

THE MESQUITE GRILL

NEWS FROM THE SOUTHWEST ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER · WINTER 2008

Gila Mexican Wolf Center gains momentum

by Kevin Bixby

Support is growing for the Southwest Environmental Center's proposal to establish a Gila Mexican Wolf Center (GMWC) in Grant County, New Mexico.

Modeled after the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota, the GMWC would be a museum-type facility aimed at providing the public with information about Mexican wolves and other wildlife of the Gila Region. It would feature exhibits, programs, a theater, gift shop, and perhaps a research arm and community meeting rooms.

SWEC is promoting the GMWC as a tourist attraction and economic development project that could bring revenues and jobs to a community on the edge of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Area. Grant County enjoys an advantage shared by few communities in the lower 48—proximity to big wilderness where wild wolves roam. Only the Northern Rockies, Yellowstone, the upper Midwest, and eastern North Carolina (red wolves) can make that claim.



SWEC Executive Director Kevin Bixby presents a proposal for a Mexican Wolf Center to the Grant County Commission.

We often hear about the negative impacts of wolves on local communities, but not about the potential economic benefits they can bring. Many people around the world are fascinated by these intelligent and beautiful creatures, and are willing to travel long distances and spend their money for the opportunity to experience wild wolves. The "experience" can include seeing wolves, hearing them howl, or just observing their sign, such as tracks, kills, and scat. Part of that experience can also include the type of interpretation provided by a facility such as the proposed GMWC.

Yellowstone provides a good example of the economic potential of wolves. Wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park in 1995. People have flocked to see them since then. A University of Montana study (2006) found that people who visited Yellowstone primarily to see wolves spent \$35 million annually in communities around the park. That's new money that wolves were responsible for bringing into the economy.

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SWEC poised to launch next big Rio Grande restoration project

The Southwest Environmental Center is set to break ground soon for its next major river restoration project, after receiving several grants for its La Mancha Wetland project.

Last September, Governor Bill Richardson announced that SWEC was one of 15 recipients of \$2.8 million in capital outlay funding to help restore and improve the health of New Mexico's river ecosystems. SWEC received a \$100,000 grant for the La Mancha project aimed at restoring the Rio Grande ecosystem in southern New Mexico. This was in addition to \$90,000 in funding previously obtained for this project.



Longnosegar, seen here in SWEC's Rio Grande aquarium, are one of approximately 15 native fish species that have disappeared from the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico and could benefit from SWEC's La Mancha project.

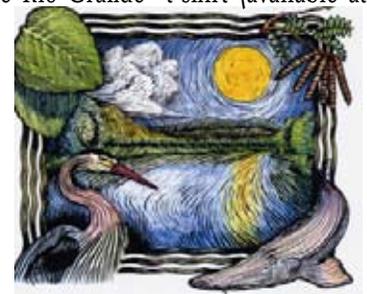
Located on private land and federal land adjacent to the river in the Town of Mesilla, SWEC's La Mancha project will re-create a side channel of the river intended to provide slow water habitat needed by native fish for spawning and rearing of young fish. Most such habitat has been lost from the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico and

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Holiday Gift Ideas

Looking for "green" holiday gifts? Here are a few suggestions:

- \$100--a raffle ticket for a new 2009 Toyota Prius hybrid car (see details on back page).
- \$18--a SWEC "Restore the Rio Grande" t-shirt (available at SWEC).
- \$30--a gift membership to SWEC (available at SWEC or online at www.wildmesquite.org).
- \$12.95--Day Hikes & Nature Walks in the Las Cruces-El Paso Area (available at SWEC and many bookstores).



Our "Restore the Rio Grande" T-shirt features a unique Bob Diven design.

Don't miss our holiday sale--25% off all items in our Ecoshop!

For more info, call us at 575-522-5552.

The Post-Election Political Landscape: Grounds for Hope

by Roger Turner, SWEC Regional Organizer

Forget about red states and blue states. The electoral map has turned green with renewed national support for clean energy.

The big difference with the incoming Obama administration (versus the past eight years under Bush) will be an emphasis on "balance," the inclusion of renewable energy, the possible development of a "national smart grid" for transporting electricity from rural areas, and suspending the evisceration of the Endangered Species Act.



NM's Tom Udall moves to the Senate.

The Cheney Energy Task Force, dominated by big energy interests, set the national energy policy in May, 2001, for the facilitated and unregulated expansion of drilling for gas and oil in the West. This included two executive orders, which

directed all federal agencies, including the BLM to "expedite [and accelerate the completion] of energy-related projects" on public lands. Not surprisingly, this is when the real battle for Otero Mesa began.

This extreme approach will change under Obama. Much of Obama's appeal is that he listens to all sides, not just to industry representatives and lobbyists. The Cheney Task Force excluded "alternative" energy voices in favor of owners of large petroleum companies, like George M. Yates, president of HEYCO and former chairman of the Denver-based Mountain States Legal Foundation, a conservative organization that frequently challenges environmental laws.

The post-election consensus among conservationists is they will have more influence on federal land decisions under President Obama. How much more remains to be seen. Decision-makers will defer more to scientists on resource issues and spending priorities will shift toward protecting land, fish, and wildlife. During the Montana primary in May, Obama told the Kalispell-Flathead Beacon newspaper that "it was critical to designate wilderness areas for permanent protection...to balance competing interests on federal lands."

Closer to home, the changes to the New Mexico Congressional delegation bode well for conservationists. Martin Heinrich, newly elected to the U.S. House from Albuquerque,

is a longtime wilderness supporter. Tom Udall, jumping from the House to the Senate, has a lifetime voting record of 96 percent from the League of Conservation Voters (LCV). We expect Udall will continue his work to preserve natural areas, as he did when he led the effort in 2006 to protect New Mexico's Valle Vidal from energy development.

Although southern New Mexico's newly elected Representative Harry Teague has no proven environmental record, he has clearly stated his opposition to drilling on Otero Mesa (which he reiterated at SWEC's annual fundraiser in October). Teague campaigned on a platform that would make southern New Mexico the clean energy capital of the United States, as well as protecting wilderness areas for hunters and recreational users.

Conservationists will not be sad to see Steve Pearce leave Washington. Pearce, who gave up his House seat in southern New Mexico to run against Tom Udall for the Senate seat vacated by the retirement of Pete Domenici, has such a dismal voting record on the environment that LCV named him one of its "Dirty Dozen" for 2008--the twelve worst members in Congress.



Harry Teague replaces Steve Pearce in the House.

On specific issues, the prospect of obtaining permanent protection for Otero Mesa is certainly brighter. Two of the main obstacles to legislation to protect Otero Mesa--Pearce and Domenici, both advocates for more drilling for oil and gas on public lands--are now out of the picture.

Although Obama has not taken a public position on the issue, conservationists are optimistic. When former U.S. Senator Tom Daschle visited New Mexico in October on behalf of Obama, he was asked by a reporter about Obama's stance on the issue. His response was that Obama "would surely follow the recommendations of his friends, Gov. Bill Richardson, Rep. Tom Udall and Sen. Jeff Bingaman... [he] would take their lead and follow their advice..." Certainly there is reason to be optimistic if he listens to his new Commerce Secretary-designate and outgoing NM governor Bill Richardson, an unwavering champion for Otero Mesa.



Conservationists hope that an Obama administration and a new Congress will move quickly to protect special places like Otero Mesa. Photo Nathan Newcomer.

The impact of the election on other SWEC conservation priorities is less clear. Surely the current evisceration of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) will not be advanced. We anticipate President Obama will consider reversing eleventh-hour Bush policy actions by invoking the new president's executive authority powers. This should improve the situation for Southwestern species such as Mexican wolves and aplomado falcons.

The re-election of Nick Rahall (D-WV) as Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee is good news. Rahall has declared his commitment "to the conservation of endangered species [and] to explore innovative measures to recover endangered populations of fish, wildlife, and plants in an era of limited budgets...[using] the best available science, we will seek collaborative solutions to improve the management of the endangered species programs at the USFWS and National Marine Fisheries Service."

We are optimistic the New Mexico and Texas congressional delegations will revisit the border fence issue. The current Secretary of Homeland Security (DHS), Michael Chertoff, has consistently used his powers under the Real ID Act to waive environmental laws, thwart public input and expedite this \$49 billion project.

We are hopeful that Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, Obama's pick to succeed Chertoff, will call a time out on whatever portion of the wall is not built by the time she takes her post. We know she is skeptical that building a fence along the border will solve anything. She once said, "You build a 50-foot wall, somebody will find a 51-foot ladder." As a lawyer, hopefully she will show more respect for the Constitution than Chertoff has.

Support for Otero Mesa grows

El Paso and Las Cruces elected officials, as well as the Catholic bishops of El Paso and Las Cruces have added their voices to the growing list of those calling for protection of Otero Mesa.

In June, the El Paso City Council unanimously passed a resolution calling for permanent protection for Otero Mesa. Citing its desire to protect Otero Mesa's "grasslands, wildlife and water for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations," the resolution calls on Congress "to introduce legislation that will provide permanent protection for Otero Mesa's unique

and irreplaceable grasslands, wildlife and water from oil and natural gas exploration."

The El Paso County Commission passed an identical resolution a few weeks later by a 4-1 vote. The Las



El Paso resident Kevin VonFinger urges the El Paso City Council to pass the Otero Mesa resolution.

Cruces City Council unanimously passed a similar resolution in August.

In a letter sent in support of the El Paso resolutions, the Catholic Bishop of El Paso, Armando Ochoa, wrote, "I am aware of the significant history and precious resources this area contains such as ancient archaeological sites, wildlife, and freshwater, and I must express my deepest concern and support for a long-term conservation plan that will sustain the resources that the Southwest is so fortunate to enjoy."

Ochoa's words echo those of the Catholic Bishop of Las Cruces, Ricardo Ramirez, who has previously expressed his support for protecting Otero Mesa.

The El Paso-based Isleta del Sur Pueblo passed its own resolution earlier in the year. In addition to expressing concern for the wildlife, grasslands and water of Otero Mesa, the Pueblo's resolution emphasized the cultural importance of Otero Mesa to the tribe, with its many traditional gathering and ceremonial sites on Otero Mesa as well as numerous petroglyphs.

Conservationists propose special designation for Otero Mesa

Imagine nearly 600,000 acres of Chihuahuan Desert Grasslands in New Mexico, an ecologically and threatened landscape, cited by the World Wildlife Fund as an area of global biological significance actually receiving the kind of protection it deserves under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Sounds like Otero Mesa, and it is.

In a bold and new proposal submitted last June by SWEC and other conservation organizations to the BLM, 583,837 acres of Otero Mesa desert grasslands have been nominated for preservation as a newly designated Otero Grasslands Wildlife Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

The ACEC designation would close future oil and gas leasing and suspend all mineral sales. Existing leases could only be drilled with no surface occupancy (i.e. directional drilling from existing pads and roads only), and would not be renewable. Vegetative management and grazing would be closely monitored to restore and maintain a viable grassland ecosystem, providing a functional habitat for wildlife: potentially restoring the historic range in NM for desert bighorn sheep, providing habitat for a unique pronghorn herd and 250 grassland bird species, including the endangered aplomado falcons.

The list goes on and on.

In making the case for protecting this special area, the Coalition drew heavily from SWEC's *The Last Desert Grasslands* report.

The BLM has acknowledged the value and need for protection of this area in a previous Amended Resource Management Plan (RMP) for Otero and Sierra counties, by restricting leases for oil and gas drilling on 121,000 acres to protect grasslands habitat.

However BLM protection efforts have been piecemeal at best. There are currently six designated ACEC's, ranging in size from 850 to 6300 acres. These areas are non-contiguous, fragmented, and too small to provide the landscape-level management needed for restoring and maintaining a functional grassland ecosystem.

The State of New Mexico agrees. New Mexico Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish (soon to be governor when Bill Richardson goes to Washington to join Obama's cabinet) sent a letter to the BLM, saying, "I urge you to seriously consider adopting the Otero Mesa Coalition's ACEC proposal."

We expect BLM to make a decision on our proposal by next summer. In the meantime, we will continue working to achieve permanent protection through Congressional action or executive order. Stay tuned.

BLM approves another well on Otero Mesa

In September, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved an application for a new exploratory well by the Harvey E. Yates Co. (HEYCO) on Otero Mesa.

This would be the first new well drilled on Otero Mesa in the past seven years. The BLM's environmental assessment (EA) declared the well would have "no significant impact" on natural resources, a conclusion conservation groups and the state of New Mexico immediately challenged.

The new drilling permit was issued on an old lease the company has held since the 1980s. New leasing on the mesa has been suspended until a lawsuit filed by conservation groups over the BLM's 2005 resource management plan (RMP) for the area is resolved. Oral arguments were presented in the Tenth U.S. District

Court of Appeals in Denver a week before the September 26 BLM announcement. A ruling is expected by the end of 2008.

Opposition to the BLM's approval of the new well is broad and organized. The New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), led by Secretary Joanna Prukop, and a broad coalition of environmental organizations including SWEC have petitioned the New Mexico BLM Director, Linda Rundell, for a Review of the Decision Record. This will constitute a serious challenge to the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

This request is based on the BLM's failure to consider an alternative that included directional drilling from existing well pads as well as the failure to consider new information pertaining to a cumulative impacts.

Annual SWEC gala a huge success

by Lauren McDowell

Let's all raise our glasses in a toast for the most successful *On the River, For the River* fundraiser ever!

Held on October 11, the twelfth annual river gala's combination of great food, great drink, great music and, most importantly, great company made the evening one to remember. The weather, though ominous, was spectacular. All of these elements came together for a night of great entertainment, raising nearly \$30,000 in support of the Southwest Environmental Center's conservation efforts.

This year, for the first time, the event was held at the Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park--a spectacular venue! 'Eat, drink and be merry' seemed to be the slogan of the evening as plates of delicious food were served by Savino's Ristorante Italiano, A Taste of India, Andele and Aqua Reef. Delectable desserts were provided by Dickerson's Catering and Milagro Coffee y Espresso.

Guests were treated to refreshing beer brewed by High Desert Brewing Company, and St. Clair's Bistro supplied the regional wines. Dining took place in style, under the stars, while listening to the melodious music of Mariachi Diamante de Las Cruces High School, Alister M, CS Truckin' and High Desert Dreamer.

The Center could not have pulled the event off without the tremendous help of the planning committee, event sponsors, silent auction contributors and all of the volunteers. Thank you all so much!

We are looking forward to another successful gala in 2009. Anyone who is interested in volunteering to be on the 2009 committee or would like to sponsor the event should feel free to contact SWEC at (575) 522-5552 or drop an email lauren@wildmesquite.org. We would greatly appreciate your time and service!



Dancing under the stars.



The new Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park provided a spectacular venue for this year's event.



Left--Congressional candidate Amy Teague enjoys the festivities.



Below--former Las Cruces Mayor Ruben Smith (left), his wife Liz and friend were among the attendees.

Above--SWEC Executive Director Kevin Bixby encourages the crowd to applaud the Mariachi Diamante de Las Cruces High School.



Thanks to our sponsors for this year's gala:

- Malooly's Flooring Co. (main sponsor)
- Warren Construction (stage sponsor)
- Antix
- Aprendamos
- Dental Associates
- Full Circle Builders
- Las Cruces Toyota
- Lilley Law Firm
- Positive Energy
- RETHINK Real Estate
- Williams Design Group
- Mary Talamini Fine Art
- Melissa Guynn
- Tom and Donna Tate
- Tom Burton and Susan Joanis
- Sally Williams and Bill Perry
- Cary and Billie Taylor



Left--High Desert Dreamers was one of four groups to donate their musical talents to the event.

Please reward our business friends with your business!

SWEC welcomes new staff

We are pleased to welcome two new faces to the Southwest Environmental Center.

Roger Turner is SWEC's new Regional Organizer, responsible for mobilizing grassroots support for Otero Mesa, Mexican wolves and other conservation priorities.



Roger was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, on the South side, near the University of Chicago. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin with a BA degree in English/History, he moved to

North Carolina in 1973, as a Vista Volunteer, organizing low-income farmers into agricultural co-operatives for growing cucumbers.

He later moved to Sylva, North Carolina in 1975, where he started Tree of Life Products, custom hand-made furniture from native Appalachian hardwoods. That is where he met his future wife, Louise. They eventually co-founded and owned "Lulu's Café" in Sylva, selected by Southern Living magazine as "best in region."

In 2000, he became the western field organizer for the Western North Carolina

Alliance (WNCA), which evolved out of public opposition to the National Forest policy that allowed drilling for gas and oil on public lands.

He worked most recently as media and outreach coordinator for the Smart Roads Alliance, a grassroots organization that promotes sustainable alternatives to major highway construction projects.

He and his wife have dreamed about living "out west," ever since their first trip to New Mexico in 1988.

Many of you have already met Lauren McDowell, our new office manager and membership services coordinator.



Lauren graduated from New Mexico State University with a BA of English and a minor in Anthropology. She also holds an Associate's Degree of Culinary Arts from the Scottsdale Culinary Institute.

Lauren was raised in El Paso, TX and has been a resident of Las Cruces since 2004. She lives with her two dogs Janis and Tyler and two Pygmy goats Madmardigan and Zumi.

River Restoration

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west Texas as a result of dam-building and channelization of the river--a major reason why two-thirds of native fish have disappeared from this stretch of the river.

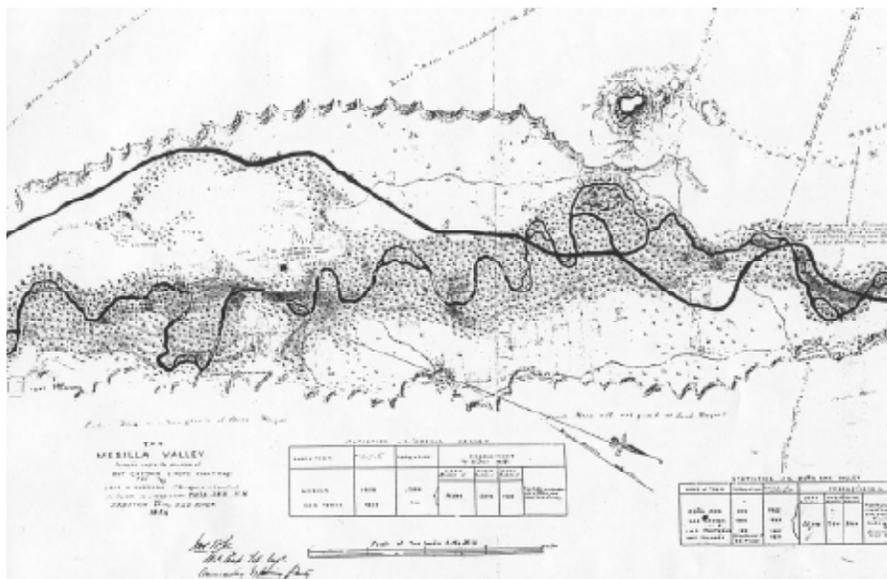
"We are very pleased to receive this grant," said SWEC executive director Kevin Bixby. "It will give a significant boost to our ongoing efforts to restore the Rio Grande to ecological health, for the benefit of people and wildlife in this part of the state." SWEC has been working to restore the Rio Grande since 1995. Past SWEC projects include the Picacho Wetlands and Mesilla Valley Bosque Park--now a new state park.

This is the second year of Governor Richardson's historic River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative. In 2007, 12 projects received \$2.5 million, the first time in New Mexico's history that state funds have been used to protect and restore our rivers and streams.

In addition to SWEC, this year's recipients also included: Isleta Pueblo, Upper Pecos Watershed Association, City of Santa Fe, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, The Nature Conservancy, Pinto Soil & Water Conservation District, Wild Earth Guardians and others. Recipients last year included Elephant Butte Irrigation District.

Earlier this year, SWEC received a \$15,000 Five Star Restoration Grant for the La Mancha project from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This money will help to bring in additional partners into this project who will collectively comprise the points of a star. Besides SWEC, partners include Alma d'Arte Charter High School in Las Cruces, which will use the La Mancha project for multidisciplinary field studies and as the basis for developing new curriculum; New Mexico State University's Scientifically Connected Communities, which will promote the project to its network of public school teachers for field studies, with the goal of improving student science and math scores; and faculty and students at NMSU's Department of Fishery and Wildlife Science for research and field work.

Last year, SWEC received a challenge grant from the Stocker Foundation to hire a river restoration coordinator to do outreach to school and community groups. Thanks to the great success of our annual fundraiser and these other grants, we have successfully raised the required match.



A map of the Rio Grande through the Mesilla Valley in 1854 (north is to the right--the current alignment of the river is the darker, straighter line). Note the sinuous nature of the river and the numerous side channels. SWEC's La Mancha project will restore a side channel and slow water habitat to the river.

Wolf Center

(continued from front page)

The proposed GMWC could be a tourist attraction in its own right. That's certainly the case with the IWC, which draws 50,000 visitors each year to a town with less than 5000 residents. The IWC employs more than 20 staff, and generates about \$3.5 million in economic activity.

We are often asked if the GMWC will have captive wolves on site, like the International Wolf Center. That is not part of our proposal. There are already plenty of zoos in the region with Mexican wolves, most of them helping to recover the species by participating in the captive breeding program.

Although the focus would be on the Mexican gray wolf, the proposed GMWC could also be a source of information about other aspects of the region's rich natural and cultural heritage. For example, the Greater Gila Ecoregion supports an extraordinarily high number of animal species, including more than 300 birds. It is also the place where Aldo Leopold, a seminal figure in modern ecological thought, first began to develop his ideas of a "land ethic." It is home to the nation's first designated wilderness as well as the Apache and Mimbres legacy, the Gila Cliff Dwellings, and the Janos Biosphere Reserve and Nuevo Casas Grandes in Mexico. A GMWC would fit well as part of a "package" with these other attractions.



The proposed Gila Mexican Wolf Center would be modeled after the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota.

SWEC is an organization devoted to protecting native wildlife in the Southwest. Our reasons for supporting Mexican wolf recovery have little to do with their potential economic benefits to humans. However, when economic arguments are on the side of conservation, it would be foolish to ignore them.

We have presented our proposal to many elected officials in recent months, in both Grant County and Santa Fe. The reception has generally been positive. We are in the process of developing a more detailed business plan and raising funds for the first phase of the project.

El Paso officials urge Obama to stop border wall

El Paso officials have taken their opposition to a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border to President-elect Obama, sending him a letter urging him to immediately halt construction of the project.

In a signing ceremony held December 3, Texas state senator Elliott Shapleigh, El Paso county attorney Jose Rodriguez, El Paso city councilor Steve Ortega, and a representative from Congressman Silvestre Reyes office reiterated their opposition to the border wall and called on Obama to stop building "muros de odio [walls of hate] on our southern border."

The letter argues that the money allocated for the border wall would be better spent on developing infrastructure of the border region, and



The border wall blocks access to essential resources for many species such as this mountain lion, photographed by the Border Patrol in southern Arizona, unsuccessfully trying to find a way through the wall.

cites the international ill-will, environmental damage and detrimental impact of the wall on cross-border trade.

The letter signing was held in conjunction with a border wall summit held in El Paso by groups, including SWEC, opposed to the wall on human rights, immigration, constitutional and environmental grounds.

SWEC's position is that the border wall is an ineffective response to terrorism, immigration, and drug smuggling concerns, and causes tremendous harm to the border environment, particularly by causing habitat fragmentation for a wide number of wildlife species, from jaguars to tortoises.

Border Wall Timeline

- 1993--NAFTA signed. Supporters argue NAFTA will lead to job creation in Mexico, thus reducing human traffic across borders. However, Mexican small farmers cannot compete with U.S. agribusiness. By 2005, there are nearly 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.
- 1993-1997--Border segments added for protection by Congress: 1993 Hold the Line [El Paso]; 1994: Gatekeeper [San Diego]; 1995: Safeguard [Central Az.]; 1997: Rio Grande [South Texas]
- 2003--Department of Homeland Security (DHS) takes over Border Patrol, releases a plan for 10-15 foot wall along entire border (later dropped)
- 2005--Congress passes Real ID Act, which among other things, gives Sec. of DHS power to waive laws for construction of border fence. Passes Senate 100-0.
- 2006--Congress passes Secure Fence Act mandating 700 miles of fence by 2008. Supporters include Senators Boxer, Clinton & Obama.
- 2007--Numerous fence Environmental Assessments (EAs) released with findings of "no significant environmental impacts." EA for fence construction on San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (NCA) released with a zero-day comment period.
- 2007--Defenders of Wildlife & Sierra Club sue to stop construction of border wall on San Pedro Riparian NCA. In response, 19 laws are waived by DHS Sec. Chertoff, making the case moot. Lawsuit amended to challenge the constitutionality of Real ID Act Waiver provision.
- 2008--Supreme court refuses to hear case.
- 2008--In April, Chertoff waives 36 federal laws across 470 miles. El Paso County and others sue DHS based upon constitutional grounds, and lose in Federal District Court. Plaintiffs have asked Supreme Court to hear case.
- 2008--In December, construction of wall begins at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in El Paso, to extend 57 miles down the Rio Grande.

Silver City endorses Wolf Center proposal

The Silver City Town Council gave a thumbs up to SWEC's proposal for a Gila Mexican Wolf Center (GMWC) at its December 9th meeting.

The Council passed a resolution to support "further planning" for the facility, and recommended that historic Fort Bayard be considered as a location.

The Council also recommended that the GMWC include information about other elements of the Gila region's rich natural and cultural heritage, including its 200+ bird species, Aldo Leopold and the Gila Wilderness, and the Mimbres and Apache legacies.

Several members of the audience spoke in favor of the proposal; none spoke against it. The Councilors appeared persuaded by the economic development aspects of the project as well as the argument that a GMWC could be a "bridge" to help dispel some of the polarization around the issue of wolves.

Fort Bayard is an historic property owned by the State of New Mexico a few miles east of Silver City. Established in 1866 to protect early settlers and travelers from the Apaches, it later became a sanatorium for Army personnel with tuberculosis.

The future use of the property is currently uncertain, and many of the buildings are in disrepair. However, it has great potential for many types of uses, including a GMWC.

Get a rub for SWEC

If you're wanting a massage in Las Cruces, consider Vincent Ortega. He is a Licensed Massage Therapist and he will donate \$10 to the Southwest Environmental Center every time a SWEC member receives a massage from him. All you have to do is mention SWEC or show your Albertsons Community Partners card. He hopes to generate at least \$1,000 in donations in the coming year. Check out his web-site www.VincentOrtega.com or contact him at (575) 642-3157.

Volunteers Needed!

The Southwest Environmental Center is calling one and all interested parties to sign up to volunteer with us! Being a non-profit, grassroots organization, SWEC relies heavily on volunteers and would be enormously grateful for all of the help we can get!

We are currently looking for volunteers for the following positions:

- Back by Noon outings coordinator
- Rio Grande Aquarium manager
- Office help (on a regular basis-- answering phones, greeting visitors, etc.)
- Office help (for mailings, special events, etc.)
- Tabling at various locations
- Phone banking
- Otero Mesa--adopt a lease team
- River restoration and clean-up
- Distribute SWEC hiking guide

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or have already signed up and want to touch base with our current volunteer needs, call us at (575) 522-5552 or email Lauren at lauren@wildmesquite.org. Or come down to the center and pay us a visit.

Please forgive us if you have offered to volunteer in the past but not heard from us. With busy workloads and staff transitions, keeping track of volunteers can be challenging. Please bear with us, and give us a second chance.

Spreading joy at year-end

Like most non-profits, SWEC is bracing for a lean 2009 as foundations trim their grantmaking to follow the downturn in the economy. We need the support of you--our members and business friend--now more than ever.

As you think about holiday gifts for family and friends, please remember SWEC when making year-end charitable gifts.

Ways to Give

For your convenience, you can mail in your end-of-year contribution using the form below or one you received in the mail, or drop it by the office.

You can also make a secure contribution online at our website www.wildmesquite.org. (Even though it says "Under Construction," you can still make a donation by going to "Donate Now.")

Another option is to donate appreciated securities (hard to find these days) or give to a plan that provides you with income for your lifetime. Other gift ideas include life insurance you no longer want or need, as well as real estate.

Please call us at (575) 522-5552 for more information.

Do you shop at Albertsons?"

If you do, you can raise money for SWEC simply by showing your Community Partners card each time you shop. Call us at (575) 522-5552 to get your card.

yes! i want to help the southwest environmental center Protect our natural heritage

\$500
 \$250
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Win this car!



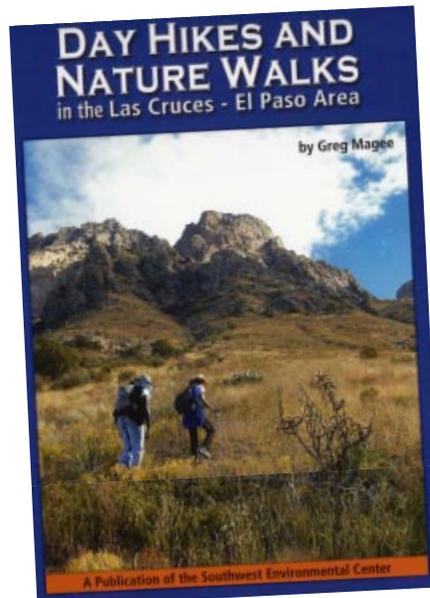
Thanks to the generosity of Las Cruces Toyota, SWEC is once again giving away a Toyota Prius. Tickets are \$100 each, and we will only sell 400. The drawing will be held on March 19, 2009.

Raffle tickets make great gifts for the people on your list that don't need any more "stuff" and are looking to reduce their carbon footprint. Not only will your gift support a worthy cause, but the recipient might win a new car! (The odds are MUCH better than winning the lottery.) Either way it's a win-win.

Call today to get your ticket. 575-522-5552. Sorry, but the IRS says that raffle tickets are not tax-deductible.

Take a hike!

Get the definitive guide to day hikes in the Las Cruces/El Paso area.



Featuring 40 day trips around Las Cruces and El Paso.

Designed to appeal to hikers of all levels of ability, from easy strolls along the Rio Grande to rugged treks to mountain summits.

Check your local bookstore or outdoor store, or call (505) 522-5552 to get your copy.

Published by the Southwest Environmental Center. A portion of sales will go to support the Center's conservation programs.



Do we have your email address?

Email is the most effective way for us to communicate with our members. If you would like to receive electronic announcements about events and issues, send an email to list@wildmesquite.org. We promise not to overwhelm your inbox, and we never trade or sell our list.

Our mission

Established in 1991, the Southwest Environmental Center works to reverse the accelerating loss of plants and animals worldwide by protecting and restoring native wildlife and their habitats in the Southwestern borderlands. We do this through grassroots advocacy, education and on-the-ground restoration projects.

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