

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

HED indicates that the Center for Wildlife Law is the only national center dedicated to education, research, and analysis of state, national, and international wildlife laws. Established at the Institute of Public Law, University of New Mexico School of Law in 1990, the Center's mission is to raise the level of understanding and discussion about wildlife issues through interdisciplinary education, training, analysis, and publication on wildlife law and policy issues.

The Center for Wildlife Law began the Wild Friends Program with funds provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the New Mexico State Legislature. Wild Friends is a wildlife education program for rural and semi-rural youth. At-risk and other middle school students and senior citizens are brought together for hands-on learning about wildlife issues and the legislative process. A network of dozens of local and national organizations has collaborated to make this program a success since 1991. Wild Friends began receiving state appropriations in 1994.

Currently there are 700 students from 18 schools in six counties participating in Wild Friends. Wild Friends youth are recognized and respected for bringing people together on wildlife issues and for facilitating the public conversation necessary to healthy communities and a democratic society. Students learn how law and government work and how citizens can make their concerns known to elected officials. They are taught about wildlife, habitat, and related issues. Students are encouraged to express their views orally, in writing, and through performing arts. Mentors are teamed up with the students to expose children to various careers relating to public policy, public service, and wildlife.

Wild Friends partake in a variety of activities such as meeting with their legislators; conduct imaginary legislative debates; draft legislation; take camping trips; write letters to legislators; interview wildlife professionals and newspaper reporters; compose theater plays and puppet shows; and testify at legislative committee hearings on legislation they authored.

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