

THE PINE CONE

Official Newsletter of the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation



Albuquerque
WILDLIFE
Federation

conservationists since 1914

February 2026

Water and Wildlife Bills in the 2026 Legislative Session

This Tuesday, February 3, marks the halfway point of this year's state Legislative Session; the deadline for filing bills follows on the 4th. As an even-numbered year, 2026 brings a whirlwind, 30-day rumpus dominated by budget concerns, with much on the ledger lines for environment and conservation in our state.

AWF, like every year, is actively monitoring these important issues. Below are some of the legislative proposals we're tracking. If you are interested in contacting your legislator about these bills (and others), you can look up your legislators and their contacts [at this link](#).

Senate Bill 110

This bill provides an appropriation of \$15 million from the general fund to the Interstate Stream Commission for expenditure in 2027-2028. The appropriation is to fund bosque management projects in the Middle Rio Grande Valley and can include riparian restoration, wildfire mitigation, and invasive species removal.

House Bill 184

The Land of Enchantment Conservation Legacy Fund, launched in 2023, is New Mexico's first dedicated funding for conservation programs including watershed and forest restoration. HB184 revises the administration of this fund by moving it to the more comprehensive Public Finances, State Funds, and Capital Programs schedule and outlining how the Department of Finance and Administration is to manage the funding.



House Bill 2/House Bill 133

The General Appropriation Act of 2026 is the annual state budget. Currently, the following items are under consideration for inclusion and dedicated funding.

- Strategic Water Reserve Fund (supports instream flows in the state's rivers);
- Surface water and groundwater permitting;
- Stewardship of private and state forest lands and associated watersheds;
- Aquifer monitoring and integration of state water data;
- Grants and loans for a wildfire mapping database.

Senate Bill 104

In 2025, the Game Commission Reform bill passed both legislative chambers, marking the most significant changes to government wildlife management in NM since the 1921 enactment of an oversight commission (for which AWF's predecessor organization Albuquerque Game Protective Association advocated and drafted legislation). The 2025 legislation renamed the state Game & Fish Department to the Department of Wildlife and changed the Governor-appointed board to the Wildlife Commission. Additionally, the reform broadened the management authority of both entities from game species to all wildlife. SB104 seeks to further this reform by formalizing a removal process for commissioners who are deemed unfit. That process would require approval by the state Supreme Court, similar to the removal processes for other state oversight bodies.

Phil Carter
AWF President

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FEBRUARY 12, 2026 MEETING: Studying Bats in a Changing New Mexico

Date: Thursday, February 12, 2026, 7:30 p.m.

Location: Albuquerque Friends Meeting House
1600 5th Street Northwest

**Topic: From Hand to Headphones:
Studying Bats in a Changing New Mexico**

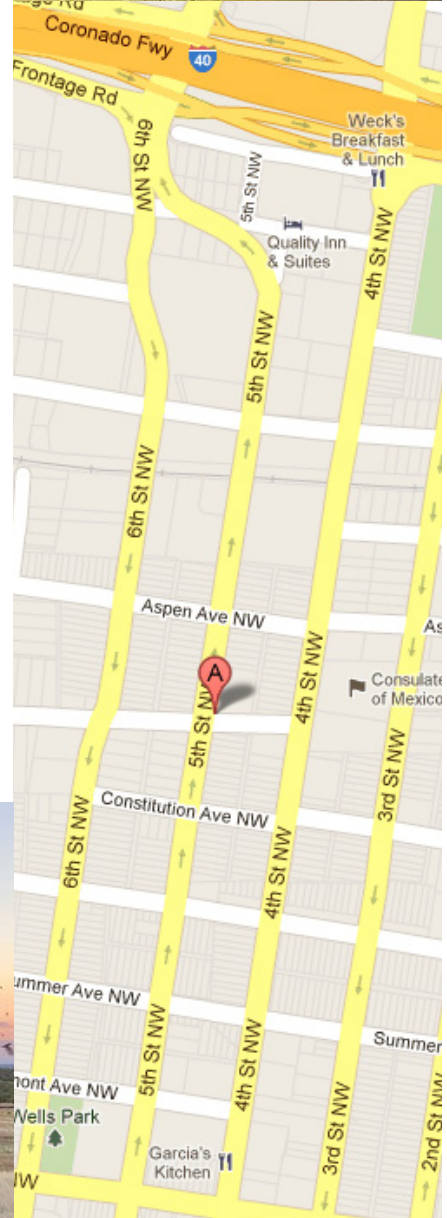
Did you know that New Mexico is home to one of the most diverse populations of bat species in North America? Local bat biologist Milu Velardi will talk about our resident bats and our lesser-known migratory species, as well as pollinator species found in the southern part of the state. She will also discuss how scientists go about studying them both in the hand and via acoustics and the status of their populations as they face the ever-growing threat of White Nose Syndrome in our state.

Speaker Bio: Milu Velardi

Milu Velardi is a certified wildlife biologist originally from Colorado with more than three decades of experience in wildlife research, conservation, and regulatory compliance across the western United States. Milu holds an M.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Resources from West Virginia University, with research focused on bat ecology and forest dynamics. Her expertise includes research focus on bat and avian ecology, habitat selection, GIS and statistical analysis, and regulatory compliance. She currently works within LANL’s biological resources team assisting in threatened and endangered species compliance and migratory bird work. She is the chair of the New Mexico Bat Working Group and enjoys spending her time in caves and in the forest above whenever possible.

Directions to the Meeting

The Albuquerque Friends Meeting House is located at the corner of 5th and Bellamah. From I-40, take the 6th street exit, then South to Bellamah.



SCHEDULE OF 2026 VOLUNTEER RESTORATION SERVICE PROJECTS

It's time to mark your calendar for AWF's 2026 volunteer ecological restoration service projects! We have eight camping weekends and three day projects planned in locations across the state, from a day project planting native vegetation along the Rio Puerco to our first project in the Zuni Mountains in over a decade. Additional details and any updates to our project schedule will be included in future newsletters and posted on our website and [MeetUp page](#).

As you know if you've joined us in the past, AWF's volunteer ecological restoration projects offer unique opportunities to discover remarkable places and team up with other enthusiastic conservationists to improve the health and resilience of the lands we all share. We have lots of fun, and it is inspiring to see how our work can heal damaged landscapes.

We'll be announcing the details of each upcoming project in these monthly newsletters, along with information about how you can RSVP to attend. We hope you'll join us in 2026!



2026 RESTORATION PROJECTS CALENDAR	
March 7.....	Valle de Oro Wildlife Refuge
March 21.....	Rio Puerco
April 10-12.....	Wolf Creek, Ft. Union Ranch
May 29-31.....	Shush'Kin Fen, Zuni Mountains
June 19-21.....	Rito Cafe, Jemez Mountains
July 10-12.....	Polvadera Creek, Jemez Mountains
August 14-16.....	Manuelitas Creek, near Las Vegas
September 4-6.....	Limestone Canyon, San Mateo Mtns
October 2-4.....	Cebolla Canyon, El Malpais
October 23-25.....	Rio Embudo, Dixon
November 7.....	Cedro Creek, Tijeras

AWF BOARD 2026	
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MARCH 7, 2026 SERVICE PROJECT: Valle de Oro Wildlife Refuge

LOCATION: Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in the South Valley of Albuquerque

THE PROJECT: Join AWF for our first volunteer project of 2026! Valle de Oro is one of the nation's first urban wildlife refuges. Volunteers have assisted with its transformation from a former dairy farm to a refuge for an amazing array of birds and wildlife, an innovative site for wetlands restoration using stormwater run-off, and a resource for the local community.

In partnership with Rio Grande Return and others, AWF volunteers will be planting native vegetation in the playa section of the refuge, and potentially building nesting boxes for kestrels and barn owls.

SCHEDULE: 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 7

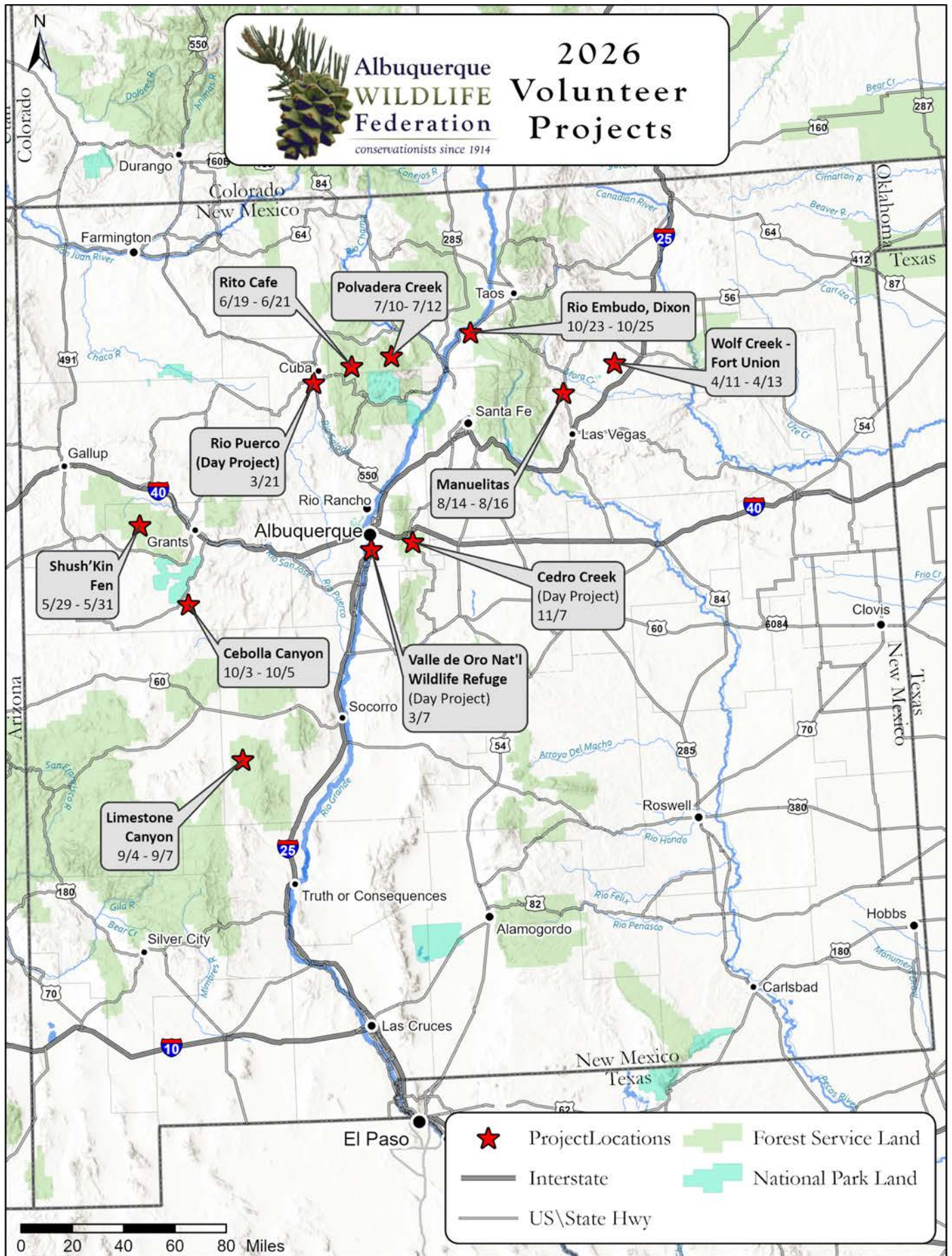
GEAR: For this project, you will need gloves, hat, long sleeves, long pants, sturdy boots, and sunscreen. Wear layers as the day may start off cool and warm up later.

FOOD: Please bring snacks, your own lunch, and plenty of water.

TO SIGN UP: Contact Cameron at cameron@riograndereturn.org

Directions and further details will be sent to you once you sign up.





The History Library at the Leopolds' Carson National Forest Home

By Dr. Richard Rubin, Arroyo Seco, New Mexico

When appointed supervisor of the Carson in 1912, Aldo built his headquarters as a Craftsman bungalow in Tres Piedras, New Mexico. His new Santa Fe wife Maria Alvira Estella Bergere named it *Mi Casita*, My Little House. It was registered as a National Historic Site in 1993 and restored to original appearance in 2005-2006.

The Forest Service plan states: “The house will function as a retreat for persons interested in modern conservation issues and as an interpretive site... The Forest Service will offer the house to the public as a place of reflection and scholarly pursuits.”

As volunteers provided practical help and the Leopold Writing Program began residencies there in 1912, the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation donated sixteen books by and about Leopold in memory of University of New Mexico Professor Richard Becker. The Federation was originally founded by Aldo in 1914 as the Game Protective Association.



The library has now grown to 175 books of Leopold scholarship, works by the Writing Program participants, New Mexico nature and culture, and Forest Service history. Several retired Forest Service staff and environmental professors have donated volumes. The widow of distinguished historian Harold Steen donated a dozen of his works. Professor Tom Swetnam gave early Forest Service manuals inherited from his ranger father, including Gifford Pinchot's 1903-1907 Primers of Forestry and Use Book.

Mi Casita, the designated eight acres, and associated structures such as barn and corrals, are listed as the “Old Tres Piedras Administrative Site.....a perfectly preserved and classic representative of the early history of the National Forest Service.” Access has been restricted for safety and Forest Service regulation.

However, with Friends of Mi Casita volunteer help, the Forest Service opened the house to rental stays May-October 2025, and again beginning March 13, 2026 with reservations available now at www.recreation.gov. It accommodates eight people for up to five days, including use of the library and forest opportunities. My role as volunteer steward supports the maintenance and amenities of the house. A detailed article about the building, restoration, and recent history is forthcoming.

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Climate Solutions Day at the Roundhouse

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 8:30-2:00, State Capitol in Santa Fe

Join the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club, Conservation Voters NM, and other allies for a day of climate action. Sierra Club will provide lobbyist training before groups speak to legislators. At noon, we will hear from our elected environmental champions in the Rotunda. Be an advocate for a just and equitable renewable energy transition, or rally and wear yellow to show your support. Register to participate at:

<https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=701Po00001Q1hLGIAZ>



Public Lands Rally at the Roundhouse

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2:00-4:00 pm, State Capitol in Santa Fe

NEW MEXICO WILD

Mark your calendars for the afternoon of February 6, 2026 for a Public Lands Rally at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe. Join us as we kick off the legislative session by standing up for New Mexico's wilderness, wildlife, and water when it matters most.

For more info: <https://www.nmwild.org/event/public-lands-rally-at-the-roundhouse/>

A Success Story: Fire Ecology & Management in the Santa Fe Fireshed

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 6:30 pm, Christ Lutheran Church, 1701 Arroyo Chamiso Rd, Santa Fe

NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO

Increasingly large and severe wildfires are threatening forests, water supplies, and communities across the western United States. Restoring the low severity fires of the past, which are recorded in tree rings, can increase the resilience of forested watersheds. The prescribed fire program in the Santa Fe Watershed is arguably one of the most successful in the West. A talk by Ellis Margolis, a research ecologist at the USGS New Mexico Landscapes Field Station, based in Santa Fe. For more info: https://www.npsnm.org/?event=tuesday-february-10-santa-fe-chapter-meeting-and-lecture-a-success-story-fire-ecology-mgmt-in-the-santa-fe-fireshed-630-pm&event_date=2026-02-10

Wildlife Wednesday: Exploring the Fungi that Sustain the Rio Grande Bosque

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 5:30 p.m., Marble Brewery NE Heights, 9904 Montgomery Blvd., NE, Abq

NEW MEXICO WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Rich Wagner, an ecologist at the nonprofit Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program, has made extensive study of the fungi that have evolved alongside cottonwoods and other native plants in the Rio Grande Bosque. He will present a talk on how disturbances in the bosque have impacted the fungi that coexist with and help sustain plant roots in the soil. For more info:

<https://www.nmwildlife.org/news/wildlife-wednesday-free-event-exploring-the-fungi-that-sustain-the-rio-grande-bosque>

Connecting Wildlife Habitat in a Fragmented World

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 6:00-7:00 p.m., Los Alamos and online

PAJARITO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER (PEEC)

Jonathan Hayden, executive director of the New Mexico Land Conservancy, explores the critical importance of connecting fragmented wildlife habitats across the Southwest. He highlights how NMLC's conservation of land forming wildlife corridors supports species movement, genetic diversity, and long-term ecosystem resilience in the face of development and climate change.

For more info: <https://peecla.app.neoncrm.com/np/clients/peecla/event.jsp?event=64480&>

Send your event information to: abqwildlifefederation@gmail.com!

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST continued

Aldo Leopold Writing Contest for Students

ENTRIES DUE FEBRUARY 13, 2026

In the Aldo Leopold Writing Foundation's annual student essay contest, students in grades 6-12 are invited to submit an essay on an environmental topic. Learn more about the details of contest and how to participate: <https://www.leopoldwritingprogram.org/writing-contest.html>

Aldo & Estella Leopold Residency for Writers

APPLICATIONS DUE FEBRUARY 16, 2026

An inspiring retreat for professional environmental writers at "Mi Casita", Aldo and Estella's first home in northern New Mexico, the Aldo and Estella Leopold Residency provides a one-month residency with stipend for writers and respected thinkers interested in reshaping the cultural story about the relationship between humans and Nature. Learn more and apply at: <https://www.leopoldwritingprogram.org/residency.html>



Plant Trees with Tree New Mexico

Volunteers plant trees with trained team leaders, so no previous experience is needed. Tree New Mexico provides instructions, tools, maps to the tree planting locations, and basic tree planting guidance. At the location, the hole is dug, the tree to be planted and mulch is nearby, and the resident provides a hose and water. Please email Mackenzie@treenm.org with any questions or concerns.

Sign up to volunteer at: <https://treenm.org>

Tree New Mexico Spring planting schedule:

February 28th- Truth or Consequences, NM
March 7th- Vecinos del Bosque neighborhood, Albuquerque
March 21st- Truth or Consequences, NM
March 28th- Eastridge neighborhood, Albuquerque
April 11th- Silver City, NM
May 9th- TBD neighborhood, Albuquerque
May 30th- Silver City, NM

2026 Land and Water Summit

MARCH 4-6, Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Albuquerque

Join us as we explore how to design and build in partnership with nature. This year's theme highlights how we can deepen our engagement with the natural world by incorporating nature-based practices into our work. For more info and to register: <https://www.landandwatersummitnm.org/>

Film Showing: Crown of the Continent & The Ends of the Earth

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 4:00-6:00 p.m., CCA in Santa Fe, 1050 Old Pecos Trail

SIERRA CLUB

The Sierra Club is presenting two films by AWF friend and volunteer John Grabowska. *Crown of the Continent* is a lyrical journey through the largest wilderness you've never heard of: Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias, a national park larger than Switzerland, with higher mountains. *The Ends of the Earth: Alaska's Wild Peninsula* is a poetic film essay profiling the remote Alaska Peninsula, a cloud-cloaked landscape where giant brown bears outnumber people and the sockeye salmon run is the largest in the world.

Register at: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar.

Donation of \$10 requested, donate at riograndesierraclub.org/donate

JOIN US!

Become a Member of the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation

The Albuquerque Wildlife Federation is an all-volunteer organization founded by Aldo Leopold in 1914 and dedicated to protecting and restoring New Mexico's wildlife and habitat.

Our work is only possible thanks to the generous support of our members.

If you like the work we do, we hope you will help keep this legacy going by becoming a member or renewing your membership.



AWF MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Albuquerque Wildlife Federation | P.O. Box 20225 | Albuquerque, NM 87154

Yes, I'd like to join AWF! This is a gift membership from: _____

name(s): _____

address: _____

city, state, zip: _____

phone: _____ email: _____

- Student _____ \$10
- Individual _____ \$25
- Family _____ \$35
- Sustaining _____ \$50-99
- Patron _____ \$100
- Lifetime _____ \$500 (*one-time payment*)

Dues: \$ _____

Extra Contribution: \$ _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ _____