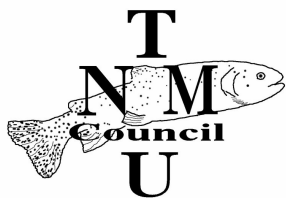


New Mexico Council of Trout Unlimited



Fish Wrap

Volume 2, Issue 2

Summer 2006

New Mexico Council Of Trout Unlimited

P.O. Box 32952
Santa Fe, NM 97594

William Schudlich

State Council Chairman
505-470-4878
bschudlich@outsidemag.com

Kevin Reilly

National Leadership
Council Representative
505-466-3786
kevinreilly@gmail.com

Inside this issue:

New Mexico Happenings 1

Valle Vidal Protection Act Moves 1

TU Awarded \$360,000 CFRP Grant 2

Gila Trout Downlisting Update 2

TU Awarded \$102,000 for Rio Costilla 3

New Mexico Happenings

By Bill Schudlich

I apologize that I haven't gotten a newsletter out since February, but Kevin and I have been up to our eyeballs with various issues and projects going on throughout the state. This I can tell you for certain, you are getting more than your money's worth for your TU dues this year in New Mexico. Here are some of the things that TU has been working on/ accomplished this year in the state:

- ▶ Received a \$360,000 Collaborative Forest Restoration Program grant for the Aldo Leopold Wilderness. (page 2)
- ▶ Received a \$102,000 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant for the Rio Costilla. (page 3)
- ▶ Instrumental in establishing the Upper Pecos Watershed Association.
- ▶ Instrumental in helping develop the state's Roadless Petition including the Valle Vidal.
- ▶ Played a big role in the advancement of the Valle Vidal Protection Act in the House.
- ▶ Instrumental in the approval and completion of the West Fork Gila Project.
- ▶ Continued to work with the Valles Caldera Coalition to improve habitat and access.

▶ Continue to participate in the Comanche Creek Work Weekends

▶ I wrote a short piece on Gila trout and piscicides for the upcoming issue of Trout.

▶ I also did a piece in the Sonoran Institute's report *Backcountry Bounty: Hunters, angler and Prosperity in the American West* (see: www.sonoran.org).

I'd bet there isn't another state in the nation where TU is playing a bigger role in defining the conservation landscape for the benefit of fishermen. I've tried to give updates on a few of these issues in this newsletter.

All that said, we are still seriously struggling to solidify TU here in New Mexico. We have only one active chapter, and I've been unsuccessful in getting any additional chapters started in either Albuquerque or Las Cruces/Silver City. This is somewhat unfortunate as I think we could do even more, and we will need volunteers to step up on some of these grant projects. Frankly, I'm starting to burn out at this point.

I'm glad to see the monsoons have started in earnest as we really need the rain, even if it did mess up my 4th of July fishing trip. I hope you are all getting out there and doing some fishing.

Valle Vidal Protection Act Moves Through U.S. House

In a surprise move, Congressman Udall's *Valle Vidal Protection Act* (HB 3817) was passed out of the House Resources committee by unanimous consent in June and was moved on to the full house. At that point, Congresswoman Wilson decided to co-sponsor the legislation.

Since this is considered to be non-controversial legislation, it is tagged for what they call the "suspension calendar" meaning that house rules are suspended, and the legislation is passed out of the house without debate and then moves on to the senate. What we need to do now is to get this legislation

on that suspension calendar, and soon. If this session of congress comes to an end without the bill getting passed by the senate, we are back to square one.

The objective is to get the legislation on the calendar in either July or September, as congress is in recess in August. If we can move the legislation out of the house, we will have but a couple months to get it through the senate. Whether it moves through the senate falls on the shoulders of one man, Senator Domenici.

(Continued on page 3)

TU Awarded \$360,000 CFRP Grant

Trout Unlimited was awarded a Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) grant in the amount of \$360,000 this year for the purposes of re-establishing a natural fire regime in the Gila National Forest and for the construction of two fish passage barriers.

The bulk of this grant money will be spent doing an environmental assessment in preparation for a controlled burn that will secure approximately 89,000 acres of Gila trout habitat in the Aldo Leopold Wilderness.

This was a pretty controversial grant, and during the funding meeting, it was touch and go whether this grant would happen or not. The Collaborative Forest Restoration Program exists only in New Mexico, originating from the 'Community Forest Restoration Act' of 2000, which was sponsored by Senator Bingaman and co-sponsored by Senator Domenici. The program was designed to help local communities that interface with the national forests in New Mexico by reducing fire threats and by adding to the economies through the sustainable use of forest products. I believe that this is the first time this grant program was used to support a controlled burn. By proposing this project, we seem to have opened up some controversy on how the USFS and the USFWS communicate with each other when controlled burns are done in the presence of endangered species. Hopefully this grant will also help those agencies sort through some of their problems.

Our reasoning behind the grant is that by securing habitat for Gila trout and other imperiled native fishes in the Gila, local communities would benefit from improved recreational opportunities. By doing large burns in the Gila under controlled circumstances, we hope to slow down the threat of the large uncontrolled crowning fires that have caused so much damage to the forest and to the Gila trout over the past decade. The area to be burned is within the South Diamond Creek drainage. With the impending down-listing of the Gila trout, it is more important than ever to pick up the pace of restoration efforts.

In addition to the money for the controlled burn, there are also dollars that will be used to build a couple fish passage barriers for two non-trout species.

Kira Finkler from Trout Unlimited's DC office was instrumental in getting this grant money for us. She helped put together the proposal and associated budgets and coordinated with the local Forest Service staff. Since Kira also worked on the legislation that created this grant program, I felt confident going into the funding meeting that we had a real good shot at getting this grant, and I was not disappointed. We were able to get letters of support for our grant proposal from several environmental and conservation organizations throughout the state.

More information on this program can be found on the internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/spf/cfrp>.

Gila Update

If you remember a year ago, the US Fish & Wildlife Service first proposed the idea of downlisting the Gila trout from a status of *Endangered* to one of *Treatened*. Well, it appears that they are following through and have published the final notice to downlist. There is currently a 30 day comment period going on, at the end of which, the fish will officially be classified as Threatened.

Unfortunately, little has changed for the condition of the Gila trout since the proposal was first published a year ago. They clearly did not meet their own recovery plan objectives, but have decided to go ahead anyway. There is no explanation for this other than some officials trying to make themselves look good, and trying to show progress where little exists. If you were to ask the members of the recovery team if the fish should be downlisted at this point, they answer would be no. But unfortunately, the people that have worked most closely on Gila trout recovery can not speak openly about the situation, and have to fear for their jobs under the current environment.

The work on the West Fork Gila River, that TU was instrumental in getting going again, has not yet been completed. The last trip was cut short by the threat of wildfire. A team is in there now assessing the work that was done on the shortened trip, and if the river is found to be clean of exotic fish, hopefully fish from the Whiskey Creek lineage can be stocked out this fall.

The New Mexico Council Needs Your Help!

We are looking for people interested in protecting the coldwater resources in New Mexico. We are specifically looking for people to help start chapters in the Albuquerque, Taos, and Las Cruces/Silver City areas. If you can help in any of the following areas, please contact:

Bill Schudlich at 505-470-4878.

I'm interested in:

- ⇒ **Starting a Chapter in my area**
- ⇒ **Helping with the NM State Council**
- ⇒ **A specific watershed project**

Send an e-mail to bschudlich@outsidemag.com and I will add you to an action list which will distribute information on issues of pressing concern.

Gila Update (cont)

The Whiskey Creek lineage has not yet been replicated, and one of the primary objectives of the recovery plan was to replicate all four lineages.

Also, the replicate populations of the Spruce Creek lineage are dubious at best. The two creeks in Arizona where there fish are located have shown limited reproductive capabilities and are rather short. All in all, the fish is still in a fairly perilous position.

Downlisting does give us an opportunity to expand the areas in which restoration can take place. It also opens up the possibility of using some of the surplus fish at the Mora hatchery for recreational purposes. With the downlisting comes the possibility of some fishing opportunities for Gilas, but we will have to wait until next year for the NM Department of Game & Fish to change the fishing regulations and set up some areas for fishing.

Valle Vidal (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

So here I am asking one more time for the members of Trout Unlimited to make a call to both Representative Wilson and Senator Domenici.

If we can get this legislation through congress this year, we will protect the Valle Vidal from energy development, and I'll be able to get a big chunk of my life back, as this has been incredibly time consuming. Especially for an issue that should be a no-brainer.

Look for the contact information for Representative Wilson and Senator Domenici on this page of the newsletter and call them.

If you know Senator Domenici or are close to someone who knows him, please email me. We are making a push to have people who know him personally contact him about this issue.

Take Action!

» If you are a member in the **Las Cruces, Silver City, Taos or Albuquerque** area, and are interested in getting a TU chapter up and running. Please contact **Bill Schudlich**.

» Please call **Representative Heather Wilson (505) 346-6781** and tell her that you want to see the **Valle Vidal Protection Act** on the house suspension calendar as soon as possible! (see page 1)

» Please call **Senator Domenici (505) 988-6511** and tell him to support the **Valle Vidal Protection Act** in the senate! (see page 1)

TU Awarded \$102,000 for Rio Grande Cutthroat Restoration

Trout Unlimited was awarded a \$102,000 grant to begin work on the Rio Costilla project to restore Rio Grande cutthroat trout (RGCT) to 120 stream miles and several lakes, including Costilla Reservoir. This is a pretty exciting award for us, as it opens the door for more grants, and creates a higher profile for our state fish on the national conservation map.

This first grant is specifically for the completion of some work that is necessary to protect existing populations. The bulk of this money will go towards the construction of a barrier on Comanche Creek to protect the pure populations of RGCT in the upper reaches of that stream. Currently, the culvert at the road crossing of FR1950 is acting as a barrier, but it is by no means secure.

There is also some money tagged for macro-invertebrate studies and genetic testing of existing fish. The macro-invertebrate studies are important as the piscicide treatments that will be necessary to complete this project will have a temporary impact on the bug populations. We want to know what kinds of bugs and in what amounts are in the stream.

Trout Unlimited is a partner in a large project to restore our state fish, the Rio Grande cutthroat trout to the Rio Costilla drainage in northern New Mexico. This is a cooperative effort that includes the NM Department of Game and Fish, the US Forest Service, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, the Interstate Stream Commission, the Rio Costilla Cooperative Livestock Association, Turner Enterprises, and New Mexico Trout. The

land owners on this project are currently drawing up a collaborative conservation agreement with assurances to protect their rights if the fish were to get listed. Besides securing the cutthroat, it is hoped that this project will add economically to the area, as people will likely want to travel to New Mexico for an opportunity to catch this rare fish.

Currently, the approval for the necessary piscicide treatments for the overall Costilla project still rests with the Water Quality Control Commission. We hope that they will address this issue at the August meeting. It is a possibility, even if the commission approves, that there will be legal action from Dr. Ann McCampbell of the NM Chemicals Sensitivity Taskforce. Dr. McCampbell is under some false impressions about the impacts of these piscicides on human and environmental health.

Also of note is that a couple private landowners in Colorado have also been awarded grants to restore RGCT cutthroat trout over the border. The range of the RGCT extends from southern New Mexico all the way up to the headwaters of the Rio Grande high in the San Juan mountains between Creede and Silverton, Colorado.

If you are interested in volunteering for our current work on Comanche Creek, please contact Bill Schudlich. We have a work weekend scheduled for the end of August (dates not official yet). We typically camp for free on these weekends behind the Shuree Lodge.



New Mexico Council of Trout Unlimited
P.O. Box 32952
Santa Fe, NM 87594

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
#463
SANTA FE, NM

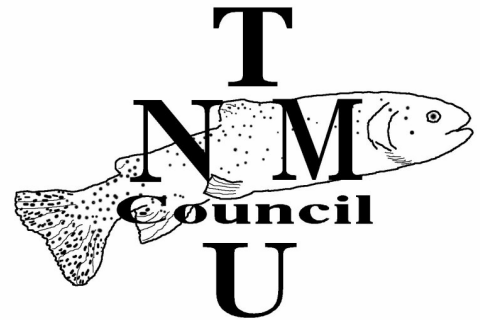
Help the New Mexico Council Address Pressing Issues in New Mexico!

Because we are such a young state council, we are operating on a shoestring budget right now. Your contributions, no matter how small, can help us address some of the pressing issues in New Mexico in a more effective manner.

Dear New Mexico Council of Trout Unlimited,

Please use my tax deductible contribution of \$_____ to work on these important issues in New Mexico.

- Coal Bed Methane Drilling in the Valle Vidal
- Re-introduction of our native Rio Grande cutthroat trout
- Gila trout recovery



Mail contributions to: New Mexico Council of Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 32952, Santa Fe, NM 87594