

THE MESQUITE GRILL

NEWS FROM THE SOUTHWEST ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER • WINTER 2016 • WILDMESQUITE.ORG

Trapped in the Past

The states are failing our wildlife when we need them the most

by Kevin Bixby



Disappointed wildlife advocates pack a NM Game Commission meeting in Santa Fe as the commissioners vote to block Mexican wolf recovery. State wildlife agencies are increasingly out of touch with public attitudes. Photo Joe Newman.

State wildlife management is in crisis.

Wildlife agencies in almost every state face shrinking budgets, a public that is fed up with decisions that ignore science and majority opinion, limited authority to protect their state's biodiversity, and internal resistance to change.

This was a serious problem before the election, but is especially urgent now. The days when the federal government could be counted upon to protect our nation's most vulnerable wildlife may be coming to an end

With Republicans gaining control of the White House and Congress, the only thing standing between a repeal of the nation's most effective bulwark against extinction—the federal Endangered Species Act—is a filibuster by Senate Democrats.

An outright attempt to overturn the popular law is unlikely to succeed, but opponents have other ways of gutting it. We can expect to see a deluge of legislative “riders” attached to unrelated bills that exempt particular species from the law's protections or weaken its core provisions.

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Will New Mexico be the first state to ban killing contests?

by Peter Sloan

As the result of the 2016 election, progress on environmental policy in Washington, D.C. is unlikely. New Mexico, however, saw a different outcome.

Democrats held onto the state Senate and reclaimed the House of Representatives. Wildlife advocates now have strong allies in Santa Fe and stand a chance to make real gains.

The Southwest Environmental Center is seizing the opportunity to advance a long-standing legislative goal: a statewide ban on coyote killing contests.

Killing contests are organized events in which contestants compete for cash and prizes by killing the most animals. Each year in New Mexico, an estimated thirty such contests are organized through mostly secretive, underground networks. The most common targets



Protesters at a rally in Las Cruces. Prospects are good for getting a bill to ban coyote killing contests through the NM Legislature. Photo Joe Newman.

are coyotes, but others include foxes, prairie dogs, and bobcats.

Proponents of killing contests defend the practice as necessary predator management, but science does not support their claims.

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La Mancha Wetland progress

See page 2.



Blessing of the Wolves

See page 3.

A Wild Night for Wildlife photos

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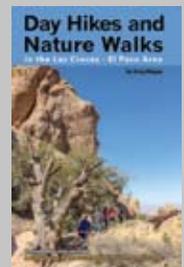


Winner of Prius raffle

See back page.

SWEC Hiking Guide updated

See back page.



Our Mission:
To protect and restore native wildlife and their habitats in the Southwest.

Not a member?
Please join us! See page 7.

La Mancha Wetland Update

This was a great year for our La Mancha Wetland project. After receiving the green light from the NM Office of State Engineer, our contractors were able to excavate the pond and shape the surrounding terrain during three weeks of intensive dirt-moving in January and February.

Once the dirt work was done, we held volunteer work weekends in March and May. More than 100 volunteers came out to remove salt cedar, burn tumbleweeds, install native plants, and construct and erect bathouses and shallow groundwater monitoring wells.

The May weekend was a BioBlitz, during which participants, including many students and their professors in NMSU's Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Ecology, attempted to identify and catalogue every plant and animal species encountered. More than 100 species were documented, despite the high winds that kept bats and birds out of our mist nets.

A big surprise was finding several species of fish living in the pond, even though it is

landlocked. Apparently somebody has been stocking the pond to create their personal fishing hole! (Fishing is not allowed.)

Located along the Rio Grande near Mesilla, the project is part of SWEC's overall strategy for restoring the Rio Grande to ecological health by creating off-channel wetlands and ponds that are periodically connected to the river and to each other, where fish can survive when the river is dry.

In addition to continuing to restore habitat around the pond, we hope to complete the project in 2017 by getting permits to excavate a connecting channel between the river and the pond.

Thanks to all of our volunteers, especially Kristen Hestir, Dr. Jennifer Frey, Dr. Niki Harings, Dr. Wiebke Boeing, Dr. Charles Bundy, Mara Weisenberger, and our intern Corey Webster.

If you would like support the project by volunteering your time or making a donation, contact kevin@wildmesquite.org or call (575) 522-5552.

SWEC receives grant to hire young people for restoration work

The Southwest Environmental Center has been awarded a \$96,000 grant from the New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps.

The money will be used to hire a crew of eight young people, ages 16-25, to do habitat restoration at our La Mancha Wetland and other sites in the Las Cruces area. The team will work part-time for six months, beginning in early 2017.

This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in learning more about habitat restoration and gaining on-the-job skills. You do not need to be a student.

We will also be hiring a part-time trainer to instruct the crew in restoration techniques.

If you are interested in applying for a crew position or the trainer position, please send a letter explaining why you are interested in the position and a resume to kevin@wildmesquite.org.

SWEC receives Partners for Wildlife grant for La Mancha Project

SWEC has also received a \$25,000 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Wildlife program to do additional habitat restoration at our La Mancha Wetland project, including removing non-native vegetation, installing native riparian and upland plants, planting grass, constructing beaver habitat, and installing interpretive signs.

We expect to begin the work in January, 2017.

The Partners program is a voluntary partnership program that provides assistance to private landowners to improve habitats for wildlife.

Don't miss out

Do we have your email address? The best way to stay informed about SWEC events and issues is to sign up for our weekly eNewsletter. You can do it at wildmesquite.org or call us at (575) 522-5552.



Lobos riding wave of global extinctions

The Southwest Environmental Center urged New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez and state wildlife officials to take immediate action to save endangered Mexican wolves in the wake of a shocking new report indicating that wildlife populations globally are on track to decline by two-thirds from 1970 levels by 2020.

The 2016 Living Planet Report (LPR), produced by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), is based on the best available population data on over 3,700 vertebrate species globally. According to the LPR, these populations declined by 58% from 1970 to 2012, and by 2020 that number will be 67%, at a rate the report says is consistent with a sixth mass extinction event. The LPR attributes this staggering rate of loss to human activity.

One of the most endangered species in the United States is the Mexican gray wolf, also known as the lobo. Mexican gray wolves were eliminated from the United States by 1970 as a result of federal anti-predator programs, but following the passage of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), they have begun to slowly recover. At last count, fewer than 100 lobos lived in the wild, far short of the 750 biologists say is a minimum size for a healthy population, while around 250 live in zoos and sanctuaries. Since all lobos in the U.S. are descended from a very small seed population, they are dangerously inbred, with wild lobos being as genetically related as siblings.

According to biologists, the solution to both the population size problem and the genetic diversity problem lies in releasing more captive wolves into the wild as quickly as possible.

New Mexico Sues to Block Mexican Wolf Releases

After a team of federal biologists placed two captive-born wolf pups with a wild litter earlier this year, the state of New Mexico sued to prevent additional releases, saying the feds needed to first obtain state permits which state officials have refused to grant.

In June a federal judge for the District of New Mexico halted further releases. The injunction is currently under appeal in the 10th Circuit.

Faith Leaders Inspired by Saint Francis in Wolf Blessing

The Southwest Environmental Center brought together religious leaders of several denominations to bless two wolf hybrids as part of the blessing of the animals on the Feast Day of Saint Francis, October 4, 2016.

The ceremony took place on the grounds of the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe. It demonstrated the support of diverse faith communities in New Mexico for preventing the extinction of Mexican gray wolves and other endangered species.

Father Rob Yaksich, associate rector of the Cathedral, Reverend M. Catherine Volland, rector of St. Bede's Episcopal Church, Bishop Carol Calvert, associate pastor of the Church of Antioch at Santa Fe, and Reverend Talitha Arnold, senior minister of United Church of Santa Fe all participated in the ceremony.

Each faith leader spoke on the moral imperative to protect the natural world before



Father Rob Yaksich with Ghost and Spirit. Photo Evalyn Bemis.



A crowd gathers for the blessing ceremony. Photo Joe Newman.

offering a blessing for the two wolves, appropriately named Ghost and Spirit. Colorado Wolf Adventures of Woodland Park, CO, provided the ambassador animals.



Statue of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis de Assisi, in Santa Fe. Photo Evalyn Bemis.

St. Francis is the patron saint of animals and the environment. His feast day traditionally includes a blessing of the animals.

In a famous parable of coexistence, Saint Francis makes peace with a marauding wolf after recognizing that the creature, who was terrorizing the city of Gubbio, was acting out of hunger and not malice. After affirming the wolf's right to existence, Francis blessed the wolf.

Pope Francis, who took the name of the environmentalist saint, wrote in his much-discussed *Laudato Si* encyclical, "Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right."

The participating faith leaders echoed these sentiments. Each signed a declaration, which can be viewed at www.wild.mesquite.org, which stated, "Caring for life is not a political cause, but a moral one. As the dominant species, it is our duty to wield our power responsibly and to ensure that our existence does not interfere with the existence of others. This is a basic principle of coexistence and humility taught by many faiths."

Wildlife Reform

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sions. Under a Trump administration, many of these will probably be signed into law.

Working at the state level makes sense for wildlife advocates. The states, not the federal government, have primary jurisdiction over most wildlife within their borders.

Federal authority is limited mostly to species protected under the ESA, as well as migratory birds, marine mammals, eagles, and species traded among states and internationally. (The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that federal agencies such as the Forest Service have extensive power to manage wildlife on lands they manage, but this power has seldom been exercised.)

The states have sovereign authority to manage, in trust for the benefit of their residents, all of the other types of wildlife found within their borders.

An iron triangle

Wildlife policies and institutions in most states still reflect the historical dominance of "consumptive users" (i.e. hunters, anglers, and trappers) and agricultural interests. Management tends to focus on producing as many game animals as possible, such as deer and trout, while reducing the numbers of predators such as wolves and cougars, which are seen as competition for game animals and a threat to livestock. Wildlife managers generally ignore science and public opinion when either conflict with these goals.

Most Americans do not hunt or fish. Only about 6 percent of Americans hunt, according to a 2011 national survey. Far more people enjoy wildlife for other reasons, such as wildlife watching and intrinsic value. Why, then, do hunters and anglers continue to enjoy a disproportionate influence over state wildlife



As in most states, members of the New Mexico Game Commission are appointed by the governor. They are not required to have any expertise in conservation. Non-hunters are seldom appointed. Photo Joe Newman.

decision-making?

A big reason is money. The main source of income for most state agencies is the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, along with federal excise taxes on guns, ammunition, archery equipment, fishing tackle, and motorboat fuel. This promotes an agency culture in which consumptive users are viewed as the most important "customers."

It has also helped create an iron triangle of interests that benefits legislators, agencies, and their primary constituents—hunters and livestock producers—but not necessarily wildlife or the general public. Agencies promote policies that maximize hunter success and keep agricultural producers happy. Lawmakers are content because they don't have to allocate scarce tax dollars for wildlife management. Satisfied hunters and anglers continue to buy licenses that generate revenue for the agencies, and so the cycle continues.

Pressure to change

This status quo is increasingly untenable, however. For one thing, the budgets of wildlife agencies are shrinking as the number of hunters and anglers declines relative to the general population.

Secondly, the widening gap between wildlife policies and public attitudes calls into question the legitimacy of state wildlife institutions. To cite just one example, most people are appalled by wildlife killing contests, yet these remain legal in every state. (California's Fish and Game Commission banned the awarding of prizes, but not the contests themselves.)

Finally, the lack of a broad mandate in state laws to protect all species, and the exclusion of the non-hunting public from decision making are at odds with the states' responsibilities under the public trust doctrine to preserve wildlife for all their residents, including those yet to be born.

Needed reforms

In almost every state, the solutions are the same but won't be easy. Additional funding sources need to be developed so that the burden of funding wildlife conservation falls on everyone. Institutions need to be democratized and insulated from undue political influence, so that decision-making is responsive and accountable to the general public. Finally, a mandate to protect all wildlife species, not just game animals, needs to be incorporated into state wildlife laws.

Reform is needed in New Mexico

The problems with wildlife management in New Mexico are typical of other states.

There is no clear legal mandate to protect the state's entire biodiversity. Laws have been passed over the years to protect certain groups of animals, such as game species and furbearers, but many species remain outside this patchwork.

An astounding 80 percent of the state's mammals, for example, are completely unprotected.

The Department of Game and Fish gets about 59 percent of its income from license sales, and another 38 percent from federal excise taxes. It receives no general appropriations. As in other states, the number of license buyers has been declining.

The Department is overseen by the Game Commission, whose seven members are appointed by the governor. They are not required to have any expertise in conservation. Although most New Mexicans (96%) do not hunt, non-hunters have seldom been appointed to the commission by governors of either party.

In recent years, the Department and Commission have been at the center of many controversial decisions, including: blocking Mexican wolf recovery, rejecting a plan developed by department biologists to protect the state's most vulnerable species, increasing hunting quotas on cougars and black bears, and opening up millions of state lands to trapping of cougars. All of these actions were taken despite tremendous public opposition and a lack of supporting science.

What we're doing

The Southwest Environmental Center is at the forefront of efforts to reform wildlife management in New Mexico. Working with other groups, we want to make New Mexico a model for other states. Our ultimate goal is to democratize and modernize the state's wildlife policies and institutions, by making the NM Game Commission more representative and accountable to the public, broadening funding sources for wildlife conservation, and extending legal protections to all wildlife.

Killing Contests

(continued from front page)

Coyotes play an important ecological role, keeping prey populations in check, including rodents that carry diseases. The coyotes killed are random, not specific animals that may be causing problems for pets and livestock. Research shows that coyotes respond to indiscriminate killing by producing larger litters and dispersing to new territories.

Killing contests are not based in science, but in a culture of animosity and disregard towards non-human life.

The contests are legal in all fifty states, though Colorado limits the number of animals that may be killed to five per contestant, Washington limits total prizes to \$2000, and in 2014 California banned the awarding of prizes in contests.

When the state legislature convenes in January 2017, New Mexico has a chance to pass a historic bill banning coyote killing contests outright. The bill would be the first of its kind and could serve as a model for other states.

This is less of a partisan issue than an urban versus rural divide. A similar bill, SB 253, was introduced in 2015 by Senator Mark Moores, a Republican from Albuquerque. It passed the Senate with bipartisan support by a wide margin, but was then killed in the House Agriculture, Water and Wildlife Committee, controlled by Republican representatives from rural areas. With Democrats taking the House, committees will be reorganized and the bill will not be assigned to a kill committee.

Political realignment presents an opportunity but no guarantee of success. The Senate must again vote to end coyote killing contests, and the House must not only let the bill out of committee, but it must pass it in a floor vote. The Southwest Environmental center has launched a full organizing effort to ensure this happens.

We have several initiatives to mobilize public support and pressure key decision-makers. For months, we have organized a postcard campaign. Hundreds of postcards have been mailed to lawmakers and Republican Governor Susana Martinez, signed by members of the public demanding an end to the contests. Petitioners are at work collecting signatures on paper and online to be delivered to the Governor in January. Volunteers have been organized to write letters to the editor of state newspapers.

Coyotes need you!

We need your help to end wildlife killing contests in New Mexico. Here are some things you can do:

- Sign our online petition (at the bottom right of our home page at wildmesquite.org) and send a message to NM Governor Susana Martinez. We need her to sign the bill once it is passed by the Legislature, so she needs to hear from the vast majority of people who oppose these events. You don't need to be a New Mexico resident, and in fact, we encourage out-of-state residents to sign because New Mexico depends heavily on tourism.
- Volunteer your time. We will be doing phone-banking to encourage people to call their legislators during the session, starting in mid-January. We will also be coordinating constituent visits to legislators by New Mexicans living in key districts.
- Write a letter to the editor. It's a great way to inform the public and alert elected officials that the issue is important. Check our website for guidance and addresses for submitting letters to newspapers in the Southwest. (Go to Take Action/Activist Toolkit on wildmesquite.org).
- Make a donation on our website at <https://www.wildmesquite.org/civicrm/contribute/transact?reset=1&id=13>.

With your help, we will succeed! Contact peter@wildmesquite.org for more information.

In October, SWEC hosted New York Times best-selling author, Dan Flores, who spoke to an audience of over 200 about his book, *Coyote America*, and in January we will screen a new documentary on wildlife killing contests produced by Project Coyote followed by a panel discussion with wildlife advocates, religious leaders, elected officials and hunters.

With Democrats controlling both houses of the state legislature, and with our lobbying efforts in full force, we believe this bill can pass. The only question then will be whether it makes it past the governor's veto pen. If not, the gubernatorial election in 2018 may become the next battleground.

Internships Available

Our internships offer the opportunity to gain important skills in conservation work. You'll learn firsthand how a biodiversity advocacy organization works to mobilize public support, influence public policy and undertake ecological restoration. We have a small staff, so you'll be an important part of the SWEC team.

Our internships are generally unpaid, but you will receive great work experience and possibly academic credit. We require a minimum three-month commitment, working at least 12 hours per week.

We are looking for interns who have good written and verbal communication skills, relevant coursework and/or experience, good interpersonal skills for public outreach, the ability to work independently, and a strong commitment to SWEC's mission of biodiversity protection.

Alternative Giving Intern

The Alternative Giving Intern will work with the Membership Coordinator to promote, expand upon and evaluate our current grassroots giving methods. He or she will work directly with students, community members and on-line to design and implement giving campaigns and reach specific giving goals.

This is a fantastic opportunity for anyone looking to work in non-profits and get a glimpse into the future of giving.

Education and Outreach Intern

As an education and outreach intern, you'll assist with all aspects of our efforts to promote public awareness and appreciation for the Southwest's natural heritage.

Possible duties include:

- Coordinate and serve as host for SWEC's Back by Noon outings
- Help develop and coordinate public educational programs
- Organize and lead public tours of SWEC's La Mancha Wetland project
- Assist with developing and implementing SWEC monthly volunteer days
- Work with staff to produce informational materials related to SWEC's work (fact sheets, articles, displays, online posts, etc.)

For information about other internships and how to apply, visit our website (Who we are/Our interns) or contact ashley@wildmesquite.org.

A Wild Night for Wildlife

More than 200 supporters turned out on a beautiful October 15th evening in Las Cruces to make SWEC's 21st annual A Wild Night for Wildlife gala a big success.

Attendees enjoyed delicious food served by local restaurants, live music on Main Street, great company, and dancing under a full Indian summer moon.

The event raised more than \$22,000 in support of SWEC's conservation work. The theme of this year's event was "Vote for Wildlife."

Thanks to the event sponsors:

- Vescovo Toyota of Las Cruces
- Enchanted Occasions Event Rentals
- El Paso Electric Co.
- Alicante Homes
- Ardovino's Desert Crossing
- Champion Services
- Classic New Mexico Homes
- Jornada Veterinary Clinic
- Kiwanis Club of Las Cruces
- Los Puentes Farms
- Sleep Lab of Las Cruces
- Solar Smart Living
- Sunpower by Positive Energy Solar

Thanks also to our silent auction donors, volunteers, musicians, food and beverage providers, and everyone who attended the event. Tell your friends, and we'll see you next year!

If you'd like to help plan next year's event to celebrate SWEC's 25th anniversary, please contact kevin@wildmesquite.org.



The many faces of SWEC



Julia with her daughter Irelyn and Fen.

Meet our Members

Julia Krampe is a new SWEC member from El Paso.

She was born in Minnesota but grew up in California and Las Vegas, Nevada. After graduating from high school, Julia joined the military. She was a helicopter mechanic in the army for 22 years. While in the army, Julia got her Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Maryland. Recently retired, Julia now works as a dog groomer and volunteers for the El Paso Animal Shelter.

Julia supports the Southwest Environmental Center, because as she says, "I love all animals and care deeply for wildlife. It is our duty to care for them and our planet. I support SWEC because it speaks up for wildlife."



Peter and the wolf (hybrid) Spirit.

Meet our Staff

Peter Sloan is SWEC's new Field Organizer.

Born in Seattle and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, Peter is a recent transplant to New Mexico, where he has fallen in love with the landscape, the sky, the sunsets and stars of the Land of Enchantment. He has been an activist since his time as an undergraduate at the University of Alabama, where he studied music and philosophy.

At SWEC Peter works to mobilize public support for Mexican wolf recovery, banning wildlife killing contests, and protecting the Otero Mesa.

Peter has an MA in music from Mills College in Oakland, California. When not hanging out with coyotes and wolves, he teaches music to children and other wild creatures in town.



Why We're Putting SWEC in Our Will

John and Linda Douglas moved here from Florida. They're avid birders and hikers, love jazz and blues, have a dog named Gracie, and have been members of SWEC since 2003. John was even president of the board at one time.

They intend to leave a gift in their will to the Southwest Environmental Center.

"We've been supporters of SWEC for many years, and we are pleased to include a bequest to SWEC in our wills. It's great to have an organization that is local and whose purpose is to conserve and protect the environment and wildlife in our region."

A legacy is not a donation, it's an investment in the future. If you would like to join John and Linda in including SWEC in your will, please call Kevin at (575) 522-5552.

Shop AmazonSmile and Support Wildlife

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support SWEC every time you shop online, at no cost to you.

When you shop at smile.amazon.com, you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to SWEC.

Simply go to smile.amazon.com from the web browser on your computer or mobile device and select SWEC as your favorite non-profit.

Thank you! Questions? Contact ashley@wildmesquite.org.

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Updated SWEC hiking guide makes a great holiday gift

The second edition of SWEC's popular *Day Hikes and Nature Walks in the Las Cruces-El Paso Area* is now available.

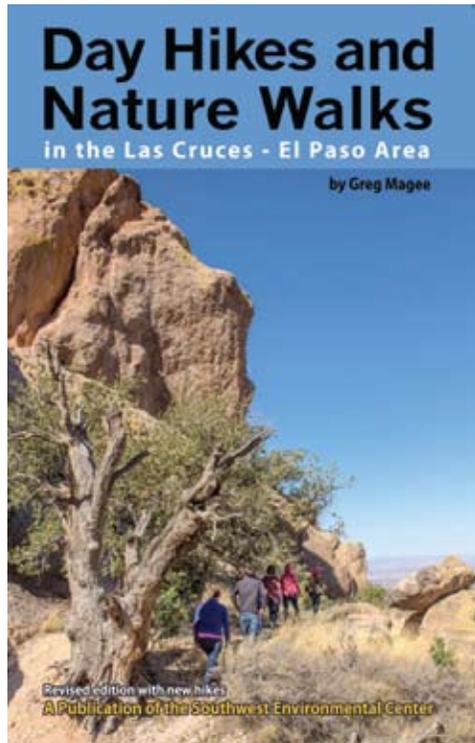
Written by Greg Magee, this is an update of his 2004 original edition, with seven new outings added. It remains the only published hiking guide devoted exclusively to the El Paso/Las Cruces area.

The guide includes descriptions, directions and maps for 45 outings, including 21 hikes within the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in southern New Mexico.

All of the hikes are doable in a single day from Las Cruces or El Paso. They range in difficulty from easy strolls to strenuous off-trail peak climbs.

The book also includes general natural history and conservation information.

The perfect holiday gift for the hikers in your life, it can be purchased at SWEC's office or online at wildmesquite.org.



In Las Cruces, it is also available at Coas Books, Outdoor Adventures, Ride On Sports, Mesilla Book Center, and Eagle Ranch Mercantile Shop in the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.



Shirley Peroutka takes the keys to her new Prius from George Vescovo, of Vescovo Toyota, while SWEC's Treasurer Ed Fridenstine and Executive Director Kevin Bixby (r) look on.

Lucky newcomer wins car in SWEC raffle

Congratulations to Shirley Peroutka for winning our 2016 annual Prius Raffle.

Shirley and her husband Ron recently retired to Las Cruces from the Baltimore area, where she was a professor of communications and media studies at Goucher College. Before winning the car, she had already gone on a SWEC Back by Noon outing and become a member.

Thanks to everyone who bought a ticket, especially those who are repeat buyers. We really appreciate your support, and wish that you could all win a car.

Thanks to Vescovo Toyota of Las Cruces for making this fundraiser possible. We will start selling tickets for the 2017 raffle in March, with a tentative drawing date set for Earth Day, April 22, 2017.

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