

Carapace

NEWSLETTER FOR THE

Upper Gila Watershed Alliance



Spring/Summer 2021

Vol. 24 No. 1



Kira Shay, a 6th grader in the Silver City Consolidated School District, submitted one of the ten winning entries in UGWA's art and nature contest. We offered this contest to entice Grant County's middle and high school students to spend less time on screen and more time in nature. We had two categories: how nature makes you feel, and description of a scientific process that is important to you. Entrants used media of their choice, including photographs, paintings, video, and poetry. Kira's entry was oil on canvas.

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Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

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Mission Statement

The Upper Gila Watershed Alliance is a non-profit watershed protection and conservation organization working to promote the long-term health of the Upper Gila Watershed and its communities of life. Through advocacy, education, research and restoration projects, we are striving to build communities of stewards in more locally based economies.

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UGWA Joins the 21st Century

by Donna Stevens

While I don't always approve – not that anyone asked me – of global technological trends, I recognize the futility of swimming against the tide. I vastly prefer actual to virtual reality. But I also acknowledge the immense power of using the latter to protect the former, the natural world. And UGWA is all about protecting water and land.

To reap the benefits of using 21st century technology to further our mission, UGWA has recently contracted with a social media specialist, Tuan Tran, to spread the word about our work via Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and platforms I've yet to explore. In addition

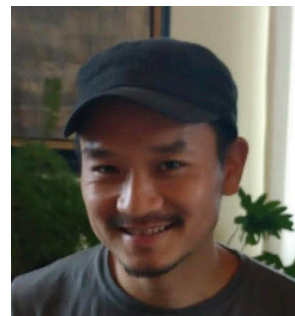
to posting updates about our work to keep supporters more informed and engaged, he will create compelling and impactful visual content to interest new people in conservation.

Several years ago, UGWA experimented with sending our newsletter via email as a way to save trees both as paper and as money. Although it was hard to know for sure, the lack of feedback on the newsletter led us to conclude that UGWA members were unenthused about reading Carapace online. After resuming the more resource-heavy print format, we again heard from appreciative readers.

Fortunately, traditional and new technologies are not mutually exclusive. When it comes to information channels, there's something for everyone. We won't abandon our old-school supporters, who will continue to receive tree-based newsletters in the mail. At the same time, by venturing further into cyberspace, UGWA aims to engage and mentor young people. Let's face it, our climate crisis is an all-hands-on-deck moment requiring all generations to row in the same direction, not argue over actual vs. virtual deck chairs.

Please join UGWA in cyberspace as we boldly go where millions have gone before. Just think of it as the Flintstones meet the Jetsons.

If you're on Facebook and Instagram, search for the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance. Don't forget to like us! Many thanks to UGWA's very generous anonymous Major Donor for the funding for social media outreach.



Tuan Tran Photo Courtesy of
Tuan Tran

Horned Lizard Joy

by Emily Pollom

Is there an animal that fills you with such joy that your face starts to hurt from smiling too much? An animal whose photo, when you post it on social media, will get more likes than your wedding or the birth of your first child? For me, this creature is the horned lizard, little mascot of the West who has won the hearts of people throughout North America since time immemorial.

There are 17 species of horned lizards in North America, and three reside in New Mexico: Texas, round-tailed, and greater short-horned lizards. They can be differentiated by looking at the arrangement of horns on their heads. If you are lucky enough to spot them despite their superb camouflage, their spiky, round bodies are their definitive feature. They are often found in mosaic habitat, meaning a mix of grasses, shrubs, and trees. They are ant-specialists, sitting near mounds, waiting for a meal to walk close enough to gulp down. In addition to evolving an immunity to harvester ant stings, horned lizards coat ants in mucous as soon as they enter their esophagi, preventing the ants from biting or stinging them.

Reproductive adaptations also allow them to exist in extreme environments. Texas and round-tailed horned lizards lay their eggs in underground borrows while greater short-horned lizards, the most common in the Gila National Forest, give live birth of up to 48 babies! Live-birth allows this high elevation species to move their embryos into favorable microclimates each day, as temperatures can fluctuate between very hot to cool at night.

I'm often asked how horned lizards are faring and if they are endangered. Many people recall finding them often as a child but never see them now. Species are facing different challenges and in most places scientists aren't exactly sure how they are doing. Horned lizards in California, Arizona, and Texas receive some special protections due to conservation concerns. Habitat loss, insecticide use, and the introduction of highly aggressive invasive ant species are some threats that have negative impacts.

For those wanting to help horned lizards I have three suggestions: steer clear of broadcast insecticides, avoid soil compaction, and participate in citizen science. Many people feel compelled to rid their property of ant mounds but I say let them be if you can stand it. A horned lizard may be depending on them. Additionally, horned lizards require somewhat loose soil in order to dig nesting burrows and bury themselves in the earth for hibernation. Avoiding



Greater short-horned lizard. – Carol Ann Fugagli

unnecessary soil compaction ensures that they have good habitat for these activities.

We have entered an era of citizen science and none too soon, as funding for research, whether through universities or government agencies, has been steadily decreasing for years. The smartphone's ability to act as a GPS and camera makes it an incredible data collection tool. The app iNaturalist is a fantastic way to post sightings of horned lizards and other wildlife. From this data, the research community can better understand horned lizard distribution, annual life cycle, and how populations may be changing. Texas was able to determine that horned lizard numbers were declining through a citizen science project which resulted in protections and increased funding for research in the state.

Please consider adding your horned lizard sightings to the project "Horned Lizards of New Mexico" on iNaturalist. Joining the Horned Lizard Conservation Society at www.hornedlizards.org is another great way to help fund research. The next time you see an ant mound or are walking through some mosaic habitat, take some time to search for and observe these charismatic lizards. If you find one, I promise you, your face will hurt from smiling so much.

Savoring Sweet Success

by Donna Stevens

Conservation work often requires patience and perseverance, since success in long-term campaigns can seem eternally beyond reach. So when a couple of years-long issues were favorably resolved in 2021, we were immensely relieved, joyous, and grateful. At last, after 15 years, UGWA and our partners in the Gila Conservation Coalition and other nonprofits prevailed in our campaign to prevent a Gila River diversion (see article on p. 8).

The second victory arrived in January of this year, when the Air Force released its final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) stating its preferred alternative for Special Use Airspace for F-16 pilot training: the Talon Military Operations Area near Alamogordo. In the draft EIS, another alternative under consideration would have resulted in F-16s doing low-level maneuvers over the Gila National Forest, including the wilderness areas. Ten percent of the flights would have produced sonic booms, ten percent would have flown at night, and most would have released flares and chaff, bundles of millions of tiny aluminum-coated fibers.

In response to this desecration of our land and water,

and the diminution of rural communities' quality of life, the public outcry was swift and deafening. The Air Force received thousands of comments opposing military trainings over the Gila, and precious few in favor.

UGWA, our conservation partners, and most of the community wholeheartedly supported the Air Force's decision to spare the Gila. Though there was no official public comment period after release of the final EIS, our coalition submitted comments as part of the official record that were critical of parts of the final EIS analyses, including the disingenuous characterization of noise levels, incorrect conclusion that wildlife would not be affected, and inadequate studies on the dangers of inhalation of chaff particles and the increased risk of wildfires. Our motive for writing comments was our concern that the Air Force could propose Gila airspace as a Military Operations Area at a future date and resurrect its substandard EIS as a green light to proceed.

Everyone who attended meetings and submitted comments should congratulate themselves on a job well done and a rare victory against militarization of public lands.

UGWA thanks all of our supporters who donated to our campaign to prevent military trainings over the Gila.



Save the Date!

**17th Annual
Gila River Festival**
September 16-19, 2021

This year's Gila River Festival is a hybrid event featuring online evening presentations and COVID-safe, guided field trips. Festival highlights include:

- Philosopher and writer Kathleen Dean Moore as the keynote speaker, addressing the need for moral courage in a time of planetary change
- A conversation with writer and activist Sharman Apt Russell, Albuquerque Poet Laureate Michelle Otero, and Michael Casaus, NM State Director of the Wilderness Society
- Presentation by Doug Tallamy, author of *Nature's Best Hope*, about transforming our yards into biodiverse landscapes
- Guided field trips on rock art, bird-banding, snakes, restoration, moths, and much more

FOR MORE INFO, VISIT **GILARIVERFESTIVAL.ORG** REGISTRATION BEGINS ONLINE AUGUST 1.



All Gila, All the Time

by Donna Stevens

Shimmering Gila River. Photo Credit: Dennis Weller

The Upper Gila Watershed Alliance is always working to strengthen safeguards for all things Gila: the national forest and the river. Here's a brief update on forest and river protection.

Gila National Forest: The Forest Service is revising its 1986 Forest Plan, which is badly outdated. This document is important because it guides the Forest Service's actions, decisions, and projects for the next 15-20 years. The draft Forest Plan was released in January 2020, kicking off a 90 day public comment period that coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UGWA coordinated a broad coalition of conservation and sportsmen's nonprofits to submit lengthy and substantive comments in response to the draft plan's inadequacies. The conservation community called for strong protections for the forest, streams, watersheds, wildlife habitat, threatened and endangered species, and native flora. We pushed for a meaningful response to climate change and protection of the special refugial areas – such as the Gila River and north-facing, high-elevation slopes – that will be increasingly important in a hotter, drier climate.

The Forest Service planning team is required by law to respond to all public comments, and either change the final plan in response to input or justify why they declined to do so. This is a time-consuming undertaking, and the release of the final plan has been postponed a few times. Recent intel from the planning team is that the final plan will be released in late 2021, with implementation of the plan following in a couple of months.

When the final plan is released, UGWA and our conservation partners will review it carefully to determine whether it conforms to our expectations. If not, the coalition will submit an administrative objection, requiring a response from the Forest Service.

Gila River: The ultimate protection for the Gila River and its major tributaries is Wild and Scenic River designation. The M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act would bestow this protected status on 450 miles of the Gila and San Francisco Rivers and smaller streams, almost all of them in the Gila National Forest.

The bill was introduced in the 2020 Congressional session by Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, had a committee hearing, but never came to a vote. Udall stepped down as a senator at the end of 2020; our current federal Senators, Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan, are fully supportive of this bill. The conservation community anticipates that it will be reintroduced in the next few months, although we acknowledge that these kinds of bills can take years to pass, especially in the current divisive atmosphere.

We look forward to the day when protecting our land and water is a foregone conclusion. Until that day arrives, and with your support, UGWA will keep pushing decision-makers to do the right thing.

Thank you to the Conservation Lands Foundation and the Wilderness Society for funding our work on Wild and Scenic River designation and forest planning.



Before, during, and after clearing the Middle Fork trail. Photo credit: Melissa Green

Tamarisks and Trails

by Carol Ann Fugagli

UGWA is pleased to announce that we received funding from the National Forest Foundation (NFF) for trail improvement and salt cedar eradication in the Gila National Forest. For the salt cedar work, we're contracting with Zack Crockett and Mike Fugagli, who have been on our crew since 2016 when we first began surveying, cutting, and treating salt cedar along the Gila River. Thus far, in 2021, this hard-working crew has treated the reach between the Mogollon confluence and upriver to Hell's Canyon. They revisited all tamarisk stands that were cut and treated in 2016 and 2017 and were delighted to find that very few treated stems had resprouted and that no new stands were found, indicating the lack of a seed source. Tamarisk is incredibly tenacious, as shown by the following example. This season, the tamarisk crew found a few stems that were initially treated in 2016, did not resprout in 2017, but resprouted this year. This demonstrates that salt cedar eradication is a multi-year process that requires revisiting the same stands several times in order to be successful. Our crew will continue to work upriver this summer, finishing their work at the Grapevine Campground.

The other NFF grant component is trail improvement. Former Gila National Forest trail crew leader Melissa Green is at the helm, organizing crews of volunteers working with the Gila Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen to improve trails such as Big Bear, Holt Apache, and Middle Fork of the Gila. This industrious group has already maintained more than 25 miles of trails, including removing 300 logs with

handsaws and crosscut saws, doing extensive brushing and significant tread repair, and building 50 cairns. Volunteers have already worked more than 2,000 hours, and there's more work scheduled!

For more information and photos, visit the Gila Trails Info Facebook page that shows examples of their good work. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the crew, volunteers, Gila Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen, New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors, Continental Divide Trail Coalition, National Forest Foundation, UGWA's anonymous Major Donor, the Forest Service, and everyone else involved with this project so that our beloved Gila National Forest can continue to be enjoyed by so many people!

The National Forest Foundation works on behalf of the American public to inspire personal and meaningful connections to our National Forests. By directly engaging Americans and leveraging private and public funding, the NFF leads forest conservation efforts and promotes responsible recreation. Each year the NFF restores fish and wildlife habitat, facilitates common ground, plants trees in areas affect by fires, insects and disease and improves recreational opportunities. The NFF believes our National Forests and all they offer are an American treasure and are vital to the health of our communities. Learn more at nationalforests.org.

Native Is Best

by Carol Ann Fugagli

When educating about plant or animal species, many times I find myself using the words native, invasive, or naturalized. Sometimes I receive nods of recognition, but more often than not, I look out into a sea of blank stares. So this is probably a good opportunity to discuss the differences between the three.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a native species is “a plant that is a part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds or thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem.” This should be used with a geographic qualifier such as “native to the Southwest.” Only plants found in this country before European settlement are considered to be native to the U.S. An invasive species is “a plant that is both non-native and able to establish on many sites, grow quickly, and spread to the point of disrupting plant communities or ecosystems.” The last definition is naturalized, which is “a non-native plant that does not need human help to reproduce and maintain itself over time in an area where it is not native.” Naturalized plants do not become native members of the local plant community. Here’s where things get sticky; since invasive plants reproduce and spread without human help, they are also naturalized. Invasive species are a small, but troublesome, subcategory of naturalized plants.

One particularly pesky plant is salt cedar (*Tamarix spp.*), which replaces riparian woodlands once dominated by cottonwood (*Populus spp.*) and willow (*Salix spp.*). This expansion of salt cedar has been facilitated by modifications to flood regimes, clearing of native riparian vegetation, livestock grazing, and urban expansion. Salt cedar is now the second most abundant woody riparian plant across the western landscape.

Although non-native trees often have lower habitat value than riparian vegetation, they can provide habitat for some wildlife species, especially where native riparian vegetation has difficulty persisting. In many areas, non-native vegetation may provide the only available habitat for some species of wildlife. Forty nine species of birds are known to have built nests in salt cedar, and wildlife use it as a source of cover. However, non-native vegetation in no way replaces the inherent value of natives, and only in areas where there is no other alternative can we consider non-native as being better than nothing. A similar mindset would be that it’s better for a starving person to only eat cookies because it’s better than having no calories at all.



Photo Credit: Carol Ann Fugagli

The bottom line is that it’s important to look at the entire picture of habitat complexity in the greater ecosystem, rather than consider a mere scattering of individual positive uses for a few species.

Thank you to the National Forest Foundation and National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance for funding tamarisk removal and trails maintenance work.

Upper Gila Watershed Alliance’s 25th Anniversary!

For years, UGWA has hosted an annual meeting in the fall, where we come together to share a meal and talk about our work. In 2020, though, to protect individual and community health, we had to forego this gathering.

It remains to be seen whether we can host an anniversary celebration this fall. We’ll keep you posted on our plans.

Thank you so much for supporting UGWA for 25 years!

Gila River Diversion – Dead In the Water!

by Donna Stevens

At last, the Gila River in New Mexico is safe from the threat of an expensive diversion that would have dewatered the river and degraded rich riparian habitat. Several partial wins in the last year and a half have resulted in total victory. Following is a short chronology of how the diversion went down in flames.

In December 2019, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt refused to give a time extension to the NM CAP Entity, the local group working to design and build a diversion. The NM CAP (Central Arizona Project) Entity continued to change details of its proposed diversion project even while environmental compliance studies were being completed by the Bureau of Reclamation's contractors. In fact, the Bureau had warned the Entity six months prior to the 2019 year-end deadline that the environmental compliance process mandated under the National Environmental Policy Act (usually called NEPA) was behind schedule and would not meet the deadline if the Entity kept altering its proposal. When the Interior Department, which includes the Bureau of Reclamation, denied a time extension, it dealt a huge blow to the CAP Entity's plans, resulting in the loss of \$56 million that could only be used to design, construct, operate, and maintain a Gila River diversion.

Because \$80 million remained in a separate chunk of Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA) funding that could be used for either a diversion or non-diversion water projects, the Bureau of Reclamation continued work on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in early 2020. At its June 2020 meeting, however, the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) voted to discontinue funding for the EIS beginning in fiscal year 2021, which began on July 1, 2020. Absent a favorable Final EIS, a diversion cannot be constructed.

Nevertheless, the NM CAP Entity persisted. It continued to convene monthly to discuss amending its Joint Powers Agreement, hoping to morph into a regional water authority, despite its lack of expertise. A Gila River diversion was still the Entity's top priority, however, as was reiterated at each meeting.

New Mexico legislators dealt the CAP Entity another near-fatal blow when they passed House Bill 200 in March 2021. HB200 had two provisions. The first was to

designate the NM Water Trust Board, rather than the NM CAP Entity, as the group advising the Interstate Stream Commission on how to allocate the remaining \$80 million to water projects in southwest New Mexico. The second provision prohibited expenditure of NM Unit Funds (from the AWSA) to evaluate, plan, or construct a Gila River diversion (a so-called NM Unit).

Another knockout punch fell on April 30, 2021 when the Interstate Stream Commission declined to fund the NM CAP Entity for fiscal year 2022, which begins on July 1, 2021. This decision prompted CAP Entity Executive Director Anthony Gutierrez to resign at the Entity's May 4 meeting.

Without funding, an Executive Director, and a defined role, it's unclear at this writing (May 7, 2021) if the NM CAP Entity will continue. They scheduled a June meeting, but the May 4 meeting barely had a quorum, so perhaps members are at last accepting their defeat, while refusing to admit it publicly.

While the CAP Entity lacks a role, UGWA and our partners in the Gila Conservation Coalition (GCC) plan to stay engaged in the AWSA process. We need to ensure that the Water Trust Board evaluates water infrastructure projects with an eye toward conservation-minded water projects benefitting the largest number of people in southwest New Mexico. While the ISC has the final say in how \$80 million is allocated, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and the public have influence.

In the past century, multiple Gila River diversion attempts have failed. The most recent attempt to dewater the Gila went further than its predecessors because of the AWSA federal funding. In the end, this attempt, too, failed. As our late colleague and GCC founder Dutch Salmon liked to remind us when victory was far from certain, "The project is a dog."

UGWA thanks the Maki Foundation for its financial support of our work to protect the Gila River. We also thank the many Gila River lovers who attended meetings, wrote emails, and refused to give up.

Climate Change Brings Opportunities

by Carol Ann Fugagli

Humanity is entering into a changed world, whether we understand it or not. Young people have inherited a planet significantly different from that of past generations, and they will need new proficiencies to navigate this changed future. We feel it's the responsibility of educators to teach youth about the science of climate change, employability in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, and opportunities for their future.

In response to these changes, the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance and The Nature Conservancy are collaborating to provide our region's youth an accelerated path toward ecological literacy and to give them the tools and opportunities for their diverse voices and unique perspectives to be heard. This will be accomplished by offering two solutions-oriented eco-camps: free, 5-day camps focused primarily on climate and biodiversity issues, with a regional emphasis and topics introduced by knowledgeable, local presenters. The camps are also designed to help reconnect young people with the natural world through a variety of fun, place-based activities, including primitive skills training and an introduction to regional indigenous cultures. Vegan lunches and snacks will be provided.

This summer we will test our pilot program, with day camps in late June and early July. In future years, we plan to have participants camp overnight for the entire week for a true immersion experience.

There are still a few spaces available, so if you know of any high school students who might be interested, please have them contact Carol Ann at: admin@ugwa.org

Thank you to the Lineberry Foundation and The Nature Conservancy for funding the eco-camps. Many thanks also to generous supporters of UGWA's early 2020 GoFundMe campaign to send students to a Climate Reality Project training, which was later cancelled due to the pandemic. That funding is now being used for the eco-camps to educate local youth about climate change and ecological literacy.



Photo credit: Gabe Etengoff

Calling All Volunteers!

If you enjoy hiking and want to help keep our Gila National Forest in a healthy condition, then you may want to join UGWA's new impact monitoring project. The goal is to notify the Forest Service when officially closed roads are being inappropriately used, when signs have been destroyed or removed, and when trespass cattle are found along the river or in areas where they are not supposed to be. Volunteers can work in pairs and choose from a number of high priority locations. We will train you in data collection and make things as simple as possible so you can also enjoy a day in our beautiful forest.

If you are interested, please email Carol Ann at: admin@ugwa.org



Photo credit: Gabe Etengoff

Thank You!

[October 23, 2020—May 15, 2021]

New Members

Eric Brown • Rebecca Summer and Richard Ducotey • Deb Preusch

Returning Members & Supporters

• Steve & Nena MacDonald • Elaine & William Halbedel • Thomas Dwyer • Torie Grass & Jim Goodkind
Alex Tager & Keith Knadler • Susan Van Auken & Gurnie Dobbs • Gerald Schultz • Marion & Jamie Newton
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Native Plant Society of New Mexico • New Mexico Environment Department
Resources Legacy Fund • Silver City Food Co-op • The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society

Thank You to Our Funders

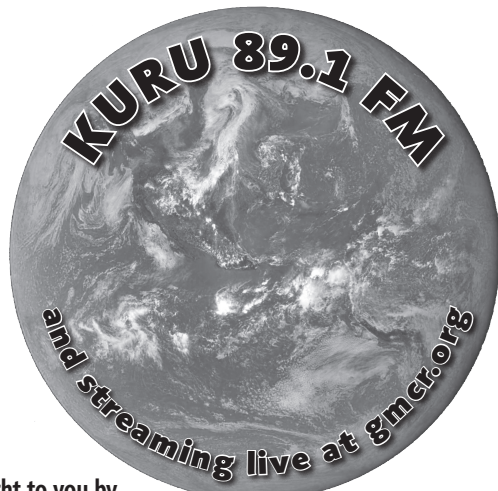
Altman Foundation • Conservation Lands Foundation • Lineberry Foundation
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Black-tailed rattlesnake. Photo Credit: Mike Fugagli

Earth Matters

A show about earthly matters that impact us all!



Brought to you by

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Las Cruces Community Radio Upper Gila Watershed Alliance
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EVERY Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 10am,

Thursday evening at 6pm

Tuesday at 10am on KTAL-LP 101.5 FM in Las Cruces



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UGWA Membership Application

Your membership and additional financial support sustain UGWA and are critical to the organization's ongoing health. Share in the protection and conservation of our watershed and become an UGWA member today.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-Mail _____

Membership Categories—Annual Dues:

Chiricahua Leopard Frog	\$ 20
Gila Trout	30
Mexican Gray Wolf	50
Beaver	100
River Otter	250
Other Amount	_____



Make your check payable to

UGWA

and send to

PO Box 383, Gila NM 88038

☐ I don't wish to join at this time, but please notify me of upcoming events:

Name _____

E-Mail _____



UGWA's Statement of Philosophy

The members of the UGWA recognize a vital and necessary connection between our individual and collective rights and responsibilities as landowners and community members and the long-term stewardship of the Upper Gila River Valley and Watershed.

The members of the UGWA share a love and concern for our community which is an integral part of our lives and, therefore, seek to harmonize our presence and activities within the watershed for the health and integrity of the entire "community," which includes the soil, the air, the water, the people, the plants, and animals.

The members of the UGWA share the conviction that men and women work best together in a spirit

of cooperation, conflict resolution, and consensual agreement that builds upon a common ground that benefits from the views and concerns of each individual acting as uncoerced free agents.

To realize our vision for the common benefit of the entire community served by the Upper Gila Watershed, and for the sake of future generations, the UGWA seeks ways and means to bring people and organizations together in constructive dialogue and activities aimed at clear communication, education, land restoration, research, and local economic health.

Give Grandly! A Grand Success for UGWA!

A huge **THANK YOU** to everyone who donated to the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance during Give Grandly! Thanks to you, we raised over \$5,800 to promote the long-term health of the Upper Gila Watershed and its communities of life!

Upper Gila Watershed Alliance
PO Box 383
Gila, New Mexico 88038

FIRST CLASS MAIL