

CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Because life is good.

GILA NATIONAL FOREST

The Gila National Forest occupies 3.3 million acres in southwestern New Mexico and is home to the Mexican spotted owl, Mexican gray wolf, Gila chub, southwestern willow flycatcher, loach minnow, and spikedace. The forest also encompasses the San Francisco, Gila, and Mimbres Rivers, and the scenic Burros Mountains. In the 1920s, conservation pioneer Aldo Leopold persuaded the Forest Service to set aside more than half a million acres of the Gila River's headwaters as wilderness. This wild land became the nation's first designated wilderness — the Gila Wilderness Area — in 1924.



Photo © Robin Silver

The Gila National Forest is home to threatened Mexican spotted owls and many other imperiled species.

In establishing the Gila Wilderness Area, the Gila National Forest set a precedent for protection of our public lands. Sadly, it appears that safeguarding the Gila for the enjoyment of future generations is no longer management's top priority. On September 11, 2009, the Gila National Forest released its travel-management plan, one of the worst plans developed for southwestern forests. Pressure from vocal off-road vehicle users has overwhelmed the Forest Service, which has lost sight of its duty to protect this land for future generations.

The Gila National Forest's plan by the numbers:

- **114,000:** number of acres of land open to continued destruction;
- **4,764:** number of miles of proposed motorized roads and trails in the Gila National Forest, equal to the distance from Hawaii to the North Pole;
- **\$7 million:** road maintenance backlog accumulated by the Gila National Forest;
- **less than 3 percent:** proportion of forest visitors who use the Gila National Forest for motorized recreation.

FOREST ECOSYSTEMS AT RISK

“Habitat destruction and the spread of alien species have been ranked as the two greatest threats to biodiversity. Off-road vehicles contribute to both of these.”

Wilcove D.S., D. Rothstein, J. Dubow, and A.L.E. Phillips, 1998.
Quantifying threats to imperiled species in the United States. *Bioscience* 48:1-15.

Perhaps the worst feature of the Gila National Forest's off-road vehicle plan is its disregard for riparian corridors — the most important areas for plants and wildlife, especially in the arid Southwest. Despite our pleas to protect these areas, the Forest Service is determined to let off-road vehicles drive directly in Big Dry Creek and the San Francisco River, a main tributary of the Gila River, the last free-flowing river in New Mexico.

The time to act is now. The Forest Service must do its job: protect our forests and honor Leopold's legacy.



Photo © Grant Courley

Our desert rivers should not be made into roads. San Francisco River, Gila National Forest.

National Off-road Vehicle Management

Scientists have recognized the impacts of off-road vehicles for decades. Effects on wildlife, habitat, vegetation, soil, air, water, and other forest users

are often severe, far-reaching, interconnected, and obvious to even the most casual observers. Motorized access is increasing on public lands and our national forests are being subjected to unprecedented damage. Finally, nearly 30 years after the signing of a presidential order designed to protect our forests from off-road vehicle abuse, the Forest Service is putting regulations in place to protect our public lands from further off-road vehicle damage. The Travel Management Rule forces the Service to manage off-road vehicles and protect our natural heritage for future generations. The rule requires the formal designation of routes and areas open to off-roading — reserving other areas for the benefit of wildlife, plants, and quiet recreation.

Off-road Vehicle Management in Southwestern National Forests

The Center for Biological Diversity has been working to protect wildlife habitat throughout New Mexico and Arizona from the ravages of off-road vehicle users for more than 15 years. The Center is committed to being a key part of the implementation of this rule in New Mexico by working with conservation groups, government agencies, and off-road vehicle riders to minimize damage and preserve natural resources.



More information on protecting public lands from off-road vehicle damage can be found on the Center for Biological Diversity's Web site at

http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/public_lands/off-road_vehicles/travel-management_planning/index.html.

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