



## Sportsmen save habitat protection project



It appears the habitat protection project funded by sportsmen and built around sensitive riparian habitat in Lincoln National Forest is having the intended effect. In this photo taken several months after work finished, the left side is the area open to cattle while the right side is protected for wildlife. (Photo courtesy U.S. Forest Service)

### Efforts to derail work funded by hunters and anglers falls short

By Joel Gay  
New Mexico Wildlife Federation

Sportsman-funded habitat projects rarely make the news, but one in Lincoln National Forest drew a surprising amount of attention this spring, including strong opposition from ranchers and others who want to remove the stream protection project for the sake of livestock.

Efforts to derail the work on Agua Chiquita, a spring-fed stream in the Sacramento Mountains south of Cloudcroft, actually started a year earlier. But New Mexico members of the National Wild Turkey Federation made it their top priority to complete the work this spring, which prompted a fresh round of complaints, threats and legal action.

“Some people have claimed this habitat protection project was ‘overreach’ by the U.S. Forest Service, but nothing could be further from the truth,” said New Mexico Wildlife Federation Executive Director Garrett VeneKlasen. “This was sportsmen doing what they have always done, which is working together to protect public land and habitat so that their children and grandchildren have opportunity to hunt and fish in the future.”

“Hunters and anglers have had to learn to share our public lands and to take responsibility for protecting

See “Agua Chiquita,” Page 12

### Tierras preciadas:

Public lands are a treasure for sportsmen and women. In this Outdoor Reporter we focus on how and why hunters and anglers work so hard to protect them.

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- Efforts to ‘transfer’ public land bad for all, especially sportsmen, Page 5
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## Gila Wilderness

### A legacy for sportsmen

By M.H. “Dutch” Salmon  
Special to New Mexico Wildlife Federation

When Aldo Leopold, founder of the organization that would become the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, arrived in the Southwest as a fledgling U.S. Forest Service ranger in 1909, he discovered six blocks of roadless country in the region’s national forests that contained half a million acres or more.

“By the 1920s,” Leopold would write later, “roads had invaded five of them and there was only one left: the headwaters of the Gila River.”

Leopold, who by his own admission had “hunting fever,” was the perfect scribe for the subject at hand – wilderness – with just the right mix of skilled narration, authenticity (he fished, he hunted, he camped out), poetry, polemic and foresight. In 1921 he wrote something in the Journal of Forestry that most Americans would never read but that professional foresters and game managers did.

By dint of his literacy, elegance and passion, Leopold would convince his peers that this far-away place in New Mexico would best serve the nation by being left “open to lawful hunting and fishing, big enough to absorb a two week’s pack trip, and kept devoid of roads, artificial trails, cottages, and other works of man.”

Furthermore, he continued, “a good big sample of it should be preserved. ... It is the last typical wilderness

in the southwestern mountains. Highest and best use demands its preservation.”

Ninety years ago this summer, District Forester Frank Pooler responded to Leopold’s assessment of “highest and best use” by designating 755,000 acres of the headwaters of the Gila River as off limits to roads, vehicles and other works of man, yet available to hunters and anglers.

It was the nation’s first protected wilderness area.

### Gila has it all

The Gila now makes up just a fraction of our nation’s wilderness system, which has grown to more than 100 million acres. And to this day you may stand, as I have, amidst these far-flung and peculiar mountains and ask: How can this be? How is it that in the whirl of population growth and burgeoning industry and technology, the nation has here, voluntarily, turned its back on the 21st century and returned to the 19th?

Well, it all happened right here in the Gila – the Mimbreno artists; the Apaches’ legacy as equine buccaneers; mountain men, hound men and predator hunters; and the conservation legacy of Leopold, the most avid and articulate of sportsmen, who killed quite a few animals and saved entire landscapes. All were inspired

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## State of the Game

### Turkey tracks getting thicker all over NM

By Jim Bates  
Special to New Mexico Wildlife Federation

“I think that’s number 25,” I said to my turkey hunting buddy Dick as we got back into my pickup and headed on down the forest road.

“Wow, this is incredible. I’ve never heard so many gobblers in my life!” Dick responded.

What was even more incredible was the fact that we were “putting gobblers to bed” along a main thoroughfare running through Lincoln National Forest.

Gobbling turkeys were everywhere on this eve of the start of the spring turkey season. What was particularly encouraging, though, was that this was not some isolated hotspot or wildly unusual incident. It was only a single example that wild turkeys are doing well in many locations in our state.

New Mexico has always had a fairly stable turkey population. Even in the grim years following the end of market hunting which decimated wild turkey numbers

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