



## Sportsmen's News

June 3, 2011

### Chaves County commissioners keep key access road open

**Sportsmen's voices appeared to make the difference** in protecting public access to a huge chunk of public land in Chaves County. In late May the Chaves County Board of Commissioners denied a request by private landowners to close public access to nine miles of Buchanan Draw Road. The road is virtually the only public access to some 37,000 acres of BLM land in GMU 32, an area that provides good hunting for mule deer, barbary sheep and quail.

Commissioners said they heard from hunters statewide who were tired of losing access to public lands, and the board voted 3-2 to keep the road open. At the same time, the commission voted 3-1 to close four and a half miles of Buffalo Valley Road to public use. Although Buffalo Valley also provides access to public land, there is an alternative route.

At a follow-up meeting, BLM Roswell Field Office Manager Chuck Schmidt told the commission that the **BLM could provide equipment and material to Chaves County to help improve and maintain county roads that provide access to BLM lands** in the area. Commissioners were enthusiastic about his offer, since the cost of maintaining roads has been one reason the county has closed roads in the past.



Sportsmen speaking out made a difference in the commission's vote on Buchanan Draw Road, **but one call was especially important**. A concerned hunter called the New Mexico Wildlife Federation with a tip about the proposed road closures. Hats off to him, and to all who spoke up on behalf of public access to public land. NMWF is here to stand up for everyday New Mexico hunters and anglers. Feel free to call or e-mail us with your questions or concerns. (Our contact information is listed at the bottom of this newsletter.)

### Game Commission to consider limiting public notification

**Public involvement will be a theme** when the State Game Commission meets Thursday, June 9, in Las Cruces. Two key issues on the agenda are: How to divvy up Habitat Stamp funds, and how much public notice is adequate when the Game Commission makes decisions? Although the meeting is being held during work hours on a Thursday, sportsmen are urged to attend. The meeting runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum, 4100 Dripping Springs Road.

Department staff will unveil a proposal to change the way some \$750,000 a year is allocated for Habitat Stamp projects. **The department proposal would change the allocation formula** and set aside a third of available Habitat Stamp funds for a statewide landscape approach, basically creating a pool of funds intended to attract matching funds. While that approach allows the Habitat Stamp Program to take on more expensive projects such as lake and stream improvements, it also dries up funds for smaller efforts. The department is looking for guidance from the Game Commission on the issue, not a final decision.

But sportsmen could receive less advance notice about issues like the Habitat Stamp program under another department proposal. Currently, a non-binding Game Commission policy states that any proposed rule change "will" be posted to the Department of Game and Fish website for public comment no less than 60 days prior to the date of possible adoption. There are 30 days for comments on a draft proposal, and the final proposed rule must then be posted for no less than 30 days before the commission makes a decision.

The Department directorate told the commission in May that they wanted more flexibility in the public notice policy. The new proposal would do that, but at the cost of **reducing sportsmen's ability to follow and comment on rule changes**. For example, the proposal says draft rule changes "should" be made available on the website for public comment, as opposed to "will be available," and the draft comment period was reduced from 30 days to 21. Final recommendations would still be posted for 30 days, unless the department comes up with "viable alternatives," which can be posted for public comment just 14 days before a decision is made. And the proposal gives the department an additional three days' deviation on any of the time frames.

**The current public notice policy is straightforward and has built in flexibility to allow exceptions**. Thirty days' comment period on drafts and another 30 days on final proposals provides ample opportunity for the public to consider all ramifications of a rule change and to weigh in. Just as important, it gives the department and the commission time to gather public input and make good decisions the first time. **There are numerous examples of hasty decisions in the past that had to be overturned later** – trespass rules and quality-high demand hunt regulations being just two. In fact, the public notice policy was adopted after a series of quick decisions had to be overturned later. Sportsmen are urged to contact their regional commissioner ([click here](#) for their contact information) and **ask them not to curtail public notice and involvement** in the department that sportsmen fund with their licenses, permits and taxes. In fact, the Commission should be moving the other way, toward greater public involvement and transparency, by holding Saturday meetings, webcasting and adopting other methods to solicit greater public input and transparency in decision-making. Contact your commissioner today to let them know that the voice of sportsmen is important in all decision-making.

**Also on Thursday's agenda:** Discussion of how best to implement Senate Bill 196, which increases the percentage of Big Game Draw licenses going to resident hunters; discussion and approval of a proposed one-year extension on the easement on State Trust Lands that has been negotiated with the State Land Office; and discussion and approval of the fee structure for Open Gate properties. [Click here](#) for the full agenda.



### Doña Ana wilderness bill comes back before Senate

Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall have reintroduced their bill to **establish permanent protection for wildlife and habitat in the Organ Mountains and other popular hunting, hiking and horseback riding areas around Las Cruces**. The Doña Ana County Conservation and Protection Act ([S. 1024](#)), creates 241,000 acres of wilderness and another 100,000 acres of national conservation areas in the Organ Mountains, Potrillo Mountains and elsewhere. [Click here](#) for a map of the proposal. Much of the proposed areas were set aside by the Reagan administration in the 1980s. If approved, S. 1024 would continue to allow hunting and grazing, among other uses. The bill also contains modifications that provides a bigger buffer zone for the Border Patrol's use and expands law enforcement capabilities. (Photo courtesy of Mike Groves)

**Las Cruces-area sportsmen strongly support the bill**. "With the rapid loss of open space and high quality habitat, it's so important that we secure the natural treasures that are left," said Jim Bates, vice president of Doña Ana County Associated Sportsmen. "We need to do this for our heritage, our families, our wildlife, and for our future," he added. Don Patterson, vice president of the Lower Rio Grande Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of America, agreed, saying, "Efforts to protect these places have been going on for over 30 years. It's time we get on with it, and pass this bill now for the future of Doña Ana County."

### In other Washington news ....

Rep. Steve Pearce joined Reps. Martin Heinrich, Ben Ray Lujan and Senators Bingaman and Udall in **supporting full funding for State Wildlife Grants**, a crucial bit of funding for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish that is on the chopping block in Washington, D.C. This makes New Mexico one of few, perhaps the only, state whose entire congressional delegation signed on their support to this valuable program. The wildlife grants have been used to keep wildlife and plants from reaching threatened or endangered species status, thus saving taxpayers and businesses millions of dollars. The House earlier this year approved substantial cuts to the State Wildlife Grants and other important conservation measures in a budget bill known as House Resolution 1. The Senate later voted down the cuts, but it was **good to see all of New Mexico's representatives stand up for the wildlife grant program**.

**Access to public lands could actually increase** under a bill co-sponsored by U.S. Sens. Jon Tester of Montana and James Risch of Idaho. The Making Public Lands Public Act, S. 901, would designate at least 1.5 percent of the Land and Water Conservation Fund toward purchases or easements to increase recreational access to federal public lands. A 2004 report to Congress found that more than 35 million acres of Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service land are inadequately accessible. S. 901 would set up a direct funding route to buy or lease access. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which comes from offshore oil revenues, still relies on year-to-year appropriations from Congress, but sportsmen have been pushing for years to get the fund permanently dedicated. When that day comes, a bill like S. 901 would make a huge difference in accessing our public lands. Last year, New Mexico Congressman Martin Heinrich co-sponsored a similar measure that passed the U.S. House, but did not make it to a vote in the Senate. A companion bill to S. 901 is expected to be introduced soon in the House.

### Sportsmen organizer sought for Northern New Mexico

The New Mexico Wildlife Federation is seeking a sportsmen organizer based in northern New Mexico to work primarily on conserving public land wildlife habitat and hunting and fishing opportunity. The ideal candidate will have strong people skills, experience with hunting and fishing on public lands and a passion for protecting wildlife habitat and outdoor opportunity. If you would like to apply, please send a resume and cover letter to [nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org](mailto:nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org), or call Jeremy at (505) 299-5404 for more information.

### 'Native Trout Adventures' to feature Rio Grande cutthroats

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership has launched a **series of videos about fishing for native trout species throughout the West**. In addition to shining light on many trout species that are fast becoming threatened and endangered, the series talks about the importance of protecting the public lands where these trout are found – trout like New Mexico's Rio Grande cutthroat. The first episode of "Native Trout Adventures" focused on the West Slope cutthroats of western Montana. The next episode, which should be available soon, was shot in Carson National Forest near Tres Piedras, and **features New Mexico anglers chasing Rio Grande cutthroats**. [Click here](#) to watch the first episode. (Photo courtesy of Garrett VeneKlasen)



### New Mexico Conservation Calendar

**Saturday, June 4, is Free Fishing Day** all over New Mexico, courtesy of the State Game Commission. No license is needed, although bag limits and all other fishing rules apply. Also on Saturday, the department and a slew of partner organizations will conduct free fishing clinics at sites around New Mexico. Learn to bait hooks, tie knots, catch fish and release them. For a list of all the sites where clinics are scheduled, [click here](#).

**Hunters can see how their fall hunting season will shape up on Wednesday, June 8**, when the Department of Game and Fish posts the results of the Big Game Draw. The department had been expecting more than 130,000 applications for about half that many licenses. Check results by going to [www.wildlife.state.nm.us](http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us).

**Restoration plans for the Red River** are the focus of a three-day symposium in the town of Red River on June 9-11. The event will provide a discussion forum and will focus on developing a strategy for the comprehensive restoration of the Red River, which has been damaged by runoff from nearby mining operations. There will be panel discussions and presentations by experts in their field, local political leaders, state and federal regulators, writers and local activists. Renowned author and fly fisherman John Nichols will give the keynote address at the dinner presentation Friday night. The general public and local citizens are encouraged to attend and get involved in the future of the Red River. For more information, go to [www.r3group.org](http://www.r3group.org).

**Fun activities for the entire family** are on tap at the first Sunrise Kiwanis Outdoor Recreation Show in Las Vegas, which runs 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 18, at the Abe Montoya Recreation Center. In addition to educational displays about hunting, fishing, camping, hiking and boating, there will be equipment vendors, outfitters, taxidermists, food, music and more. For more information, call (505) 617-6242 or e-mail [jcdmills@zlink.com](mailto:jcdmills@zlink.com). You can also [click here](#) to view the Event Flyer.

**If your group has an upcoming event of interest to sportsmen**, post it on the New Mexico Conservation Calendar, a free service of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. E-mail the information to [nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org](mailto:nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org) or call (505) 299-5404.

### Pass it on

**If you appreciate receiving the Sportsmen's News**, please share this newsletter with a friend and ask them to get involved by joining our Sportsman's Alert network. New Mexico sportsmen need to stay involved to ensure our hunting and fishing traditions continue. **And please make a contribution to NMWF**. With sportsmen like you, we can continue to make a difference. [Click here to donate now](#).

### About the New Mexico Wildlife Federation

Founded in 1914 by sportsman and conservation pioneer Aldo Leopold, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation is New Mexico's first and most effective conservation advocate. We are dedicated to protecting New Mexico's wildlife, habitat and outdoor way of life. We spearheaded permanent protection of our hunting and fishing rights in the Valle Vidal, and stopped cold the previous sell-off of your public lands. We believe that the best way to get things done is to build consensus with common goals.

Our key priorities are: Opportunity Habitat Youth

[NMWF Website](#) | [Donate Now](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#)

New Mexico Wildlife Federation | 121 Cardenas Drive N.E. | Albuquerque NM | 87108