

For immediate release

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Thousands of New Mexicans Call for Wildlife Protections in Santa Fe and Carson National Forest Plans

Santa Fe, NM (November 6, 2019) A diverse coalition of New Mexico conservation organizations, sportsmen and women and public land advocates, today called for stronger protection of critical wildlife habitat, clean water and wildlife migration corridors in the Upper Rio Grande Watershed and delivered more than 23,000 public comments to the U.S. Forest Service calling for improvements to the Carson and Santa Fe National Forests' land management plans.

The New Mexico Wildlife Federation, Trout Unlimited, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Defenders of Wildlife, New Mexico Wild, National Wildlife Federation, Amigos Bravos, and others have been promoting public participation in the forest plan revision processes on the Carson and Santa Fe forests that will guide management decisions in the coming decades. The two national forests in northern New Mexico comprise 3.1 million acres in the heart of the Upper Rio Grande Watershed, one of the best-connected wildlife landscapes in America. The public comment period ends November 7.

The Santa Fe National Forest includes most of the 220,000-acre Pecos Wilderness, as well as three other designated wilderness areas and 55 inventoried roadless areas. A bright spot of the plan is the inclusion of the Caja del Rio Wildlife and Cultural Interpretive Area, which is home to herds of mule deer and elk and a variety of unique and sensitive plant and animal species, including black bear, cougar, western burrowing owl and golden eagle. The area has also been designated as an Important Bird Area with a river corridor that is critical for waterfowl and non-game species migration. It contains numerous native archaeological sites as well as significant portions of the El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro.

The Carson National Forest's draft management plan includes key protections for the Valle Vidal and San Antonio Management Areas, which are important in securing wildlife connectivity in the region. However, the plan also includes a reduction in protections for wild and scenic rivers and streams that will leave too many of northern New Mexico's waterways and wildlife vulnerable to development.

Coalition Statements

"Connectivity is the key to protecting and restoring wildlife and their habitat. The elk, mule deer, pronghorn, Rocky Mountain big horn sheep, Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout and other wildlife that call the Upper Rio Grande Watershed home need protected migration corridors to thrive. The Carson and Santa Fe National Forests have done a good job recognizing key areas of

the forests that wildlife need to thrive, but we believe there are improvements that would make the plans stronger.”

- *Jesse Deubel, Executive Director, New Mexico Wildlife Federation*

“Clean, cold water is the most important resource provided by our national forests in New Mexico. The plans do a good job of emphasizing watershed health, but they also should include strong protections for streams and riparian areas. Riparian areas are essential to preserving water quality and are hotspots of biodiversity. The final plans should emphasize protecting high-value riparian habitat and free-flowing rivers and streams.”

- *Dan Roper, New Mexico Public Lands Organizer, Trout Unlimited*

“To maintain the unparalleled public hunting and fishing opportunities we currently enjoy on public lands throughout the region, we need to maintain the area’s high-quality fish and wildlife habitat. To accomplish this, we have called on our public land managers to develop a management plan that includes meaningful limits on development within key wildlife corridors and winter range. The public land management planning process is our opportunity to have a say in what the future of this landscape will look like – and we thank the U.S. Forest Service for engaging public landowners everywhere in such robust way.”

- *Tim Brass, State Policy and Field Operations Director, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers*

"We thank the U.S. Forest Service for identifying sensitive wildlife habitat in the San Antonio, Valle Vidal and Caja del Rio within the plans for the Carson and Santa Fe National Forests. These proposed designations will help prioritize the protection of wildlife and habitat over the life of the plan. However, to ensure on-the-ground actions match the proposed vision, the Forest Service needs to also restrict road construction, oil and gas leasing, and mineral development."

- *Michael Dax, Southwest Representative for New Mexico, Defenders of Wildlife*

“The Carson and Santa Fe National Forests are home to incredible biodiversity, and these fish and wildlife species require undisturbed migratory routes to find food and mates, and to escape the adverse impacts of climate change. We urge forest managers to remember that New Mexico's wildlife do not recognize barriers constructed by humans and to choose the alternatives that most adequately protect endangered and threatened species.”

- *Mark Allison, Executive Director, New Mexico Wild*

“A diverse group of people who live, work and recreate in the Santa Fe and Carson National Forests have made their voices heard: they want the U.S. Forest Service to safeguard wildlife corridors and protect critical habitat in the final forest management plans. Including special management areas for wildlife will protect public lands and waters, safeguard cultural traditions and promote the outdoor recreation economy on which so many of our local communities depend.”

- *Andrew Black, Public Lands Field Director, National Wildlife Federation*

"The Forests in Northern New Mexico are the home to the headwater streams and wetlands that nourish downstream communities. We hope to see strong provisions for clean water, robust wild and scenic protections, and a focus on restoring wetlands in the final plans."

- *Rachel Conn, Projects Director, Amigos Bravos*