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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 an 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 Leetz Belen
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

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 Pati J. Bisbee
District 2: Karen Heldmeer
District 3: David Cass
District 4: Matthew Ortiz

Please refer to details about each candidate on page 18.

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 a way 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

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 de-watering in this section.

See Trickle on Page 2
**Executive Committee**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
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**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 Chapter Leaders. The nearest full-time Club staff is in Phoenix.

The Rio Grande Chapter has 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.

**Issue Committee Chairs**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Chair Name</th>
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**Regional and National Representatives**

- **Southwest Area Conservation Committee (SWACC)**
  - Chair: Gwen Wardwell, Alternate: Elizabeth Walsh, Jennifer Johnson
  - Contact: Barb Johnson, Norma McCollan (alternate)

**Sierra Chapter**

The Rio Grande Sierra 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 Texas.

Make address changes by contacting Membership Services at 141 977-5454 or send name and number to address.changes@sierradclub.org

Non-member subscriptions must be paid in advance. Send checks to Blair Brown, Treasurer, 2228 W. Wyoming NE, P.O. Box 722, Albuquerque, NM 87112. Please allow 8 weeks for processing.

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Contributions are welcome from members. Email contributions preferred. Send to jburgher@nl.net or mail to John Bucher, 225 N. Guadalupe PMB 416, Santa Fe, NM 87501. All submissions MUST be received by the 10th of the month prior to publication. The Rio Grande Sierra is published in early January, March, May, July, September, and November. Photos, artwork, and poems are also welcome. Letters and articles are subject to abridgment.

The editorial policies adopted by the Grand Canyon Chapter will be used as guidelines for publication of future issues of the Rio Grande Sierra. Letters to the editor over 300 words will be edited for length and 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 which 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 spoiled 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 bequest to 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 habitats and preservation of large open spaces are 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

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

Río Grande Sierran—Page 3
Volunteering For Wilderness
By Edward Sullivan
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

Throughout New Mexico there are unique, enchanted islands 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 pristine wilderness.

Volunteers are needed to help keep this amazing land free of humans.

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 times, 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 24-25: Big Hatchets Wilderness Inventory Weekend, Boot Heal Region Part of the Sky Islands region the Big Hatchets are known for their craggy soils and incredibly diverse animal populations. This area 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 Nocito believes the infusion of wealthy elites will greatly increase the cost-of-living and drive out average residents. Bayfield resident Don Johnson compares the East Fork to Yosemite Valley before it was overrun by development.

The private club is slated for a 2,300-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, this remote dirt road, the East Fork Valley is a haven for wildlife and other unique species.

The valley’s sweeping meadows and wetlands invites comparison 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 sightings 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 $10 million development plan is to turn this unhabited 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, undisturbed valley into a bustling center of human activity will devastate native wildlife.

Join the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance!

It's easy!
1) Fill out the form below
2) Select your membership class
3) Clip this coupon and send it in!

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- Outright $100
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Protect Wilderness - New Mexico's Natural Heritage

Readers might recall the East Fork Valley was once the site of a massive proposed ski resort, owned in part by American Express's Horizon 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. 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 racing, Jacqueline Mars Veger, heiress to Mars Candy, Walter Matthau of on-screen barker E. O'Brien, and other Silicon Valley entrepreneurs.

One of the founding investors in the resort is New Mexico sculptor Dave McGary of Hudson. Mr. McGary's bronze sculpture immortalizes the Puppy, a Houdini trout in Pagosa Springs - Christine's Great Estates in Denver is marketing the resort in high-profile national media.

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, te private ski runs, 100,000 square-foot lodge, fifteen trophy homes, dozens of condos, a 30-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.

Continued on next page
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 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 string 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 soon route-aged 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, Archaeological and Historical societies, and other groups. This offers the public numerous opportunities for public comment. Here’s how you can help stop the most destructive development in the Mar. issue.

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 cars per day. The Piano Service is surveying management projects on preserved road, write to David Katter, 14360 W. Detroit, Detroit, MI 48239.

Mr. Keith Fox
Clace Systems
1736 West Brilliant Drive
Saratoga, CA 95070

Neil A. Armstrong
Chairman
ALL Systems Inc.
345 Commodac Road
Deer Park, New York 11729-4991

For additional information about the proposed development, contact the Forest Service at the Mar. 22 "Wilderness Heritage" issue.

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's (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 Bedterm (MD), Phil Berry (CA), Robin Cox (NC), Ed Dobson (MT), Michael Dorsey (MD), Chad Hanson (CA), Roy Hengerson (MO), Reba Jocen (NY), Alon Kuper (OH), Susan Parson (KY), Nancy Rasch (PA), Lisa Reamenti (NC), and Jon 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 instructions:

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3. Post the message to the list.

By Emile Atenas

Formally with Amigos Bravo

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 diversions 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 in some years, overspills cause serious damage to downstream land and property.

Amigos Bravo with Revival of Rio Costilla (RRC), a coalition of local residents, is pressing for more efficient, equitable and environmentally responsible management of the river.

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Amigos Bravo with Revival of Rio Costilla (RRC), a coalition of local residents, is pressing 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 finest 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 Bravo with 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 sediments 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 slauging of the major diversion dam just upstream. This process has buried the natural stream channel and resulted in a critical aggradation, raised, stream bed, which hinders the flow of water to that point.

EPA recently approved a TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) for Cordova Creek, which recognizes sediment as a serious water quality issue. It 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 to a valuable 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 this 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 Bravo has offered to coordinate volunteer labor to help with the work (please contact our office for more information). However, road cuts along 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.amigosbrawos.org for additional information.

Río Grandes Sierran—Page 5
Rio Grande -- In Trouble?

Middle Rio 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 reduce 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 levees between the river and the Low Flow Conveyance Channel.

While the threats to the middle Rio Grande's remaining 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 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 out of all these efforts and the efforts of others on the river. For example, Santa Ana, Isleta, and San Juan 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 acceptance 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 rivers other than the mainstream 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.

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 federal 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 while 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 miling 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.
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 ways in which 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 at times 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, its 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 of 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 smarter is imperative so that effort can create a more integrated system with all of these water management agencies working together should be evaluated as an integrated system.

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 in a computer-based model called the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Model, URGOWM. 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 late February and public hearings later in the year. There will be opportunities for all to provide input, both the alternatives, options and issues to be evaluated and those of us who care about the river and our local water supply for the future should plan on participating.

The Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Management Review Project is being carried out by 3-1-Environmental Consultants and the results are expected early in 2004.

Trickle from Page 1

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

Water Conservation? Environmentalists have become accustomed to blunting streamflow/habitat problems on the Middle Rio Grande Conservation District, which annually diverts 600,000 acre feet to serve about 30,000 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 McCookin actually pegged 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 fifth of the water that flows in the river. The City purchased almost 50,000 acres of water rights in the San Juan Chama interbasin division 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 boasted 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 debilitating 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 Bell’s story). The Alliance for Rio Grande Heritage includes Southwestern 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 preparing to watchdog Endangered Species recovery processes, a major federal 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 98-9126
• Poster river restoration in the “Canalization Project” near El Paso, call Councilman George Alameda 525-2323
• Rio Grande Restoration’s new Albuquerque office will connect you to exciting local restoration projects - call 266-3609

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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 Interagency Stream Commission (ISC) with respect to Upper Rio Grande Water Operations:
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 completion of all NEPA processes with this Project.

For more information, call: Dale Stroh, COE, 505-342-3434; PAX 505-342-3195 Chris Gorbach, BOR, 505-248-5779, PAX 505-248-5308; Rolf Schmidt-Petersen, ISC, 505-841-9480, PAX 505-841-9483.

Check the Internet:
www.spaf.sasce.army.mil/argwops

Fly Fishing on the East Fork of the San Juan

Stream Health Assessment Class

T-Walk "Stream Health Assessment" Short Course by Corky Olander, 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 (505-867-0700), 47 miles from La Cueva Lodge.

Tuition: $200 payable to Corky Olander, 6048 So Lakeview Street, Litticento 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, microfilm, and a sense of humor.

Instructor: 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 week is a combination of lecture, class exercise, photograph, and hands-on field practices.

Monday 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Class room: watershed reporting, project assessments, legal framework, but management practices.
Tuesday 8:30 a.m. Class room: stream health, thalweg depths, channel materials and pebbles, Tarwell Substrate Ratios 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Field: equipment use, T-depth, Tarwell Substrate Ratios, riffle insects.
Wednesday 8:30 a.m. Classroom: stream runoff content, vegetative buffers, bank stability, channel physics, site maps, diversity screens and interpretation. 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Field: Recovery at Cielo site, T-Depth & Tarwell 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: Tarwell, restoration, expected limiting factors (s), remedial and monitoring plans.
Friday 8:30 a.m. - noon Restorations costs, stream recovery, remedial plans, monitoring plans.

Questions? Steve McWilliams 505/438-7854, Chic Spira 505/842-3355; Corky 303/798-4821.

Page 8—Rio Grande Sierran
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: Costly Solutions for New Mexico and El Paso," as reported in the January-February 2000 Sierra.

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 probability falls in most parts of the world. It behooves several interest. 1. The ultimate driving force behind sprawl is population increase. There are better and worse solutions to the problem of sprawl, distributional differences, and today is a stupid time to be discussing this. 2. Regardless of what level of population is considered "right", on a finite earth, that level must be finite. We expect no subject of population fact that the sustainable level of population for planet earth has already been reached on paper. That saying is a perniciously good that it represents population increase is a rub and restlessness flaring new solutions to the problem of urban sprawl. I worry about this. Eventually, a point is reached where further growth in population is not sustainable. We need to face up to this fact and make it known to all our policy development precincts.

Dave Collins
Los Alamos, NM

The West Is Not A Place For
Commercial Grazing

Regarding the letters "Healing a tool of many" and "Range research provides a scientific basis for sustainable livestock grazing," I believe that the letterwriters cite an article from the journal "Research" in an effort to support the notion that grazing is a sustainable practice. The article, by John R. Nisbet, is a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on the topic. It is well-written and provides a clear understanding of the complex relationships between livestock grazing and the environment. However, the letterwriters fail to acknowledge the limitations of their argument. The grazing system described in the article is a highly controlled one, and it does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of grazing on the environment. Thus, it is not surprising that the letterwriters have failed to reach a consensus on the issue of sustainable livestock grazing.

The West is Not A Place For
Commercial Grazing

Economic Significance Of The Livestock Industry

Despite the multiple ecological impacts associated with livestock production, the livestock production industry continues to be a major contributor to the economy. The livestock industry is a significant source of income for rural communities, providing employment opportunities, and supporting local businesses. In addition, livestock production plays a critical role in the conservation of natural resources, such as grassland ecosystems, which are vital to the ecosystem of the region. Livestock production also contributes to the economic diversity of rural communities, providing an alternative income source for farmers and ranchers.

The myth of the western cowboy and ranch depen
dency is reinforced by several factors. One is simply the vast acreage under livestock production. When you leave the out
districts of almost every western community, you are almost im
diadomately surrounded by ranching operations. The vast amount of land devoted to livestock production generates a dev
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Mitochondria, the engines themselves continuously reinforce this false sense of economic benefit, inserting that they are the backbone of the regional economy. This perspective is a continuation of the long-term misrepresentations that have been used to support the idea of a "rural" economy. The livestock industry is a significant source of income for rural communities, providing employment opportunities, and supporting local businesses. In addition, livestock production plays a critical role in the conservation of natural resources, such as grassland ecosystems, which are vital to the ecosystem of the region. Livestock production also contributes to the economic diversity of rural communities, providing an alternative income source for farmers and ranchers.
Continued from previous page

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the recent article in your publication discussing the impact of climate change on the livestock industry. The article highlighted the challenges faced by farmers and the need for innovative solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change on their livelihoods.

As a farmer myself, I completely agree with the need for more research and investment in sustainable farming practices. The article mentioned the increasing use of technology in agriculture, which I believe is crucial in adapting to the changing climate conditions. However, I would like to add that education and training for farmers on sustainable farming practices are equally important.

In addition, I support the call for increased government support for research and development in the agricultural sector. This will not only help farmers adapt to the changing climate but also ensure food security for the future generations.

Thank you for providing a platform to discuss these important issues.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

Grazing Most Pervasive Environmental Problem

I am glad to see the increasing awareness about the impact of grazing on the environment. The article accurately points out the importance of sustainable grazing practices to conserve natural resources and prevent soil degradation.

As a rancher, I have seen firsthand the benefits of adopting sustainable grazing practices. It not only helps in maintaining the ecological balance but also ensures the long-term productivity of the land.

I completely agree with the need for more education and training programs for farmers on sustainable grazing practices. This will not only benefit the environment but also improve the livelihoods of the farmers.

Thank you for highlighting this important issue.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
Letters to the Editor

Continued from previous page

Environmentalists who support grazing stress the need to cut out of a wish to protect the rural past, or to help sustain the viability of the livestock industry and its working livestock and land. Their actions are motivated by a desire to enhance wildlife diversity and environmental values. They are working to protect and enhance wildlife habitats and ecosystems. These are worthy goals, but one can only be accomplished for grazing to have an impact on our environment is addressed in this essay and way and when we remove or suppress its aggressive impacts on environmental values and the animal and human life on our public lands.

Public discussions on the role of livestock in our environmental values often focus on the economic benefits of grazing. Grazing can improve the quality of our rangeland ecosystems, but it also has environmental costs. Grazing can lead to overgrazing, which can cause soil erosion, water runoff, and the loss of biodiversity. In some areas, grazing can also contribute to the spread of invasive species.

Grazing pressure is a serious concern, especially in areas with limited water resources. Overgrazing can lead to soil degradation, water runoff, and the loss of biodiversity. In some areas, grazing can also contribute to the spread of invasive species. It is important to manage grazing pressure to ensure the sustainability of our rangeland ecosystems.

Continued on next page
Outings Notes

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 Godina (chairperson, 922-1576). A rare opportunity to explore (hike & looking) this normally off-limits area.

Sat March 11: Organ Needle. Barbara Coor 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 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 Cano. Jennifer Johnson 389-9183. Moderate/hard loop hike along one of the few designated pieces of the Continental Divide Trail in northern NM.

Sat April 22 Cerro Peladillo/Atilaya 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 Invury 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 mmwa@earthlink.net for details.

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@al.net

Join today and receive a FREE Sierra Club Member's Cap!

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Contribution gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible; they support our effective citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Donors receive $1.00 for each $1.00 you give towards the Sierra Club's Endangered Species Act.