



If this toad is still in the region, plans are in place to aid its recovery

Recovery plans initiated for fungus-plagued Alpine toad in its high-country habitat, says Game and Fish

By R. Scott Gerdes
The Taos News

It has warty skin, a plump body and a nonexistent croak — an unusual poster child for the toad community. The boreal toad (*bufo boreas*) is an Alpine dweller that is native to New Mexico. It feasts on the bugs we humans refer to as “pests.” The problem is the population of the toad with a racing stripe down its back, is dwindling in Northern New Mexico’s mountains — and no longer exists in some areas.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) has initiated a recovery plan for the high elevation amphibian. Leland Pierce, Terrestrial Species Recovery Plan Coordinator, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, is heading the effort that he calls “repatriation.”

Over the next two years, Pierce will conduct studies to confirm boreal toad numbers. The best guess, he said, is that it no longer exists in the state. If it does, Pierce believes it will most likely be found in the Chama area.

“They could be in the Taos mountains,” Pierce said. “But I wouldn’t hold my breath.”

Biologists’ opinions are that the boreal toad has not been around since

1990. The current theory is that the chytrid fungus is to blame, according to Pierce. The fungus, which exists in cold waters, somehow negatively impacts amphibians. Biologists aren’t sure why or how, said Pierce. It has also “wiped out” other frog species, especially in Colorado.

If studies and public survey determine that a repatriation plan for the boreal toad is viable, Pierce said his department will begin by protecting areas where the toad may exist. They would then get tadpoles from a hatchery in Colorado, where the boreal toad is being repopulated.

The project would be long-term, Pierce stated, because it takes male boreal toads four years to mature and females, six years. Since the boreal toad makes almost no sound at all, the male toad responds to vibration — such as splashing water — when searching for a mate.

Chorus frogs and tiger salamanders are more common in the Taos area, Pierce said. Both of those species “are doing quite fine,” he added.

If interested in participating in the boreal frog repatriation project, contact Leland Pierce at 505-476-8094.

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Karel Bergmann

Although similar to toads of lower altitudes, the boreal toad prefers the mountains and high country.

SENDEROS NUEVOS Y VIEJOS: OLD AND NEW TRAILS



Greg Kreller

Angel Fire continues as a popular destination with the arrival of recent new snow.

Enjoy winter excursions in Angel Fire

By Marti Segura
For The Taos News

The New Year brought new snow to much of Northern New Mexico, which provided prime skiing conditions in the region. Just minutes away, Angel Fire has plenty to entertain you all season and makes for the perfect winter getaway all in a day. From skis and sleighs, snowmobiles and sleds, whatever you crave in winter fun, Angel Fire has you covered.

Angel Fire Resort offers over 500 skiable acres, two freestyle terrain parks, a halfpipe and brand new glade area. The base elevation lies at 8,600 feet with a summit elevation of 10,677 feet. The terrain is 26 percent beginner, 50 percent intermediate and 24 percent advanced. Ride to the mountain tops aboard any of seven lifts, including two high-speed quads, three double chairlifts and two surface lifts.

The average snowfall is 210-inches with snowmaking capacity on 52-percent of the mountain. The resort boasts one of the most powerful and complete snowmaking systems in the southwest and they offer a snow satisfaction guarantee. If you’re not perfectly satisfied with the snow conditions, simply return

your lift ticket within one hour of your first chairlift ride and you can ski for free another day.

Snowboarders are welcome to practice their moves at the Lowrider Terrain Park. This is the perfect place for experienced riders and skiers to boost their skills on short rails, fun boxes, jumps and rollers. Liberation Park has been called a freestyler’s paradise with more room, more jumps and the state’s only 400-foot halfpipe.

Try something different. Let the experts teach you some new tricks on twin tips, or take a lesson in skiboarding or cross-country skiing. The resort offers a variety of ski and snowboard lessons, clinics and workshops conducted by world-class instructors. Ski and ride workshops are open to skiers of all levels from beginner to expert. They include workshops for beginners, carving, bumps and moguls for intermediate skiers and steeps for advanced skiers. This year, the Polar Coaster tubing park opens. New bumps, rollers and banks get you to the bottom of the mountain and the expanded 720-foot SunKid Wondercarpet will carry you effortlessly back to the top.

According to the weekend ski report,

Angel Fire received five inches of new snow with the past storm. Six out of seven lifts are open serving 12 groomed trails. The resort is open 9 a.m.-4 p.m., seven days a week.

The resort offers equipment rentals and demos, as well as clothing and accessories for purchase. When you work up an appetite, there are several options for dining on the mountain, at the base and in the hotel.

For more information on rates and snow conditions visit www.angelfireresort.com or call 505-377-3171.

In town, there are additional options for dining, shopping and more winter excursions. Explore the trails on an old-fashioned sleigh ride offered by Roadrunner tours. The company offers winter trail rides complete with hot drinks, snacks or a chuck wagon supper around a campfire. It is located on State Road 434 across from the airport. For more details call 505-377-6416. Angel Fire Excursions offers first class guided snowmobile trips through the scenic trails of the Carson National Forest. One day advanced reservations are recommended. For rates and reservations call 505-377-2799.



Greg Kreller

The Valles Caldera is home to a large and healthy elk herd.

Senate approves Valles Caldera habitat bill

Staff Report

Legislation aimed at protecting the Valles Caldera National Preserve and Trust from geothermal energy development passed in the U.S. House of Representatives Tuesday (Dec. 6).

Passed in the full Senate in July, the Valles Caldera Preservation Act of 2005 now heads to Pres. George Bush’s desk. The bill was cosponsored by U.S. Sens. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) and Pete Domenici (R-N.M.).

The legislation directs Agricultural Secretary Mike Johanns to negotiate a price with mineral rights owners for buying the remaining geothermal interests in the 89,000-acre preserve in north central New Mexico. If negotiations fail within 60 days, the matter would be directed to federal court for resolution.

All of New Mexico’s legislative delegation voted in support of the bill, including U.S. Rep. Tom Udall who commented, “This legislation provides a reasonable method for resolving in a timely fashion the sizable differences of opinion regarding the fair market value of the outstanding mineral interests.”

The Valles Caldera was private property known as “the Baca Ranch” until 2000, when the federal government bought it. The 12.5 percent of underground mineral rights, however, are still privately owned. The mineral rights are leased to GeoProducts of New Mexico which proposed the creation of a geothermal energy plant within the preserve.

Mineral rights owners embrace the legislation, stating the act will allow for them to receive an acceptable monetary value for their rights.

The preserves remaining mineral rights were valued at \$1.8 million in 2000. That offer was rejected by the mineral rights owners who claimed it was too low.

The preserve is situated inside a collapsed crater in the volcanic Jemez Mountain Range. It is studded with eruptive domes and features the 11,254-ft. high Redondo Peak.

In July 2000, Pres. Bill Clinton signed the Valles Caldera National Preservation and Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act which defines employment classifications, and resource management and funding authority.

ANGEL FIRE BRIEF

Winter fun rides offered in Angel Fire

Bobcat Pass Wilderness Adventures is offering snowmobile and ATV rides and tours. Reservations are needed. Call 505-754-2769 to book a ride. Rides leave from Bobcat Pass on State Road 38, 14 miles north of Eagle Nest.

Four-wheeler and ATV tours are also available from Angel Fire

Excursions. To make reservations call 505-377-2799. The company is located in Frontier Square at 3365 Mountain View Blvd., just south of Valley Market.

Horseback and wagon rides, including dinner rides are available at Roadrunner Tours, located at 3007 Mountain View Blvd., across from the airport. Reservations are recommended. To reserve a tour spot call 505-377-6416.