20 Years, and Still Going Strong

by Donna Stevens, Executive Director

I’ve read (and written) many articles in the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance’s newsletter over the years. But reading them in one sitting, as I did for this 20th anniversary issue of Carapace, was very enlightening. I was surprised to note that many themes recurred over the last twenty years: invasive species inventory and eradication, reintroduction of river otters, safeguarding of the Gila National Forest, protection of the free-flowing Gila River, restoration projects along the Gila River and its tributaries, local employment, conservation education, and community building.

Ongoing is UGWA’s advocacy for a wild Gila River; with a decision still three years away, we vow to continue this campaign. A long-term program started within the last year is our work on the Gila National Forest’s Forest Plan Revisions. Because the management plan guiding the Forest Service is thirty years old, it’s badly in need of an update, especially in light of expected climate change impacts. UGWA plans to provide input every step of the way to ensure that the Forest Service develops a robust new plan to protect the forest’s watersheds, streams, wildlife and habitats, native flora, and quiet areas.

Currently, we have a couple of ongoing programs along the Gila River in the Gila Wilderness Area: removal of manmade debris from the Gila River and eradication of invasive tamarisks.

In this issue, we reprint several articles from the last two decades of UGWA’s newsletter. Many of the people who were originally involved have moved on to other pursuits and passed the torch to new workers. Consistent throughout the years, however, is the appreciation for the Gila watershed, and the goal of maintaining or restoring its health, vigor, and beauty.

Huge thanks go out to the current UGWA board, most of whom have served for many years: April Crosby, Sarah Johnson, Tom Krohley, Ron Parry, Sharman Apt Russell, and Dennis Weller. Uncountable thanks extend to Carol Fugagli, UGWA’s Administrative Assistant. UGWA members are fortunate indeed to have these dedicated folks on our side.

We hope you’ll join forces with the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance for the next twenty years, as we continue to love and protect our precious Gila River and Gila National Forest. Many thanks for your continued support.
The Upper Gila Watershed Alliance (UGWA) was born in October 1996. The “Initiating Board of Trustees” consisted of Sue Mullen, Stephen MacDonald, Nora Fiedler, Jay Slavec, Tom Cooper, Mary Giardina, Nena MacDonald, Roger Skaggs, Jim Seely, and Cindy Serna, with Mike Fugagli as the “Staff Volunteer.”

Here’s the “creation story” behind the UGWA masthead. By the time the next newsletter was published, the UGWA logo had evolved to its current incarnation.
Despite its genesis in a low-tech, sleepy valley, UGWA has had a website for almost twenty years. The man who made it happen, Kyle Johnson, went on to found Gila/Mimbres Community Radio, KURU. Coming full circle, UGWA now co-hosts Earth Matters, a weekly program exploring environmental issues, on GMCR, along with our partners in the Gila Conservation Coalition, Gila Resources Information Project (GRIP) and New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.

UGWA does some very local work in the Cliff/Gila Valley in spring 1997.

**Youth Conservation Program Focuses on Private Lands**

Since mid-January, local youth have been constructing checkdams in the Spar Canyon watershed as part of Grant Soil and Water Conservation District’s ongoing Gila River Stabilization Program. The work being done in Spar Canyon was funded, in part, by a $36,000 mitigation grant received from the State of New Mexico’s Conservation Trustee in conjunction with the Cleveland Mill’s Natural Resources Restoration Plan. The checkdams in Spar Canyon, structures designed to capture sediment and decrease the velocity of running water, are the latest in a series of restoration and erosion control projects being done by local youth. Although similar to GSWCD’s regular Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program, the projects funded by this latest grant target the restoration of private lands which are in the most critical condition in the watershed. “The youth conservation programs provide unique educational and economic opportunities for many of our young people”, says Mary Giardina, Project Coordinator for GSWCD’s youth conservation programs. “Employment opportunities are limited for many young people and I think these programs are making a real difference.” The regular YCC summer program will begin in early June. For additional information contact: Mary Giardina,
Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

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Mission Statement
The Upper Gila Watershed Alliance is a non-profit watershed protection and conservation organization working to promote the long-term health of the Upper Gila Watershed and its communities of life. Through advocacy, education, research and restoration projects, we are striving to build communities of stewards in more locally based economies.

UGWA Staff
Donna Stevens
Executive Director
Carol Fugagli
Administrative Assistant

Board of Directors
April Crosby (Development Chair)
Gila, NM & Fairbanks, AK
Sarah Johnson
Gila, NM
Tom Krohley (Treasurer)
Silver City, NM
Ron Parry
Silver City, NM & Houston, TX
Sharman Apt Russell (Chair)
Silver City & Gila, NM
Dennis Weller
Silver City, NM

Carapace is published by the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance. It is sent free to all UGWA members.

UGWA is a 501(c)(3) organization incorporated in New Mexico. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Help us celebrate UGWA’s 20th Anniversary

Saturday, November 5
3:00–8:00 p.m.
at the
Valley Market in Gila
across from the Post Office

Please join us for some or all:
3:00–4:00 Meeting
4:00–6:30 Potluck supper
Bring a dish to share, plate & utensils. Stories will be shared about UGWA’s early days. Bring a favorite memory!
6:30–8:00 Dance!
Music performed by the legendary Iya Khan.

RSVP to director@ugwa.org
Mike Fugagli has been involved with UGWA since its inception. When he left for a while to work in California, he sent this email to his friends in the valley, who printed it in the autumn 1998 Carapace. Returning to the valley with Carol Reynolds, who soon became Mike’s wife, he re-engaged with UGWA. Carol Fugagli is now UGWA’s Administrative Assistant.

This short blurb appeared in the Winter/Spring 2000 Carapace. Since purchasing the Gila Farm, The Nature Conservancy and UGWA have partnered on several projects, including removing invasive species—tamarisk, Siberian elm, Russian Olive and Tree of Heaven—from the Cliff/Gila Valley.

Whatever Happened to Fugagli?

Dear Steve and UGWA Friends,

I hope all is well. I appreciate your thinking of me for the newsletter. Here’s a brief update.

I’m living and working in San Diego. I was hired in July of 1997 by Ogden environmental as a conservation biologist to help with a variety of Habitat Conservation Plans here in southern California and on the lower Colorado River.

The lower Colorado River Multispecies Conservation Plan is the focus of my work right now. The plan is fundamentally an attempt by the Bureau of Reclamation to meet its obligations under the ESA for conservation of endangered species occurring from Glen Canyon Dam south to the international border with Mexico. Although approximately 100 species are being planned for, the MSCP is focusing on the conservation of endangered native fishes (Bonytail chub, Flannelmouth sucker, Humpback chub, Razorback sucker) and birds (Southwestern willow flycatcher, Yellow-billed cuckoo, California black rail, Yuma clapper rail). I’m basically the bird guy. I’ve been busy developing conservation goals and strategies for these species including plans for the restoration of 4,000 ha of cottonwood-willow riparian forest along the river corridor.

In general, the extreme degradation of the lower Colorado River and the ongoing and increasing demand for water by multiple users makes development of this plan very challenging (and costly). Although the Gila (as well as most southwestern riparian systems) faces many of the same conservation challenges, I think residents of the upper Gila watershed should be proud of the fact that, regionally, the upper Gila is viewed as a biological stronghold for many of the species nearly extirpated from all 700 miles of the lower Colorado River. My appreciation for Gila has only grown as I’ve come to realize what a unique place it really is. There’s more willow flycatchers next to Emanuel’s house than on the entire lower Colorado; there’s more yellow-billed cuckoos in the Cliff-Gila Valley than in California! As a community, you’re truly blessed!

Breaking New Ground

Tucked in the Gila Valley north of Cliff is the new Gila River Farm (formerly, "Seeds of Change Farm"). Recently secured by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Farm comprises over 126 acres of prime river bottomland, farmland, and development property. With the land comes over 60 acres of "old" water. TNC has been working closely with the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance on various aspects in this exciting new venture that promises to offer all involved the opportunity to learn, on-the-ground and up close, just what it means and entails for us humans to fit in, somehow, while doing good work for the land and its other inhabitants.
Part-time valley resident April Crosby volunteered her considerable skills to guide the UGWA board in its development as a nonprofit organization. Shortly thereafter, she became a board member, and continues to this day to help UGWA with both long-term visioning and short-term operations.

"Cheshire Puss," she began, "would you tell me please which way I ought to walk from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
"I don't much care where," said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you walk," said the Cat.
"---so long as I get somewhere!" Alice added.
"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

- Alice in Wonderland, by Lewis Carroll

After I volunteered at the January UGWA meeting to analyze where UGWA is along its developmental path, I felt pretty stupid. I didn’t experience the excitement of UGWA’s formation in ’95 and ’96 nor the throes of its growth since then so my insights are limited. But I do know about organizations, especially small nonprofits, and I’ve seen them both thrive and fail. Multiple, often conflicting, directions within new organizations are common, but apparent dead ends and other diversionary efforts can be productive along the way. It helps to put them in a context of predictable stages that developing organizations encounter.

The easiest way to think of these stages is in the transitions among forming, norming, storming and performing. As with other evolutionary processes, these stages aren’t totally distinct or necessarily linear. But each stage has typical characteristics and successive periods help frame what happens next.

Early activity of forming an organization is a dynamic, exciting time of creativity, is both an upside and a downside for the future of the organization: the hazier the purpose, the more people see what they want in it and climb on board. Yet, the hazier the goal, the hazier the path. This early stage of community-forming, often pre-organizational, is known for its founders’ zeal.

The second stage, called norming, is one of commitment and settlement. Organizations set in, and participants see to dues, an office, phone, mailing address and newsletters; develop "boiler plate" for funding proposals, clarify Board committee vs. other volunteer roles and related policies. Official status [like 501 (c) (3)] and recognition from funding agencies is achieved. Organizations may consider permanent staff and how to support their overhead costs, or operational expenses. Board meetings tend to occur regularly and organizational structures take hold.

Then, inevitably, comes a third stage called storming. The organization gains greater complexity leading to divisions of labor which can burden the group with conflict. Sometimes interpersonal frictions threaten common goals. Realism sets in regarding long-term funding. Board members, project volunteers and paid staff may burn-out as they compare early, idealistic hopes to limited achievements. This period is one of turmoil and disenchantment. To stabilize, the group may focus on fewer, perhaps different outcomes than were in the original mission statement, which can prompt the departure of founders or early participants. Some small organizations never get through this rocky part of the path, and disband.

Assuming the organization survives the
Although consensus can be a slow and difficult decision-making process, it can also be very rewarding. With few exceptions, the UGWA board shares a common vision of our purpose and unique niche as a very local organization. Cartoonist Orien MacDonald, the son of founders Stephen and Nena MacDonald, still makes his home in the valley.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. In these words of gratitude from UGWA co-founder Nena MacDonald in the Winter 2000–2001 Carapace, readers can glimpse the underlying foundations of UGWA, which hold true today: Nature needs a voice. We have reason to be thankful. We have as our home the last undammed river in our state. The names of board members and staff have changed, UGWA is fifteen years older, and our original purpose remains the same.
Encounters with a Beautiful Rogue
Kevin Keith

In 1973, during one of our shopping forays to Tucson, my wife and I took notice of an impressive flowering tree. The droopy posture and pink feathery flowers led us to inquire about it. We were told that it was a salt cedar and my admiration for its beauty has never waned. Its dubious reputation was only revealed to me later.

Our local salt cedar is not a cedar at all but a member of the Tamarisk family (Tamaricaceae). Tamarisk was introduced to North America at the turn of the century for erosion control and as an ornamental. There are over 100 species worldwide, three of which are naturalized on this continent. Its origins remain somewhat nebulous, with different sources citing it being from Africa, eastern Europe, and western Asia. Opportunistic by nature, it adapted readily to North American climates and spread over practically all of the U.S. and well beyond to the south. One species, the Athel Tamarisk (Tamarix aphylla) is an evergreen that produces a brittle but highly polished furniture-quality wood. The common salt cedar of the southwest river corridors is probably Tamarix pentandra (although it seems that its taxonomy is confusing even to authorities).

Tamarisk is considered to be a phreatophyte, a deep-rooted plant capable of reaching the water table. Consequently, it uses high amounts of water which might otherwise be available to native plants. The qualities which initially made Tamarisk appealing for erosion control—its fast growth, drought resistance, and tolerance to alkaline soils—eventually made it problematic. It furthers its noxious status by using salt-secreting glands to get rid of surplus salts, thus concentrating them beneath the canopy and inhibiting native plants with lower alkaline tolerance. Thus the trees can create dense monoculture thickets along rivers and irrigated fields.

Wildlife has taken advantage of the Tamarisk invasion and probably contributes to its distribution. The flowers are frequented by bees for the nectar. Kangaroo rats have been observed eating the seeds and foliage. Doves find its shelter desirable for nesting. A tamarisk tree containing a double clutch of willow flycatchers was recently reported on the river. Once, while visiting the Bosque del Apache, I entered a dense stand of pure Tamarisk near the visitors center. A surprised sharp-shinned hawk lit off a perch and flew out of sight. Looking closer, I found numerous patches of...
Way back in the Spring 2003 issue of Carapace, UGWA was concerned about unmanaged off-road vehicle damage in the Gila National Forest. When the federal Travel Management Rule came out in late 2004, UGWA was involved right from the start in advocating for a responsible, affordable road system that protected the Gila’s watersheds, streams, wildlife habitat, and quiet. Finally, in 2016, Travel Management was implemented by the Forest Service, and conditions can finally begin to improve from years of driving damage.

This article about off-road vehicle damage at the Mogollon Box appeared in the Spring 2004 Carapace. The Forest Service eventually placed large boulders at the campground perimeter to prevent vehicular access to the Gila River. However, some of the rocks were spaced too far apart, the perimeter wasn’t complete, and a few boulders were undercut by flooding. Because their closure attempt wasn’t effective, UGWA received a grant in 2011 to repair and reinforce the closure and ensure that the river is protected from motor vehicles. The resulting riparian recovery is truly impressive.

Good News for Restricting OHV Access in Gila N.F.
April Crosby
UGWA board members got promising news from Gila National Forest Supervisor, Marcia Andre, during a recent meeting with her about our concerns regarding forest management. Marcia explained that the new Regional Forester, Haver Forsgren, has made it a priority to manage off-highway vehicle (OHV) use in New Mexico’s forests. All NM forests are charged with developing action plans for progress on this issue by the end of September. To move this along, the region has contracted with a private firm called Recreation Solutions to assess Forest Plans in order to determine what level of the NEPA process would be appropriate to change all NM forest policies to allow OHV use only on designated roads and trails.

This represents a huge change from present practice, which is that NM forest roads are basically open to any and all uses. The present situation has led to intense degradation of existing roads and trails and to a criss-crossing of new ORV trails as these vehicles plow further and further into the back country. UGWA will work closely with forest personnel and the public during the coming Travel Management Planning process, while we also push for some much needed immediate closures in critical areas like the upper box canyon of the Gila River.

ORVs to Be Banished from Upper Box Campground
Mike Fugagoli
In February, UGWA’s board and staff met with Gila National Forest Supervisor, Marcia Andre, and Silver City District Ranger, Gerry Engels, to discuss the status of the Forest’s travel management planning process. We left discouraged because we were told that off-road vehicle management actions being addressed at the national level precluded the possibility of changing the status quo of the Gila National Forest—open to cross-country travel—to a system of “closed unless posted open” by a simple stroke of the pen. We were also told that funding and staff time for travel management planning would be problematic for the foreseeable future due to higher priorities, generally meaning fire management.

Emerging from the meeting, however, was a commitment by the Forest to close Box Canyon campground to off-road vehicles. UGWA pointed out that ORV use at Box Canyon was nonsensical. Not only is the campground surrounded by private lands, precluding its use as a staging area for cross-country travel in the Forest, but it is also a campground/day-use area totally incompatible with its growing use as an ORV park.

One quick visit to Box Canyon reveals that incompatibility. The area has become a spider web of roads, with some places converted to nothing but sand dune. A dwindling population of the State endangered elf owl, an owl that requires good herbaceous cover for moth production, is certainly being affected, and we thank the Forest Service for their willingness to address this serious issue.

The goal of the upcoming closure will be to contain all motorized vehicle use to designated routes within the campground and to prohibit motorized recreation—other than coming and going—within the area. UGWA will need lots of volunteers to make this project a success. We hope you will join us in the protection of this special place—we’ll keep you posted for times and dates. Thanks!
This bold headline graced the cover of the Spring 2004 newsletter. The threat to the Gila River continues to this day. Advocating for a free-flowing river is a major part of UGWA’s current work.
In this Summer 2004 article, author Allyson Siwik explains how GRIP, UGWA, and the Center for Biological Diversity have resurrected the Gila Conservation Coalition, founded in 1984 to prevent the Hooker and Conner Dams on the Gila River. Other conservation groups have since joined forces with the Gila Conservation Coalition to advocate for a wild Gila River. Together, we’ve made significant progress in bringing to light the numerous reasons why a diversion is such a poor idea. Although some of the particulars in this article segment are now outdated, the push for a diversion continues today, as does our advocacy work on behalf of the river.

New Mexico and Arizona Reach Agreement on Gila River Water

Role of the Gila Conservation Coalition

The Gila Conservation Coalition (GCC), a partnership of environmental and conservation groups that promotes conservation of the Upper Gila River Basin, has been closely tracking the New Mexico Gila Settlement negotiations and “observed” two rounds of discussions along with Jack Hiatt, Grant County Attorney, and Vance Lee, a private citizen representing Hidalgo County. The Gila Resources Information Project (GRIP), UGWA, Center for Biological Diversity and other interested citizens have been actively involved in reinvigorating the GCC, which first came together in 1984 to help stop the Hooker and Conner dams proposed for the Gila River. GRIP’s assistant director, Allyson Siwik, is the coalition’s executive director, and GRIP is serving as its fiscal agent. The GCC’s efforts seem to have influenced the ISC staff on the importance of drafting amendment language that would not tie New Mexico Unit funds to a specific water development project and would allow our local communities, through the Southwest New Mexico Water Planning Group, to decide how this federal funding is applied to regional water management priorities.

The region is already engaged in the water planning and management process. The Southwest New Mexico Regional Water Plan Steering Committee has completed Phase 1 of the Regional Water Plan, which estimates available water supplies and projects future demand. In Phase 2, water management alternatives will be analyzed and the results used to inform local decision makers on how best to satisfy future water needs. Dutch Salmon, Gila Conservation Coalition chairman, and Joe Hutto are members of the steering committee and have provided input to this process.

The GCC believes that there are lower-cost options available to us to meet future demand while allowing the Gila to remain a free-flowing river. For example, a calculation performed by the GCC and based on publicly available information indicates that a large-scale pumping and reservoir project would cost more than double on an acre-foot basis the expenditure of purchasing idle water rights and reallocation of those rights. The GCC is currently working on its own version of a water plan that will provide economic analysis of these alternatives and the economic benefits of instream flows.
This excerpt from the Spring 2006 newsletter is a snapshot of where we were in that year.

UGWA’s 2005 Annual Report

Mission
The Upper Gila Watershed Alliance is a non-profit watershed protection and conservation organization working to promote the long-term health of the Upper Gila Watershed and its communities of life. Through research, education, and restoration projects, we are striving to build communities of stewards in more locally based economies.

As such, we strive to:
- Increase awareness of the watershed and the values associated with it, while preserving the rural quality of life
- Increase awareness of issues and/or threats by making them relevant to people’s lives
- Provide opportunities for stewardship
- Support economic opportunities in restoration

2005 Accomplishments
Participated in the Gila NF’s Travel Management Planning Process
In July, the Gila National Forest formed a collaborative work group to begin the process of designating routes open to motorized travel. This is an important shift from an “open unless stated closed” paradigm, towards a “closed unless posted open” policy on the Forest. UGWA is a valued participant in this process, working for optimal resource protection and assisting the Forest Service in identifying hot spots that would preclude motorized travel or require mitigation to support continued motorized travel. The collaborative work group includes Forest Service staff, user groups, residents, and conservation representatives.

Co-coordinated the First Annual Gila River Festival
In coordination with the Gila Conservation Coalition, this event is designed to increase awareness of the river and the work that a variety of groups are doing to protect it. It provides opportunities for action and to experience the river (get wet!). The Gila River Festival causes more people to become aware of their place in the watershed, and understand how issues (local/regional/national) relate to individuals. The first event, held in May 2005, attracted more than 500 participants to the weekend’s activities. Planning is underway for the second annual event to be held May 12-14, 2006.

Began Collaborative Forest Restoration Project
We received a contract award from the New Mexico Environment Department and have begun a collaborative forest restoration project in a tributary of the Gila, the Sapillo Creek drainage, with the intention of improving water quality through thinning of overcrowded forest. This project provides employment and training, while enhancing water and forest quality, and perhaps protects some against the worst of forest fires. Partners in this effort include the Center for Biological Diversity, Gila National Forest, Gila Woodnet, and Gila Conservation Education Center.

Hired New Executive Director
In July, UGWA welcomed Melanie Gasparich as Executive Director.

Closed Box Canyon Campground to Motorized Use
During the summer, UGWA successfully petitioned the Gila National Forest to exclude motorized vehicles from an approximate 10-acre section of the Gila River floodplain within an area known as the Box Canyon campground. Following a large flooding event in February 2005, the area encompassed by the exclusion order had taken on greater ecological significance, and had become an area of safety concern as well. UGWA coordinated and implemented a physical closure of the area and continues to monitor the closure to ensure long-term compliance.

Continued Volunteer Monitoring of Springs
More than 20 springs in the Burro Mountains continued to be monitored in 2005, providing valuable documentation of the significance of each spring. This important information will continue to be used by UGWA in its participation in the Travel Management Planning Process.

Adopted a New Mission Statement
At the annual meeting, the board and attending members worked through a group process to adopt the new statement (see above).
This article from Summer 2006 was full of hope and promise to return river otters to their ancestral home in the Gila after a 50+ year absence. But when Governor Susana Martinez came into office in early 2011, she relieved conservationist Dutch Salmon of his duties on the Game & Fish Commission, and replaced him and other progressives with her handpicked associates. UGWA and our partners in the River Otter Working Group saw the writing on the wall, and we decided to put river otter restoration on hold until we have a state administration that values wildlife.

Help See River Otters Returned to New Mexico & the Gila!
An Update on the Process

After more than 3 years of work, Thursday, August 24th promises to be an important date for moving forward with restoring river otters to New Mexico rivers. At their August 24th meeting, the Game Commission will be reviewing a Department of Game and Fish drafted feasibility study on otter reintroduction and then making a decision on whether or not to proceed with otter restoration in New Mexico.

New Mexico is the only state that historically had otter populations that has not restored otters to their native habitat. Twenty-one other states have successfully restored river otters to waters within their states that historically supported river otters. It is thought that otter restoration will help restore a healthy balance to our river systems by preying on the larger slower moving exotic fish and crayfish that are currently negatively impacting New Mexico’s aquatic ecosystems.

The New Mexico River Otter Working Group, of which the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance is a founding member, has been working to research and promote otter restoration in New Mexico for many years. The Working Group, through much research and study, has determined that otter restoration is indeed feasible in the Upper Rio Grande, Gila and San Francisco watersheds. The Working Group is encouraging members of the public to attend the August 24th Game Commission meeting in Santa Fe to express support for otter restoration in the state and in particular in specific watersheds. Public support for otter restoration in the Gila is especially needed. The meeting is being held at the State Capitol Building – Room 321 in Santa Fe, NM. Carpool opportunities may be available. For more information contact Melanie Gasparich at director@ugwa.org, or 535-2519, or Amigos Bravos at 505-758-3874.

If you are unable to make the meeting in person, the Working Group encourages members of the public to draft letters of support for otter restoration in the Gila using the sample letter below as a template and specifically asking to see otter restoration in the Gila as well as in other places in New Mexico.
Children’s Water Festival a Resounding Success

Tim Arguello, Gila Conservation Education Center

On April 17th and April 18th, 2008, 571 local students from the Silver School District and various private schools took part in the 5th Annual Children’s Water Festival. Education ‘stations’ presented topics ranging from Water Chemistry and Watersheds, to Fire Ecology and Macro-invertebrates.

On the first day, a group of excited fifth-graders arrived at the Lichty Center in Cliff; cycling through a number of ‘stations’ designed to educate and engage them. The next day was spent at the Silver City Recreation Center where local partners and experts set up more ‘stations’ for local fourth-grade students.

Objectives for the Water Festival included educating students about local water resources, and demonstrating the dependence of all living things on water. Helping the children identify threats to water quality and develop an interest in environmental protection were other key goals. The Festival did much to promote networking between teachers and professionals in the community while they worked together to plan the event.

My favorite experiences of the Water Festival evidenced to me the power of conservation education for youth. I saw a young girl suddenly perk up as she remembered her visit to the Hoover Dam, and how anxiously she tried to get the attention of the presenter so that she could share her experience with a non-free flowing river. A young boy was so captivated by the macro-invertebrate station that his teacher had to go back and get him so the rest of the class could proceed to the next station.

Moments like these were repeated over and over again during the two-day event. During the Children’s Water Festival, local children were introduced to conservation in a hands-on way that no textbook or classroom experience could ever duplicate. It is our hope that all of these children will remember what they learned and carry it with them through the coming years.
The impetus for this project was a comment by avid hiker and UGWA board member Dennis Weller, who alerted the board and staff that vehicles were being driven into the Gila River from Brushy Canyon. In 2011, Tris Germain, then an UGWA board member, wrote about UGWA's project to protect the Gila River by closing this access point. As noted elsewhere in this newsletter, UGWA did a similar closure at Mogollon Box. Subsequent to this article, we again protected the river from motorized trespass, this time at Forks Campground. Slowly, we are helping to change the culture from one in which rivers are seen as roads to one where rivers are perceived as precious gems to be protected from all threats.

BRUSHY CANYON
By Tris Germain

I have a confession: I like Jeeps. I have driven Jeeps and trucks off road. It started 42 years ago, driving over the sands of the Mojave Desert. Ideally, we would have two abused four wheel drive vehicles so when some critical part fell off or broke from all the bouncing and jostling, we could self-rescue, attaching chains to our wrecks to jerk them out of the endless washes and soft spots. We spent days camping, hiking, and driving, our compass guiding us, as we headed over hundreds of miles between highways. Many of these miles were over pristine desert landscapes: glittering sand in the day and glittering stars at night. It was all a grand adventure. Rarely did we see another person or any tracks, except for those of General Patton, where he’d practiced for fighting Rommel in North Africa during World War II. I don’t think tank tracks ever go away in the desert, and now I realize it takes a really long time for Jeep tracks to completely disappear, too.

In just a couple of years, the Mojave changed. I changed. I started noticing really ugly tracks crushing cacti and other delicate desert flora in many areas where there had previously been no tracks. I started noticing our impact. Then the BLM closed it all to off-road use. I believe it was one of the first closures of that type ever for them. I didn’t like it, but I saw the wisdom in it, and by then I was off to the Baja in Mexico with endless pristine beaches to explore.

Now we have ATVs. They can go places I only dreamed of forty years ago, and are cheap and plentiful. It’s curious to me that there is still even a debate about having unrestricted, off-road, vehicular access on public lands. This is the present policy over most of the Gila National Forest, but it will change if they ever finish the new Travel Management plan. The USFS has already closed a few particularly sensitive areas to vehicles.

One of these areas is on the Gila River upstream from the Box Canyon Campground near Cliff, NM. About seven years ago, the USFS placed boulders to prevent vehicular access to the river where the road crosses Brushy Canyon on the way to Turkey Creek Campground. Since then, erosion has moved some of these boulders, creating an opening that ATV users have exploited. Now there is a little ATV highway going down the river.

UGWA received a grant in 2010 to repair this barrier to prevent access and to restore the drainage leading to the river. Work on the barrier will be finished in February, followed by a work party of volunteers to help with the restoration work. Want to volunteer? Call Robin at 505-330-5087.

More confessions: when I moved here 30 years ago, I regularly drove across the Gila River above Turkey Creek Campground to go hiking and camping. I don’t own an ATV but they look like they could be fun. It’s my position, and UGWA’s, that there are places in the forest appropriate for their use. River bottoms are not one of them.

Editor’s note: UGWA’s grant to repair Brushy Canyon is from the National Forest Foundation.
This year, the Gila National Forest released two Motor Vehicle Use Maps, one for the east side of the forest and one for the west side. These maps show the roads that are open to motorized travel. They are free and available at the Forest Service office in Silver City and at each of the district offices.

In summer 2016, UGWA resumed our cleanup of the Gila River in the Gila Wilderness Area. See this excerpt from an article in the Fall/Winter 2015 Carapace. As of October 2016, we’ve removed most of the garbage, and will conduct a reconnaissance trip to make sure the river is trash-free. UGWA contractor Zack Crockett even removed metal that had been wrapped around a tree next to the river for many years prior to the September 2013 flood.

Stock animals get loaded with trash to pack out of the Gila Wilderness, which was then piled into a truck (see facing page) and taken to the landfill. Photos: Zack Crockett

River Cleanup Continues

by Carol Fugagli

On a sunny afternoon in late September, a handful of local folks from Gila Hot Springs loaded up their rafts and headed down the Gila River.

Their mission: to clean man-made debris and trash out of the river.

Many of our readers may remember the flood of September 2013. A few building structures were washed downstream from private properties in Gila Hot Springs. When the floodwater receded, it left behind deposits of man-made debris in various stages of disintegration. UGWA was awarded a grant from the Secure Rural Schools federal program, which is administered through the Forest Service. This grant was awarded to clean up flood trash. UGWA is working with a small crew of strong folks, mostly locals from Gila Hot Springs, to continue to remove the trash.
In this 2015 article, UGWA staffer Carol Fugagli discusses the seven threatened and endangered species that would be negatively impacted by a diversion on the Gila River. As discussed elsewhere in this newsletter, opposing a diversion is one of UGWA’s major campaigns.

**Two Birds, Two Snakes, Two Fish, and a Frog**

by Carol Fugagli

Yes, this should be the title of a children’s book. It’s also an easy way to remember which threatened and endangered species currently live along the Gila River and could be extirpated by a river diversion. Southwest willow flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, northern Mexican garter snake, narrow-head garter snake, loach minnow, spikedace, and Chiricahua leopard frog. The names are certainly familiar, but just how well do we know these characters that live in our backyard? Here’s a bit about their life histories and conservation status.

Southwest Willow Flycatcher

*(Empidonax traillii extimus)*

*Empidonax* is Latin for “mosquito king” and is an apt name, because flycatchers are insect eaters. As are most members of the genus *Empidonax*, the willow flycatcher is difficult to identify in the field, and without vocal cues is nearly impossible to distinguish.

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**Children’s Water Festival, Continued**

On September 13, 2016, after a two-year hiatus, UGWA resumed the Children’s Water Festival. More than 200 fifth graders explored the Gila River at The Nature Conservancy’s Gila Farm in Cliff. The festival was a partnership between UGWA and the Ella Jaz Kirk Water Conservation Fund.

Teachers were enthusiastic about incorporating pre- and post-festival activities in the classrooms to reinforce the lessons learned at the river. On the day of the water festival, students cycled through six learning stations: (1) macroinvertebrates and water quality testing; (2) bird migration; (3) plants and pollinators; (4) river critter skulls; (5) people and the river; and (6) building a river.

The Children’s Water Festival honors the memory of Ella Jaz Kirk, Ella Myers and Michael Mahl, teen conservation leaders who died in May 2014. The three created the Gila River Natural History trunks during their sophomore year as members of a Youth Ecological Monitoring team, and were teachers at the Children’s Water Festival in spring 2014.

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It’s off to the landfill (see facing page).
Thank You!

New Members
[April 14–September 12, 2016]
Jeff & Allison Boyd • Pamela Bryant • Pat Cowan & Tim Bell • Azima Forest • Valerie McCaffrey • Frank Merritt • Wendy Phillips • David Turner • Patricia Walsh

Returning Members
[April 14–September 12, 2016]
Joanne Allen • Barrett & Sebert Brewer • Harry Browne • April Crosby & Merritt Helfferich • Lyle Dethlefsen • Thomas Dwyer • Nora Fiedler • Mike & Carol Fugagli • David Gierke • Katherine Gould-Martin & Bob Martin • Sandra & Glenn Griffin • Sarah Johnson & Kevin Keith • Tom Krohley & Esperanza Quintero • Raymond & Betty Lawson • Richard & Carolyn Martin • Larry McLaud & Carol Morrison • Marion & James Newton • Ron Parry • Robert Pittman • Peter & Sharman Russell • Howard Smith • Jill Steidl • Donna Stevens • Laurie Van Vliet • Dennis Weller • Karen Weller-Watson

Thank You to Our Funders
Altman Foundation
Ella Jaz Kirk Water Conservation Fund
McCune Charitable Foundation
National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance
New Venture Fund • Secure Rural Schools • The Wilderness Society

Special Thanks
Jack & Martha Carter, for donating dozens of copies of their book *Trees and Shrubs of New Mexico*, which we’re sending to members who donate $100 or more.
Becky Campbell, for use of her pack animals. Becky donated the use of her mules to pack garbage out of the Gila Wilderness Area in summer 2015.
SPECIAL OFFER!
This beautiful and informative book by Jack Carter will be sent to you free for a donation of $100 or more. It includes more than 500 full-color photos and 450 finely detailed illustrations and descriptions of almost 500 native and cultivated trees, shrubs, and woody vines known to occur in New Mexico. Distribution maps and dichotomous keys are also included.

UGWA Membership Application
Your membership and additional financial support sustain UGWA and are critical to the organization’s ongoing health. Share in the protection and conservation of our watershed and become an UGWA member today.

Name(s)

Address

City State Zip

Telephone

E-Mail

Membership Categories—Annual Dues:

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Make your check payable to UGWA and send to
PO Box 383, Gila NM 88038

☐ I don’t wish to join at this time, but please notify me of upcoming events:

Name

E-Mail
UGWA’s Statement of Philosophy

The members of the UGWA recognize a vital and necessary connection between our individual and collective rights and responsibilities as landowners and community members and the long-term stewardship of the Upper Gila River Valley and Watershed.

The members of the UGWA share a love and concern for our community which is an integral part of our lives and, therefore, seek to harmonize our presence and activities within the watershed for the health and integrity of the entire “community,” which includes the soil, the air, the water, the people, the plants, and animals.

The members of the UGWA share the conviction that men and women work best together in a spirit of cooperation, conflict resolution, and consensual agreement that builds upon a common ground that benefits from the views and concerns of each individual acting as uncoerced free agents.

To realize our vision for the common benefit of the entire community served by the Upper Gila Watershed, and for the sake of future generations, the UGWA seeks ways and means to bring people and organizations together in constructive dialogue and activities aimed at clear communication, education, land restoration, research, and local economic health.

UGWA Meeting Schedule
Monthly board meetings are usually the second Monday of the month, from 9–11 a.m.
All are welcome to attend.
For meeting location, please e-mail director@ugwa.org or call 575-590-5698.