

# Albuquerque Chapter Newsletter

## Native Plant Society of New Mexico

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### From Your Copresidents: Leading the Way

A leader is someone who takes us somewhere we would not go on our own. Any organization can also be a leader if it introduces its members and its community to new ideas and attitudes, or in our case, if it broadens understanding about the importance of native plants to the continued health of our ecosystem, upon which all life depends.

But leadership is truly about taking action, and not merely talking about what needs to be done. How can our chapter of the state Native Plant Society (NPS) be a leader? We can *act* in ways that educate our neighbors and ourselves about how native plants support the ecosystem, while invasive plants harm it. Currently our chapter is involved in a project that is educating others *and* reducing the damage caused by an extremely invasive plant called tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). (See the sidebar on page 2 for more information.)

In 2007, a dedicated group of chapter members began the project by removing *Ailanthus* (tree-of-heaven) from one of the side drainages (created when developers of High Desert Community rerouted the main Bear Canyon drainage to the south). Bear Canyon drainage is a natural arroyo located in the northeast quadrant of Albuquerque at the base of the Sandia Mountains that is included in the Albuquerque Open Space. It is just south of the Elena Gallegos Picnic Area. Our efforts have resulted in alerting the High Desert Community—a large and growing residential development in the Sandia foothills—and their landscaping company about how *Ailanthus* is colonizing great sections of the natural Bear Canyon drainage on their property. Fortunately it is now on their radar screen. The Heads Up landscape company even joined NPS members in this last project (March 7, 2009).

Because of NPS's efforts, The High Desert Association is now targeting these plants and brainstorming ways to enlist residents of the community to take an active part in a clean-up program. An article about the plant and the problems it causes will appear in an upcoming High Desert



*Iris missouriensis* on Sandia Crest  
Photo: Bob Sivinski, June 2003

Association quarterly newsletter. The Association is also considering revising their contract with their landscape company to include the removal of invasives. No landscape company, however, can handle such an extensive project alone. It really is a community responsibility, and it will take constant vigilance to keep this invasive from overtaking the entire Bear Canyon Open Space which extends west of Tramway.

These seem propitious outcomes of our chapter's efforts on this project. Many more people in this section of Albuquerque now have a clearer vision of their responsibility and role in taking action to protect our native plants and our natural areas. I urge you to become part of this NPS leadership role by joining our project. For more information, please contact me at robertson45@comcast.net, or 505-828-4775.

Frances Robertson  
Copresident



## What is Tree-of-Heaven?

Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) was brought to this country in the 1870s by Chinese immigrants (imported as railroad workers) to remind them of home. Since the tree produces thousands upon thousands of seeds in samaras (winged fruited pods) that float in the breeze for miles. Since the plant also spreads readily through its shallow roots, its proliferation is difficult to halt.

Once established, it can quickly overrun native vegetation and form an impenetrable thicket. *Ailanthus* trees also produce toxins that prevent the establishment of other plant species. The root system is aggressive enough to cause damage to sewers and foundations. All parts of the tree have a strong, offensive odor. For all of these reasons, it has acquired the nickname “tree-of-hell.”

Tree-of-heaven is a common tree in disturbed urban areas, where it sprouts just about anywhere, including alleys, sidewalks, parking lots, and streets. The book, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, was based on the story of a girl who grew up knowing only one tree, the one outside her apartment—which ironically was a “Tree of Heaven.” Away from cities, it is commonly seen in fields, and along roadsides, fencerows, woodland edges, and forest openings. Nationally, *ailanthus* has become an agricultural pest and may occur as seedlings that pop up by the hundreds in recently planted fields, or as persistent thickets in rocky, untillable areas.

(Source: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/aial1.htm>)

## State NPSNM News

Below are highlights from the last NPSNM board meeting at Sevilleta on January 30 to February 1, 2009:

- The Board decided to increase annual membership dues slightly, and to create new membership categories. They are as follows: Individual (\$25), Family (\$30), Student/Senior/Limited Income (\$15), Friend (\$50), Sponsor (\$100), Patron (\$250), and Life Member (\$1,000).
- Jane Mygatt was appointed as our new state website editor, and Sarah Johnson is the new state newsletter editor.
- Members will soon be able to make donations, renew their membership, or join NPSNM on the state website. The Board is also designing membership cards, and plans on asking nurseries to offer discounts to our members. In addition, NPSNM members now can join the not-for-profit New Mexico Educators Credit Union, which offers free checking and online banking and competitive rates, and where members have a greater voice in governance because board members are volunteers.
- New membership brochures have been printed and are available at our monthly meetings and at the Albuquerque Garden Center.
- The Board approved \$5,000 in grants. Awards were given to the following individuals and groups: a NMSU graduate student to help her complete her dissertation; the Asombro Institute for hands-on science education in the Gadsden School District; the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance, which is working on travel planning in the Gila Forest to limit motorized vehicle use there; the Randall Davey Audubon Center for a native plant restoration project; Ken Heil (professor at San Juan Community College, Department of Science) and Dr. Steve O’Kane (professor at University of Northern Iowa, Department of Biology) for field work to update the existing *Flora of New Mexico* (Martin and Hutchins, 1980); their book, *Flora of the Four Corners*, will be available sometime this year, but it only covers the northwestern part of our state; and to Santa Domingo School, Bernalillo School District, to create a demonstration garden of native plants, xeriscape habitat, and plants that help to regulate diabetes.

Pam McBride  
Copresident



Top: A portion of Bear Canyon before chapter volunteers removed *Ailanthus* (tree-of-heaven).  
 Bottom: Same site following invasive plant removal. The site will now be able to revegetate without competition from this aggressive species.



### Environmental Forum June 3

The chapter's Board of Directors has chosen the Valles Caldera National Preserve as the topic for the Environmental Forum that will take place at our monthly meeting on June 3.

Many of our members have been disgruntled over the lack of public access to the preserve, which has been in existence for eight years now. The preserve has been trying to pay for itself through livestock grazing and elk hunting, but has recently acknowledged that it is not going to meet its requirement of being self-supporting by 2015.

At the forum we will learn more about the current situation with the preserve, and how the NPSNM–Albuquerque Chapter can become involved in promoting positive changes in how it is managed.

Jim McGrath  
 Vice-President

### EXPOsing the Native Plant Society

The signs of spring come early in these parts, and along with mild, breezy days and thoughts of gardening, the annual International Water Conservation and Xeriscape Expo has become a stimulating season opener. At least it was for the nearly 12,000 attendees who showed up over the February 28-March 1 weekend to learn more about ways of conserving water in their homes and gardens. The crowd was diverse and many people seemed “thirsty” for ways to integrate sensible landscaping with a love of nature.

Eight of our members helped to staff our Native Plant Society of NM (Albuquerque Chapter) exhibit, and maintained a friendly and informative presence. Also engaging the public were more than 250 vendors and nonprofits ranging from artificial turf developers, rain barrel suppliers, and native plant nurseries to Hawks Aloft! and the New Mexico Gourd Society.

Judging from the large number of materials we gave away and sold, it was the perfect place for us to become better known in the community. We hope more of you will join us next year. In the meantime, we'll be gathering ideas for enhancing the impact of our booth.

Tom Stewart  
 Secretary

Left: Gary Runyan and George Miller identifying four-winged salt bush in the Rio Grande Bosque.

## Landscaping Workshop May 15

The next state landscaping workshop, "Becoming Rain Keepers, Getting Ready for the Rainy (Or Not) Season," will take place in Albuquerque on May 15. Most of us have had a dry winter and know that we need to plan how to capture every drop of rain we may be fortunate enough to get this summer. This all-day workshop will include three outstanding speakers, box lunches, and visits to gardens that make use of special techniques for capturing rainwater.

Judith Phillips, one of the speakers, is well-known to many NPSNM members. She is the author of several books on landscaping in the Southwest with native and xeric plants, grows and sells such plants at her native plant farm in Veguita, and is a landscape designer. The second speaker, Jim Brooks, has been a soil conservation specialist for over 18 years, and is cofounder and president of Soilutions, Inc., an Albuquerque organics recycling company that specializes in the manufacture of organic composts. The company also has a landscape division for rainwater harvesting and erosion control. Richard Jennings, the third speaker, owns Earthwrights Designs, a Santa Fe company that specializes in the design of systems that make the most efficient use of water in homes, landscapes, and communities.

NPSNM members and nonmembers from all over the state are encouraged to attend the workshop. You can either use the registration form that came with the most recent state newsletter (Vol. XXXIV, No. 2, May-July 2009) or print out one from the state website at [http://npsnm.unm.edu/whats\\_new.html](http://npsnm.unm.edu/whats_new.html). Be sure to include a check for the workshop fee when you return your form.

Sandra Lynn  
State Administrator Coordinator



## Welcome to Our New Membership Secretary

We'd like to welcome and express our gratitude to Nancy Hudson for taking on the job of membership secretary for the Albuquerque Chapter. Nancy moved here about two years ago from northern Illinois and has been very active in our chapter.

Back in Illinois, she worked for the McHenry County Conservation District, and for many years before that she volunteered there doing native plant restoration. She was also the treasurer of the McHenry County Historical Society for five years, and served on their board for ten.

Now she is interested in learning the flora of New Mexico, and despite hungry rabbits, she manages to grow natives in her yard at Rio Rancho.

Please be sure to send any changes in your address, phone number, or e-mail to Nancy at [HUDSONIA1@Q.COM](mailto:HUDSONIA1@Q.COM).

Pam McBride  
Chapter Copresident



## Albuquerque Chapter Officers

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