

My Turn

Make your voice heard in 'Forest Management Plan'

Jim O'Donnell

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Right now the Carson National Forest is revising the Forest Management Plan for the entire forest. This type of revision takes place once in a generation. The last time the Carson developed a fresh plan was in the mid-1980s. Given that the Carson manages 1.5 million acres of public lands in our own backyards this is a big deal.

This is a great opportunity for the people of northern New Mexico to have a say in how our forests, lakes, streams and landscapes are managed.

A number of northern New Mexicans including groups like Amigos Bravos, the Western Environmental Law Center, Trout Unlimited, New Mexico Wildlife Federation and Backcountry Horsemen of New Mexico have joined together to impact this management plan revision in two specific ways.

The first has to do with our Valle Vidal. You may remember, almost 11 years ago we were able to get legislation through Congress that permanently protected the Valle Vidal from oil and gas development. This was an incredible community victory. Now, with this plan revision we have the opportunity to get a solid management plan in place for this area that is sometimes called the "Yellowstone of the Southwest."

We've crafted and submitted a management proposal to the Carson that seeks to create a cohesive vision for the Valle encompassing the restoration work that is underway, the area's wild, roadless lands, its unique biological and recreation values, and the fact that it is a working landscape. We would like to see the Carson National Forest recognize the unique biological and social values of the Valle Vidal by adopting our proposal.

The second has to do with what we are calling "Wetland Jewels." These high-altitude wetlands are rare in the southwest and our forest hosts an impressive number of these places. We've identified 10 wetlands that hold important watershed and biodiversity values. Our proposal seeks protections against impacts from roads, off road vehicles and ungulate grazing. These areas also need to be given special restoration priority, so that the numerous head cuts and other erosional features that are currently draining and drying up these wetlands are addressed and the functions of these critical headwater wetlands are restored.

Without healthy headwater wetland systems, snowmelt and storm water flow out of the forest all at once, causing floods in the spring and then dry streambeds later in the season. Our changing climate will increase the frequency and intensity of both drought and flood events. Healthy wetland systems mitigate both of these impacts by soaking up flood waters and substantially augmenting stream flow during dry times.

The Valle Vidal proposal is available at: *amigosbravos*.

org/spotlight/view/76 and the Wetland Jewels proposal is available at:*amigosbravos.org/spotlight/view/67*

The Carson is planning on coming out with proposed management areas and recommended directions for the planning process sometime in mid-November. We are trying to do a push of comments between now and November to advocate for Management Areas for the Valle Vidal and Wetland Jewels. Our goal is to push the Carson on these Management Area proposals now in the hopes that they incorporate them into the draft they are releasing in November.

And this is where you come in. As a resident of northern New Mexico and a user of the Carson National Forest your say in this management plan matters. Your voice should be heard. And we are asking you to support the Valle Vidal and Wetland Jewels proposals.

We urge you to tell the Carson to incorporate these proposals into the final Carson Forest Plan. We want the Carson to continue to provide healthy habitat for wildlife, recreational opportunities for future generations, and clean water for ecosystems and downstream communities. By establishing these two Management Areas the Carson National Forest will be taking an important step in protecting these resources for future generations.

Submit your comments to Carson National Forest, 208 Cruz Alta Road, Taos, NM 87571 If you find yourself struggling to put together your own letter, a bunch of Taose-os are going to meet at the Amigos Bravos office on Thursday, Oct. 19 from 5-8 p.m. to craft letters together. I will be there to answer questions and help you draft your comments along with folks from the Western Environmental Law Center and Rachel Conn of Amigos Bravos.

O'Donnell is a Taos photographer and environmentalist.

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