

BOSQUE WATCH



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In a Nutshell: Bosque del Apache NWR Biology Program

**As presented by John Vradenburg, Supervisory
Biologist, Bosque del Apache NWR**

Last fall at the Friends annual meeting, Supervisory Biologist, John Vradenburg provided an overview of the refuge biology program and possible future changes at the refuge. John has kindly agreed to allow me to synthesize his presentation into an article for the newsletter. --The Editor

In overview, the biology program at Bosque del Apache NWR has a number of components including outreach, habitat management and research, and habitat condition work. In 2014 persistent drought continued through spring and into the fall with limited water supplies throughout the summer. As a result, several wetland areas were taken out of production. Although the somewhat late monsoon provided much needed surface irrigation water, as of October it appeared that the limited water supply throughout the Rio Grande watershed might compromise winter wetland flooding. In part because of limited water to flush the wetlands, winter 2013/2014 was a bad disease year.* The New Mexico meadow jumping mouse is now listed as endangered as well as the yellow-billed cuckoo. The summer mouse surveys identified nineteen individuals, the highest annual count in recent years.

**Editor's Note: avian cholera rates so far in 2014/2015 are even higher than last year, affecting the light geese population but also the sandhill cranes.*

Outreach

It goes without saying that the education and outreach program at Bosque del Apache for young students and professionals has global reach. Activities this past year included a "Biology Fundamentals" course taught at National Refuge Academy, continued participation in the Middle Rio Grande Valley (MRGV) Collaborative Program, private lands efforts (the refuge did a wetland review for the Armendaris Ranch which adjoins the refuge on the south boundary), collaborative work with numerous universities, a summer intern program, initial planning for an International Arid Wetlands Symposium, and a winter meeting with biologists from Mexico.

Habitat Management

A short list of accomplishments includes the completion of a seasonal river channel on the north loop and the beginning of savannah restoration efforts on unit 18C. A mouse habitat management plan was implemented and three new Langemann gates were installed on the riverside ditch supplying wetlands. The process for installing a Langemann gate provided as a donation through the Friends was begun on the Socorro ditch. The refuge successfully tested seven heirloom corn varieties. Next steps included testing energetics and bird use of these varieties and then a larger scale test planting next year.

Research



The puma project run by Furman University is ongoing, but the elk project done by a student from Texas Tech has been completed and a thesis submitted.* The crane energetic study by New Mexico State University, which includes banding and blood isotope work, is ongoing. This winter telemeters will be placed on cranes in the MRGV which will allow GPS tracking of crane movements. In the near future, Sul Ross University will initiate a “wetlands condition” project to evaluate new flooding regimes to control invasive species and promote invertebrate production.

**Editor's Note: both projects were supported in part with funds through the Friends.*

Habitat Conditions – Wetlands

In wetland areas where flooding was possible, food production has been excellent. However due to limited water, 40% of the cocklebur mowing/flooding could not be done this summer. Needless to say, the cockleburs thrived requiring additional refuge resources this fall to deal with the growth. In general, the riparian communities are stressed and there has been extensive tree loss particularly in willows. The impact on older trees is not yet clear.

Habitat Conditions – Crops



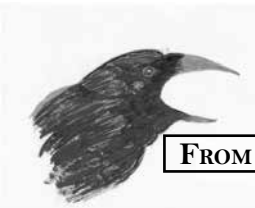
Corn production has declined and is below sandhill crane management needs. The elk population on the other hand has continued to grow and as a result of the elk study, the herd has been culled to limit damage to corn. In the ongoing attempt to provide adequate corn supplies the refuge has drafted a new farm agreement that will address crop production issues in the future. In the interim, the refuge has planted approximately 200 acres in milo and buckwheat to help get the birds through this year, but production has been mixed. The sudan grass harvest has also been postponed and this will provide most of the early migration food for cranes.



Fall and Winter Waterbird Predictions – The challenges ahead

Continent wide, duck numbers remain at an all time high (49.2 million breeding ducks), which is the highest on record since record keeping began in 1955. Canada and light goose populations have experienced growth, the decline in the Rocky Mountain population of sandhill cranes seems to have stabilized and these changes are reflected in the continued increase in the number of waterbirds wintering at the Bosque.

All of the issues and events highlighted here have impacted the way the refuge meets its primary goal to provide winter habitat for these migratory birds. As a result of the continuing drought, the overall habitat/water management plan, which is based on previous and projected future habitat conditions, is becoming more focused and deliberate to ensure efficiency. The good news is that with adequate water, wetland impoundment productivity can be increased. However, in limited water periods, some impoundments will have to be kept dry. Ground water use is going to be more closely monitored and again, in limited water periods, fall/winter flooding may be more restricted and more tightly focused on providing food. The agricultural program will have to continue to be evaluated to consider less ‘thirsty’ crops to ensure water availability in winter. With no assurance of future rainfall increases, habitat change is, for all intents and purposes, a given, and the refuge management plan will have to continue to evolve and change to meet these new challenges.



FROM THE EDITOR

Not a few of us were happy to wish 2014 ‘adios.’ There were a few too many challenges last year, some of which are yet to be resolved, to include continued drought, continued federal budget shortfalls, new government regulatory rules and loss of critical staff at the refuge. None of this is good and you would suppose that in total it was a less than stellar year...but you’d be wrong.

In some ways it was a great year. Membership is creeping up, the Nature Store had a good year, we received some really awesome donations, monsoon rain amounts were decent and the Festival was a huge, repeat, **HUGE** success. We hosted a very successful Field Day in May for 46 local kids with many requests to make it an annual event. We hired a contractor to organize and archive the refuge’s documents, publications and books, an effort that has garnered significant positive attention for the refuge from the Washington office of Fish and Wildlife. In all we provided over \$10,000 in cash and manpower to the refuge for volunteer and staff appreciation and support....and even got a new roof put on the Friends House. So, no more leaky roof and endangered computer hardware.

This winter’s mouse population explosion in the House is another issue. They are not endangered yet....but soon.

When you weigh all this good news against the ‘challenges’

that are still with us, you have to believe that there is some justice in the world. We, the Friends, are doing well and because of that we can continue to do good. We can continue to support and promote the refuge, fill the gaps, help make ends meet. As the lead article suggests the refuge is changing because it has to, not because it wants to. New conditions require new strategies and clearly the refuge (as most of us have known it) will not necessarily be the refuge of the future. The thing that will remain the same however is the Friends dedication to the refuge and its staff, and the need to meet future challenges whatever they may be. Yeah, it was a good year.

--Lise Spargo



Annual Meeting

At the annual meeting in October, 4 new Board members were elected. They include Steven Rudnick, Mary Ruff, Ed MacKerrow and Dwayne Longenbaugh. We also welcomed the return of Board members Sonja Mendoza, Ann Adams, and Cheryl Learn for second terms. Paul White, a Board member at large and former President, accepted the nomination and was elected as President. Friends Executive Director Leigh Ann Vradenburg provided a review of Friends activities over the past year, to include continued upgrades of our software that have, among other things, greatly streamlined our membership and donor management process. In

addition to a well received Field Day for local kids in May, the Friends worked with the refuge on “greening” projects, provided editorial, graphic layout and printing of the 2015 *Habitat!*, hired a local youth summer intern for the maintenance shop and continued our outreach to our Congressmen and Senators, advocating for Refuge System and refuge-specific needs. In September we hosted a mentoring workshop for Friends groups from our region (FWS Region II including Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma). Fifty participants from 17 refuges met in the Lannan Center to share organizational insights and experiences.

At the Festival Banquet, the Friends were recognized as the USFWS Region II Friends Group of the Year. Refuge Manager Kevin Cobble nominated the Friends last fall for this annual award that recognizes exceptional efforts to advance the mission of the USFWS, to promote partnerships between refuges and the local communities, and to advocate for the protection of natural resources.

In December the Board met to hear the first readout from the Festival of the Cranes. Board members received a brief tutorial on Friends programs, finances, and general operations, and an overview of the structure of the USFWS. In total, the Friends had a good fiscal year ending 30 September 2014. Operating costs were at 9%, well below the national average for similar non-profit organizations. Income exceeded expenses by \$42,357 and there was a substantial increase in program expenditures, i.e. the

Friends was able to grow their support to refuge programs and education. The Nature Store continued to expand its online sales, and an increase in the number of off-season visitors helped to boost sales at the refuge. This revenue growth was particularly beneficial given new FWS regulations that resulted in the Friends having to hire seasonal employees to work in the store. Our friendly store staff!



Festival Report

This year the weather was more cooperative and by all accounts this was the most successful Festival of the Cranes (FOC) ever. Revenue (registration fees) for 2014 topped \$111,000. This is almost double the amount from 2012 (\$69,512), and does not include Nature Store sales during Festival that also set a new record. Birding events still dominate FOC sales, and this year Festival coordinator Michael Hanauer added new events for birders and photographers. The Expo Tent did a brisk business. Expo Tent exhibitors continue to support festival events, providing professional photographers for tours and workshops. Canon USA announced during the festival their selection of the FOC as the #1 Wildlife Photography Festival in the country. Canon said that by their estimate, FOC was also the #1 Birding Festival in the country. Kudos to Michael for his exceptional efforts.

2014 Martha Hatch Award: Kale Batsell

This year the Friends of the Bosque was pleased to present the 2014 Martha Hatch Award to Kale Batsell. Locally Kale is perhaps best known as a registered avian rehabilitator. With a carefully designed aviary on her property she has taken birds from as far away as Las Cruces for care and release. When Kale first arrived in the area, back in 2005, she joined the Friends almost immediately and found herself busy with the Hospitality tent at Festival time, a job she enjoyed and eventually ended up coordinating for several years. Many of the skills she had honed in her professional career as an educator came in handy. She also served a term on the Board of Directors during 2009-2010.

At the end of her term, then-president Paul White paid tribute: "It's hard to know where to start in singling out some of your many contributions. You have always been generous with your time, volunteering in support of the Festival and numerous other special events. I cannot recall anyone who read reports and draft materials as conscientiously and with such a discerning eye as you. You helped us immeasurably through your role on the Finance Committee and in our review of our new Financial Procedures Manual. I am particularly grateful, however, for the thorough, thoughtful and careful manner in which you led the Board's review of our Mapping the Rio Program. This effort may have been painful at times, but your efforts left the Board much more committed to supporting sound environmental education programs in the future."



Friends Executive Director Leigh Ann Vradenburg, Friends President Paul White, award recipient Kale Batsell, Friends President Emeritus Lise Spargo

It's Not about Where You Live, but What You Love

“Oh, no thank you. We’re not from here.” We often hear that in the Bosque Nature Store when we ask if the customer would like to become a Friend of the Bosque. Although it is often just intended as a polite way of declining an offer to join, there is some truth to the statement that our philanthropy is often tied to our backyard. A study conducted by the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy found that 62% of high net worth donors cite “giving back to the community” as a primary motivation for giving. So where does that leave Environmental/Animal Welfare organizations, especially those in remote locations, such as the Friends of the Bosque del Apache?

Last. Yes, out of nine major nonprofit subdivisions, charitable giving to Environmental/Animal Welfare organizations is lowest on the list – less than half of giving to Public/Society Benefit organizations, and less than a quarter of contributions to Human Services. Fortunately for us, things are changing. Nationally, environmental groups are seeing some of the greatest year-to-year growth in giving, and for the Friends of the Bosque, our 2014 fiscal year showed our highest membership and donation revenue in our 21 years.

Is this a trend or trendy? If we consider national wildlife refuges, the number of “Friends”

groups has more than doubled over the last fifteen years. This not only points to an increased interest in being involved in our natural treasures, it indicates an understanding that we have a right and a responsibility to partner with the government to ensure that these lands represent the legacy that we want to leave for future generations.

Last year the Friends of the Bosque received a generous bequest from the estate of Dave and Luween Smith. I am always interested in finding out if there is a story that a friend or family member can share that would shed light on the role of the refuge in their lives. Their niece, Patricia, shared with me that Dave and Luween lived in New Mexico and had visited the refuge several times. They travelled abroad, but had a particular interest in the Southwest; they sought out places with “vegetation, conversation, and animals.” The legacy of Dave and Luween that they shared with their niece was a passion for bird watching, an appreciation for creating a critter-friendly and vegetation-rich yard, and a love of nature and natural places like Bosque del Apache.

I find that people give to the Friends of the Bosque, not only because they love the refuge, but because the work of the Friends and refuge is representative of their values. There may be many wild and

beautiful places in this world that they love, but they see that they can be a part of the success story here. In November the Friends of the Bosque were recognized as the Friends Group of the Year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 2. The number and diversity of projects we have accomplished has been due to the guidance and support of more than 1,110 committed members and donors. Our supporters may not be “from here,” but they see Bosque del Apache as part of giving back to their conservation community.

--Leigh Ann Vradenburg

In recent months the Friends of the Bosque has made it even easier to provide support with online and automated giving. Please see our website for more information.



Luween and Dave Smith

People You Should Know....

John Olson

If you came to the Bosque this winter you may well have bumped into John Olson, Fish and Wildlife Volunteer extraordinaire and avid photographer. Here's his story.

I was raised on a small farm in northeastern Colorado and attended school in Brush. I graduated high school in 1965 and received draft notice within six months. I enlisted in the Navy prior to being drafted and was attached to an aviation unit in California. Six months later I was transferred to a helicopter squadron destined for Vietnam. I served two tours in the Vietnamese theatre, one inland and the other aboard an aircraft carrier in the Tonkin Gulf. After Vietnam, I was stationed in Albuquerque, New Mexico, attached to the Defense Nuclear Agency formerly known as the Defense Atomic Support Agency. I was honorably discharged from the Navy in 1973 and headed home to Colorado where I worked with my family racing greyhounds.



In 1981, we moved to Missouri and I worked with a veterinarian for eight years. In 1988, we moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, where I started work for US Postal Service as a letter carrier. In 1997, I transferred to Lewisville, Texas, with the USPS. While working in Texas we would take short trips to the coastal areas or to the area wildlife refuges to enjoy nature. After carrying mail for twenty-plus years, I retired from the USPS. Shortly thereafter, Betty (my wife), and I started doing volunteer work for various parks and refuges throughout the western United States.

I suppose it was the whooping cranes that sparked my interest in taking pictures. I found taking pictures to be very fulfilling, although I realized that they were just pictures and not photographs. I acquired my first digital SLR and it 'all' began. I started going to local parks, state parks, open spaces, or any place that would or could hold wildlife and took pictures of it all. After a few years of struggling with settings, inferior equipment, and techniques, I began to see improvement. I've worn out or upgraded my camera twice since first starting and have acquired quality lenses.

It's tough to shoot quality photographs without any photographic background or formal training, but if I keep practicing, reading, and listening to other photographers I meet, someday I may succeed. My other hobbies include astronomy, fishing, fly-tying, and writing poetry.

Montie retires!



At the end of 2014 we wished farewell and happy retirement to refuge maintenance worker Montie Coe after sixteen years of Federal service. Montie was dedicated and dependable, and he was always willing to lend a hand. No matter how hectic things got around the refuge, Montie maintained a cool head and a quick wit that always put his coworkers at ease. Thank you, Montie, for all that you did for the Friends and the refuge!

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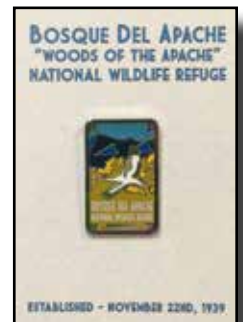


hats!

shirts with cool
crane tracks on
the sleeves!!



patches!



label pins!

Celebrating 50 Years of The Wilderness Act

2014 marked the 50th anniversary of The Wilderness Act, an opportunity to reflect on this legislation and the overall concept of wilderness.

Wilderness, which can only be legislated by Congress, provides a strong protective overlay to selected portions of public lands: National Parks, Forests, USFWS and BLM lands. Ours was the first country to conserve wilderness through legislation, an idea now replicated internationally.

Howard Zahniser wrote the first draft of the wilderness bill in 1956 and, with Olaus Murrie, shepherded it through 66 revisions over the next eight years. In a time before electronic tablets he lobbied Congress wearing a specially tailored coat with multiple interior pockets to keep facts and figures readily at hand! Both men died just prior to the bill's passage.

Signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in September 1964, this legislation "... to secure for the American people of present and future

generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness" was visionary, concerning itself with land use, not at the time, but in the future. Wilderness was defined as: "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man," where natural processes operate freely, not subject to human control or manipulation.

Today wilderness comprises about 5% of all US lands and includes biotic communities from snowcapped peak to old growth forest, swamp to desert, tundra to coral reef. Almost half of wilderness lands are in Alaska, our western states taking a distant second place.

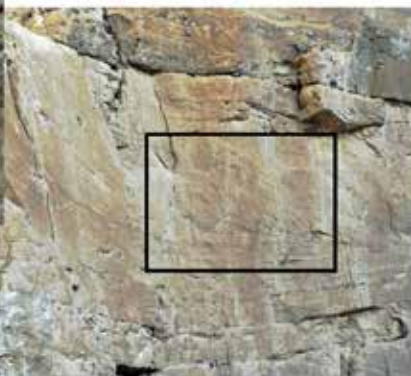
Although wilderness areas are protected from development, they are mandated for public purposes: recreation, science, education and historic preservation. Are you among the more than twenty million people who visit wilderness each year seeking adventure, self-discovery, solitude or deep connection?

New Mexico is unique in having the first designated wilderness in the world. The Gila Wilderness, proposed by Aldo Leopold, was designated in 1924, thirty years before the Wilderness Act! Additional NM wilderness trivia: 2/3 of Carlsbad Caverns NP is legislated wilderness as are three sections of Bosque del Apache NWR; the majority of NM wilderness acreage is managed by the Forest Service.

More recent was the creation of the Sabinoso Wilderness in northeastern New Mexico and



These petroglyphs are in the Indian Wells Wilderness Area of the Bosque del Apache NWR



two “wilderness study areas” (long managed as but not yet legislated as wilderness) in the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument in Taos County. Because the monument was created by Presidential Executive Order in 2013, these “study areas” must join the long line awaiting legislative action. Monument status is significant, however, and many are working for this protection for other unique landscapes such as the proposed Organ Mountains/Desert Peaks National Monument near Las Cruces.

Not everyone agrees with legislated wilderness. Some argue that it interferes with individual freedoms or economic development. Others argue that it is insufficient and too fragmented, advocating for landscape-level conservation reconnecting ecosystems along key corridors.

These views aside, one’s initial connection to wilderness is often its scenic beauty beneath which lies the intrinsic value of these complex, biologically diverse communities: protected wildlife habitat, repositories of human and earth history, clean air and water, clear night skies, natural laboratories and classrooms, and often, the bonus of an economic boost for nearby populations. For many of us, however, wilderness is simply “coming home” - essential to one’s soul.

--Sandra Noll

Additional references:

- The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

- Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains/Desert Peaks National Monument websites
- wilderness.net - “The Wildlands Project” and “Yellowstone to Yukon”

(Editor’s Note: Sandra Noll is a long time volunteer at Bosque del Apache, intrepid naturalist, environmental educator and wildlife photographer.)

The Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge is a registered 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation incorporated in New Mexico. The Friends promotes appreciation and conservation of wildlife and habitat through environmental education and natural history experiences at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.

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Janet & Mark Webber*
Linda & Greg Wilson

Friend Indeed (\$500-\$999)

Rita Leard
Gwen Lotz
Larry and Liz Kuo

* - indicates Sustaining Club Member



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PO Box 340
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To see color versions of the photos
in this newsletter, go to:
www.friendsofthebosque.org

YOUR STORY MATTERS!

For more information on sharing your story
about Bosque del Apache with decision
makers, please contact the Friends at
friends@sdc.org.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

The White House, Washington D.C.
202/456-1111 President@WhiteHouse.gov

US Fish & Wildlife Regional Director

500 Gold Avenue SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505/346-2545

Hon. Sally Jewell

Secretary of the Interior
18th & C Streets NW, Rm. 6151
Washington D.C. 20240 202/208-
7351

NEW MEXICO SENATORS

Hon. Martin Heinrich

US Senate, Washington D.C. 20510
202/224-5521
website: heinrich.senate.gov

Hon. Tom Udall

US Senate, Washington D.C. 20510
202/224-6621
website: tomudall.senate.gov

NEW MEXICO REPRESENTATIVES

Hon. Michelle Lujan Grisham

House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515 202/225-6316
website: lujangrisham.house.gov

Hon. Ben Ray Lujan, Jr.

House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515 202/225-
6190
website: lujan.house.gov

Hon. Steve Pearce

House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515 202/225-2365
website: pearce.house.gov

Friends of the Bosque del Apache Membership Application

Name _____

Family Members (for Family Membership) _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

- I want to hear about volunteer opportunities at the refuge.
- I want to receive emails (<2/month) about current events and issues at the refuge.
- Please contact me about planned giving.

Please mail with your check to:
Friends of the Bosque del Apache
PO Box 340
San Antonio, NM 87832

Membership Level:

- Individual \$20
- Family \$25
- Student \$15
- Senior \$15
- Special Friend \$60 or more
- Best Friend \$100 or more
- Lifetime \$1000 or more
- Business Sponsor \$200

- I want to receive the newsletter electronically.

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