



**FROM SUBALPINE** forests in the north to the Chihuahuan Desert along the southern border, New Mexico is one of the most biologically diverse states in the country. Defenders of Wildlife has long worked to protect the imperiled wildlife that depend on the state's varied landscapes, including the Upper Rio Grande Basin and the Greater Gila Bioregion, and to broaden support for wildlife conservation.



VALLES CALDERA NATIONAL PRESERVE © CAROL BEIDLEMAN

## Upper Rio Grande: Safeguarding Water, Connecting Land

Stretching north into Colorado, the **Upper Rio Grande Basin** begins at the headwaters of the Rio Grande and includes all the system's tributaries south to Cochiti Reservoir west of Santa Fe. It encompasses three national forests and numerous wilderness areas, national parks and monuments that protect the region's wild character and provide significant conservation opportunities.

### *Aquatic and riparian species and ecosystems*

Water is New Mexico's most precious resource, and as the effects of climate change mount, the threats to the aquatic and riparian ecosystems of the Upper Rio Grande Basin will only increase. This includes impacts on the wildlife that rely on these habitats such as the **New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, beaver, southwestern willow flycatcher, numerous amphibian species** and the **Rio Grande cutthroat trout**—our state fish.

Through policy, research and on-the-ground restoration, Defenders is working to restore vital habitats to improve their resilience to climate change and increase their capacity to support sensitive species for generations to come. Because wildlife often serves as an indicator of ecosystem health, taking a species approach to watershed health helps ensure our work is effective.

### *Wildlife corridors and landscape connectivity*

Many species travel long distances on a seasonal and daily basis. Unfortunately, energy development, road and border wall construction and urban development limit this movement and climate change increases the need for wildlife to seek new habitat.

Defenders is actively involved in passing legislation and shaping policy that will protect the safe passage of wildlife across roads and through a connected complex of federal, state, tribal and private lands across New Mexico. This includes supporting the development of wildlife underpasses and overpasses, encouraging the application of wildlife-friendly fencing in sensitive areas, and building capacity and creating opportunities for factoring wildlife movement into management and planning processes. The passage of **New Mexico's Wildlife Corridors Act** is testimony to the value the diverse stakeholders and cultures of our state place on this work.

### **Greater Gila: Keeping the Wild in Wilderness**

Ranging from pine-forested mountains to yucca-studded lowlands, the vast **Greater Gila Bioregion** of southwest New Mexico and southeast Arizona once supported grizzly bears and jaguars. This remote region is still home to the **Mexican spotted owl, Gila trout and numerous other desert fish species**, and the **Mexican gray wolf**—the most endangered wolf subspecies in the world.



### *Land and water protections*

The Greater Gila Bioregion includes the nation's first designated wilderness area—more than 500,000 acres of ponderosa pine, pinyon-juniper, desert and grassland ecosystems. To provide lasting security for wildlife, Defenders is advocating for more land and water protections in the region including wilderness additions and **Wild and Scenic River** designations.

### *Mexican gray wolves*

Defenders helped lay the groundwork for the reintroduction of Mexican gray wolves in 1998 and remains actively involved in their recovery. Working closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, we continue to be a leader in shaping state and federal policy supporting recovery.

Defenders also works with ranchers, tribes and land managers to implement coexistence practices and programs that help wolves and people share the landscape. These coexistence measures include hiring

range riders, providing specific deterrent tools like fencing and fladry, and devising compensation programs that incentivize conflict avoidance.

### **Modernizing State Wildlife Management**

For more than 100 years, the primary purpose of state wildlife agencies has been to sustain game species populations for the benefit of their main constituency, hunters and anglers. While effective by certain standards, this management approach diminishes the value of the nongame wildlife that is essential to the functioning of natural ecosystems.

Defenders seeks to evolve the statutory authority and culture of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to better equip the agency to play a role in fighting the extinction crisis. This includes broadening the state's conservation constituency and creating new funding sources that are not tied to the sale of hunting and fishing licenses to support staff, research and restoration focused on nongame species.



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