



**BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS**
NEW MEXICO

Nov. 26, 2019

To whom it may concern,

The New Mexico Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (NM BHA) seeks to safeguard North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting through education and work on behalf of wild public lands and waters. Lack of access is cited by U.S. sportsmen and women as the number one reason they stop pursuing their passions of hunting and fishing. For that reason, BHA's work includes enhancing and maintaining hunting and fishing access for sportsmen and women throughout North America, but particularly on behalf of our 500 members in New Mexico.

It recently came to our attention that a 238-acre tract of State Trust Land, spanning the Rio Grande in Albuquerque's South Valley and adjacent to Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, is at risk of being closed to hunting due to complaints from neighbors and non-hunters. After visiting the site ourselves, we have seen firsthand that the tract is in close proximity to private property and to access trails to and along the Rio Grande, and that it is used for a variety of purposes including hiking, educational tours, fishing, biking and bird watching. Hunters have legally accessed this State Trust Land to pursue game, but recently the area has experienced an increase in use, likely due to access improvements stemming from the designation of Valle de Oro NWR and the current 2019 waterfowl season.

BHA values the multiple-use philosophy that guides the management of our State Trust Lands, and we believe the limited hunting underway on this particular tract should be given thorough, unbiased consideration before any permanent decisions are made regarding future use. This property provides unique opportunity to New Mexico sportsmen and women, both for its close proximity to Albuquerque and because it provides access to waterfowl hunting in the Rio Grande Valley, which is extremely scarce – in fact, priceless to current and future generations.

We believe continued access to this parcel for hunters and anglers should be supported by both the State Land Office and Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. Earlier this year, Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard appointed two NM BHA representatives – BHA Southwest Chapter Coordinator Katie DeLorenzo and NM BHA Chairman Joel Gay – to serve on the SLO Sportspeople's Advisory Committee, and we know that hunting access to State Trust Land is a priority for the Commissioner and her office. In addition, the mission statement for the National Wildlife Refuge System includes "providing the public with safe, high-quality and compatible wildlife-dependent public use," including hunting and fishing, so we are optimistic that Valle de Oro refuge staff are open to working with the hunting community as well.

New Mexico BHA's board is committed to working with the State Land Office, refuge managers, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and other users, including residents of the Valle de Oro NWR neighborhood, to ensure this area remains safe and accessible for a variety of user groups, including hunters and anglers. To that end, we have outlined some preliminary suggestions for your consideration and are available to further discuss solutions. We believe the



SLO should:

- Install signage to delineate the State Trust Land boundaries and inform all user groups that firearm use can be expected at certain times but is both safe and legal;
- Limit weapon type for use on this tract. We believe rifles, handguns and muzzleloaders should not be allowed on this property but archery equipment and shotguns are acceptable and safe;
- Limit waterfowl hunting by day and time, mirroring the NMDGF Wildlife Management Areas farther south such as La Joya and Bernardo. Allowing hunting only on select days and/or times (e.g., from one half-hour before sunrise to 1 p.m.) would limit annoyance to neighbors and allow time for others to have primary use of the area;
- Prohibit the construction of permanent blinds by waterfowl hunters.

With these commonsense efforts, we believe the State Trust Land in Albuquerque's South Valley can provide a number of sportsmen and women the opportunity to hunt close to home, protect the outdoor heritage cherished by generations of New Mexicans and maintain the neighborhood's safety and rural character.

Sincerely yours,

Joel Gay, Chairman, New Mexico Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Kevin Lockhart, Policy Coordinator, NM BHA
Katie DeLorenzo, Southwest Chapter Coordinator, BHA

