



## Sportsman's News Roundup

November 2009

### Sportsmen need governor's help to protect resources we fund

The Department of Game and Fish came out of the Legislature's special budget session better than many had feared, but not completely unscathed. Sportsmen's biggest concern was that the Legislature might raid the Game Protection Fund, which is made up of license fees and taxes on hunting and fishing equipment. The Legislature didn't even discuss tapping the fund.

The legislature did, however, vote to transfer \$800,000 from the ATV Trail Safety Fund into the state's General Fund, and failed to exempt the NM Department of Game and Fish from across the board 7.6 percent budget cuts—even though cutting the Department will do nothing to help the budget crisis, since the Department is separately funded by sportsmen dollars.

New Mexico sportsmen have always paid our own way. We fund the state Game and Fish Department almost exclusively with sportsmen's dollars. Similarly, the Trail Safety Fund is derived from ATV registration sticker fees - many of which are purchased by sportsmen - and was established to provide enforcement, education and restoration money for ATV issues. Considering that the fund consists solely of ATV user fees and does not include any general fund money, this \$800,000 transfer is clearly improper.

Sportsmen understand that these are tough economic times in which all New Mexicans are faced with tough budget choices. But because these fees are levied on ATV users to preserve and protect the outdoor landscapes that contribute nearly \$1 billion annually to our state economy, this transfer of funds is an unethical move against the users who have paid these fees and will be damaging to wildlife habitat.

The legislature also failed to exempt the NM Department of Game and Fish from an across-the-board 7.6 percent cut of state agencies. Since the Department of Game and Fish is funded by sportsmen fees and without any general fund money, cutting the Department of Game and Fish's budget will do *nothing* to help the state's budget woes—but the misguided cuts would affect law enforcement and wildlife conservation duties performed by the NM Department of Game and Fish.

Luckily Gov. Bill Richardson can still veto the legislature's proposal to raid \$800,000 raised by ATV users for habitat protection and trail safety, and he can also help ensure the NM Department of Game and Fish is not subject to unnecessary cuts. This is your money that is supposed to be used to help protect the wildlife and habitat you care about.

Please take a moment and ask Governor Richardson to veto the unethical raid on the ATV Trail Safety Fund and protect the NM Department of Game and Fish from unnecessary and misguided budget cuts that do nothing to help the budget crisis. [Click here to send your message.](#) Governor Richardson has been a strong supporter of habitat conservation in New Mexico and he will listen to what you have to say.

### Senate bill would protect habitat on behalf of sportsmen

Sen. Jeff Bingaman has taken an important stand for sportsmen by introducing legislation in the U.S. Senate to put money on the ground to protect and restore valuable wildlife habitat from the effects of climate change and increasing drought. [The Natural Resources Climate Adaptation Act of 2009 \(S. 1933\)](#) dedicates funding to address the harmful effects that warmer temperatures, invasive species and other climate-related problems are having on wildlife habitat and on those who depend on natural resources for their recreation or income.

"Our natural resources have started to suffer from climate change, and these impacts will increase if we don't act," Bingaman said in a release. "The economic wellbeing of communities throughout our nation depends on healthy natural resources, and we've got to work to prevent negative impacts while we try to lower greenhouse gas emissions."

Similar legislation was passed by the U.S. House in May. It, too, dedicates funding to natural resource management agencies such as the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to address the effects of climate change on habitat and wildlife.

Many sportsmen are speaking out on the climate change issue, and the importance of on-the-ground habitat restoration. This [op-ed piece by Garrett VeneKlasen](#) appeared in the Santa Fe New Mexican [and this one by former NMWF President Kent Salazar](#) was published recently in the Albuquerque Journal.

### Fishing license sales up nationwide

Two sportfishing industry groups report that [fishing license sales rose](#) nearly 8 percent nationwide from January through July 2009 compared with the same period a year earlier. It was the biggest single-year increase since the 1970s, said American Sportfishing Association President Mike Nussman. The numbers come from nearly a dozen state fish and wildlife agencies that represent a good cross-section of the industry. New Mexico is not among them, but Texas and Utah are. The economic downturn probably plays a role in the fishing uptick, Nussman said in a news release. Anglers and hunters are the most significant funding source for conservation and recreation in the United States, through license fees and taxes on hunting and fishing equipment. New Mexico relies almost exclusively on sportsmen to fund the Department of Game and Fish.

### Rio Grande has newfound spring, but a cloudy outlook

Scientists have discovered another major [spring feeding the Rio Grande](#), the Santa Fe New Mexican reported recently. Located near the Colorado border in the proposed El Rio Grande del Norte National Conservation Area, the spring contributes about 6,000 gallons a minute to the river's flow. About 170 such springs have been located, but this is the biggest found to date. If Congress approves the conservation area proposed by U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Jeff Bingaman ([S. 874](#)), the Rio Grande and its surrounding uplands from Ute Mountain to San Antonio Mountain would win stronger protection from development. Hunting, fishing and other traditional opportunities would continue to be allowed and would benefit from the protections.

But the Rio Grande is still in trouble, experts say. There is too much demand and not enough supply, according to a [story in the Albuquerque Journal](#). A substantial portion of the river is actually below ground, and cities along the river's edge are pumping out more water than is being replaced by precipitation, snow melt and springs. In the long run, the cities will have to live within their water means if residents want the Rio Grande to continue to host a vibrant bosque with all its fish and wildlife.

### River otter population grows

The stock of [river otters in the upper Rio Grande](#) got a big boost in October when more animals were transplanted from Washington state by a coalition of federal, state and nonprofit agencies. They join 10 otters transplanted in the Taos Pueblo area in 2008 which quickly became a focal point for the northern New Mexico economy. The playful, social animals have become an attraction for Rio Grande rafters, kayakers and anglers. They also are a missing part of the Rio Grande ecosystem. Otters once lived in throughout New Mexico, including the Gila, Mora, San Juan and Canadian river systems.

"We are so thrilled to see this species back in New Mexico," said Linda Rundell, state director for the Bureau of Land Management. "We are working with partners throughout the state to restore watersheds and wildlife habitat: the icing on the cake comes when we can restore species like the river otter to their rightful place in New Mexico."

The BLM also recently celebrated the restoration of more than 1 million acres of degraded land across the state since 2005. [The Restore New Mexico program](#) has worked to restore native desert grasslands, riparian areas and open woodlands, the agency said in a release. A reception to celebrate the program was held in Roswell.

### Doña Ana wilderness proposal gets editorial thumbs-up

The bill sponsored by U.S. Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall to protect critical desert habitat in Doña Ana County on behalf of hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts got a positive note from the Las Cruces Sun-News editorial board. The editorial is no longer available in the Sun-News archives, but it applauded the senators' plan to set aside some 330,000 acres in the county in a bill known as the [Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Wilderness Act \(S. 1689\)](#).

The El Paso Times also chimed in on the bill, praising the El Paso City Council for passing a resolution in favor of it. "The bill is meant to protect the outdoors, and our views of it, from becoming what it looks like when El Pasoans look at our mountains," the editors wrote. "Development has gone quite far up the foothills. There will be no scenic postcards printed for Crazy Cat Mountain. ... This bill would not stifle the much-needed, economy-boosting building industry. There is plenty of land around here on which to build new neighborhoods. Plenty. This bill will simply preserve the outdoors for everyone, not just those who can afford to live high on a mountain."

### Game Commission agenda items concern sportsmen

[The agenda for the next Game Commission meeting has been posted](#) and two issues that caused immediate concern for sportsmen are fortunately going to be remedied by Chairman Jim McClintic.

[First, the agenda proposes a potential massive change to the state's trespass posting rules](#), but the proposed rule change was posted to the Department of Game and Fish's web site barely 30 days before the commission meeting, violating the State Game Commission's new Public Notice Policy, which states, "...a draft of any proposed rule ... 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."

The proposed rule change would set up a system where landowners who receive unlimited or transferable private land-only big game authorizations could begin to use the special licenses to hunt on federal or state public lands unless the lands were posted by the land management agencies. The rule would conflict with state law that says private landowners are responsible for minimal posting requirements so that the public can tell where land boundaries lie. The rule would come without any funding for public land agencies to post land boundaries and would incentivize those landowners who benefit from New Mexico's controversial system of transferable and unlimited "landowner" licenses to NOT post their land boundaries. The result would be a confusing mess that would hurt the average sportsmen concerned about where land boundaries lie.

Fortunately, Chairman McClintic has pledged to remove the item from December's agenda so that the public will have more time to comment on this anti-sportsmen proposal. NMWF will keep you informed as this foolhardy proposal develops further.

[The other item of concern was a missing agenda item for a vote on new chair and vice-chair for the commission](#). The State Game Commission appointed by Governor Bill Richardson has every year rotated the chairmanship, creating a positive and collegial atmosphere on the State Game Commission, and sportsmen worried the absence of change on this year's agenda may signal an end to the friendly transfer of power. However, Chairman McClintic told NMWF that the commission is considering moving the chairmanship rotation to the first meeting of the New Year to allow continuity through the legislative session, which always starts in January. If adopted, this could certainly be a positive move.

You can still speak up for better public access to Game Commission decisions

The State Game Commission has not yet set a schedule for next year's meetings. If you have not already, make your voice heard for Saturday meetings in order to open State Game Commission decisions—which affect your hunting and fishing opportunities—to more public comment from sportsmen.

[Click here](#) to ask for Saturday meetings that are more centrally-located to make Game Commission decision-making more transparent and open to public input.

### NM Conservation Calendar

The [New Mexico Conservation Calendar](#) is available to help keep sportsmen abreast of events and meetings around the state. Send your group's calendar information to [nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org](mailto:nmwildlife@nmwildlife.org) and we'll take care of the rest.

### Last but certainly not least

**NMWF has been standing up for the sportsmen of New Mexico** since 1914, and the work continues. Share this newsletter with a friend and ask them to get involved by joining our Sportsman Alert network, and consider making a contribution yourself. With sportsmen like you, we can continue to make a difference.

### 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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