

Victory for Clean Water in New Mexico

Río Santa Barbara Protected

In January, the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission approved Amigos Bravos' nomination of the Río Santa Barbara as New Mexico's *first* Outstanding National Resource Water (ONRW), a category of water recognized and given special protection under the Clean Water Act. "At last we can say that New Mexico has a designated outstanding river," commented Rachel Conn, Clean Water Circuit Rider for Amigos Bravos. "Twenty three years after passage of the Clean Water Act, in a state where *all* rivers should have special protection, New Mexico will finally have a designated outstanding river."

This designation represents a substantial victory for Amigos Bravos. Amigos Bravos staff, Board, and volunteers have been working on the nomination for the past 3 years. The Truchas Chapter of Trout Unlimited helped by assisting with fish surveys and petition-gathering. In addition, the nomination was supported by Picuris Pueblo, Senator Jeff Bingaman, Congressman Tom Udall, and New Mexico Trout. Numerous members of the public, including Taylor Streit of Streit Fly Fishing, and Amigos Bravos' Board members Hope Buechler and Jon Klingel, testified at the public hearing in favor of the nomination.

Amigos Bravos nominated the Río Santa Barbara as New Mexico's first ONRW after being identified as a treasured New Mexico river by people attending an Amigos Bravos sponsored Clean Water Act Workshop. The Clean Water Act describes ONRWs as "waters of exceptional recreational or ecological significance" (40 CFR §131.12 (a)(3)). The Clean Water Act protects these waters by stating, "water quality [in the designated ONRW] shall be maintained and protected" (Id.). Designation of a water body as an ONRW provides the maximum level of water quality protection under the Clean Water Act and forbids any degradation of water quality. Amigos Bravos' nomination included a written statement, scientific evidence, as well as an economic analysis.

Improved Water Quality Standards in the Rio Gallinas and Rio Grande

The Water Quality Control Commission also adopted numerous other river-friendly changes proposed by Amigos Bravos, including upgrading standards in the Río Gallinas and the Río Grande to protect people who swim in those rivers.

During several Clean Water Act Workshops organized by Amigos Bravos, participants identified instances of community members swimming in rivers where

continued on page 7

Amigos Bravos, in partnership with Black Mesa Winery,
is proud to introduce

Amigos Bravos Chardonnay.

Join us as we celebrate the debut of this fine wine,

Saturday, May 14th, 3-6 pm at Embudo Station Restaurant and Brew Pub.

see article on page 4

CBM Industrialization Threatens the Valle Vidal

*Jim O'Donnell, Outreach Coordinator,
Coalition for the Valle Vidal*

Unless Congress can pass a bill offering permanent protection, the watersheds of northern New Mexico's much-loved Valle Vidal face complete destruction from Coalbed Methane (CBM) development. Another promise to posterity plowed under in the Bush Administration's insane fossil fuel orgy.

The Valle Vidal, or Valley of Abundant Life, is a 100,000-acre gem of the Carson National Forest in the heart of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Home to the native Rio Grande cutthroat trout, over 200 species of birds, black bears, bison, mountain lions, and the state's largest elk herd, the Valle Vidal has been called a "reservoir of life" by area residents.

The Valle Vidal, treasured by all three of Northern New Mexico's cultures, attracts hunters, anglers, campers, hikers, skiers and horseback riders from all over the nation, generating 3-5 million recreation dollars each year to area economies. The Valle Vidal also supports northern New Mexico's traditional communities through grazing and each year over 3,000 Boy Scouts access the area from the Philmont Scout Ranch to learn outdoor skills and Wilderness ethics.

continued on page 3

Weed Control Protects Water Quality

Amigos Bravos continues to serve as a participating member and fiscal sponsor of the Taos County Noxious Weed Control Committee, a group dedicated to promoting effective, affordable, and non-toxic methods of weed control in Taos County. Amigos Bravos became involved in the Weed Committee due to concern about pesticide application and its potential impact on water quality. One of the worst effects of pesticides (which include both insecticides and herbicides) is the potential for contamination of the hydrologic system. According to the USGS, water is one of the primary pathways by which pesticides are transported from their application areas to other parts of the environment. Unintentional pesticide-related fish kills are common throughout the United States. Some of these kills have been large, involving thousands of fish, as well as frogs, turtles, mussels, water birds, and other wildlife. Many species, including rare and endangered ones like the peregrine falcon, bald eagle, and osprey, have been victims of pesticide poisoning.

The Weed Committee has been successful at working with the New Mexico Department of Transportation to secure a moratorium on spraying of pesticides along roads and highways in Taos County. Amigos Bravos, in conjunction with the Weed Committee, reviewed and commented on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement put out by the Forest Service on the impacts of spraying pesticides on thousands of acres in the Carson and Santa Fe National Forests. Amigos Bravos is especially concerned about the over-3,000 acres of riparian areas proposed for treatment in the Carson National Forest alone. The Weed Committee gathered over a thousand signatures from the public calling for the use of safe, alternative methods of weed control on our public lands. The Weed Committee has worked to identify

continued on page 7

River Otter Update

As a founding member of the River Otter Working Group, Amigos Bravos continues to work for otter restoration in New Mexico. Amigos Bravos and the New Mexico River Otter Working Group have been working with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to prepare a feasibility study for otter restoration in the rivers of New Mexico. This winter, public meetings were held in Silver City, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Taos to present the preliminary findings of this feasibility study and to gather public input and concerns to be incorporated into the study. The feasibility study will take into account potential habitat, prey biomass, and socio-economic impacts and opportunities. The final feasibility study will be available for public review at the end of the summer.

Amigos Bravos continues to give public presentations to groups and schools and to collect letters of support for otter restoration from members of the public. These letters will be sent to the New Mexico Game Commission, the final decision-making body on otter restoration in the state. To send a letter, go to Amigos Bravos' web-page at www.amigosbravos.org and click on the otter project. A sample letter is provided to download, sign, and send. Jon Klingel, Amigos Bravos board member and wildlife biologist, has been assisting with the otter project and has provided invaluable assistance with surveys, research, and writing.

We hope to see otters in our rivers someday soon! ❖



River Otter Out of Water, © Jean Hamilla

Three Ways to get involved!

If you would like to join the effort to protect our wild rivers, read on! Amigos Bravos is involved in three exciting projects offering ample opportunity for volunteer and community involvement.

Red River Restoration:

Amigos Bravos recently received a three-year grant to address pollution problems in the upper Red River. The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has identified the upper Red as impaired for aluminum, stream bottom deposits, and turbidity, and noted recreation as one of the sources of this pollution. The project will focus on limiting impacts from off highway vehicles (OHV) to Bitter Creek, Pioneer Creek, Placer Creek, and the other stretches of the upper Red River watershed. Amigos Bravos will be working in collaboration with the Forest Service to hire an OHV enforcement officer to patrol and educate the public about OHV recreation. Amigos Bravos will also be organizing two restoration projects this summer to close and revegetate illegal roads. Amigos Bravos is looking for volunteers to help with the two projects which have been prioritized for the 2005 field season.

Midnight to Valle Vidal Project

Problem: A road, created for a logging project and due to be closed after timber

continued on page 6

CBM Industrialization Threatens the Valle Vidal

continued from page 1

Yet now, one of America's largest natural gas companies, the El Paso Corporation, seeks to drill up to 500 CBM wells in the eastern 40,000 acres of the Valle Vidal. If the Valle is opened up for gas extraction, the wells, power lines, pipelines, bulldozers, and hundreds of miles of associated roads will kill this great land.

CBM development extracts natural gas trapped within a coal formation thousands of feet below ground. Initially, the work requires drilling a well and pumping thousands of gallons of toxic substances (diesel fuel, sand, glass and other petrochemicals) known as 'frac'ing' fluid, into the coalbed to crack the coal, thereby releasing the gas. Then, the underground aquifer is "de-watered", that is pumped clean of water, so that the gas can rise to the surface. The groundwater, besides being invaluable to a high desert state like ours, can potentially contain dangerously high levels of dissolved solids, uranium, toxins (from the 'frac'ing' fluid), salts and carcinogens. Often, this water is discharged into area streams, spread out on the surface to evaporate or re-injected into a very deep aquifer, forever unreachable to those who may one day need it.

The intensive industrialization that accompanies CBM development would stain the Valle with a dense web of roads, pipelines, well pads, power stations, toxic storage ponds, and giant compressor stations – all in the primary wintering range of our state's largest elk herd. The din of industrialization would shatter the noble silence of the Valle while diesel smoke and dust from hundreds of vehicles would cloud the mountain air.

Ironically, the Valle Vidal is a shining example of the good the Forest Service can do. American taxpayers, local volunteers and Forest Service personnel have invested heavily in closing, re-grading and re-vegetating old logging roads, repairing head-cuts and logging scars and restoring the Cutthroat Trout to its former range. The Forest Service deserves a massive round of applause for their management of the Valle Vidal.

Unfortunately, that could all change.

In April, 2005 the Carson National Forest will begin an 18 month EIS process to determine if the Valle Vidal should be made available for mineral leasing or not. Formal public participation will be provided at three points in the process. At the beginning (June-August, 2005), the public can provide input on the scope of the project and identify issues that should be considered and concerns that should be addressed. Once the "draft" is prepared, the public can review the plan and provide additional comment. Finally, in the spring of 2006, the "final" will be completed, but before a formal decision is reached, the public has an opportunity to 'object' to the plan proposed by the Forest Service.

We have seen, however, that under the current Administration the opinions of local people may not count. So, while it is imperative that New Mexicans of all backgrounds participate in the Forest Service process, permanent and lasting protection for the Valle Vidal will only be assured by an act of Congress.

The Coalition for the Valle Vidal is an assembly of over 130 local governments, businesses, and organizations that believe that the Valle Vidal constitutes a vital core to the culture and economy of Northern New Mexico. We seek permanent protection for the Valle Vidal through Congressional Legislation. A Reservoir of Life, a Valley of Abundant Life, deserves nothing less.

For more information, please visit our website: www.vallevidal.org . ❖



From the Round House

Francisco Apodaca

The first session of the 47th New Mexico Legislature was, at best, a hectic nail-biter. Laws hard-won by the environmental community were assailed by industry and commerce in an unprecedented fashion. In response, a pitched battle was fought on behalf of continued protection for our state's delicate natural resources by individuals and groups who banded together in a tireless effort. At the same time, proactive assertions by the environmental community did not prevail in most attempts. At the end of the day, we came out even!

Three of those proactive bills deserve special notice. Senate Bill 710, the **Healthy Communities Act**, sponsored by Senator Linda Lopez, (D), Bernalillo, and (HB722) Representative Antonio Lujan, is the first of its kind in the nation. When it passes, as someday it surely must, it will require that all communities in New Mexico be treated equally in decisions regarding the location of toxin emitting facilities that pollute New Mexico's communities' water, air, and other resources. The bill was proposed in recognition that such facilities have historically tended to be located in predominately low-income communities of color, with members of those impacted communities having little or no say. The Healthy Communities Act, which is an environmental justice measure, was heard in the House, but killed in committee because of strong lobbying by industry and the New Mexico Municipal League. On a positive note, the hearing did provide important feedback to the bill's sponsors and the feedback will be useful in the reworking of legislation for next year's session.

House Bill 1015, the **Surface Owners Protection Act**, sponsored by Representative Andy Nunez (D) Dona Ana, would have provided protection of surface lands from impacts of oil and gas exploration. The oil and gas industry has for decades enjoyed exemption

continued on page 6

Save Water, Drink Wine!

Amigos Bravos, in partnership with Black Mesa Winery, is proud to introduce Amigos Bravos Chardonnay

Join us as we celebrate the debut of this fine wine. Saturday, May 14th, from 3-6 pm at Embudo Station Restaurant and Brew Pub (Just 45 minutes from either Taos or Santa Fe – on the banks of the Río Grande!)

Tickets are \$25 in advance, \$30 at the door and include: 2 glasses of wine, appetizers, a commemorative wine glass, door prizes, and 10% off dinner at Embudo Station.

Amigos Bravos is also proud to present: Singer-Songwriter **Becky Reardon** and Jazz Singer **Christine Autumn** performing Original Works, Jazz Standards, and Lyrics from the Great American Song Book as well as flamenco guitarist **Daniel Fries** and singer **Jaime Martinez**.

So come eat, drink and dance on the beach to support Amigos Bravos' work this Spring! You can purchase tickets online at www.amigosbravos.org or by phone at (505) 758-3874. ❖

Farewell, Joseph

This February, Amigos Bravos said goodbye to Associate Director, Joseph DiChiaro. For more than two years, Joseph managed personnel, wrote grants, and directed fundraising and communication efforts for our team. His contribution to Amigos Bravos will be missed, though we are proud that Joseph will continue to serve the northern New Mexico community as Development Director for Open Hands in Santa Fe.

This month, our members will receive a copy of the 2005 annual report - which Joseph designed and edited as his final project for Amigos Bravos. We are proud of this document, and see it as an example of Joseph's professionalism and contribution to our organization.

Thank you, Joseph, and best of luck to you. ❖

Welcome Michael Jensen, Grants &

Michael does grant tracking and reporting, proposal development, and other writing for Amigos Bravos.

He came to Amigos Bravos in February from the Alliance for Transportation Research Institute at UNM, which does transportation- and environment-related research and program management. For over a year, he wrote drafts of certification documents (especially the Intergovernmental Contract and the Board Bylaws) and research reports for the North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD), located in Río Arriba, Santa Fe, and Los Alamos counties. Prior to that, he was Outreach Coordinator for the College of Fine Arts and for five years Program Coordinator for the US-Japan Center, both also at UNM.



Michael worked for .four years for international development management firms in Washington, DC, helping write proposals, most of them for USAID projects.

Michael was born in Berkeley, California, and grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, before Silicon Valley replaced miles of orchards. After college, he began traveling. He lived for almost three years in Norway, and in Düsseldorf, Germany, for about a year. He has traveled in most of Northern and Central Europe, but has some especially fond memories of a warm and sunny ramble through Tuscany, Umbria, and the Amalfi Coast in Italy.

In 1999, he and his family moved to Brazil for nearly two years to spend time with his wife's family. He contracted with a state-private sector organization, identifying international funding sources for a new environmental and occupational health training facility located in São Paulo city's industrial zone.

When they returned, Michael worked briefly for the Tropical Forest Foundation (TFF) in Virginia. In mid-2001, the family settled again in Albuquerque.

Michael has a B.A. in American Studies from UC Santa Cruz. Most of all, though, he has three totally awesome kids. The family divides most of its travel time these days visiting family in California and Brazil, but there's a big world beckoning. ❖

Otters have their own musical

OTTERS FOREVER! is a musical fable for children to perform, about the return of river otters to New Mexico; The idea of otters returning to our state, where they had been hunted to extinction, delighted Taos composer Joanne Forman, and this musical is the result. About a half-hour in length, the jazzy musical score is designed to be within the abilities of grade school students--with a little help from a high-school or adult pianist, and also a Troubador who leads the otters to this Promised Land. The script and score is available for every public and private school in New Mexico.

Says Forman, "I guess I'm more interested than I previously thought, as this is my third musical about animals." The other two are **Dance Back the Buffalo**, about the return of buffalo to the Great Plains, and **Willy and the Poo** (with writer William Weida) about the horrors of factory hog farming. She is also the composer of many other musicals for children, as well as (for the grownups) orchestral, choral and chamber music, song cycles, ballets and operas.

Amigos Bravos, a founding member of the River Otter Working Group, has been heading up their organizing efforts. The composer has mandated 50% of the net profits for Amigos Bravos.

For further information, please contact Joanne Forman at jof@laplaza.org, or telephone her at 751-1102. ❖

Calendar of Events:

- May 14** (Saurday) **Amigos Bravos' Wine Tasting Event at Embudo Station.** See article on page 4.
- May 15** (Sunday) **Amigos Bravos and South Valley Partners co-host San Isidro Feast.** See article on page 8.
- May 20-25** (Fri.-Tues.) **River Network's Annual River Rally**, Keyston, CO. "This year's program will highlight ways to overcome the water-related impacts of new development and how human health is affected by degraded water quality." http://www.rivernetwork.org/rally/content.cfm?doc_id=641
- June 17-18** (Sat.-Sun.) Work days on Red River OHV Project. See Article on page 2 & 6.
- Sept. 12-13** (Sun.-Mon.) **American Rivers** is hosting the **2nd annual River Lobby Day in 2005**. River activists from across the country will descend on Capitol Hill to tell their elected officials the story of a broad movement of people who care deeply about the health of rivers in their communities. This is your chance to keep your elected officials accountable for protecting river health. For more information, contact Jamie Mierau at jmierau@americanrivers.org or (202) 347-7550.
- Oct. 27-28** (Thurs.-Fri.) **People's Oil & Gas Summit**, focusing on **Public Health & Toxic Issues Associated with Oil & Gas Development, Farmington, NM**. To register, contact Jennifer Goldman, jennifergoldman@ogap.org

Amigos Bravos' Cash Reserve Fund is Amigos Bravos' insurance against hard times. The Cash Reserve Fund is money set aside to ensure that the organization can survive cash flow shortages in the annual operating budget. It can only be accessed for certain purposes, such as meeting payroll or for emergency capital outlay. There are strict guidelines on when and how money from the fund can be used. Any use of money from the Fund requires approval from the Board of Directors. This Fund is a hedge against hard times, ensuring that Amigos Bravos will stay healthy and able to pursue its mission.

Our Cash Reserve account was opened in March 1998 with a \$15,000 grant from the Ruth Mott Fund. Thanks to generous contributions of our members, the \$5,082 proceeds of *Brian Shields, Unframed*, the net cash flow surplus from FY 1999-2000, and generous donations from James Davidson, Allen and Mary Anne Sanborn, and Marian Gurewitz, the interest-bearing account now has a balance of \$66,299. Our goal is to have \$150,00 in the account by the end of 2007. Please consider making a contribution to the Cash Reserve Fund. ✨

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

By including Amigos Bravos in your will...



...you could protect a river for years

CONFIDENTIAL REPLY

To explore a bequest to Amigos Bravos, please complete this form and return it, marked confidential, to Brian Shields, Executive Director, Amigos Bravos.

- I have included Amigos Bravos in my will.
- Please send information on how to include Amigos Bravos in my will.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____
 Telephone _____ Best time to call _____

Help us save the Río Grande Join Amigos Bravos!

- \$15 Introductory
 - \$25 General Membership
 - \$35 River Steward
 - \$50 River Advocate
 - \$75 River Advocate
 - \$100 River Protector
 - \$125 Business Member
 - \$250 River Guardian
- I want to make a donation to the **Amigos Bravos Cash Reserve Fund**.

Amigos Bravos is a 501 (c)(3) organization.
Your membership donation is fully tax-deductible.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

Email _____

- Charge my credit card: VISA MasterCard

Card #: _____

Exp. Date: _____

Mail to: **Amigos Bravos, P.O. Box 238, Taos, NM 87571**

505-758-3874 • Fax 505-758-7345
 email: bravos@amigosbravos.org • www.amigosbravos.org

From the Round House

continued from page 3

from punitive measure in spite of harm they caused through exploration and production of oil and gas. The last of the "Robber Baron" laws, enacted at the turn of the 20th century at the behest of John D. Rockefeller and his Standard Oil Company, has provided protection to industry with safeguards against damage claims for environmental degradation resulting from their incursion onto private property. As surface owners, ranchers and farmers have had no choice but to put up with what ever oil and gas companies have wanted to do on the land owner's property. Testifying at the House Energy and Natural Resource Committee hearing, a witness told of waking one morning to find a drilling rig on his property, 200 feet from his bedroom window, with nothing he could do about it. Passed in the House, it was not heard in the Senate.

On a positive note, Senate Bill 123, the **Strategic Water Reserve Act**, which would enable the Interstate Stream Commission to purchase or lease water from willing sellers, did pass the House and Senate and was signed into law on April 5. The bill was sponsored by Senator Carlos Cisneros (D), and is the brainchild of *Think New Mexico*. The Strategic Water Reserve Act will create a pool of publicly held water rights dedicated to keeping New Mexico's rivers flowing to meet the needs of river-dependent endangered species and fulfill water delivery obligations to other states. Legislation to create a Strategic River Reserve was initially introduced in the 2004 legislative session, where it was expanded to include groundwater and renamed Strategic Water Reserve. In the initial 2005 version of the bill, funding for sale or lease of water was to be 3% of the severance tax bonding capacity between 2005 and 2025. The bill was stripped of that mechanism by the Senate Finance Committee. This means that funds for appropriation will have to be negotiated each year at the legislature. Nevertheless, passage of the bill is a significant step forward for rivers in New Mexico.

Three Ways to get involved!

continued from page 2

removal, is still being used today. There is a gate closing the road, but it is easily bypassed and the road continues to be used by OHVs and to gain illegal access into the Valle Vidal.

Proposed project: Close and reclaim the road, leaving only single-track, hiking access.

Proposed Project Dates: June 18 & 19

Anchor Mine Project

Problem: Public is driving around the south side of an historic cabin located near the Anchor Mine site, making an illegal road that continues up the Bitter Creek drainage. This road is also used to gain illegal access into the Valle Vidal.

Proposed Project: Close off illegal road by installing barriers and signs

Proposed Project Dates: Dates have yet to be determined.

Please contact Rachel Conn at 505.758.3874 to find out how you can help with these projects!

Río Pueblo de Taos Watershed Group Formation

Amigos Bravos is bringing together community members to form a watershed group for the Río Pueblo de Taos. This is an exciting opportunity for Taos residents to get involved in a grass-roots, hands-on effort to protect and restore our local watershed. The group will be working together to draft a Watershed Restoration Action Strategy (WRAS) to identify pollution sources

Foiled were the Dairy and Construction Industry lobby's two bills that would have resulted in the fouling of New Mexico's surface waters. Senate Bill 583, sponsored by Senator Stuart Ingle, (R) San Juan, and House Bill 711, sponsored by Representative Jose Campos (D) Guadalupe, Quay, Roosevelt, and De Baca, would have removed approximately 40% of the state's surface water from Clean Water Act protection. The New Mexico Environment Department, many environmental and community groups, and the Pueblos and Tribes successfully killed off these attempts to eliminate protection for our desert waters.

Senate Bill 220, also sponsored by Senator Ingle would have placed limits on civil penalties imposed by NMED. The effect of limiting civil penalties would be that the State's judicial system would be overburdened by cases brought about as a result of the State's effort to impose costs of environmental clean up. Likewise, polluters who could afford to pay the lowered civil penalty could ignore it. The bill passed the Senate, but was fortunately never heard in the House.

There were many other bills, good and bad, that fell by the way side. The final score: even, *quid pro quo*, thank goodness! ❖

and potential restoration projects. Watershed group meetings are held monthly. For more information, call the office at 505.758.3874 or email rconn@amigosbravos.org.

National Watershed Health Project

Since January 2004, Amigos Bravos has been participating in the National Watershed Health Project, which brings together river groups from several states and a number of national river protection organizations in an effort to build the technical and organizational strength of the river movement. The project focuses on providing technical and capacity-building assistance to small, grass roots organizations that are working to protect water quality in their communities. Amigos Bravos has worked with the Rio Colorado Reclamation Committee, The Coalition for the Valle Vidal, South Valley Partners for Environmental Justice, Upper Gila Watershed Alliance, Truchas Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and many others by providing Clean Water Act Trainings, strategic planning and fundraising assistance, and media trainings. If you are involved with an organization – whether small or large – working to protect water quality, you and your group are eligible for technical or capacity-building training and/or assistance under this program. For more information contact Rachel Conn or Sean Larkin at 505.758.3874. ❖

Victory for Clean Water in New Mexico

continued from page 1

water quality wasn't protected. Amigos Bravos then proposed changes to New Mexico's water quality standards to protect community members who swim or recreate in nearby rivers. Amigos Bravos also supported local communities' proposed changes to New Mexico's water quality standards. "This is an example of the people speaking up to ensure that the laws and regulations of the state protect their health and welfare," said Conn.

Julia Stephens, director of the Rio Grande Community Development Corporation and member of the South Valley Partners for Environmental Justice, spoke about her organization's petition and efforts to protect South Valley residents who swim in the Río Grande. "We had numerous members of the community, including a group of youth, travel to Santa Fe to let the Commission know that we wanted the river protected so that our families and neighbors are not at risk when they swim in and enjoy the waters of the Río Grande. The Commission's decision is a first step towards ensuring the health of the river and our communities. We remain concerned about water quality in the *acequia* network where many community members fish and swim. Conducting water quality monitoring on a regular basis would establish a water quality baseline and could support addressing potential problems." Presently, water quality is not monitored in *acequias* and ditches statewide.

Michael Coca, a resident of Las Vegas and the President of Amigos Bravos, who swims in and irrigates from the Río Gallinas, commented on changes to the standards: "We have people swimming year-round in the Río Gallinas below the hot springs. We are glad the water quality in the river will now have high enough standards for E. coli that it will be safe to swim in the river."

Counteracting the Bush administration's attacks on New Mexico Waters

Other changes, including a more comprehensive definition of toxic pollutants and a broadening of the definition of *waters of the state* to include *all* waters of the state (water in closed basins were previously excluded from protection) were substantial victories for those concerned about water quality. The definition of *waters of the state* has been a focal issue in recent months, as the Bush administration stripped federal protection for many waters. "Broadening the legal definition of *waters of the state* has been a major priority for Amigos Bravos. We are pleased and relieved that the Commission has chosen to protect all of New Mexico's waters," said Conn. "We commend the Commission and the New Mexico Environment Department for their resolve to protect the water, and therefore the

health, of all New Mexicans."

All of the above changes were pursued during the Triennial Review of Water Quality Standards, a hearing process that takes place every 3 years. During the Triennial Review, the public and various stakeholders have the opportunity to petition for changes to the state's water quality standards. During these hearings, Amigos Bravos was represented by Erik Schlenker-Goodrich and Matt Bishop of the Western Environmental Law Center; testimony was provided by Rachel Conn, Gayle Killam of River Network, and Matt Bishop.

Post Script: Industry attempts an end-run at the Legislature

No sooner had the Water Quality Control Commission adopted the new definition of *waters of the state*, in January, than special industry interest groups – including the dairy, mining, and construction industries – introduced legislation to counter those advances in February. Senate Bill 587 and House Bill 711 would have reversed the Water Quality Control Commission's decision, and over two years of work by Amigos Bravos and other community activists. Fortunately both Bills were vehemently opposed by informed citizens and were tabled in the Judiciary Committees of both chambers. ❖

Weed Control

continued from page 1

alternative methods of weed control such as using bindweed mites to control bindweed, smothering, and timed-interval mowing. An overview of these methods is provided in a brochure printed by the Committee. A poster identifying the noxious weeds in Taos County and providing general information on alternative controls is now available. For a copy of the brochure and or poster, please contact the Amigos Bravos office at 505.758.3874. ❖



Members of Miguel Santistevan's class at Río Fernando cleanup, April 2005



Friends of
the Wild
Rivers

P.O. BOX 238 • TAOS, NM 87571

BULK PERMIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
TAOS NM
NON-PROFIT
PERMIT NO. 70

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Board of Directors:

- Michael Coca, *President*
- Roberto Vigil, *Vice-President*
- Hope Buechler, *Secretary*
- Martha Quintana, *Treasurer*
- Kimi Green
- Tom Griego
- Mary Humphrey
- Jon Klingel
- Ross Ulibarri

The Staff:

- Brian Shields, *Executive Director*
- Francisco Apodaca, *Mining & Energy Reform
Campaign Manager*
- Rachel Conn, *Clean Water Circuit Rider*
- Michael Jensen, *Grants and Communication*
- Sean Larkin, *Membership & Outreach Coordinator*
- Lucy Sanchez, *Albuquerque Projects Director*
- Betsy Wolf, *Office Manager*

Amigos Bravos co-hosts Feast of San Isidro in Albuquerque's South Valley

In honor of the relationship between people, water, and spirit, Amigos Bravos and the South Valley Community are organizing a *Fiesta de San Isidro*. *San Isidro* is the patron saint of farmers and as such is of special significance to land-based communities in New Mexico where water is scarce and elaborate communal *acequia* systems have served to sustain farming practices for hundreds of years. ***Please join us for an afternoon of music, blessing of the acequias, and breaking of the bread with Amigos Bravos and our South Valley partners!***

The Fiesta will take place nearby our office (at Isleta and Arenal) in Albuquerque's South Valley on Sunday, May 15th from 1:30 to 5:00 in the afternoon.

This year, congregations will walk in procession and go in caravan from each of ten South Valley area Catholic Churches to the *Fiesta de San Isidro* following the traditional mass and blessing of the *acequias* which takes place every year on San Isidro Day. Although Catholic Churches are serving as primary partners in the organization of the fiesta, all churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, etc. of all denominations are heartily welcomed to participate on this day of blessing and spring celebration of crops and water! Working in partnership with Amigos Bravos and the South Valley area churches are the Committee on the Future of Agriculture in the South Valley, the Pueblo of Isleta, the New Mexico Acequia Association, Ecology Ministry of the Social Justice Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Kalpulli Izkall, South Valley Partners for Environmental Justice, the Rio Grande Community Development Corporation, the Indo-Hispano Academy, and *Las Promotoras*, among others. Each of these organizations is a non-profit working in the areas of economic development and the environment as it relates to human health, especially in terms of water.

Those wishing to attend are asked to bring a favored dish to share from their culture. Music indigenous to New Mexico will be provided by Paul Piño, and others to be announced. For more information, contact Amigos Bravos' Albuquerque Projects Director Lucy Sanchez at 505-452-9387 or lsanchez@amigosbravos.org. ❖

What's At Stake? Nothing Less Than New Mexico's Future

Toxic poisons are reaching the Río Grande from the Los Alamos National Lab (LANL). Poisons as old as the Manhattan Project and the Cold War — including radio-nuclides, high explosives, PCBs, heavy metals, and other as yet undreamed of toxic brews — are leaking from the Los Alamos National Lab and reaching the Río Grande through storm events that transport the poisons down side canyons and via groundwater to the river in White Rock Canyon. Think for a moment about what is at stake here—future drinking water for all communities and large cities downstream from LANL, future economic development potential for downstream farmers, ranchers and industries that depend on clean water for their sustainability, the survival of species who depend upon the Río Grande, and the spiritual and ceremonial practices of indigenous cultures that depend on the ingestion of water and the use of herbs and medicinal plants.

Poisons reaching the Río Grande in White Rock Canyon represent the most horrifying water pollution problem in the state. Here is what we know to be true: Los Alamos National Lab has discharged wastewater into area canyons since 1943, and for 60 years radioactive pollutants have been filtering their way through ground and surface water systems. These discharges have contaminated the shallow alluvial, intermediate, and deep ground-water systems, while the plume of contaminants including nitrates, fluoride, perchlorate (a carcinogen linked to thyroid cancer), high explosives, and radioactive elements are migrating to the river and the regional aquifer – a source of Santa Fe's drinking water. Many of these pollutants have already affected certain public wells that supply the towns of Los Alamos and White Rock, and several springs along the west side of White Rock Canyon. Perchlorate has emerged as a major issue because of widespread detection in ground water that has migrated as far east as White Rock Canyon Springs, and because of low-level detections in Los Alamos tap water. The concern is particularly serious because there are no proven treatment technologies for the removal of this carcinogen from drinking-water supplies.

What we also know is that **from 1943 to 1964 over two million gallons of untreated radioactive liquid waste was dumped in the Pueblo Canyon system** – leaving behind a plutonium legacy of major proportions. PCBs are a concern in Pueblo and Sandia Canyons, and residue from High Explosive tests – including high levels of mercury and lead – are a serious concern in Water Canyon. There are over two thousand solid waste dump sites on the LANL property, the soils of over 300 of which have – by LANL's own admission – been eroding, or have the potential to erode in such a way that toxic pollutants are further disseminated through the canyons to the Río Grande.

Pollution reaching White Rock Canyon at this time represents just the tip of the iceberg. If it has taken sixty years for LANL's pollution to reach the river, we can only expect the level of toxins to increase. Still worse, this is occurring at a time when all of the major metropolitan areas downstream from White Rock Canyon including Albuquerque, Las Cruces, El Paso, and Ciudad Juárez are looking at the Río Grande as a source for drinking water. The State of New Mexico is well aware of what is at stake and would like to move aggressively towards cleanup. To that end, the State and LANL have finally signed a Consent Order that lays out a road-plan to do just that. Nevertheless, how water contamination issues will be dealt with remains in question.

It will be up to the public and the State to push the water contamination issues to the forefront of the political agenda. A number of issues hamper the State's and the public's ability to take enforcement actions: The Department of Energy (DOE) contends that neither the State nor EPA have the authority to regulate water contaminated by radionuclides at the Lab. LANL is regulated by a highly tangled web of laws, regulations, and governmental agencies that place barriers on a comprehensive

cleanup approach. In addition, and due to a long history of secrecy, LANL tends to perceive itself as unaccountable to regulatory or public scrutiny. Funding for LANL is politically charged; congress is unlikely to put LANL in a bad light or challenge its future. In the war to prove or disprove research findings, LANL has far more in the way of financial resources than the State.

The role of Amigos Bravos and our allies is to educate the public of the lurking danger on the Pajarito Plateau, to pursue every legal and technical venue available with which to expose water contamination and explore cleanup options at LANL, to support the State in its monitoring and enforcement actions, and, to ensure a seat for the public at the decision-making table. Most importantly, ***it is our role to speak the unspeakable, to take courageous action, and to propose creative solutions.***

Cleanup of waste at LANL will be at minimum a twenty-year process that will challenge our staying power. We are, and always will be, under resourced. In the short-term, we do not have the power to ensure that federal agencies or the congressional delegation will respond to our concerns, and we have very few enforcement options other than those provided by the citizen's provision of the Clean Water Act. At the same time, there are a few things working in our favor. We have the knowledge and experience of a similar (though admittedly less complex) clean-up battle at Molycorp. The New Mexico public has long been aware of the importance of protecting its water resources, and there is increasing acknowledgement, across the board, that waste at LANL is a profound, frightening, and seriously threatening problem. As mentioned earlier, State government is eager to pursue cleanup.

Our strategies for dealing with LANL's pollution involve short-term (3-5 years) and long-term (5+ years) goals. In the short-term, we have to slow down and, where possible, stop existing pollution from reaching the river. In the long term we have to clean up the sources of pollution so that no new pollution is produced. The immediate challenge is to ensure that we have a legally recognized seat at the decision making table, and a strong negotiating voice. A tried and effective way to accomplish this is through legal action – or the threat of legal action. However, legal and technical strategies alone cannot accomplish the ultimate goal of responsible clean up. ***The ultimate decisions and commitment of national resources will be made in the political arena, and will depend on public demand and congressional integrity and will.*** In the long-term, we will have to develop the infrastructure and expertise to provide creative solutions, review and respond to restoration proposals, and independently monitor the progress of cleanup efforts.

Over the past year, we have built a core project team of legal, technical, policy, and community organizing expertise. We have analyzed our legal options, identified threshold technical issues to pursue, produced technical reports, undertaken data reviews, responded to various regulatory and policy initiatives directly related to LANL, built cooperative relationships with other groups working on LANL and DOE issues, established working relationships with New Mexico State agencies responsible for monitoring and regulating LANL, kept ourselves, the public, and the media informed of new findings and activities at LANL, and developed messages that will help hold LANL accountable.

Our goal now is to increase our effectiveness by continuing to do all of the above while establishing ourselves as a force on the playing field to be reckoned with. We are building a “war chest” and looking for long-term commitments toward funding this battle. ***We invite you to stand up and be counted in the effort. Send a donation now (see page 5). You won't ever regret it. ❖***