West Fork of the Gila River. Photo: Carol Ann Fugagli

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After years of reviewing the Gila River diversion proponents’ various plans – originally very ambitious and expensive and later scaled back to more modest projects and price tags – 2019 has been especially eventful for conservationists. Under the Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA), the Secretary of the Interior was originally slated to release a formal Record of Decision by December 31, 2019 on whether to divert the Gila River. In October, however, the NM Central Arizona Project (CAP) Entity formally requested a time extension from Secretary David Bernhardt.

As of now, the draft Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled to be released in December 2019, with a 45 day public comment period to follow. A preliminary final EIS should come out in April, a final EIS in July, and a Record of Decision will be announced in September 2020.

Delays Abound  Why is an extension needed? The Bureau of Reclamation, the lead agency analyzing the ecological, socioeconomic, and cultural resources impacts of the various diversion project components, sent a letter to the CAP Entity on May 31, 2019 documenting that the Entity changed its proposed project eight times, even after the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) analysis began. The changes required Reclamation to redo its NEPA analyses many times, which led to the missed deadline (as well as increased expenditures).

Reclamation has also identified that “another primary source of delay in the NEPA schedule has been the extended period of time the Entity has taken to respond to Reclamation’s requests for specific design information needed to conduct the NEPA analysis.” As this newsletter goes to press, we have not yet heard Secretary Bernhardt’s decision. What are the implications of his verdict? The stakes could hardly be higher for the NM CAP Entity.

Scenario One  If granted an extension, the Entity can continue to plan for a diversion project. In October,
they whittled their project proposal down even further, limiting the project to two storage ponds in Virden. These ponds would store less than 500 acre feet of water total in two storage ponds, one on each side of the river a few miles upstream of the Arizona border, using existing irrigation diversion ditches.

At first glance, it appears that the “Virden only” alternative, as the CAP Entity calls it, would spare the river in the Cliff/Gila Valley the ecological impacts of a diversion. But there’s more to the story. The so-called “construction fund” of the AWSA, approximately $55M, can only be used for a diversion, and this money goes away at the end of 2019 unless Secretary Bernhardt grants an extension. Therefore, the main reason that the CAP Entity is pushing for the small Virden project, estimated to cost $7M, is to “put a stake in the ground,” in the words of CAP Entity attorney Pete Domenici, Jr. In other words, to hang onto the $55M.

If the CAP Entity gets an extension, they hope to build the Virden project and have more than $40M left over for a diversion in the Cliff/Gila Valley. Because Governor Lujan Grisham is opposed to a Gila River diversion, the CAP Entity hopes to wait for a more favorable administration. At recent CAP meetings, their battle cry has been, “We’ll never give up!”

Scenario Two If Secretary Bernhardt does not grant an extension, the NM CAP Entity will lose the AWSA $55M construction fund. To build a diversion, they would then have to dip into the NM “Unit Fund,” federal money from the AWSA, which now holds about $90M, minus the considerable amount already spent on diversion planning. Almost $20M of the Unit Fund has been expended in the last few years for Reclamation’s contractors to analyze ecological, socioeconomic, and archaeological impacts of the various diversion project components and to write the Environmental Impact Statement; to fund the Interstate Stream Commission’s Gila staff; to pay the NM CAP Entity’s Executive Director’s salary and attorney’s fees; and to cover other expenses.

The CAP Entity’s dilemma is that there is competition for the NM Unit Fund, which can be used for non-diversion projects, many of which have been identified by the four counties covered by the AWSA – Grant, Catron, Hidalgo, and Luna. Because the governor continues to make clear that she does not support a diversion - and in fact sent a letter to Secretary Bernhardt opposing the extension request - the CAP Entity is unlikely to prevail. The other quandary is that the NM Unit Fund lacks sufficient funds for an expensive diversion in the Cliff/Gila Valley, thus forcing the CAP Entity to conduct a challenging search for supplemental funding.

If an extension is not granted, the NM CAP Entity’s path forward is unclear. Will they disband, or try to make decisions on non-diversion projects? Will Governor Lujan Grisham reconfigure the CAP Entity so that it’s more representative of the community and includes conservation advocates?

We are definitely at a crossroads in our years-long campaign to keep the Gila River free-flowing. At this point, all we know for certain is that we’ll be following Yogi Berra’s famous advise: “When you get to a fork in the road, take it.”

Thank you to the Maki Foundation and Conservation Lands Foundation for our work to protect the wild Gila River.
Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

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.

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What IS A Chapter?
Whether you’re a lifelong environmentalist or a new activist just starting out, there’s a place for you in your local Climate Reality chapter.

Climate Reality chapters bring together people of all backgrounds and walks of life to push for practical clean energy solutions in their communities, creating and executing their own plans for climate action at the local level.

Already, Climate Reality chapters have become a vital force for progress, helping expand clean energy alternatives, tackling the legacy of fossil fuels in low-income communities, and pushing for carbon pricing policies, to name just a few of the many campaigns already underway.

The only pre-requisite to joining a chapter is the desire to make a difference. And with over 160 chapters and growing in cities, towns, and campuses across the US, there are many ways to get involved with other activists in your community.

Why Join?
By joining your local Climate Reality chapter, you’ll:

- Connect with a local network of engaged activists just like you.
- Gain the skills and have access to the resources you need to help you make a difference.
- Help bring real climate solutions to your community.
- Ensure the US continues to move forward at a critical time in the fight for climate solutions.

JOIN the Silver City Chapter!
Contact: Carol Ann Fugagli: admin@ugwa.org

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Conservation By Any Other Name

By Donna Stevens

What’s in a name? Can people be “conservationists” without realizing it? In Grant County, Hispanics make up half of the population. According to a 2018 poll, 83% of them support Wild and Scenic designation for the Gila River. Three quarters oppose a Gila River diversion. When asked about military trainings over the Gila National Forest and Gila Wilderness, 70% say that the Air Force should conduct trainings over less sensitive areas.

Yet, attend a local meeting about any conservation issue, and you’ll encounter a largely Anglo audience. The hypotheses about lack of Hispanic attendance at meetings are various: they’re too busy earning a living and raising their families; theirs is a family-oriented, versus meeting-oriented, culture; there’s a historic divide between the Anglo and Hispanic communities, replete with prejudice and segregation; or a combination of these factors.

To help bridge the gap between Hispanics’ self-professed support of conservation and their lack of representation at meetings, UGWA, with our partners in the Wilderness Society, began a new program called “Nuestro Gila.” We hired a Nuestro Gila outreach person, Corina Castillo, to do one-on-one organizing in the Mining District (Bayard, Hurley, Santa Clara) and Silver City.

Here’s how Corina describes her interest in doing this work:

I was born and raised in a Hispanic Grant County family that loved to be outdoors. The word “conservation” was foreign to me and, although we did the things that constitute conservation, I didn’t really connect the two. After graduating from Cobre High School and moving to Phoenix to complete my undergraduate degree, I realized how much the Gila meant to me and how much of my formative years had occurred there. I returned home and began working in positions that aligned with my bachelor’s degree, but I realized my heart wasn’t in it. I began hearing about community organizers in Grant County doing some great work and wanted to be a part of that somehow. When the opportunity arose, I jumped at it! I look forward to helping my community and my people realize that they have been doing conservation all along and need to have a louder voice in the processes that occur around the land we love and call home.

I relate to Corina’s words, although my upbringing was different. I was raised in Chicago, where nature-based experiences are rare (unless you include encountering huge rats in the park at dusk). My mother certainly didn’t call herself a conservationist, but she hated waste and overconsumption. I got in trouble if I didn’t bring home my paper bag from my school lunch. I can still hear her saying, “It’s a perfectly good bag! Why throw it away each day?” These values were instilled in me from an early age, just as Corina’s love of the outdoors was something she learned as a child. “Conservation” was something we did, without thinking about it or needing a label.

At some point, Corina and I realized that the term “conservationist” applied to us. How many Grant County residents care deeply about the Gila River and Gila National Forest but haven’t labeled themselves as conservationists? How many Hispanics are ready to step up to the plate to defend the natural world, but have never been invited to do so, or welcomed into the conservation community?

Through the Nuestro Gila campaign, we’re about to find out. Corina will be tabling at community events, and doing outreach through phone banking and door-to-door canvassing. She’ll talk with local Hispanics about conservation issues, and gather letters of support for wilderness, protection of the Gila National Forest, Wild and Scenic River designation, and more.

The ecological crises we’re facing today are dire, and it’s past time to include everyone in defense of the natural world. I keep flashing back to these words from Ben Jealous, former president of NAACP and 2018 candidate for governor of Maryland: “If you are comfortable in your coalition, your coalition is too small.”

Thank you to the Wilderness Society, Resources Legacy Fund, and Conservation Lands Foundation for Nuestro Gila funding.
Welcome to the Anthropocene

Text and photos by Mike Fugagli

In their latest and most frantic warning yet to humanity, published November 15, 2019 in Bioscience, 11,000 scientist signatories from around the world declared “clearly and unequivocally that planet Earth is facing a climate emergency,” and that “an immense increase of scale in endeavors to conserve our biosphere is needed to avoid untold suffering due to the climate crisis.”

Two years ago, when UGWA’s climate advocacy and youth empowerment project, Thinking ON a Mountain, began, there was little recognition, outside of scientific circles, that our global environmental predicament warranted this kind of red alert, that, in fact, our time was up and the prevention of a “hot house” future where large portions of the Earth’s surface could become uninhabitable would require immediate and unprecedented action at a global scale.

Since then, while UGWA has been turning up the volume on climate justice issues right here in southwest New Mexico, the rest of the world has finally begun to grapple with the scale and scope of our environmental predicament. Reality is finally seeping in. After a half century of dithering, a recent surge of concern is sweeping the globe with governmental bodies making climate emergency declarations, schoolchildren striking, ecocide lawsuits proceeding in the courts, grassroots citizen movements demanding change, and many countries, states and provinces, cities, and businesses responding to the urgent need for major transformations in the ways our global society functions and interacts with natural ecosystems.

Driving this recent surge of concern is the simple fact that the science has become unequivocal, forcing societies all over the world to wake up and consider their ethical, legal, and constitutional obligations to those most affected by our climate and ecological emergencies, including young people, people of color, future generations, and the rest of the living world.

Locally, Thinking ON a Mountain’s focus on youth empowerment is designed to help facilitate rapid social change by giving voice to the clear moral authority that young people, in particular, bring to our climate conversation. Through no fault of their own, our youth are now the recipients of a severely degraded planet and a future where success can only be defined by restoration, resilience, and recovery, terms of regeneration and renewal that divulge in their meanings the urgent need for planetary healing. Shouldering the burden of ecological knowledge, Thinking ON a Mountain’s young climate advocates understand that the future will not be like the past. They know that they have been forcibly ejected from a stable-state earth-climate system into an increasingly hotter and more chaotic future. They know that 93% of all the heat added to the planet since industrialization began has been absorbed by our threatened oceans.

They know that the current rate of planetary heating is equivalent to the additional energy of 500,000 Hiroshima-style atomic bombs exploding every 24 hours.

They know that the seas are rising, the corals are dying, the forests are burning, and, at both ends of the world, polar ice is collapsing. They know that human agency is a shrinking asset and that our species’ ability to forestall a tragic “hot house” future, at this late date, demands urgent action, and that many powerful people are actively working to prevent that action by denying young people their equal protection rights to a livable world. They know that our climate emergency is just one part of the larger ecological crisis that is unfolding primarily as a crisis of will, a human-caused mass extinction event driven by habitat destruction and degradation at a global scale. They know, in other words, when they are, the meaning of this transformative moment, and it’s a heavy burden to bear.

But for young and old alike, I think, the path to empowerment lies in transforming the meaning of this moment. If nothing else, our ecological and climate crises have given humanity a pretty big chance to shine. From an evolutionary perspective, I suppose our big, self-reflective brains are being tested for their
capacity to work peaceably, at a global scale, to organize a rapid, rational, and effective response to our planetary woes. And you know what? In some quarters it’s going pretty well. For example, the affordability of renewable energy and its exponential rise globally in the energy sector is very good news, giving credence to the technical possibility of reaching the global goal of net-zero emissions by mid-century. And importantly, it reminds us, in those moments more prone toward pessimism, that it’s not like we’re facing a challenge that we don’t understand and without any intellectual or technological tools to get the job done; we know what has to be done, and we know how to do it! So go ahead and kiss an environmental scientist next time you see one because we are facing this dangerous moment with an astonishing amount of understanding and creativity, giving our edifice of hope a solid foundation of possibility.

Still, the challenges posed by our climate and ecological emergencies are less technological than spiritual.

Our ability to rise to this occasion will require us to manifest a larger, more comprehensive version of ourselves, understanding that living in the Anthropocene, our new geological epoch, actually changes what it means to be human. In fact, you can think of the present moment, I suppose, as a do or die ethics exam for our species, with the big essay on intergenerational equity worth almost our entire final grade.

The simple truth that humanity has now become the principal driver of global ecological change is hard for many people to accept, I think, primarily because of the direct moral implications that admission entails; it puts us squarely in the driver’s seat, fully responsible now as “the stewards of life’s continuity on Earth.” We have gone, in the blink of an eye, from a small world on a big planet to a big world on a small planet. We no longer have the luxury of an all-forgiving biosphere. In fact, Earth-system scientists no longer even recognize social and ecological systems as distinct entities; it’s all combined for them now in one big, not so happy at the moment, socio-ecological system changing so fast that our ability to steer, to have any say at all about our planetary future and the width of the mass extinction pinch point that awaits us, is rapidly slipping away.

So it’s time to act. The science is clear; what we do in the next ten years will determine what kind of planet we will have for the next ten thousand. Sounds scary at first, but talk about empowerment! Never before in the entire history of our species have we had such a moment.

Never before has a single generation had the capacity to affect the entire course of our planetary future.

Yes, the house is on fire. Yes, it’s an emergency. But it is also a moment ripe with meaning and filled with opportunity.

For decades now we have been caught between two worlds: one dying and one helpless to be born. But those days are over. Led now by the idealism of our striking youth, the world is finally waking up. Rebellion is in the air. So act! Speak up! Be like Greta! Join the conversation! Make a difference! You will never have more power than you do at this moment. And you will never have this chance again.

Thinking ON a Mountain is a youth empowerment and climate advocacy project of the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance. Our goal is to develop young climate leaders in our community by providing high school students with an accelerated path toward ecological literacy through hands-on field ecology studies in important climatic refugia areas, and by providing the resources and opportunities needed to advocate successfully for environmental justice and intergenerational equity.

Thank you to the Lineberry Foundation and Conservation Lands Foundation for Thinking ON a Mountain funding.
In solidarity with the Fridays for Future movement, UGWA's Thinking ON a Mountain youth have been protesting in Gough Park every Friday for 35 weeks. September 20 was a global call to action inviting adults to join the youth cli-
Climate Change Strikers

Climate movement. This event was also part of the Gila River Festival, with Aldo Leopold Charter School students marching from the school to Gough Park, where they met up with other climate strikers. Nearly 500 people participated.

Upper left photo credit Mike Fugagli. All other photos Hawk Fugagli.
Before Susana Martinez became New Mexico’s governor in 2011, UGWA was making progress in our quest to return river otters to the Gila River. We were optimistic enough to build temporary otter holding pods, which were later mothballed in The Nature Conservancy’s barn when reintroduction plans were put on hold during the Martinez administration. Her appointed Game Commissioners looked askance at predators, even ones as charming as river otters.

But there are occasional opportunities even during a hostile administration. Here’s an unusually exuberant verbatim entry from my UGWA timesheet for February 23, 2012: “Attended NM Game Commission mtg. Spoke in favor of otter reintro. WON!!!” This joyous timesheet entry is a reference to a Game Commission meeting held in Hobbs. Four river otter enthusiasts from Silver City, including me, drove six hours to attend this meeting, where we were joined by our otter partners from northern New Mexico. This meeting is an example of my homegrown principle: “The world is run by those who show up.” Because half a dozen people spoke up for otters in the remote outpost of Hobbs, the Game Commission opted to temporarily shelve river otter reintroduction, rather than to kill the idea outright. As I reasoned at the time, “A ‘maybe’ is better than a ‘no.’”

With the Lujan Grisham administration’s new Game Commission ensconced, UGWA and our river otter partners up north are once again exploring the possibility of reintroducing river otters into the Gila. In September, we met with Gila National Forest fish biologists, who expressed cautious support for river otter reintroduction. Their concern – and ours – is the impact of otters on threatened and endangered fish species such as spikedace and loach minnow. There is evidence, however, that otters will prey mainly on slower, introduced species, e.g., the invasive crayfish, and largely ignore the speedy, less-than-a-mouthful endangered minnows.

In the coming months, the otter partners will contract with a biologist to update fish inventories and studies that are now several years old. Our northern NM colleagues will meet with the NM Dept. of Game and Fish biologists to nudge the reintroduction effort forward, and we’ll begin doing public outreach to generate widespread public support for the return of river otters to their ancestral home in the Gila.

If you’d like to make a donation to the river otter effort, which is currently unfunded, please write a check to UGWA with “river otter” on the memo line.
Rivers sometimes sprint to their destinations. Other times they slowly, steadily make their way to journey’s end – here surging ahead, there meandering a bit.

Slow and steady works not just for turtles and rivers, but also as a strategy to pass legislation. The coalition of nonprofits, including UGWA, working towards Wild and Scenic River designation for the Gila and San Francisco Rivers, as well as major tributaries, continues to make progress.

Only Congress has the authority to designate rivers as Wild and Scenic.

Because we know that it can sometimes take years for legislation to pass, we are prepared for the long haul. But the clock is running out for legislation to be introduced by Gila Wild and Scenic River champion Senator Tom Udall, who is stepping down from Congress in 2020.

One of Udall’s goals was achieved in September, when the Grant County Commissioners voted 4-1 in favor of a resolution to support Wild and Scenic River designation. In October, NM Wild (aka New Mexico Wilderness Alliance) organized a group of southwest New Mexico Wild and Scenic supporters to fly to Washington, DC to meet with Senators Udall and Heinrich. Both senators expressed their unwavering commitment to permanent protection of approximately 445 miles of the Gila, San Francisco, and tributaries through Wild and Scenic River legislation.

Wild and Scenic River lovers will continue to make our way, deliberately and doggedly, to our designation destination.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the November 2018 issue of Carapace has a lengthy article on W&S. See ugwa.org for this article and others. Thank you to Conservation Lands Foundation for funding our work on Wild & Scenic.
Two years ago, when residents of southwest New Mexico learned that Holloman Air Force Base was proposing to conduct F-16 military trainings over the Gila National Forest and Gila and Aldo Leopold Wilderness Areas, the outcry of public opposition was swift and vehement. It is once again time for a strong response to this threat to our quality of life. In late October, the Air Force released its draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which analyzes environmental, social, and cultural impacts of its three proposed alternatives.

The Air Force is holding a series of public meetings, where there will be a short poster display, followed by a presentation and public comments. The Silver City meeting is on Wednesday, December 4, from 5:30-8:30 pm, at the Grant County Conference Center, 3031 Hwy 180 East (next to Ace Hardware). Please attend, because it’s important to show strong opposition to military trainings over the Gila.

The DEIS has three alternatives for expanded airspace across southern New Mexico for F-16 pilot trainings. Although the Air Force acknowledges that current airspace is adequate for F-16 combat training, it proposes an additional 10,000 training sorties (flights) annually and discharge of 15,000 flares and 15,000 bundles of chaff annually. (Chaff consists of bundles of aluminum-coated fiberglass smaller than a human hair. The DEIS doesn’t adequately assess the potential impacts of chaff on air and water quality, wildlife, and human health.)

Alternatives 2 and 3 would add 4.5 million acres of Special Use Airspace, including the new Lobos Military Operations Area (MOA), for a total of 7 million acres of training area over the Gila region, largely in places the Air Force has not used before. Areas affected would include: Silver City and the Mining District communities, Las Cruces, Truth or Consequences and Socorro; the Gila and Cibola National Forests; wilderness areas such as the Gila, Aldo Leopold, Robledo Mountains and Sierra de las Uvas; and tourist attractions, such as the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument and Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. These places are quiet and distinguished by a wealth of unique natural assets. People living
in southwest New Mexico will receive no economic benefits from intense training by F-16s coming from Holloman Air Force Base, but will experience extreme noise, pollution, increased risk of catastrophic wildfires, and severe impacts to tourism and outdoor-based economies.

Alternatives 2 and 3 are overkill for Holloman’s stated F-16 training airspace needs. Holloman has admitted that its current airspace is adequate for its training mission, although it wants to improve airspace efficiency. Alternatives 2 and 3 create a continuous block of military training airspace from Phoenix to eastern New Mexico. This block would be the largest mix of MOAs, Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA), and restricted airspace over any land in the continental U.S. It would be a magnet for more training use in the future from other bases, including F-35s from Davis-Monthan that are reportedly four times louder than the F-16. This would be a radical increase in military training in southern New Mexico.

Alternative 1 would expand the existing Talon MOA that Holloman currently uses over southeastern New Mexico, east of Alamogordo. Military aircraft have trained there intensively for a long time, benefitting the economies of Alamogordo and Otero County.

The Air Force acknowledges that Alternative 1 meets its training needs and airspace optimization goals with the fewest risks and impacts. We recognize the role of Holloman’s F-16 pilot training mission to national defense. Alternative 1 best meets those needs.

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<th>Alternative 2 – SW New Mexico</th>
<th>Alternative 3 – SW &amp; SE New Mexico</th>
<th>Alternative 1 – SE New Mexico</th>
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<tr>
<td>Creates large new Lobos MOA</td>
<td>Combines Alts 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Expansion of existing military airspace</td>
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<td>Reconfigures and expands Cato/Smitty MOA</td>
<td>Creates new Lobos MOA, reconfigures &amp; expands Cato/Smitty MOA, expands Talon MOA, and creates new additional airspaces</td>
<td>New airspace: 1 million acres</td>
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<td>Adds other additional airspaces</td>
<td>New airspace – 4.5 million acres</td>
<td>Total Talon expanded airspace: 2 million acres</td>
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<td>New airspace – 4.5 million acres</td>
<td>Total airspace—7 million acres</td>
<td>Long history of air combat training</td>
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<td>10,000+ annual training sorties (flights)</td>
<td>10,000+ annual training sorties</td>
<td>No Wilderness areas affected</td>
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<td>15,000 flares/15,000 chaff released annually</td>
<td>15,000 flares/15,000 chaff released annually</td>
<td>No history of catastrophic forest fires</td>
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<td>Low elevation and supersonic flights allowed in specified areas</td>
<td>Low elevation &amp; supersonic flights allowed in specified areas</td>
<td>Positive impact to local economy</td>
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<td>Wilderness affected: approximately 1 million acres</td>
<td>Wilderness areas affected: approx. 700,000 million acres in NM</td>
<td>Meets all F-16 training needs</td>
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<td>Substantial history of large-scale catastrophic forest fire</td>
<td>Substantial history of large-scale catastrophic forest fires in SW NM</td>
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<td>Severe impact to local economies</td>
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How to Write Effective Comments

When writing comments on the proposed Holloman Air Force Base military trainings over southwest New Mexico, it’s important to understand the process. Comments can be a Force is legally obligated to respond to all substantive comments and address all concerns.

But there’s no way for them to address non-substantive comments, such as “I don’t support these trainings over the Gila.” Because this is not a voting process, comments like this are useless.

Substantive comments bring up real issues of concern that the Air Force must address. Examples include:

- Many veterans use the Gila and Aldo Leopold Wilderness Areas to encounter solitude and heal from PTSD. F-16 jets flying at low levels over wilderness will trigger their PTSD.
- Wildlife exposed to excessive F-16 noise will experience stress, which could result in depressed breeding success and inability to hear the approach of predators.
- The Gila Wilderness Area is the nation’s first designated wilderness. This remote area attracts visitors from around the nation and the world. Visitation will decrease if the wilderness becomes a military training area, and local businesses will suffer loss of income.

You get the idea. You can express your disapproval of the military trainings such that the Air Force must address your legitimate concerns, and not just toss aside your opinion.

Comments can be submitted at the December 4 meeting in Silver City. You may submit your comments via Peaceful Gila Skies at https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/f-16 The comment deadline has been extended until January 31, 2020.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

Holloman Air Force Base Meeting on Proposed Military Trainings
Wednesday, December 4, 5:30-8:30 pm
Grant County Conference Center, 3031 Hwy 180 East, Silver City (next to Ace Hardware)

Meeting format:
- 5:30 pm Open house with poster displays staffed by Air Force representatives
- 6:00 pm Presentation by Air Force on proposed action and alternatives, followed by public comment period

For more information, see article on page 12
For tips on writing comments, see sidebar to the left.
Excerpt from: Wild and Scenic Rivers Act
Frequently Asked Questions:

Background, Intent, Implications
Prepared by the Offices of Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, September 2019.

How is the legislative process different than the eligibility study being conducted as part of the Gila National Forest Plan Revision?

The Forest Service is in the process of revising the Gila National Forest Plan, an administrative process that will include a Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Study. That study will include a list of river segments within the Gila National Forest that the agency finds eligible for WSR designation based on Forest Service-specific criteria. The Plan will also include direction for managing those segments over the life of the Plan.

The Plan makes only temporary determinations and recommendations, and management outlined in the plan can change at any time through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Only Congress can make WSR determinations and protections permanent, which is why Senators Udall and Heinrich will be introducing legislation.

Are there effects of WSR designation on private landowners within a river corridor?

Private lands will not be considered for inclusion in the senators’ WSR legislation unless a private landowner indicates interest. Under the Act, designation neither gives nor implies government control of private lands within the river corridor, whether or not private land is included within the legislated boundaries. Although many rivers already designated include private lands within the boundaries of the designated river corridor, management practices only apply to federal lands. Put simply, under the Act, the federal government has no authority to regulate private lands, and people living within a river corridor may use their private property with the same flexibility as they had before designation.

Designation of federal lands adjacent to private lands does not provide permission for the public to access or use the private lands in any way. Public use of private lands remains at the sole discretion of the private landowner.

Would WSR designation affect the New Mexico Central Arizona Project (CAP) Entity’s proposed action under the Arizona Water Settlements Act?

The senators’ legislation will be crafted not to impede the New Mexico CAP Entity’s current proposed action.

Does WSR designation affect access by the public for fishing, hunting, boating, camping, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, hiking, and other forms of recreation?

No. WSR designation neither limits the public from accessing public lands within designated river corridors nor opens private lands to public access. Routes and trails can be maintained, and new access may be considered based on segment classification.

Designation has no effect on fishing and hunting. Where hunting and fishing were allowed prior to designation, they may continue. These activities will continue to fall under the jurisdiction of the State of New Mexico as would game management.

Does WSR designation affect existing water rights?

Designation does not affect valid, existing water rights, nor are interstate compacts affected.

Common Merganser with Young. Photo credit: Mike Fugagli.

Long-eared Owl. Photo credit: Mike Fugagli.
Thank You!

New Members [April 6 - November 14, 2019]

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