

# The Rio Grande SIERRAN



THE RIO GRANDE CHAPTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB

Spring, 1988

## RIPARIAN AREAS THREATENED

by Jim Fish, Placitas

The most critical habitats on public lands are the green zones associated with rivers, streams, springs, lakes, and ponds. These riparian areas, if healthy, offer a wide diversity of plant and wildlife species, protect watersheds by preventing erosion and removing sediment, and provide a variety of recreational opportunities.

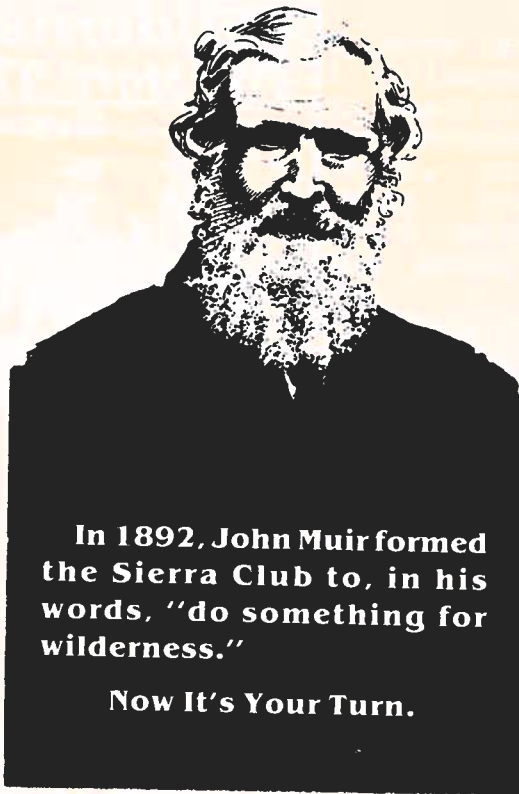
The most significant threat to riparian areas is livestock grazing. Especially during the hot summer months, livestock are drawn to the water and the vegetation and shade at its side. The congregation of livestock leads to loss of vegetation both by consumption and by trampling, to increased stream bank erosion, and to displacement of wildlife.

The United States General Accounting Office (GAO) is currently carrying out a study of the condition of riparian areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). On March 1, the preliminary results of that study were presented to the House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands.

The GAO finds: 1) that tens of thousands of miles of riparian habitat in the West have been severely degraded by poorly managed livestock grazing; 2) that riparian areas are generally quite resilient and, with proper care and management, dramatic recovery is possible; 3) that all successful restorations they examined had one feature in common--a change in livestock management to give the native vegetation more opportunity to grow and the streambanks an opportunity to stabilize; 4) that although the BLM has issued a riparian area policy statement that endorses riparian improvements, at the same time, it has substantially reduced the number of skilled staff (e.g., wildlife and fisheries biologists) necessary to develop the site-specific strategies for implementing the policy; and 5) that rancher opposition is a significant institutional barrier to widespread improvement of riparian areas.

One riparian area that has been identified for restoration is the Gila Lower Box Wilderness Study Area (see photograph on the cover). This area supports some of the largest cottonwood, sycamore, hackberry, and mesquite in the

State. Thanks to the cows, however, there are very few young trees to take the place of the ancient ones as they die off, as they inevitably will. BLM plans call for fencing the area and providing livestock watering elsewhere. The project appears to have support of both the local ranchers and conservation groups. Anyone interested in tracking this issue should contact Tim Salt, BLM's Lordsburg/Las Cruces Resource Area Manager, at 525-8228. \*



In 1892, John Muir formed the Sierra Club to, in his words, "do something for wilderness."

Now It's Your Turn.

nation to preserve Yosemite as a National Park. But many battles were also lost. Some say John Muir died of a broken heart after hearing the news that Congress had passed a law to construct a dam in Hetch Hetchy Valley.

Today the Sierra Club that John Muir started almost 100 years ago has 400,000 members throughout the country. 4,000 members are here in the Rio Grande Chapter. We are still winning some battles and losing others. Our hard working volunteers are fighting every day for the protection of our New Mexico/West Texas environment.

Our National Forests are managed better than they used to be, but timber and grazing policies still need much improvement. The BLM is recommending half a million acres of wilderness, but there is at least 1.8 million that is worthy of protection. The Albuquerque West Mesa is recommended for protection, but the State legislature has appropriated a mere \$300,000 for acquisition as development threatens. Many polluters have cleaned up their act, but our air and water continue to be polluted. Much has been done, but there is much, much more to do.

In March you received the Rio Grande Chapter's annual appeal letter. Our hard-working volunteers are counting on you to help out. They do a great job of stretching our small budget to do the most good. However, so much more could be done and needs to be done to turn the lost battles into victories. It would be a great help if everyone would send a small contribution. It need not be large. Five or ten dollars per member would go a long way in making New Mexico and West Texas a better place to live.

Send your contributions to:

Rio Grande Chapter, Sierra Club  
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## CHAIR'S COLUMN

by Tom Brasfield, El Paso

April 23 of this year marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of John Muir. It was 1892 when he and a small group of friends started the Sierra Club to protect his beloved Yosemite. Under his enthusiastic leadership, many battles were won in those early years. He helped convince the

We are required by law to inform you that contributions to the Sierra Club are not deductible for federal income tax purposes, however, your reward will be knowing that you are helping to continue the tradition that John Muir started.

THANK YOU AND HAPPY TRAILS! \*

**NEW APPLIANCE EFFICIENCY BILL INTRODUCED**

Legislation has been introduced to set minimum energy efficiency standards for fluorescent lighting ballasts. The ballast is the electrical transformer used in fluorescent light fixtures, and it is responsible for as much as 25% of the light's power consumption.

H.R. 4158, introduced by Rep. Phil Sharp (D-IN), would reduce national electrical demand by 9500 megawatts and save the energy equivalent of 560 million barrels of oil between 1990 and 2010. Consumer savings are estimated at \$15.6 billion during the same period. The electrical demand saving is equal to the output of 10-15 coal or nuclear power plants. (The two mega-plants near Farmington, part of PNM's excess capacity, produce about 2,000 megawatts each.)

The House bill has been marked up by Sharp's Energy and Power Subcommittee and is currently awaiting markup by the full Energy and Commerce Committee. There are currently between one and two dozen sponsors in the House.

In the Senate, the companion bill, S. 2167, has been introduced by Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH) and has been scheduled for hearings before his Energy Regulation and Conservation Subcommittee of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) is a cosponsor of the bill.

Environmental and public interest groups have been joined by utility regulators, state energy offices, and the lighting ballast manufacturers themselves in supporting the bill. The only major entity opposing the bill thus far is... (you guessed it)... the Reagan Administration. Remember that Reagan vetoed the last energy efficiency bill that passed Congress, only to be overridden by Congress. Supporters are trying to attract enough Senate sponsors to easily sustain a veto override again, if necessary. ★

**BISHOP APPOINTED TO BLM ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Long-time environmental activist and wilderness advocate Judy Bishop has been elected to the 10-person BLM Albuquerque District Advisory Council.

The Advisory Council provides guidance to Bureau of Land Management officials on a wide range of issues pertaining to the management of public lands. The Council meets several times each year to discuss current issues and to adopt advisory positions, when possible, for the consideration of BLM managers.

Judy's appointment to the Advisory Council is good news for the environment. Her long experience with wilderness issues and her adeptness in dealing with bureaucrats, politicians, and industry reps will make her an effective voice on the Council.

The BLM is lucky, too. If they take Judy's advice on public land issues, they will undoubtedly find that they will tend to stay out of trouble. ★

**BIKING HAWAII**

Are you looking for a great summer bicycle vacation? There's still room on the Bicycle Tour of the Big Island, July 2-16, 1988. This bicycle tour has everything--fantastic biking, scenery, swimming, snorkeling, hiking, and camping. You can call Hawaii the "Orchid Island," or the "Volcano Island," or the "Big Island." It proudly answers to all three names.


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**RASCAL AND BLACKIE**

by Jim Fish, Placitas

The coyote trotted down the trail, setting an easy but steady pace, in and out of the early morning shadows of pin-yons, ponderosas, and junipers. The trail led southeast through a pass above Canon Chamisa Losa and into the heart of Canon Salado.

At the edge of a clearing, Rascal paused. He listened for a moment. Nothing but the songs of birds: the melodious notes of the black-headed gros-beak, the piercing call of the flicker, the beautiful decending adagio of the canyon wren. Rascal bounded into the middle of the clearing, snapping at grasshoppers that flew out of his way. He rolled in the grass and leaped into the air and chased his own tail and yelped with delight. Early summer in the Banco Breaks. Rascal dropped to the ground and stretched out in the sunshine. He laid his head back and closed his eyes.

Unknown to Rascal, Blackie had been watching the festivities from the rim of Chivato Mesa. He honked twice, hopped over the edge, and tilted his wings for a straight shot to the clearing. Rascal raised his head. Blackie landed on a boulder, "Morning, Rascal."

"And a very good morning to you, Sir." Rascal rolled upright. "Long time no see. How goes it, Blackie?"

"Not bad. Not bad at all. And with you?"

"Likewise, thanks." Rascal looked thoughtfully at Blackie for a moment. "You know, you may be able to explain something I've been wondering about."

"Shoot."

"Do you have any idea why there have been so few vehicles up on the mesa the past year?"

"Oh yeah. Last May, the BLM slapped an emergency closure on the road that comes up by Barrel Spring and crosses the Ignacio Chavez Grant."

"How about that. No wonder the turkey and elk seem to be thriving."

"Yes, it has made quite a difference. Almost put a stop to the poaching, the illegal wood cutting, and the off-road vehicle activity that was rapidly destroying the area."

Rascal snapped at a wasp flying by. "What do the hunters think about the closure?"

"Depends. Some who have wheels instead of feet are irritated. Their rape and pillage attitude is not much different from a strip miner's or a clear cutter's. The environment be damned as long as they can maximize their take with the least possible effort.

"Others understand that the closure means long-term improvement in the quality of hunting. They don't mind a

couple of extra miles of walking. They appreciate what they see and feel and smell and hear along the way. Also, the elk seem to be spending more time below the rim around Barrel Spring."

"You said that it was an emergency closure. Until when?"

"The official scoping study is underway. The alternatives are to upgrade the road, to close it permanently, or to allow seasonal vehicular access. Meanwhile, hats off to the BLM for keeping it closed."

"Which way is it going to go?"

"Depends." The raven watched an eagle sweep along the mesa rim. "Depends on how many of our friends are willing to defend the area over the next few months."

"I'd say that the choice is rather clear. Either keep the road closed to protect the pristine, wild, and remote nature of this small niche of the Mt. Taylor system or open the road and watch the last chance for a true wilderness on the slopes of the mountain disappear." Rascal stood up. "Blackie, it's been great chatting, but I better get myself down to the spring. I promised Martha a rabbit for supper tonight."

Blackie headed west up the canyon. Rascal disappeared into the bottom of the canyon.

Twenty miles away, on the other side of Mesa Prieta, urban sprawl moved westward with the staccato sound of hammers and saws.

Over half a million people in the Albuquerque area. Few of them, in their hustle-bustle modern world, realize that a potential wilderness of National Park quality and over three times as large as the Sandia Mountains Wilderness exists so close by. \*

**NOTE:** The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) on the fate of the roads penetrating the Ignacio Chavez Grant (see map)

is scheduled for release around May 1, 1988. Get a copy of the EA sent to you (free of charge) by calling the BLM at 761-4504 and asking for Kathy Walter or Mike Pool. Take fifteen minutes to study the EA when you get it and then another fifteen to write a letter to the BLM asking that the roads be closed permanently and rehabilitated. \*

**CAMPING TRIP**

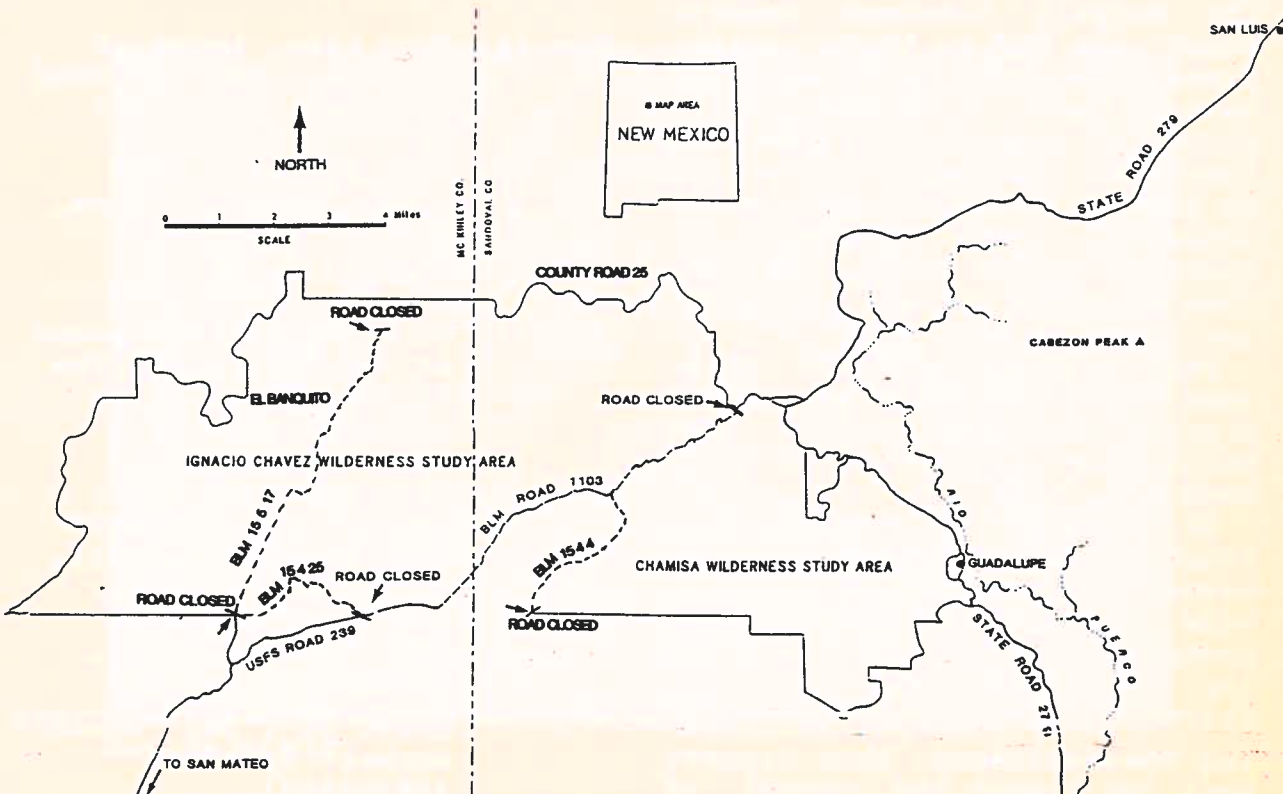
Memorial day weekend, Chuck Wiggins and Jim Fish will lead a trip to the Ignacio Chavez and Chamisa WSAs. We will leave from the Pizza Hut in Bernalillo at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday morning, May 28. With BLM permission, we will spend a few hours on Saturday afternoon rehabilitating one of the ways on top of the mesa.

Those who want to camp out Saturday night will be greeted by the moon, a few nights short of full, rising over the Rio Puerco Valley as the sun goes down, casting long shadows of volcanic plugs across the valley floor. After a pot-luck dinner at the vehicles, some of us are going to hike back up to the rim to spend the night. Although the glow of Albuquerque will be visible on the eastern horizon, the only light in the valley two thousand feet below us will be that of the moon.

On Sunday, various options are available: short hikes, a short course in birding, rehabilitation of another way or two, a good book in ponderosa shade, lizard imitations on a flat rock, etc. Sunday evening will be a rerun of Saturday. The moon will be one night closer to full.

Bring lots of water, food, camping gear, daypack and/or backpack, work gloves, camera, binoculars, and layers of clothing. No dogs please; the area is sensitive wildlife habitat.

Call Fish at 867-3062 or Chuck at 266-3622 for additional details or last minute changes. \*



**BLM WILDERNESS UPDATE**

by Jim Fish, Placitas

Efforts to reach consensus on a statewide BLM wilderness bill appear to be faltering. In spite of offers for major concessions from the Coalition, the opposition continues to hold out on several key areas. In addition, no agreement has been reached on language for grazing, water, release, and special management areas.

Discussions with the Congressional staffers and with BLM personnel suggest that areas for which there is still considerable disagreement include Brokeoff Mountains, Blue Creek, Cedar Mountains, the western portion of West Potrillo Mountains, Rio Grande, San Luis, Antelope, Culp Canyon, Stallion, Continental Divide, Florida Mountains, and the Robledo-Las Uvas Mountains complex.

It can be anticipated that we will have additional objections concerning detailed boundaries once we see what the Congressional staffers have done to the areas from the perspective of a Washington, D.C. office. We have asked for ample time to examine carefully the proposed boundaries and have continued to invite both the staffers and the Delegation members to tour the areas on the ground with us.

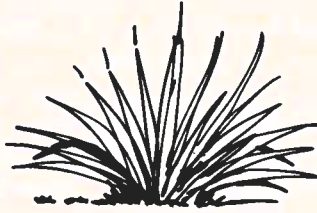
The language issues are more complex than the area issues due to the national significance of the former. The water issue is tightly coupled with the negotiations on-going in Colorado. Certain members of our Delegation have proposed language that would establish the principle that wilderness has no water rights. Imagine the Lower Gila Box with no water because the Gila River had been diverted.

A compromise on the grazing issue was worked out for the Malpais bill by incorporating the Colorado Grazing Guidelines by reference. The BLM Field Solicitor wrote an opinion that the Malpais language legally bound the BLM to those guidelines. The grazing lobby wants more. Some of us feel quite strongly that if the grazing issue is going to be reopened, we need to start at the beginning: no cows, no sheep, no goats on public lands, period. (See also the article on riparian areas on page 1.)

For an example of the problems over special management areas, see the article "The Wilderness Battleground" on page 5.

In summary, we need to continue working with the Congressional staffers on the statewide BLM wilderness bill. We cannot afford to walk away from the table leaving only our friends, the cowboys, influencing the decisions. What happens here can change the concept of

public lands throughout the West. We must assure that the change is for the better. \*



**OUTINGS**

Sponsored by the Santa Fe Group

The following outings are sponsored by the Santa Fe Group of the Sierra Club. All outings, unless otherwise specified, leave from the PERA parking lot at the corner of Paseo de Peralta and Old Santa Fe Trail (across the street from the State Capitol). Car pooling will be arranged at the parking lot, and each hiker should be prepared to pay 5 cents per mile to the driver. Hikers should bring lunch, water, sturdy hiking boots or shoes, and clothing suitable for the weather. The leader reserves the right to turn away anyone whose equipment or experience appears unsuitable. Unaccompanied minors must have written permission from parents or guardians to participate. Dogs are not permitted on hikes unless otherwise noted. Telephone the leader for details on the individual hikes.

**San Mateo Mountains  
May 14-15**

Car camp in the San Mateo Mts. or Black Range. Dogs allowed. Margo Wilson is the leader (894-2289); Norma McCallan is the Santa Fe contact (471-0005).

**Day Hikes Near Santa Fe**

May 14: Easy hike. Leave at 9:30 am. Contact Mike Ginsberg (988-2347).

May 15: Moderate/strenuous hike. Leave at 8 am. Contact Art Judd (982-3212).

May 21: Strenuous hike. Leave at 9 am. Contact Tom Hickey (982-0611 or 982-1935 at work).

May 22: Easy/moderate hike. Leave 9 am. Contact Alan Karp (982-6233).

May 29: Moderate/strenuous hike by Deer Creek. Some bushwacking. Leave at 8 am. Contact Norbert Sperlich (983-1962).

**Hike to Ceremonial Cave  
May 21**

Easy contemplative hike, campground to Ceremonial Cave in Bandalier National Monument. Leave 9:15 am. Contact Victor Atyas (471-7545).

**Picuris Range Hike  
May 22**

Moderate hike in Picuris Range with Jon Callender, director of NM Museum of Natural History. Explore oldest rocks in New Mexico and wander through one of the state's prettiest canyons. Leave 7:30 am. Contact Norma McCallan (471-0005).

**Backpack SE Utah  
May 28-30**

Backpack Memorial Day weekend in southeast Utah, possibly in Arch Canyon. Dogs allowed. Leave Friday afternoon. Contact Norma McCallan (471-0005).

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## THE WILDERNESS BATTLEGROUND

by Jim Fish, Placitas

Some may think that when Congress designates an area as Wilderness, the battle to protect the area in a pristine state is finished and that the weight of the Wilderness Act is sufficient to hold off all those who would violate the area. In fact, the Wilderness Act was a compromise with many threats to wilderness areas built into the law. A wilderness area is nothing more than a battleground in the possession of conservationists.

Consider the following quotes from the Wilderness Act:

"Mining locations lying within the boundaries of said wilderness areas shall convey title to the mineral deposits within the claim, together with the right to cut and use so much of the mature timber therefrom as may be needed in the extraction, removal, and beneficiation of the mineral deposits..."

"Within wilderness areas... the President may, within a specific area and in accordance with such regulations as he may deem desirable, authorize prospecting for water resources, the establishment and maintenance of reservoirs, water-conservation works, power projects, transmission lines, and other facilities..."

"the grazing of livestock, where established prior to the effective date of this Act, shall be permitted to continue..."

Some may now wonder what good is accomplished by wilderness designation. The strength of the Wilderness Act is that it and subsequent pieces of legislation have defined the circumstances and the manner under which these impairing activities may take place. In other words, the battle rages on, but there are rules of battle. In most cases, these rules favor conservation.

To illustrate the value of wilderness designation in the battle to protect an area, I will offer two examples from the current BLM wilderness debate.

The Ojito Wilderness Study Area, located near San Ysidro, an hour from Albuquerque and little more than an hour from Santa Fe, has been recommended for wilderness designation. The 10,000-acre area is a scenic kaleidoscope of color, landforms, wildlife, and vegetation offering outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. In spite of its nearness to Albuquerque and human use of the area for thousands of years, Ojito remains wild and untamed.

Unfortunately, Ojito is also blessed with Seismosaurus, the largest dinosaur ever discover-

ed. Paleontologists involved in the excavation of Seismosaurus have suggested that Ojito be designated a "Research Natural Area" instead of wilderness. Although paleontological research, including excavations requiring mechanized equipment, could be carried out in an Ojito Wilderness under the stipulations of the draft legislation for the area, paleontologists continue to oppose wilderness designation.

Let us assume that the paleontologists have their way and examine the battleground. Without the protection afforded to a wilderness area, mechanized equipment will be used as convenient instead of only when the "minimum necessary tool". Furthermore, the use of mechanized equipment need not be in such a manner to protect the wilderness values of the area.

Since the purpose of the designation as a Research Natural Area would be to further paleontological research, when the paleontologists are finished, there is nothing to stop the gypsum miners from moving in along the roads and into the quarries left behind. Do you think I exaggerate? At this very minute, the paleontologist and the coal interests in the Farmington area are jointly proposing this scenario for the Fossil Forest Research Natural Area.

The Florida Mountains Wilderness Study Area, located due south of Deming, has not been recommended for wilderness designation. Instead, the BLM has proposed a National Conservation Area. Initially, the Wilderness Coalition was willing to consider this compromise provided the area be protected with Congressionally mandated management prescriptions including closure of all unnecessary roads and trails, complete withdrawal from mining claims and mineral leasing, and restriction on developments in a core area.

Although there has been extensive historic mining activ-

ity in the area, it is not clear that an economic mine has ever been discovered. Certain members of the Congressional Delegation, however, insist that the area be left open to mineral development. Rather than fight the battle to protect the area under the rules of a weak National Conservation Area, conservationists have withdrawn their offer to compromise.

Designation of an area as wilderness may not signify that the war is won, but we have no better battleground on which to fight. It is important that we continue to defend those areas designated, that we are relentless in our efforts to get more areas designated, and that we work to tighten the rules of the battle. \*

### MOVIE REVIEW: The Milagro Beanfield War by Jim Fish

The scenery and the people are pure Northern New Mexico. The characters are outrageous, threading well a tricky path between fantasy and captivating familiarity. The message is a simple, important one. The war goes on throughout the State, throughout the West.

The enemy in the movie is but one incarnation of the same bunch that is fighting the Lobo, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, the Gray Ranch, endangered little fish, petroglyphs, and, in general, public land management for the benefit of the public instead of the pockets of the few.

The audience clapped when the movie finished and most sat satiated until the last credit rolled off the screen and the last note of the score gave way to silence.

I came home energized, understanding a little better why we have to continue the beanfield wars, win or lose. Midnight has come and gone. One, one-thirty. Still, I cannot sleep. \*



Lower Gila Box WSA

photo by Jim Fish

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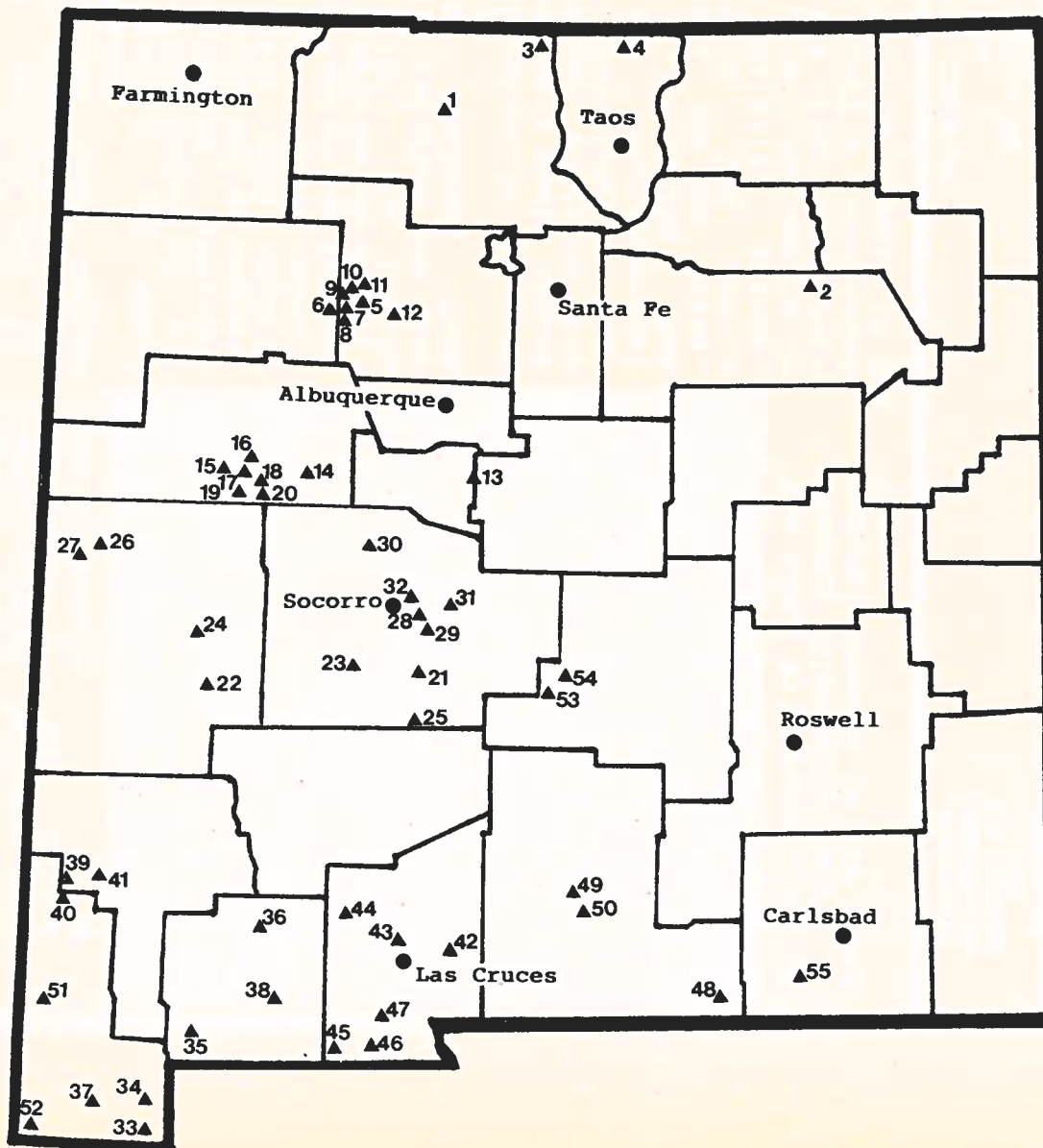
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PROPOSED WILDERNESS AREAS



- |                    |                         |                           |
|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Rio Chama       | 20. Techado Mesa        | 39. Blue Creek            |
| 2. Sabinoso        | 21. Antelope            | 40. Gila Lower Box        |
| 3. San Antonio     | 22. Continental Divide  | 41. Gila Middle Box       |
| 4. Rio Grande      | 23. Devil's Backbone    | 42. Organ Mountains       |
| 5. Cabezón         | 24. Horse Mountain      | 43. Robledo Mountains     |
| 6. Ignacio Chavez  | 25. Jornada del Muerto  | 44. Las Uvas Mountains    |
| 7. Chamisa         | 26. Cerro Pomo          | 45. West Potrillo Mts     |
| 8. Banco Breaks    | 27. Red Hill            | 46. Mt. Riley             |
| 9. Empedrado       | 28. Presilla            | 47. Aden Lava Flow        |
| 10. La Leña        | 29. Sierra de las Canas | 48. Brokeoff Mountains    |
| 11. San Luis       | 30. Sierra Ladrones     | 49. Sacramento Escarpment |
| 12. Ojito          | 31. Stallion            | 50. Culp Canyon           |
| 13. Manzano        | 32. Veranito            | 51. Granite Gap           |
| 14. Petaca Pinta   | 33. Alamo Huecos        | 52. Guadalupe Canyon      |
| 15. El Malpais     | 34. Big Hatchets        | 53. Carrizozo Lava Flow   |
| 16. Rimrock        | 35. Cedar Mountains     | 54. Little Black Peak     |
| 17. Sand Canyon    | 36. Cooke's Range       | 55. Mudgetts              |
| 18. Little Rimrock | 37. Cowboy Spring       |                           |
| 19. Pinyon         | 38. Florida Mountains   |                           |

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Dave Glowka, Tijeras

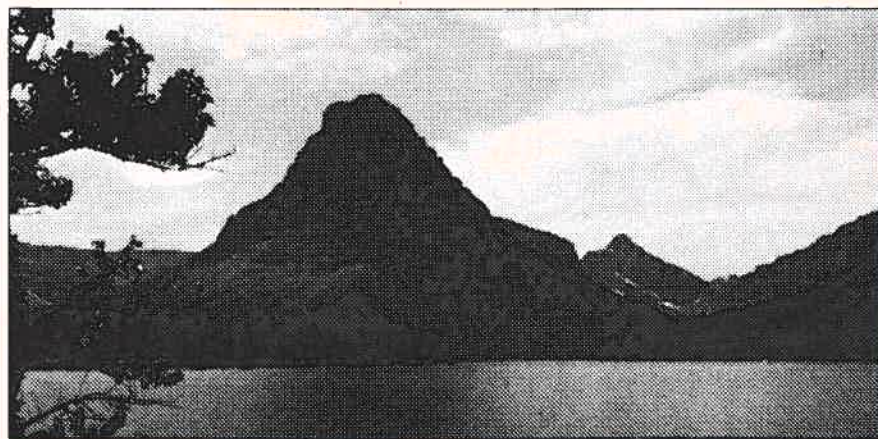
The 55 BLM Wilderness Study Areas located on the map represent an asset that future New Mexicans, in general, will probably appreciate and need far more than most folks do now. But as you have no doubt realized, it's going to be a long, hard battle to win these areas the wilderness protection they need to make it into the future as something more than trashed-out, cow-ridden pastures, abandoned mines, and public landfills.

Hard conservation battles require a multitude of activists willing to sacrifice major parts of their personal time and effort to win. The key to waging a long-term environmental battle, however, is to spread the work thin, not the workers. We need more people to get involved.

Still, enormous progress has been made. All 55 WSAs have been thoroughly studied, their most logical boundaries identified, and a solid case developed for preserving each one. The fight to defend the boundaries has begun with vigor. The ranks of concerned folks who just might want to get involved is rapidly growing. The ball is starting to roll.

Thanks, Jim. You set a good pace. ★

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From the Atlantic to the Pacific, the Arctic to the Gulf, our land is constantly under attack from the polluters and despoilers.

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Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund  
 2044 Fillmore, San Francisco, CA 94115

# SIERRA CLUB ENDORSES BINGAMAN

by Steven Flint,  
Santa Fe Group SCOPE Chair

On April 23, the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee voted unanimously to endorse incumbent Senator Jeff Bingaman in his bid to continue representing New Mexicans in the United States Senate.

The decision was based upon careful review of all five candidates' environmental positions as expressed in their past records and in questionnaire responses solicited by the Club's Committee on Political Education. The choice was easily ratified one week later by national Club officials.

The selection of Bingaman as New Mexico's best choice for Senator reflects his active, long-standing support for environmental causes, including BLM wilderness, the Rio Chama, El Malpais, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and his recent statements on WIPP. The Club looks forward to Jeff's continued good work in the Senate in the

the years to come.

Activism by Club members on Bingaman's behalf in coming months can make the difference in November. Watch this space and your group newsletters for opportunities to keep Jeff Bingaman in the United States Senate. ★



The Bisti Wilderness, one of Senator Bingaman's many accomplishments in his first term.

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# The Rio Grande SIERRAN



THE RIO GRANDE CHAPTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB

Spring, 1988

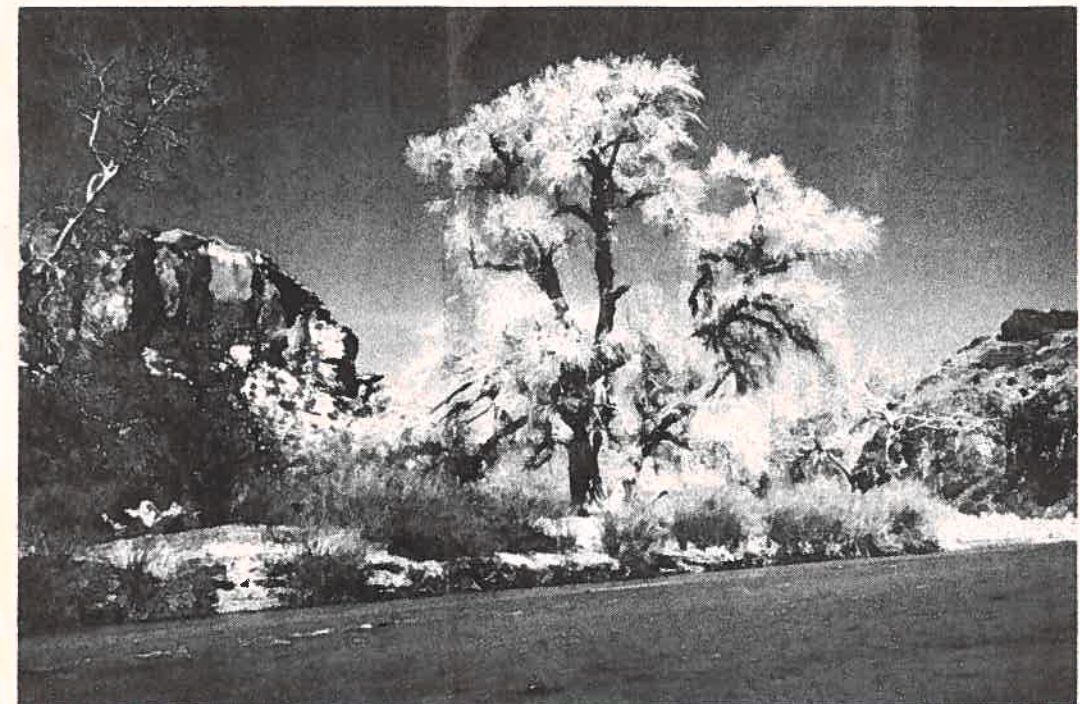


Photo by Jim Fish

Lower Gila Box WSA

See story, page 1

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