

THE PINE CONE

Official Newsletter of the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation



Albuquerque
WILDLIFE
Federation

conservationists since 1914

May 2026

New nuclear era threatens New Mexico's lands & water

New Mexico bears many scars from its nuclear history, ranging from the Tularosa Basin, where downwinders were poisoned by the first atomic explosion, to the site of the largest release of radioactive material in U.S. history, at a uranium mine near Church Rock. Across the state there are around 1,100 abandoned uranium mines contaminating soil, air, and water. The cost of cleaning them all up is estimated to run into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Now the state is facing new threats to its lands and waters as the Trump administration pushes to ramp up the production of both raw uranium and nuclear weapons.

A year ago, the Cibola National Forest began the process of fast-tracking federal approvals for two new uranium mines near Mt. Taylor, designated as La Jara Mesa and Roca Honda. These uranium mines, which would be the first to begin operations in the state in at least 50 years, are fiercely opposed by tribal nations who have long fought to protect Mt. Taylor as a sacred site.

Then, earlier this year, a Canadian mining company called Gamma Resources Ltd. applied for permits to drill up to 12 exploratory boreholes 500 feet deep in the Carson National Forest near Canjilon. Ultimately the company seeks to extract 2.9 million pounds of uranium from a 4,625-acre area in the Rio Chama watershed. (AWF's restoration project next month on the



Rito Café is located one watershed over from Canjilon.) The Rio Arriba County Commission has expressed its unanimous opposition to the proposed mine, as have several state lawmakers and members of our congressional delegation.

Meanwhile, the federal government is pushing for Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) to more than double its annual production of plutonium pits, the triggers for nuclear bombs, from 30 per year to 80. This will dramatically increase the amount of nuclear waste being produced by the lab, even while roughly 500,000 cubic meters of legacy waste (enough to fill 200 Olympic swimming pools) has yet to be cleaned up.

There is still time to defend New Mexico's lands and waters and prevent a new era of nuclear contamination. The state Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department has committed to holding a public hearing later this year on the La Jara mine near Mt. Taylor. Public opposition is mobilizing around the Canjilon mining proposal. And a public hearing on the proposal to expand pit production at LANL will be held on May 14 from 5:00-8:00 pm at the Santa Fe Farmer's Market. [Comments on that proposal can be submitted](#) until July 16th – 81 years to the day after the Trinity test, and 47 years to the day after the massive uranium spill at Church Rock.

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Kristina G. Fisher
AWF Secretary

MAY 15-17, 2026 SERVICE PROJECT: Red Canyon Reserve

LOCATION: The Quivira Coalition’s Red Canyon Reserve, near Socorro

THE PROJECT: This month, AWF is partnering with the Quivira Coalition for a workshop in Red Canyon Reserve, a rangeland property that is managed as a land-based laboratory for experimenting with innovative restoration techniques. On Saturday morning, we’ll build rock restoration structures in the canyon; on Saturday afternoon, volunteers can participate in a soil amendment activity designed to enhance grasslands and stream systems in southern New Mexico; and on Sunday morning, there will be a hike to showcase the native cacti and succulents of Red Canyon Reserve.

SCHEDULE: Friday, May 15 – Sunday, May 17
Volunteers do not need to be present for the entire weekend to participate.

GEAR: Bring everything you need for a weekend of camping and restoration work, including work gloves, hat, long sleeves, long pants, sturdy boots, and sunscreen. Rain gear, layers, warm clothes for the evenings and plenty of water are essential. This is an area that can be very windy and hot, so please plan accordingly.

FOOD: Quivira will provide breakfast and coffee on Saturday and Sunday mornings, as well as brown bag lunches on Saturday. AWF will provide our usual bison or veggie burgers on Saturday evening. Please bring a dish to share for the Saturday potluck dinner (Quivira also holds a Friday evening potluck). As always, bring lots of water!

TO SIGN UP: Participants must register with the Quivira Coalition:
<https://quiviracoalition.org/events/spring-2026-red-canyon/>
Directions and further details will be sent to you after you register.



2026 RESTORATION PROJECTS CALENDAR

- March 7.....Valle de Oro Wildlife Refuge
- March 21.....Rio Puerco, Cuba
- April 10-12.....Wolf Creek, Ft. Union Ranch
- April 18.....Cedro Creek, Tijeras
- May 15-17.....Red Canyon Reserve, San Mateo Mtns
- 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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- Vice President – Cameron Weber*
- Treasurer – Laurie Marnell*
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- Hamish Thomson*
- Bob Tilley*
- Alexcia Trujillo*
- Bill Zeedyk - Director Emeritus*

RECAP OF APRIL 10-12, 2026 PROJECT: WOLF CREEK, FT. UNION RANCH

Thanks, Volunteers!

Abe Aufdermauer

Lyle Aufdermauer

Betty Bastai

Peter Callen

Phil Carter

Simon Doane

Kristina G. Fisher

Mathew Freeman

Finn Gregor

Kayla Gustafson

Laurie Marnell

Anabella Miller

Laura Murphy

Peter O'Brien

Toby Rosenblatt

Scial

Marilynn Szydlowski

Hamish Thomson

Alexcia Trujillo

Cameron Weber

Jacob White

Leza Wimett

Daryl Woolems

Bill Zeedyk



For AWF's first weekend-long restoration project of the year, we partnered with Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance to continue the restoration work along Wolf Creek, a tributary of the Rio Mora. AWF has been assisting with restoration of this creek since 2018. As a result of heavy wagon traffic when Fort Union was active during the mid to late 1800s, Wolf Creek has deeply downcut and lost access to its floodplain, turning former wetlands into drier upland meadows. This restoration project seeks to rebuild wetland habitat and improve surface and underground water storage to help bring back perennial stream flows.

With stormclouds swirling around us all day, this hardy group of volunteers completed 14 large rock structures along a one-mile stretch of creek. We wrapped up when the rain arrived around 3:00 pm, and we were grateful to be able to return to the Marshall House to wait out the storm in comfort.

On Sunday morning, Bill Zeedyk led a tour of Higgins Canyon, where AWF volunteers have completed several restoration projects in past years. A 100-year flood in September 2025 massively impacted the canyon, and it was fascinating to see where our structures held – and helped! – and where they were washed away. This canyon holds many important lessons in an era of increasingly extreme weather events, and we look forward to putting what we've learned to use in our future work.



RECAP OF APRIL 18, 2026 PROJECT: CEDRO CREEK

Thanks, Volunteers!

Seamas Alessio
Betty Bastai
Braden Belliveau
Matthew Blood-Smyth
Phil Carter
Kristina G. Fisher
Jess Karan
Robert Long
Laurie Marnell
Sabrina McIlwrath
Theresa Palmer
Scial
Hamish Thomson
Alexcia Trujillo



On April 18, AWF held a bonus project at Cedro Creek to make up for the one that had to be cancelled last fall due to the government shutdown. We met up with our Forest Service contact, District Wildlife Biologist Andrew Ellis, near the top of the Cedro Creek watershed, an area where AWF volunteers and other groups have been building restoration structures for over three decades.

During this project, we focused on rebuilding one key structure, a sizeable Zuni bowl protecting a meadow just above the creek's intersection with Forest Road 242. We also added a substantial baffle just downstream to induce meandering and spread the water during large flow events. The small but energetic group of volunteers harvested and transported local rock and completed both structures by midday.

After lunch, we walked downstream to admire the results of past restoration projects. The creek channel is stable and well-vegetated throughout a reach that was once raw and downcutting. It was gratifying to see how well this landscape is recovering, and we look forward to returning later this year to continue the work of restoring Cedro Creek.



UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Love Your Watershed Day

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., DeVargas Park in Santa Fe
SANTA FE WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

Take part in a river cleanup, enjoy live music by the Partizani Brass Band, and explore hands-on educational activities! AWF will be among the many environmental organizations tabling at the festival. For more info:

<https://www.santafewatershed.org/lywd-2026/>



Restoring Desert Ciénegas: Working with Water and Context

MAY 5, 2026, 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., online
QUIVIRA COALITION

Desert ciénegas—rare, groundwater-fed wetlands in arid landscapes—once supported rich ecosystems and sustained human communities for generations. Yet many of these systems were altered over the past century through ditch irrigation, channelization, and land use changes that disrupted natural water flow. In this webinar we'll explore the story of one such ciénega in Fort Davis, TX. Robert Potts, rancher and conservationist, will share the methods he has used to restore the in-stream channel as well as upland interventions such as bale grazing, and biochar and compost additions. More info at: <https://quiviracoalition.org/events/cienegas/>

New Mexico Butterflies, their Host Plants, and Unintended Chemical Contamination

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 7:00 p.m., UNM Continuing Education building, 1634 University Blvd NE
NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO

Kaitlin Haase, Southwest Pollinator Conservation Specialist with the Xerces Society, talks about our butterflies, and reveals the unexpected results of host plant analyses done in Albuquerque. [More info here.](#)

Survey Riparian Birds in the Isleta Reach

MAY, JUNE, JULY
AUDUBON NEW MEXICO

Come bird with us! We're seeking birders who can volunteer three mornings in May, June, and July to survey birds in the Isleta Reach along the Rio Grande in New Mexico. Land and water managers use the data to inform how the bosque is managed to support wildlife.

More info at: <https://www.audubon.org/southwest/news/bird-surveys-isleta-reach>

Sign up at: <https://www.mobilize.us/audubon-southwest/event/911920/>

Continental Divide Trail Dark Sky Gathering

MAY 15-17, 2026, Pie Town, NM
DARK SKY LAND

This second annual event includes speakers, workshops, and hands-on stargazing experiences for long-time observers and new enthusiasts, with several astronomy experts in attendance. For more information, contact Marisela La Grave, darkskylandnewmexico@gmail.com

Confluence 2026

MAY 19-21, 2026, Ft. Collins, CO

Confluence 2026 is a national gathering for collaborative conservation practitioners, researchers, students, and emerging leaders who are working across to address complex social and environmental challenges. Register at: <https://collaborativeconservation.org/western-collaborative-conservation-network/confluence/>

Volunteer Stream Restoration Day



Rio de Las Vacas Santa Fe National Forest

**Curious about beaver habitat restoration?
Join Rio Grande Return to plant willows
and build beaver dam analogues.**



How You Can Participate

- **Volunteer**
Spend a day building beaver dam analogues with us. No prior experience is needed, just your enthusiasm and willingness to make a difference.
- **Learn**
Rio Grande Return is creating wildlife habitat along Rio de Las Vacas by planting more willows, installing beaver dam analogs, post-assisted log structures and large woody debris. Learn about the role of beaver mimicry in improving water quality, storing water, expanding wetlands and creating habitat for other wildlife.
- **What to Bring**
Lunch, water, warm work gloves, warm clothing (layers), waders or muck boots, hat/sunscreen.

Event Date

Wednesday
May 13, 2026
9:30am - 3pm

Location

Near Hwy 126
and FS Rd 20
(30 minutes from
Cuba, NM)

RSVP by email before the
prior Monday to:

Karen Menetrey
karen@riograndereturn.org
505-603-1328

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: \$ _____