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A PUBLICATION OF THE NEW MEXICO WILDERNESS ALLIANCE

SUMMER 2016

From the Director: Wild & Scenic Protection for the Gila Now! *A letter to Senators Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall*

Dear Senators,

This letter is to formally request your leadership in the drafting and introduction of legislation to permanently protect the Gila River, the San Francisco River, and major tributaries via the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968.

We very much appreciate your strong voices of skepticism to the proposal to construct major diversions on the Gila River as part of the Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA). In addition to numerous good governance and fiscal concerns, we oppose the diversion because of the impacts it would have on one of the Southwest's last free-flowing rivers. We share your view that the Gila River is a "crown jewel of the Southwest."

As you know, this current proposed diversion is merely the latest in a long line of threats to the Gila River. Throughout the 1970's, conservationists fought the proposed Hooker Dam project, which would have transformed some 20 miles of the wild, free-flowing Gila River within the Gila Wilderness into a dead slack pool. Later, the Hooker Dam proposal was replaced by the Conner Dam proposal.

While conservationists were ultimately able to defeat these proposals, they underscore the chronically threatened status of the river. Even if current attempts to divert the river fail, it is certain that without permanent protection, this scenario will play out again and again in the future. Proponents of developments, dams and diversions only have to be successful once to destroy the river's essential character, while advocates of keeping the Gila River wild and free have to be successful every time in order to preserve it.

The headwaters of the Gila River are within the world's first protected Wilderness. It is here that the Nearctic and Neotropical realms overlap to make up a world-class landscape of biological diversity, ecological jumbling and wildness. The Gila headwaters is one of the largest wilderness complexes in the Americas south of the boreal forest and north of the Amazon rainforest. The Gila headwaters are the most ecologically diverse wilderness complex in North America. This area harbors some of the greatest non-coastal breeding bird diversity and density in the United States. It is home, of course, to one of the largest undammed headwater watersheds left in temperate North America. Sections of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers are included on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory due to their free-flowing nature and their scenery, geology, fish, wildlife, cultural, and other values. And yet, the river itself is unprotected.



*The Gila Middle Box,
Photo by Natban Newcomer*

While New Mexico was honored to have one of the first rivers designated as Wild and Scenic after the 1968 Act, (sections of the Rio Grande), the Gila River was unfortunately not among them. Indeed, nearly 50 years later, of the approximately 108,014 miles of rivers in New Mexico, a scant 124.3 miles of them are designated as Wild and Scenic—or approximately 1/10th of 1% of the state's river miles.

The multi-year efforts to kill this most recent diversion proposal have created, out of necessity, a strong, well-organized and sophisticated community that is educated on the issues and mobilized. Community members are eager to rally behind a proactive effort to afford the Gila permanent protection. More generally, independent polling shows strong support for permanently protecting the Gila River. A December 2015 state-wide poll showed 66% of New Mexicans registered to vote are in favor of designating the Gila River Wild and Scenic.

We respectfully request that legislation be drafted and introduced at the earliest and most advantageous time and that it include the following elements:

- Wild and Scenic designation for all sections of the Gila River to include the West, Middle, and East Forks plus the Main Stem through the Gila Wilderness, and for all sections that flow through federal public lands to the Arizona state line.
- Wild and Scenic designation for all major tributaries of the Gila River.
- Wild and Scenic designation for all sections of the San Francisco River that flow through federal public lands.
- That those sections of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers that do not flow through federal public land be included for Wild and Scenic Study, to provide interim protections and afford opportunities to engage stakeholders.

Designation by 2018, the 50th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, would be a fitting tribute to America's first Wilderness river. The timing and circumstances are ripe and the need for permanent protection is as urgent as ever.

Sincerely,



Mark Allison, Executive Director



Mark Allison

Notes from New Mexico



Gila Lower Box

In the face of fierce organizing by conservationists and overwhelming public opposition, proponents of **diverting the Gila River** have abandoned the Gila Upper Box as one of their recommended sites. This area is of particular importance to us due to its wilderness quality and ecological sensitivity. Here is proof positive that your voices make a difference! And while we should all celebrate our victory, we can't let our guard down for one minute. The Gila River is still very much at risk. One alternative being pushed now, for example, would be a surface diversion of the Gila River at the gauge site into a pipeline to a downstream pump station, which would then pump water up into a reservoir in sensitive Upper Spar Canyon.

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The bill to **protect the Cerro de Yuta and Rio San Antonio** areas totaling 21,420 acres within the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument as Wilderness passed the Senate in May. We now need Congressman Lujan to introduce a companion bill in the House.

.....

In June, the **Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act** (S. 3049) was introduced in the Senate. This would protect eight areas within the new national monument, including parts of the Organ, Potrillo, Sierra de las Uvas, and Robledo mountains, in addition to Aden Lava Flow and Broad Canyon—totaling approximately 240,000 acres.

.....

Mexican gray wolf recovery efforts suffered another blow as Judge Johnson of the Federal District Court of New Mexico granted the NM Game and Fish Department a preliminary injunction, temporarily preventing US Fish and Wildlife from releasing any more wolves in New Mexico. (Fortunately, the ruling did not require that recently released pups be removed from the wild). We call for USFW to appeal this decision.



Rio Grande del Norte National Monument



Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

What We Do

Each day, you and resourceful NM Wild staff members fight for your wild public lands. We...

- Monitor New Mexico's federal public lands and Wilderness Areas to hold management agencies accountable for following the law and minimizing abuses
- Conduct field research to identify and document lands with wilderness characteristics that are currently unprotected and under threat from off-road vehicles, oil and gas, timber harvesting and development
- Train and coordinate volunteers for service projects on public lands
- Build broad community support for wilderness protection and cultivate new stewards through education, outreach and service projects
- Advocate for the permanent protection of our dwindling special wild places in New Mexico by building grassroots campaigns and working with our federal congressional delegation and the executive branch

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New Mexico
Wilderness Alliance
PO Box 25464
Albuquerque,
NM 87125
Questions?
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ext 104

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PHOTO: MIKE GROVES, ORGAN MOUNTAINS, NM

Whittling Away at the Gila Wilderness for Over 80 Years



Dave Foreman

“A wilderness,” Aldo Leopold wrote, “should be big enough to absorb a two-week pack trip without crossing your own tracks.” To early forester Leopold, the wilderness was the pine forest and sheer canyons of the headwaters of the Gila River in the Mogollon Mountains and Black Range in southwestern New Mexico. During the second decade of the last century, he became enthralled with this remote vastness and worried that it would soon vanish without positive action on the part of its manager, the United States Forest Service. With popular articles and through in-house discussions with Forest Service decision-makers, Leopold pushed his point that, because of the sudden availability and spread of motor-cars in the National Forest backcountry after World War I, there would soon be no place left for those so inclined to practice the primitive arts and skills of pioneer travel—primarily horse- and mule-packing. In 1924, Southwest Regional Forester Frank Pooler administratively designated a Gila Wilderness Area of nearly one million acres stretching from Glenwood east to Kingston, New Mexico. Areas were soon set aside in other Forest Service regions and all were renamed as primitive areas.

The Gila was the first area specifically protected as wilderness by human civilization. But within eight years of its designation, the Forest Service cut the North Star Road through it north to south, slicing the Black Range from the rest of the roadless country. The Forest Service claimed the road was needed for quicker communication between its ranger stations at Beaverhead and Mimbres, and fire-fighting, private livestock management, and hunting access. A key reason, however, was that this region of the East Fork of the Gila River was dusty, pinon-juniper steppe, and in the aesthetic eye of the Forest Service not pretty enough to be wilderness—this scenic bias still plays a role in efforts to add other lower-elevation lands to the wilderness. Part of the Gila Primitive Area east of the new road was redesignated as the Black Range Primitive Area.

With the road came the extermination of the grizzly and lobo. Ranchers, hunters, and fuelwood cutters in early pickup trucks began to branch off from the North Star Road, pushing deeper into the Gila Primitive Area to the west and the Black Range Primitive Area to the east during the 1930s, leaving a network of two-track routes. During World War II, several thousand acres believed to have critical minerals were chopped from the primitive area boundary on the south.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the Forest Service undertook a program to review all of the primitive areas that had been created during the 1920s and 1930s to determine whether they should remain protected and, if so, to draw firm boundaries for them.

After the study, the areas were to be called wilderness areas if over 100,000 acres and wild areas if under 100,000 acres. In 1952, the Forest Service issued their recommendations for the Gila. Already cut down from its original near-million to 560,000 acres, the Gila National Forest proposed to further reduce it to 300,000 acres by lopping off over 100,000 acres in the east alongside the North Star Road where, said the Forest Service, the gentle topography made defense against vehicles impossible. They would also chop out the valley containing the Gila Cliff Dwellings and access route. They planned to build a paved road into the Cliff Dwellings for tourists. In perhaps the most grievous cut of all, another 100,000 acres of towering old-growth mixed-conifer and ponderosa-pine forest around Iron Creek Mesa in the north would be pulled out for full-on, industrial logging and road building.

The Forest Service's silver-tongued flimflam justifying the “slight” boundary revisions almost won over the far-away Wilderness Society and Sierra Club. But local hunters, fishers, hikers, and horse-packers knew better. Community organizations and citizens from southwestern New Mexico didn't just say no. They said, “Hell, No!” This brought the national groups around, and New Mexico Senator Clinton P. Anderson stepped forward as the conservationists' champion. The Forest Service quickly backtracked and came out with their revised proposal in 1953: a 429,000-acre Gila Wilderness Area (including Iron Creek Mesa), and a 130,000-acre Gila Primitive Area for further study. The locals hadn't objected so much to the paved road and exclusion of the Cliff Dwellings, so a twenty-mile-long, one-mile-wide corridor was whittled out between the wilderness and the primitive area.

Alas, the Forest Service took the knife to other primitive areas much as they did to the Gila, and some areas did not have stalwarts such as those in Silver City to fight back. The Forest Service attack on primitive areas and its fevered drive to road and log the backcountry led Howard Zahniser of The Wilderness Society and others to call on Congress to protect wilderness areas with a Wilderness Act. An eight-year battle raged, with fierce opposition to the Wilderness Act from the Forest Service and Park Service alongside the logging, mining, livestock, irrigation, development, oil & gas, and industrial tourism industries.

In 1964 the Wilderness Act became law and all existing national forest wilderness areas became “instant” units of the new National Wilderness Preservation System. The Act directed the Forest Service to study the remaining primitive areas and give Congress recommendations by 1974 on how much should be designated as wilderness. In 1969, the Gila National Forest proposed a paltry 188,179 acre Aldo Leopold Wilderness for the 169,356-acre Black Range Primitive Area and some high-elevation additions.

continued on next page

Whittling Away, Cont.

The New Mexico Wilderness Study Committee (NMWSC) and other groups, reflecting their high-country, recreational bias, countered with a better but still inadequate 231,000-acre wilderness line.

In 1972, the Gila National Forest combined their study of the Gila Primitive Area with an overall boundary revision of the Gila Wilderness. True to history, they proposed most of the gentle mesa country near the North Star Road for deletion once again. Their new proposal totaled 543,474 acres of wilderness. We conservationists proposed 614,000 acres. During the 1970s, conservationists and the Forest Service enlarged their recommendations. The enlargements were significant for the conservationists (around 400,000 acres for the Aldo Leopold Wilderness and around 700,000 acres for the Gila Wilderness) and slight for the agency. Throughout this time, I was insistent that we look at the Gila and Aldo Leopold together as parts of a single wilderness complex and not as two separate, island-like units as the Forest Service did.

In 1980, Senator Pete Domenici and Representative Manuel Lujan, Jr. were ready to move on a New Mexico wilderness bill for national forest areas. It was made clear to the senators that we had to bring the wilderness boundaries for the Gila and

Aldo down to half-a-mile of the North Star Road. Otherwise, we would ask to kill the entire bill. We ended up with a 570,000-acre Gila Wilderness Area and a 211,300-acre Aldo Leopold Wilderness Area and the two wilderness boundaries were each brought down to one-half mile from the North Star Road. Had the Forest Service boundaries prevailed in 1980, the non-wilderness gap would have been up to ten miles. Knowing what we now know about the importance of connectivity for wildlife movement between protected areas, this was a real victory.

Most of the other lands that conservationists proposed for addition to the Aldo Leopold and Gila in 1980 still qualify, and are even more important now for biodiversity. The two largest undesignated national forest roadless areas in New Mexico are the 190,000-some acres around the Aldo Leopold Wilderness and the 130,000-some acres around the Gila Wilderness. Maybe by the time of the 100th Anniversary of the designation of the Gila Wilderness in 2024, we will have finally added enough land to the Gila and Aldo Leopold so that they are large enough to once again play as “the theater of evolution” as Leopold described them in 1937.

Dave Foreman

Senior Campaign Advisor to the Executive Director—New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. Copyright 2007

Resource Recommendations



The following is an excerpt from the Wilderness Alliance's new Wild Guide: Passport to New Mexico Wilderness. This is one of the featured hikes in the Gila Wilderness.

LOOP HIKE: LITTLE BEAR CANYON

Round-trip length: 10.5 miles

Low and high elevations: 5,700 & 6,300 feet

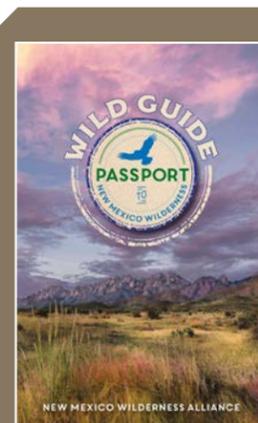
Difficulty: moderate

Administration: Gila National Forest, Wilderness Ranger District

This hike allows you to experience the Gila Wilderness uplands as well as the popular canyon bottoms. Begin at TJ Corral near Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. Trail 729 climbs not too steeply through grassy meadows onto the upland separating the West Fork and Middle Fork drainages. Here you meander through open ponderosa forest before an interesting descent through a tributary canyon of the Middle Fork. At about 3.5 miles, you reach the Middle Fork of the Gila. To make the loop, take the Middle Fork Trail, No. 157, downstream (lots of river crossings) about 5.5 miles to the ranger station and national monument visitor center. One half mile before the visitor center you will come to Lightfoot Hot Spring

near the river. From the visitor center, it is about a 1.5-mile hike back to TJ Corral.

For an adventurous overnight trip with solitude, extend this loop hike to reach The Meadows. Follow Trail 729 to its junction with Trail 164. Continue along Trail 164 across the uplands to its junction with Trail 28, which descends from the uplands into Big Bear Canyon then climbs again before descending to The Meadows. From The Meadows, connect with Trail 157 (Middle Fork Trail), which follows the Middle Fork of the Gila River. Expect slower travel and multiple river crossings for the remainder of this hike and don't forget to save time to enjoy Lightfoot Hot Spring before the end of your trip. When water levels are high, exercise caution with all river crossings.



Our NEW Wild Guide: Passport to New Mexico Wilderness!

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This comprehensive guide to New Mexico's protected wildlands is the only book that features each of the state's designated wilderness areas and wilderness study areas as well as other treasures, such as

the new Rio Grande del Norte National Monument and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument.

"The Wilder the Nature, the Better"

Member interview with Bob & Phyllenore Howard, conducted June 15, 2016



Phyllenore and Bob Howard, with Mark Allison and Nathan Newcomer. Photo by Lois Manno

Silver City residents Bob and Phyllenore Howard were wilderness advocates before it was hip to be one. As the first chairman of the board of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, Bob helped shape the direction and focus of the organization's work. Also an Alliance founding member, Phyllenore had the “real world” expertise to help launch this organization that has proven its staying power after nearly twenty years, and is still going strong. What follows is a bit of history regarding wilderness conservation in New Mexico, and how the Howards got involved.

Q: Was there an event or place or person that first hooked you into really loving wilderness and knowing it was going to be a part of your life?

Bob: I grew up in the suburbs of St. Louis, played in the creek, hiked in the woods, and just felt comfortable outdoors. I loved Boy Scouts, particularly hiking and camping with them. I hadn't been that involved in wilderness *per se*, but was involved in environmental issues and systems. With a background in chemical engineering, and in medicine and computers—which is all about systems—I tend to take a systemic look at things. It's how I make sense of my world.

What little “wilderness” we had left in New Mexico wasn't designated Wilderness, and not much was truly untrammeled. It made sense to me that we ought to try and enlarge the boundaries of the wilderness areas that we had and should try to get more designated. We soon ran into Dave Foreman, who gets a huge amount of the credit for my early wilderness education. What was then the New Mexico Wilderness Study Committee (NMWSC) was formed from Los Alamos and Sandia Laboratory scientists, for the most part. They were trying to study the characteristics of places that might qualify for Wilderness designation.

Q: Then you became more involved with New Mexico environmental groups?

Phyllenore was the first chair of the Albuquerque Sierra Club chapter, and we were very active at all levels of the Sierra Club over the years. That was in the early to mid- 1980s.

Phyllenore: It wasn't just the NMWSC doing wilderness inventory. There were people who identified more with the

Sierra Club or the Wilderness Society at the same time. It was a loose coalition of groups.

Bob: In the mid-80s Judy Bishop had formed the New Mexico Wilderness Coalition (NMWC) when she needed it for some lobbying we were doing in D.C. That was a more formal effort, and many of the people from the NMWSC were getting older and dropping out, so the NMWC became the “go to” center of activity for a number of years.

In the mid-90s, the NMWC was struggling with organizational issues and finance. It made more sense to many of us to start a new organization, make a clean break of it. A bunch of us started the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, and within the first year it gained great momentum.

Phyllenore: We set up a 501(c)(3), we had bylaws and an executive director. The earlier NMWC didn't have any of that. Bob and Dave Foreman, with Nancy Morton, Rick Aster, Bob Langsencamp, Todd Schulke, and Bob Tafanelli were involved, along with many others.

Bob: I think one of the successes has been that we've had an extraordinarily deep bench for any environmental organization, let alone a wilderness effort. Very quickly, the [land management] agencies began to pay attention because we simply had better data—we knew more about their areas than they did.

Q: Were you and Phyllenore both involved individually in environmental issues before you met each other?

Phyllenore: No, we came into it together. We got married in 1966, and in 1968 we moved to San Antonio. We were both working at the medical center. A friend suggested we go to a Sierra Club meeting about estuaries and ecology. You didn't get that in school. I'd never heard the word “estuary.” We joined, and started going on Sierra Club hikes in the forest. It's said over and over again that the way to get people involved in protecting an area is to get them out into it. They're not going to do it intellectually, they're going to do it because they care.

Bob: That got us in touch with environmental and conservation efforts in 1968. We're the sort of folks that—if something needs doing, we say “yeah, we can do that,” and just do it—Nike style. Once you've been in the wilderness enough to observe some of its lessons, then you can appreciate wilderness from an armchair or from home. I always get recharged just being around nature... the wilder the nature, the better.

A GILA SUMMER CELEBRATION

Wilderness Alliance members, staff, and other interested people from around Silver City gathered at the home of Bob and Phyllenore Howard for a house party and fundraiser. The June 15 event was well attended, the refreshments were enjoyed, and there was a lot of great energy in support of our work in the Gila and across the state. Executive Director Mark Allison and Gila Grassroots Organizer Nathan Newcomer spoke about the Gila diversion, Mexican gray wolves, and much more. We appreciate everyone who attended the party. Thanks to our generous hosts, Bob and Phyllenore, for opening their home for this fun event!

Save the Gila: Damn the Dam!

The Hooker Dam, Conner Dam, and Mangas Diversion each in their turn looked inevitable through the 1980s. Yet by 1990 all three proposals had crumbled. Now we have a fourth iteration of this folly, the Gila Upper Box Diversion, which has apparently met the same fate, leaving us with a laundry list of equally unfeasible proposals for the Cliff/Gila Valley down stream. What's going on here?

In sum, there is no economically viable or ecologically benign way to get 14,000 acre-feet of water—or even half that amount—out of any reach of the Gila River in New Mexico and still satisfy senior water rights downstream in Arizona. Plus no entity has ever stepped up to declare they would or could or should buy and use the water. Huge groundwater reserves and fallow water rights locally negate any need for river water in the first place. But our Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) has been a reluctant student of history and present-day reality!

Elsewhere I have written that the Gila watershed is “an unlikely place for water.” This refers to the fact that the high country above 9,000 feet averages some 40 inches of precipitation a year, while everywhere surrounded by desert that gets less than ten. This anomaly is enhanced by another geographic fortune, which puts the region as a natural link between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Madre of Mexico: where else can you see an elk

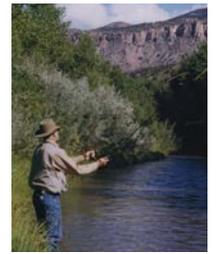
and a coatimundi in the same canyon; hike to a Engelmann spruce and an Apache pine on the same day; catch a wild Gila trout and a flathead catfish out of the same pool?!

This rich natural history is matched by a notable human procession worthy of study. Geronimo, who was born and reared at the Gila's headwaters, left a legacy of unrepentant resistance that has caused many a conservationist to likewise dig in his heels and say enough. The mountain men of the Gila left a legacy of adventure and the spirit of the western myth. Aldo Leopold was inspired by the headwaters of the Gila to define a conservation legacy that would spread nationwide, and still rings true today.

It's time to articulate a new destiny for the Gila River. Let the ISC join us if they will, or nuts to them if they won't. The river adventure that a hound dog and a tomcat and I enjoyed 33 years ago—and recorded in the book *Gila Descending*—is still available to you; indeed, the Gila is in better shape now than it was back then. I see the Gila ascending, and this most unlikely place for water will be the last to give it up.

Dutch Salmon

For more information on the Gila River issues: gilaconservation.org



Dutch casting on the Gila

EVENTS: You are invited!

Trip details and registration at NMWild.org.
Please contact Tisha@nmwild.org for more information.

July 29-31 • Gila National Forest Volunteer Service Project

Led by our Gila grassroots organizer Nathan Newcomer, we will be camping for the weekend at the Wolf Hollow Campground and conducting extensive fieldwork in areas adjacent to the Aldo Leopold Wilderness. No experience in wilderness inventory necessary.

August 7 • Rio Chama Rafting Day Trip

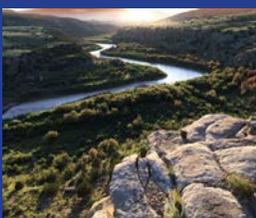
This 10-mile Rio Chama river rafting trip begins near the tranquil setting of the Christ in the Desert Monastery and ends at the head of Abiquiu Reservoir on a silty desert river, rolling among the rainbow cliffs. Led by Far Flung Adventures, we meet at 9:00 AM at Ghost Ranch, taking out mid-afternoon, which enables us to return you to your vehicles around 5 pm.

September 8 • Wilderness Alliance Annual Membership Meeting

Join Wilderness Alliance staff and board members at a fun gathering to celebrate YOU! We'll meet up at the Elena Gallegos Open Space Park in the Sandia Mountain foothills from 4:00-7:30 PM, for an afternoon of drinks, food, and camaraderie. This is a great opportunity to see old friends, make new ones, and tell us what's on your mind. You'll hear the most recent news about wilderness in the Land of Enchantment.

September 29 to October 3 • Utah Trek to Cedar Mesa

Dr. Andrew Gulliford and Peak and Canyons Wilderness Trekking will lead us on an adventure exploring the ancestral Puebloans landscape of Cedar Mesa, Utah. Limited to 10 guest, this trip promises to be a unique archeological and wilderness experience in the heart of Southeast Utah's Canyon Country. \$450 per person includes meals, guide service, and permits. Proceeds to benefit the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. This area could very possibly be within the nation's next national monument.



Support our work by donating securely online at www.nmwild.org or by sending a check payable to NM Wilderness Alliance to PO Box 25464, Albuquerque, NM, 87125.

Please also consider remembering the Alliance in your will. New Mexico Wilderness Alliance delivers on your desire to protect New Mexico's wild public lands forever. To learn more about making a charitable contribution, including stock transfers and bequests, call 505-843-8696, ext. 100. Thank you!

