on BLM allotments would result in "little economic disadvantage." The GAO concluded, "local economies are not dependent on public lands ranching."

Thomas Power found that all ranching, (both public and private lands) contributes to less than one half of one percent of all income received by Westerners. If all livestock grazing were terminated on public lands, Power has calculated that it would take less than six days of normal income growth and only eleven days of normal job growth to replace all western federal grazing jobs and income.

Power has argued further that it is the growth in other industries that is "supporting" most ranchers, not ranchers supporting rural communities. Ranchers work outside jobs to supplement what is often a negative net income from ranching operations. As many ranchers are quick to point out there isn't a lot of money to be made directly off of livestock production, particularly in the arid West. Indeed, more than 80% of all BLM permittees run less than 100 head of cattle, yet most authorities agree with the GAO's conclusion in its Hot Deserts report that operations of less than 300 head typically fail to realize a profit. In other words, the majority of ranchers utilizing public lands forage are doing it primarily as a "lifestyle" decision. Most public lands ranchers are engaged in "hobby ranching" because it is a "way of life" not a viable business enterprise.

Nevertheless, there are other economic and social benefits realized by those in the ranching industry. These include the social prestige associated with being identified as a "rancher" and the opportunity to live in rural communities. Many are also able to remain in ranching because they also enjoy significant direct government subsidies as well as equity appreciation as land prices have risen around the West.

These factors are responsible for the strong devotion to the ranching lifestyle, and the reason why many ranchers fiercely oppose any reductions in public lands grazing privileges. Nevertheless, environmentalists and others concerned about the ecological health of western rangelands would be wise to challenge any suggestion that ranching is the "lifeblood" of the rural economy or that elimination of public lands livestock production would produce a significant economic hardship for western states. Indeed, the elimination of livestock production would have the opposite effect: A reduction in livestock production would enhance many other natural resources such as water quality, fisheries, wildlife and recreational values that ultimately would translate into greater economic value than the current economic output resulting from livestock production.

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George Wuerthner
Seattle, Washington



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Konfessions of a Kangaroo Rat

Hi there. I don't think we have met before. I only come out at night. Visualize a tan-colored animal with large eyes, strong hind legs, and a long, hairy tail that ends in a tuft. Horns? No, we don't have horns. You must be visualizing a cow. Kangaroo rats are a bit smaller than cows. And much cuter. Get the picture?

Kangaroo rats are very curious. When somebody left a copy of the Rio Grande Sierran near my burrow, I had to read it before shredding the paper to build a nest. 2Range-land Research Provides A Scientific Basis For Sustainable Livestock Grazing was the headline that caught my eye. I live on the range, I depend on grass seeds for my livelihood, and I thought I knew a thing or two about sustainable life styles. Turns out I was wrong.

The article started out innocently enough, explaining how to use cows as a tool for range improvement. Why are they choosing cows instead of kangaroo rats to build a better range, I wondered. We have been around much longer than cattle, after all. Alas, kangaroo rats are not amenable to herding. We are an unruly bunch and hard to control. Also while owls, coyotes, weasels and snakes all like to have us for lunch, organic kangaroo rat steak has never been a hot item on supermarket shelves.

In any case, cows contribute incomparably more to the range than us wild animals. There is that secret ingredient in cow poop that makes the grass grow greener. Take away the cow, and the range will suffer. That's what science has found out.

I kept on reading, and then things got a bit scary. Two range scientists had conducted an experiment that would establish once and for all the role of the kangaroo rat in the ecology of the range. Take a patch of desert shrub land, put a fence around it, kick out all the kangaroo rats, and let nature take her course. Twelve years later, the experimenters revisited the land to find what? An ecosystem in disarray! Hell no. The desert inside the fence had turned into lush grass land!

Well, what do you know? All these years I have raved about cows ruining the neighborhood. Now it turns out it is the kangaroo rats that are doing the damage. Never less to say, I feel terrible. The article mentioned another experiment—put a number of range scientists and a couple cows inside a fenced-off desert area, and leave them alone for ten years or so. I did not even bother to find out what the outcome of that experiment was. I had other things to worry about. Was I consuming the grass that rightfully belonged to the cows? Would bounty hunters come after me to restore nature's balance?

Excuse my paranoia, folks, but I am planning stay around for a while. Will you help me achieve this goal? Will you make room for me and all the other creatures of the wild?

Thank you for listening and may you walk beauty. Yours truly,

Hop Along Bannertail
[Editor's note: Kangaroo rats do read (between the lines mostly), but they don't send E-mail. This message was channelled directly from the range by Norbert Sperlich, Santa Fe]

Grazing Most Pervasive Environmental Problem

I'm happy a lively debate about commercial livestock production on our public lands is developing among Sierra Clubbers in New Mexico. Public land grazing is the most pervasive problem facing public lands, water supply and wildlife in New Mexico. It is an issue that is growing visibility and may well be the most consuming public land issue of the next decade throughout the West as more people join the call for increased protection of endangered species watersheds, fisheries, and wildlife now threatened by grazing.

The last two issues of the Rio Grande Sierran featured letters debating aspects of range science and how managed grazing affects grasslands. Although interesting, the debate is dangerously narrow and only addresses a small portion of the problems caused by livestock production on public lands. Scientific exchanges complete with citations are convincing, but readers must step back and look at the broader grazing issue and the economic, environmental and political conflicts caused by an entrenched special interest which dominates all aspects of public land management in the Southwest.

Continued on next page

Letters to the Editor

Continued from previous page

Environmentalists who support grazing seem to do so out of a wish to protect the rural poor, or to help calm animosity between the livestock industry and those working to restore ecosystems and watersheds. These are worthy social goals but ones that can only be accomplished after grazing damage to our environment is addressed in an honest way and when ranchers stop their aggressive assault on environmental laws and on plant and animal life on our public lands. The public should not be asked to subsidize a narrow economic use of public lands that eclipses or destroys other public values of our common lands.

In the Southwest, most of the species on the endangered species list are threatened due to livestock grazing. This is true because cows gut the core of ecosystems by damaging or destroying soils, streams, and grasses. Once grasses are substantially stripped from an area, many of the small mammal, insect and bird populations that depend on grasses decline. When over grazing occurs, grasses are eliminated in favor of sage and juniper which completely change the structure of the plant and animal life in the area.

This basic injury to grasses and other "primary producers" causes significant damage to food chains. Coupled with US Government programs to slaughter prairie dogs, beaver, coyote, wolves, bears, and any other animals deemed inconvenient to ranchers on public land, the result is serious disruption of whole food chains and ecosystems throughout the West. Thus ranching has damaged wildlife populations profoundly, even causing the extinction of most large predators and many birds, plant species and small mammals.

Meanwhile, grazing has also caused profound damage to watersheds in the Southwest by compacting and degrading soils and stripping streamside vegetation from thousands of rivers and creeks. Cows, being semi tropical animals, concentrate grazing in lush vegetation along waterways. Plant communities along streams are rich in species and when cattle eliminate streamside vegetation, the exposed streams warm in the sun, trout die and eventually the stream dries up completely. As cattle trample stream banks, gullies form and surface water retreats downward in the soil, ultimately falling below the reach of plants and animals. This is the process of desertification which has affected millions of acres throughout the west and has caused rivers like the Rio Grande to lose many of their feeder streams. Thus the Rio Grande runs lower today than it did a century ago due to past and present grazing. This compromises water supplies for the Rio Grande silvery minnow and our urban areas.

Economically, the livestock industry is unimportant, a hold-over from the 19th century. Taxpayers give direct subsidies through below-cost grazing fees, and free agency services to public land ranchers to the tune of more than \$250 million per year. Few benefit from these subsidies as only three percent of the nation's cattle producers have federal grazing permits. According to Thomas Power, of the University of Montana, federal grazing provides .06% of all jobs and .04% of all income in 11 western states. Further, large corporations and wealthy individuals control most federal grazing permits.

The story of the Mexican wolf tells us much that is wrong with public land ranching. Mexican wolves are a subspecies of gray wolves which live farther north in the Rockies and have a similar painful history. Mexican wolves were common in the Southwest for thousands of years, living on small mammals, deer, antelope, grouse etc. Ranchers killed the last wild Mexican wolves in the 1930s with the help of the federal government. Only a few survived in zoos.

Recently, over the strong objections of the livestock industry, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has reintroduced Mexican wolves into the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona. A few packs have begun to reproduce while ranchers' lawsuits seek to halt the reintroduction program. In the wilds, the wolves have found very little to eat given the wholesale destruction of forest and desert ecosystems from decades of grazing and fire suppression. With food chains in tatters due to diminished grasslands and watersheds, wolves have found cattle (many of them illegally grazed) easy prey in the absence of most wildlife species (see above).

Once wolves prey on cows or even if they eat dead cows killed by other means on public lands, they are shot or captured by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Currently two formerly wild Mexican wolf packs are in captivity with no plans for their return to the wild due to conflicts with the livestock industry. The government has never removed cows from public lands so wolf reintroductions can succeed and intense political pressure from the livestock industry caused USFWS to fire its Mexican wolf recovery coordinator who has not been replaced. Efforts to expand the wolf reintroduction into the Gila Wilderness where fewer ranching conflicts would occur have been stymied by political pressure from the livestock industry.

The livestock industry has been a most aggressive opponent of the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act and of wilderness and national park designations. They have fought virtually all efforts to restore fisheries or endangered plant and animal populations. They kill people's pets on public lands and the increasing presence of fencing and stock ponds in designated wilderness areas disrupts recreation and violates the spirit and letter of the Wilderness Act. Water pollution from cattle grazing is a serious problem in the Jemez River and elsewhere. The presence of cattle in Wilderness areas diminishes public uses of those areas and causes conflicts between ranchers and wilderness users.

For these reasons, the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club might consider joining the other Sierra Club chapters who have called for an end to all public land grazing in the near future.

Tom Ribe
Santa Fe

Breach of Trust?

As presumptuous as it may be for me to try to expand and elaborate on the comments of a conservationist with the national stature of George Wuertner, I'm going to do it anyway.

With regard to the first item in George's checklist, the item entitled "Truncated Nutrient Flows," I need to say "hurray" for George for stepping back and looking at the basic physics and chemistry of what livestock do to our lands. In any open land situation, plants convert soil nutrients, moisture, and carbon into biomass. Grazing animals continuously gather this biomass from across the ecosystem and systematically concentrate it, up the food chain, into animal flesh. In a "natural" grazing process, this material is regularly "recycled" within the ecosystem as grazing animals die and are in some way or another internally consumed and returned to the system. In commercial livestock operations, however, such accumulated biomass, still containing the originally converted soil nutrients, moisture, and carbon, is regularly removed in the form of beef or mutton that is shipped elsewhere for external processing, consumption, and final disposal. Over the decades, this slow, but constant, removal process has an impoverishing impact, gradually resulting in soil that contains only relatively low levels of residual organic matter, and that can thus retain only minimal soil moisture and sustain only a reduced level of plant growth.

If there is anything on which I might fault George's comments, it is that he failed to address the current trendy thinking that rotating cows through a greater number of smaller pastures will automatically result in "holistically sustainable" livestock production, which when combined with aromatherapy is supposed to solve all of our problems. These "new age" grazing schemes usually involve the notion that keeping cattle bunched up in these smaller pastures will force them to utilize a wider variety of forage plants more efficiently, thus allowing even more grazing while curtailing undesirable changes in the composition of the plant community. In fact, when grazing pressure is sufficient to harvest most or all of the most palatable forage, livestock will indeed shift to less desirable materials. Unfortunately, as George

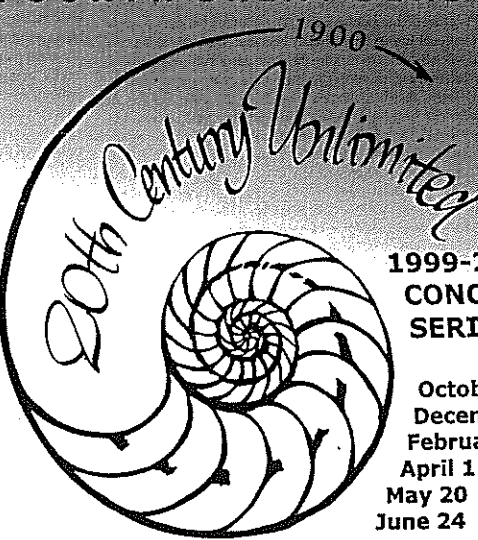
pointed out, there is no free lunch and these less desirable materials start with deciduous sprouts and saplings, including aspen and cottonwood, long before progressing onto pinyon, juniper, and other woody invaders. As this "rotational grazing" is cyclically repeated, it can hinder the recruitment of cottonwoods, willows, alders, and other species, while leaving the faster growing grass community looking relatively healthy. For a while, the ecosystem can seemingly be forced into "high gear," as competitive pressure showcases those grass species, native or exotic, that can recover quickly and successfully reproduce in the relatively short windows between one grazing rotation and the next. Some people contend that this shift to "quick recovery species" is a sign of sound "holistic range management." Over time, however, this situation actually does several things. First, it eats off those more delicate and often also most palatable native plants that did not evolve and cannot, at least in the span of a decade or two, adapt to this kind of draconian manipulation. Second, it provides a competitive advantage for the least palatable species in the ecosystem, since they are often the only plants that can achieve steady growth through more than a single grazing season. It can also prevent sufficient accumulation of ground fuels to support fire in its natural role, thus again encouraging encroachment by pinyon and juniper. Again, there is no free lunch. This "new age" aromatherapy generally does nothing more than put up a cloud of perfume to cover a genuinely stinky situation and mask the need for some real housecleaning.

Well, speaking of a genuinely stinky situation and the need for some real housecleaning, what is really important here, at least in my mind, is not so much what is said in the various letters and articles about grazing that have been popping up in the Rio Grande Sierran recently. What is really important is why they have been popping up and what their presence really says about the leadership of the Rio Grande Chapter and their agenda.

In the end, what conservationists, conservation activists, and conservation organizations provide, all they can provide, is leadership. In the end, our members, the media, the politicians, the pundits, and most important, the public,

Continued on next page

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By Norma McCallan

Outings Chair

Celebrate Earth Day! Take A Hike! Not just on April 22, but any day, every day! New Mexico & El Paso are blessed with an extraordinary number of hiking opportunities, year round; our Chapter has many excellent hike leaders, and all 5 Groups regularly lead hikes to a wide variety of unusual, little known, and special places. Hiking not only provides great exercise while you're admiring the scenery, but it clears the mind and nourishes the soul. And it's a great way to meet interesting people. So if you are one of those members who has been intending to go on a hike, but never quite get around to it, try one out this earth season. Below are listed a sampling of our intriguing outings; check out the Group pages for additional hikes and information. Be sure to call leader to confirm time & meeting place. All phone numbers are area code 505 except as otherwise noted.

Sat March 4 San Nicolas Canyon, White Sands Missile Range. Jim Echols, Public Information Officer, guest leader; Barbara Coon, contact person, 522-1576. A rare opportunity to explore (bushwhacking) this usually off limits terrain.

Sat March 11 Organ Needle. Barbara Coon 522-1576. Rock scrambling experience needed to climb this prominent peak on the Las Cruces skyline.

Sat/Sun March 11/12 Adobe Canyon, Gila National Forest. Wes Leonard 915-747-6649. Moderate, 10 mile backpack to a little known area in the Gila.

Sat March 18 Bear Canyon, White Sands Missile Range. A 2nd chance to get into the

Outings Notes

WSMR, for a moderate 8-10 mile hike. Rollin Wickenden 915-532-9645, leave message.

Sat March 25 Rabbit Ears Plateau (north end of ORGAN MOUNTAINS). Ron Gordon 522-4257. Off trail experience needed for this moderate hike.

Sun April 9 Cabezon Peak WSA. Steve Markowitz 983-2829. Short but steep hike, with serious rock scrambling, up this prominent volcanic plug between San Ysidro & Cuba. Limited to 10; call for reservations.

Sat April 22 Chama River To Mesa del Camino. Jennifer Johnson 289-9183. Moderate/strenuous hike along one of the few designated pieces of the Continental Divide Trail in northern NM.

Sat April 22 Cerro Pelado/Atalaya Peak. Ned Sudborough 474-4055. Strenuous loop hike, much of it on old abandoned trails, between these 2 high points in the Santa Fe foothills.

Also consider ... New Mexico Wilderness Alliance's monthly Wilderness Inventory Weekends. Combine car camping, exploratory hikes, and good company with detailed surveying of **potential wilderness areas** in some of the most remote and spectacular areas of New Mexico. No experience needed, just enthusiasm.

March 24-26

Big Hatchets Mountains, in the boot heel of NM

April 14 - 16

BLM WSA's East Of Socorro

Call Edward Sullivan 255-5966, x.110 or email nmwa@earthlink.net for details.

Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee and Conservation Committee

Meeting Schedule -- 2000

March 18/19
Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge

June 10/11
Location to be determined

September 9/10
Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge

December 9/10
Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge

*Members are always welcome...
(encouraged, shall we say)*

Sierran Deadlines

The deadlines for the Rio Grande Sierran for the coming year are as follows. Submissions are due the 10th of the month preceding publication.

May/June	April 10
July/August	June 10
September/October	August 10
November/December	October 10
January/February	December 10

If time-sensitive, late material will not be printed, otherwise, late material will be considered for publication in the next issue.

Send contributions (songs, poems, pictures, drawings, and the usual enviro-stuff) to jbuchser@ni.net



As threats to the Grizzly Bear have increased, so has the need to protect them. The last remnants of bear habitat in the Greater Yellowstone area are threatened by timber cutting and road building, oil and gas drilling, and private land development.

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SENIOR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
LIMITED INCOME	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32

Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1.00 for your Chapter newsletter.



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