

# New Mexico Wildlife Federation



Protecting our outdoor way of life since 1914

## May 2009 Sportsman's News Roundup

### Bingaman making news all month

**Sen. Jeff Bingaman has been busy on behalf of conservation-minded** New Mexico sportsmen this spring, sponsoring several measures that will protect access to public lands for hunting and fishing and ensuring those lands remain healthy for wildlife. The chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee can be expected to remain in the news, too, as Congress tackles legislation to rein in greenhouse-gas pollution and dedicate funding to protect and restore habitat that is critical for wildlife and sportsmen.

#### Public lands chief tips his hat to Bingaman, NM delegation

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar was in Albuquerque in late April to praise the omnibus public lands bill sponsored by Bingaman and then signed into law. Salazar tipped his trademark cowboy hat to Bingaman and the rest of New Mexico's congressional delegation for passing the public lands bill, which will protect public hunting and fishing grounds across the west, including the Sabinoso area east of Las Vegas, and also authorizes a study of the Salt Basin aquifer beneath Otero Mesa to help ensure the important water source is not contaminated by oil and gas development. **Hats off to sportsmen like you, too, for helping push this legislation through.**



*From left, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Lt. Gov. Diane Denish, Sen. Tom Udall, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Sen. Jeff Bingaman, Rep. Martin Heinrich and BLM New Mexico State Director Linda Rundell (Tami A. Heilemann, Dept. of Interior)*

#### Congress to take up Bingaman's Mining Act reform bill

Shortly after passage of the public lands bill, Bingaman introduced a measure strongly supported by sportsmen to overhaul the 1872 Mining Act, an antiquated law that allows irresponsible development of hard-rock mining throughout the country, particularly in the West — and still allows sale of our public lands for as little as \$2.50 per acre. Bingaman's measure would require mining companies to pay for publicly owned minerals and use that funding to reclaim abandoned mines and restore wildlife habitat. The bill would eliminate the sale of public lands to mining companies, and instead establishes a leasing system allowing lands to remain in public ownership. Several New Mexico communities have passed resolutions in support of the reform measure, including most recently the Village of Questa, home of a massive molybdenum mine. [Click here to read more about the mining reform bill.](#)

#### Rio Grande Gorge area eyed for protection

On the heels of his mining-reform bill, Bingaman then announced legislation to protect large tracts around the Rio Grande Gorge in Taos and Rio Arriba counties to preserve them as prime public hunting and fishing areas. El Rio Grande del Norte National Conservation Area Establishment Act, which Bingaman and Sen. Tom Udall are co-sponsoring, would classify almost 215,000 acres of public land along the Rio Grande Gorge as a national conservation area. Another 21,000 acres in two other tracts — around Ute Mountain and along the Rio San Antonio — would be designated as wilderness. Altogether, the bill would protect key elk wintering grounds and migratory corridors along the plateau between Ute Mountain and San Antonio Mountain, as well as protect habitat for other game species and birds of prey. Thanks should go to Bingaman and Udall for listening to the concerns of New Mexico sportsmen and introducing this important bill. [Click here for more information.](#)

### Legal battle to protect Otero Mesa pays off

**Responsible energy development will have another chance at Otero Mesa.** The state of New Mexico's recommendations to protect core habitat and groundwater were ignored by the Bureau of Land Management under the Bush administration, which made plans to drill. However the BLM will now be sent back to the drawing boards, giving us another chance to move forward a responsible plan for oil and gas drilling in the area. The 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in late April ruled that the BLM failed to follow national environmental law in its plan to develop oil and natural gas on Otero Mesa and said the agency must at least consider the idea of no drilling in the area in southern New Mexico. The court said BLM did not consider alternatives to surface drilling that would protect the fragile habitat and water resources of Otero Mesa, and that the agency didn't adequately analyze the likely impacts of the plan it proposed to permit gas and oil development. NMWF was one of several groups that joined the state to protest the Otero Mesa plan in 2005.

**Unless BLM appeals to the U.S. Supreme Court and wins,** the decision essentially means the agency must go back to the drawing boards before it can proceed with oil and gas development on the 427,000-acre area, the largest undisturbed parcel of Chihuahuan Desert in the United States. Otero Mesa is home to New Mexico's only thriving herd of native pronghorn antelope and one of the state's most desirable pronghorn hunts (other New Mexico herds were repopulated with pronghorn from Wyoming). Attorney General Gary King said in a statement that BLM will likely have to complete an environmental impact statement on the entire Otero Mesa management plan, consider closing Otero Mesa to development and conduct further analysis before leasing can be done. [Click here to read more.](#)

### Valles Caldera at a crossroads

**Valles Caldera National Preserve was created** as part of our National Forest system in 2000 with overwhelming public support in New Mexico. However, in order to appease anti-public lands sentiments in Congress at the time, an experimental management system was adopted that calls for our land to be managed by a federal government corporation overseen by political appointees rather than by a professional natural resource agency. The experimental Caldera plan was modeled after the Presidio, an urban area in San Francisco, and is supposed to raise its own operating revenue.

**In April, the preserve's board of trustees unveiled a revenue enhancement plan** that would move to commercialize the Valles Caldera, including building new luxury lodges and semi-permanent tent camps for high-priced "glamorous camping" or "glamping," and further pursuing the privatization of hunting opportunity, placing hunts there out of reach of most citizens. The plan spells out two alternatives to meet the preserve's goal to try to become financially self-sufficient by 2015. One proposes more than \$50 million in public and private development, such as a luxury lodge with around 20 rooms, a separate 100-room, mid-priced lodge and restaurant, and additional campground and RV space. The second alternative eliminates the lodges and restaurant, which reduces development costs but creates less revenue. [Click here to read the Albuquerque Journal story on the commercialization plan](#) (you may have to watch a short ad first.)

**As the preserve considers commercial expansion, sportsmen and others are encouraging Congress** to hold hearings on revising the preserve's long-term management strategy and putting a professional natural resource agency in charge of management. The state Senate this

session approved a memorial sponsored by Sen. Tim Eichenberg of Albuquerque that says the experimental management system for the preserve "will never generate adequate funding without developing, and thereby destroying, the Valles Caldera itself." [Click here to read more on the options facing Valles Caldera, including the revenue plan and the state Senate memorial.](#)

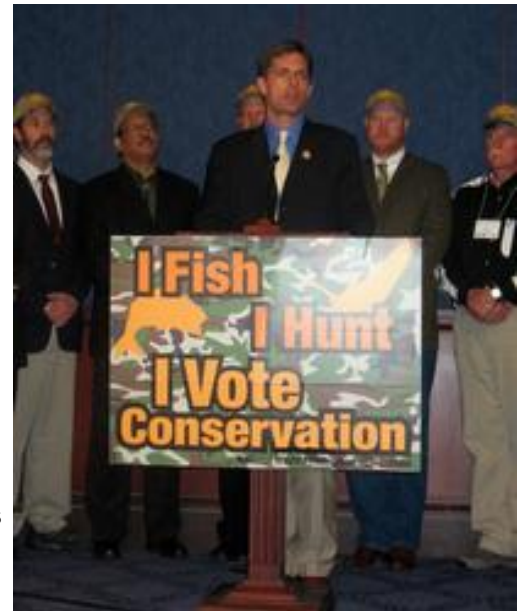
## NM sportsmen speak out on climate change bill, natural resource funding

**New Mexico was well-represented in Washington, D.C.**, on Earth Day when congressional leaders introduced legislation to reduce greenhouse-gas pollution and stimulate the economy. State Game Commission member and NMWF past-president Kent Salazar and NMWF campaign coordinator Alan Hamilton were among more than 70 sportsmen from around the country in Washington to promote congressional action on the legislation. The bill calls for capping carbon pollution; sportsmen also want it to provide funding to help the nation's natural resources adapt to the changing climate.

**Salazar, NMWF's northern New Mexico campaign coordinator, was called on to speak** at a national press conference during the event. The room was packed with reporters, but the longtime New Mexico hunter and angler said he stated what sportsmen have always known. "I just said we were there because hunters and anglers have always been the leading conservationists in America, and that we realize more than most that these climate changes are going on already," he said.

**Rep. Martin Heinrich also spoke out on behalf of hunters and anglers** at an Earth Day news conference, saying climate change legislation is needed to protect wildlife and public lands. Heinrich, a public lands hunter himself, told the press, "This bipartisan group of wildlife and conservation leaders share my strong belief that we must do more to fight climate change and protect our planet for generations to come. I am deeply committed to protecting wildlife, capping carbon pollution and investing in clean energy jobs."

*At right, Rep. Martin Heinrich and other sportsmen call for action on climate change legislation in Congress, including dedicated funding for natural resource protection and restoration. (Chris Kleponis)*



## Town hall with Heinrich focuses on climate change, economy

**Heinrich will be a key participant at a town hall meeting** in Albuquerque this month that focuses on clean energy and green jobs in New Mexico, but that also will include a session on the effect of climate change on wildlife and sportsmen. The event begins at 2 p.m. Saturday, May 9, with public discussions on topics such as clean energy legislation and green jobs. NMWF will host a session on how climate change threatens public lands and wildlife, and why sportsmen should be concerned about reducing greenhouse-gas pollution. At 3 p.m., Heinrich will participate in a round-table discussion on green energy and the economy with representatives of state, local and nonprofit economic and environmental agencies. The event concludes with a keynote address by state Sen. Eric Griego at 4 p.m. The town hall will be held at Smith Brasher Hall on the Central New Mexico Community College campus. [Click here for more information.](#)

## Consensus developing around San Juan River concerns

**San Juan River fishermen say the river is changing** and many agree that sediment is a concern, but what to do next is the question. The Department of Game and Fish surveyed hundreds of fishermen and sportsmen's groups this spring in an effort to determine why some anglers are voicing strong concern about the Special Trout Water fishery. Department staff presented their survey results to the State Game Commission in April. Groups such as New Mexico Trout, the San Juan River Guides Association and the San Juan Fly Fishing Federation all said the river has changed and that sediment is high on their list of concerns. Possible fixes listed by the department include habitat projects to reduce sedimentation or improve the river bottom and working with Navajo Dam authorities to increase the river flow. Game Commission members took no action at the Farmington meeting, but a consistent call across the board was for a more comprehensive analysis of threats facing the fishery to ensure that projects and plans have the maximum effect. [Click here for more on the San Juan River fishery.](#)

## Game warden dies unexpectedly

**New Mexico wildlife and habitat lost a good friend and staunch supporter** in March with the unexpected death of Department of Game and Fish habitat specialist Mark Olson. A 16-year veteran of the department, Olson died of an apparent heart attack while running on his treadmill at home. His co-workers called him one of the most dedicated and hard-working individuals they knew, going extra lengths on habitat protection work and wildlife protection projects. Said department Public Information Officer Ross Morgan, "I can guarantee you there wasn't a person in this world that knew Mark that had one bad thing to say about him." The 46-year-old Olson leaves a wife and two young daughters. The Mark J. Olson Memorial Fund was established to assist his daughters, Kaytlin and Amanda. To donate, contact the State Employee Federal Credit Union, 813 St. Michael's Drive, Santa Fe, NM 87505, or call (505) 884-0128. The fund account number is 3001066070.

## Hunter education Class of 2009

**More than 2,200 New Mexico youngsters completed** the Department of Game and Fish Hunter Education Program from January through March, making them eligible to enter this year's big game hunting license and permit drawing. It also reduces the chances that any of them will be involved in a gun-related accident. Since mandatory hunter education took effect in New Mexico in 1976, the number of accidents has declined substantially, and national statistics show hunting is safer than swimming, boating and golf, according to Mark Birkhauser, hunter education coordinator for the department. The department always welcomes more hunter education instructors. For more information about becoming an instructor, call (505) 222-4722.

**NMWF also is looking for volunteers** to become hunter education instructors. The Department of Game and Fish will teach the course and certify instructors for live-fire supervision at a range near Las Cruces. The training is tentatively set for May. NMWF and the department are working together to provide small game hunting clinics to youths who have not had an opportunity to experience hunting and the outdoors. If interested, please call us at (505) 299-5404 or e-mail us at [nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org](mailto:nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org).

## In the news

**Columnist Bob Marshall had an insightful piece in the May issue of Field and Stream** naming five crucial goals sportsmen must work toward to stop the relentless loss of public lands. Topping his list was passage of the Clean Water Restoration Act by Congress, followed by improvements to the Conservation Reserve Program – that part of the Farm Bill that pays farmers to develop wildlife habitat on marginal croplands. Marshall also calls for reforming U.S. energy policy and the 1872 Mining Act, and for climate change legislation that includes funding for fish and wildlife agencies. And last, he urges sportsmen to maintain their relationships with conservation groups, which together make a more effective lobby for fish and wildlife. [To read the full column, click here.](#)

**The Washington Post recently ran a good story** (picked up by the New Mexico Independent) about the potential for conflicts between renewable energy projects and the environment. It focuses on a proposed transmission line linking wind and solar projects in New Mexico with consumers in Arizona. "As the push for renewable-energy development intensifies across the United States, scientists and activists have begun to

voice concern that policymakers have underestimated the environmental impact of projects that are otherwise 'green,'" the Post story says. It goes on to quote Johanna Wald, a senior lawyer at the Natural Resources Defense Council, saying, "There is no free lunch when it comes to meeting our energy needs." On the other hand, Wald adds, the renewable-energy boom "offers a chance to do it right." [Click here to read the story.](#)

**Two more New Mexicans have been appointed to high posts** in the Department of Interior. Last month Hilary Tompkins was named solicitor. She will soon be joined by Ned Farquhar and Deanna Archuleta, both of whom are well known in state conservation circles. Farquhar, a former conservation adviser to Gov. Bill Richardson and staffer with the Natural Resources Defense Council, has been named deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals. Archuleta, the southwest regional director of the Wilderness Society as well as a Bernalillo County Commission member and chairwoman of the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, will become deputy assistant secretary for water and science. Neither appointment requires Senate confirmation.

## NMWF honored as top affiliate

**The National Wildlife Federation has named NMWF as its affiliate of the year.** The announcement, made at the NWF annual meeting in Pittsburgh this week, cites NMWF as "New Mexico's first and most effective conservation advocate." Recent NMWF successes including leading the coalition that secured the Valle Vidal Preservation Act, building support for a congressional overhaul of the 1872 Mining Act, advocating for responsible energy development in New Mexico and working with the Legislature and management agencies on issues of conservation and public access. "NMWF is blazing the trail and creating a proud model to emulate at the state level," the national organization said in a release. Accepting the award in Pittsburgh were NMWF Executive Director Jeremy Vesbach and President Ed Olona, accompanied by past presidents Kent Salazar and Oscar Simpson, and Glenda Muirhead, president of Albuquerque Wildlife Federation.

## Help wanted

**NMWF could use a hand from members** who live outside the Albuquerque metro area – as delivery drivers. Sporting goods stores throughout the state have agreed to distribute our quarterly newspaper, the Outdoor Reporter. If you could carry a bundle or two of the papers (they're small) and live in or near Farmington, Grants, Taos, Roswell or Las Cruces, please give us a call at (505) 299-5404 or e-mail [joel@nmwildlife.org](mailto:joel@nmwildlife.org).

## NM Conservation Calendar

**The New Mexico Conservation Calendar** is available to help keep conservation-minded sportsmen abreast of events and meetings. Just send your group's calendar information to [nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org](mailto:nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org) and we'll take care of the rest.

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## 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**

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