

Conservation Director Report for June, 2022

Earl Conway, Conservation Director June 8, 2022

General State of Affairs

I want to thank Campbell and Campbell Real Estate for donating funds for fish care and weigh-in at the qualifiers.

We have a new threat of ash and mud flows from the new burn scars. Santa Rosa and Cochiti took the hard hits last time. It may be a repeat. Conchas may also be impacted. Lake levels are still generally pathetic! However, the fish seem to be weathering the drought well. Catch numbers and size seem to be at or above normal. It is clear that low but relatively stable water levels are better than wild fluctuations, especially at Elephant Butte. We have had several good spawns and it shows. <https://webapps.usgs.gov/MRGESCP/hydrology/usbr-tea-cup-diagrams>

Relations with NMGF and Federal Agencies are excellent. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has expressed full support for a new project at Cochiti Lake to provide spawning habitat and deal with invasive Eurasian watermilfoil.

Relations with NM State Parks are back on track with a good discussion with the new Director, Toby Vellasquez.

Political Advocacy: I have had to get more involved with candidates and elected officials to get things done. Now that the primaries are over, I will be focusing issues to the appropriate elected officials and candidates.

One lingering issue is the contract between BOR and NMSP that needs to be renegotiated. Congresswoman Stansbury has been asked to inquire about the new 20-year lease agreement between BOR and State Parks. The agreement was never put through public comment and should be challenged.

Here are a few political areas of focus since January 2022: Sedimentation: I communicated with U.S. Senate offices about trying to get sedimentation projects in the infrastructure bills. I'm not sure what stayed in the bills. The Governor's race: As soon as the primaries are settled, I will be meeting with the candidates. Members are welcome to join me.

Projects

I currently have 5 major projects funded and in play:

Elephant Butte (Bass Pro Shops (\$15K) All spent and closing out with report.

Need to drop final 100 trees and pull out the floating island.

Cochiti Spawning and AIS (AFTCO \$5K AND USFWS \$47.3K)

Made new contacts and accepted new USFWS grant

Carlsbad Municipal Lake (RFHP \$40K)

Completed upper lake habitat. Need to finish by May 2023.

Southeast BLM Waters Access (BLM \$40K) Free consulting with BLM and Loving, NM. Possible habitat at Six Mile and new pond at Los Cerritos. All spent. Transported four huge kiosk signs from Mesa AZ to Carlsbad as a volunteer effort.

Statewide AIS Prevention and Awareness (BLM \$45K) 50% spent. 4 Kiosk signs need to be finished and installed near Carlsbad. Aquatic vegetation projects are moving forward with Loving, Cochiti, Tinnin Hunt Club, Vara Wines and maybe Trees That Please.

Most of these projects were started before 2019 are either completed or are going as well as could be expected with COVID and a drought.

Elephant Butte has proven to be resilient, partially because of all the tree piles planted over the last ten years and the large cockle-bur patches. The May NM Bass Team trail weigh-in was a good example of how even a low lake can be productive. There were three 20-pound bags. Every fish was released alive.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=5187767667942176&set=pcb.993636074620156>

The Southwest BLM waters include Six Mile Reservoir, Conoco Pond, Los Cerritos (under construction), Black River, and the Pecos River below Brantley to Avalon. Most of the work has been at Conoco Pond assisting with a NM G&F habitat stamp project, writing a cattail management plan, cutting in new trails and placing prototype artificial habitat. (all under the direction of BLM and NMGF). Los Cerritos is on hold awaiting well permitting through the State Engineer office which seems to have evaporated during COVID!! I have provided BLM with detailed design plans (coordinated with NMGF). The City of Loving and Artesia have asked for assistance designing new ponds.

At Six Mile Reservoir (south of Carlsbad) a kayak access point, handicapped fishing and viewing access, and willow tree planting were all designed and executed with significant NMBN involvement. BLM followed up with Cottonwood planting in March. The City of Carlsbad and the BLM Carlsbad office have been exceptional to work with on all area projects.

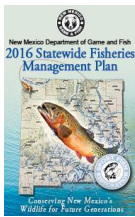
There will be a lot more money available for grants in 2022 but it will require matching non-federal funds. This will require closer coordination with the state and corporate partners.

AFTCO was an awesome sponsor for the event and they continue to provide assistance to the CDs. We need to support them at every chance.

Fisheries Management: New Mexico Game and Fish (NMGF) continues to up their game. The warm water biologist group is fully staffed and equipped with a new habitat boat. The hatchery has new personnel that have a better understanding of how to raise largemouth bass and have been successful raising bass the last two years. Progress is being made on improving the Rock Lake bass hatchery in Santa Rosa. NMGF is considering a program like TPWD “Share-a-Lunker” to study and improve genetics. We will continue to support this effort. It is very important that our members do not relocate fish or vegetation!!!!

Aquatic Invasive Species: Golden algae fish kills are still probably the greatest threat to our Pecos bass fisheries. It is almost impossible to detect the algae in our live wells so the “Clean, Drain and Dry” routine is still the best way to keep from transporting the algae to other lakes. Quagga mussels keep getting closer with them now in Amistad and O.H. Ivie. Everyone needs to get their boats inspected after leaving the state. It’s the law!!

I will continue to work with game and fish to have a restocking plan for reservoirs when a fish kill occurs. The development and publishing of the first state Fisheries Management Plan was a major step in that direction. It has measures for restocking affected lakes. I was working with NMGF for 5 years to get the plan published. We have used it the last two years to guide decisions and it is working. It is being updated.



<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/download/commission/public-comment/NM-Fisheries-Management-Plan-2016-SCG-Approved.pdf>

Finances: As reported in the 2019 and 2020 Conservation reports, due to our 501 (c) 7 (social club) status and uncertainty in the future of NM BASS Nation, I am directing all grants through Friends of Reservoirs, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit. NM BASS Nation and the Sun Country Outdoors (aka Canadian River Bass Club) are FOR member affiliates. FOR must act as the fiscal agent to apply and receive federal grants. Accounting for the grants has been provided to Friends of Reservoirs and the NM BASS Nation treasurer has access to all accounts.

Future Plans: I am transitioning to allow the state and Federal agencies to lead more habitat work with our continued support the way it should be. I talked to Eric Frei and we intend to meet later in April. I continue to support AIS and sedimentation prevention efforts. I have improved partnerships between NMBN, federal and state agencies. I should be able to hand it off to someone in good shape.

Final warning: We need some new conservation leaders I will not continue to be the Conservation Director past 2023. NMBN needs to find a successor. I think I have earned the opportunity to just focus on fishing and hunting for a few years. It has been challenging, especially with my other family and life challenges. But the Conservation Director role it is a very rewarding experience for anyone that is passionate about fish and fishing.

Fish Care:

We had an issue with the use of metal cull tags that were not being used as penetrating tags and I will address the situation with the Directors.

We pushed out a video on fizzing when people began asking about how to do it. It is posted on the conservation page on our website. With the current website and facebook changes we may have lost some content. I will review this next year.

http://www.bassmaster.com/sites/default/files/bassmaster2011/imce/keepin_gbassalive_card_0.pdf

<http://www.bassmaster.com/tips/keeping-bass-alive>

Summary

A new Conservation Director will be needed in a 2023.

Interaction with politicians and agencies will be intense this year.

Things are much better this year but they could be better. More involvement from members in conservation and youth initiatives would really help. There are lots of ways people can help without a huge effort.

NMGF and the Federal agencies are on board and working hard to improve habitat and hatcheries and genetics.

Siltation and sedimentation is still the big “elephant under the table” that is impacting many of our reservoirs.

We don't need any more money. What we really need are more volunteers and more water!

Youth are the key to fishing's future. Get involved.

Earl Conway