

Introduction

The Gila region in southwestern New Mexico is an important area for biodiversity and cultural history and possesses unique natural resources that include the Gila River, New Mexico's last major undammed river. The *Gila region* is here broadly defined as the Gila National Forest in southwest New Mexico, as well as surrounding lands and mountains that include the Black, Burro, Mimbres, Mogollon, and Pinos Altos ranges, and all their drainages, including the Gila, San Francisco, and Mimbres rivers. Scientific and cultural research has been conducted in the Gila region over the years, but surprisingly little of it is readily accessible, being unpublished or buried in government agency offices. Recently, scientists in southwestern New Mexico have realized the great need to document, highlight, and share scientific and cultural insights about the region, as well as to identify areas for future research.

Late in 2005, the Gila Conservation and Education Center in Silver City, NM, formed a steering committee to investigate research possibilities in the Gila region and to consider putting together a symposium that focused on past and current research conducted in this region. On October 6–8, 2006, after two years of planning, the first Natural History of the Gila Symposium was held at Western New Mexico University in Silver City. Attended by about 150 people, was a tremendous success, as researchers from regional universities, federal and state agencies, and conservation organizations presented and discussed topics and issues pertaining to the Gila region. The social gathering at the historic Buckhorn Opera House in Pinos Altos will not soon be forgotten, and the field trips the following day highlighting the flora, fauna, restoration efforts, and environmental issues of the region were likewise memorable.

Publication of the symposium proceedings is possible thanks to Kelly Allred's gracious offer of *The New Mexico Botanist* pages. Editorial help and reviews were conducted by Kelly Allred, Paul Boucher, Jack Carter, Richard Felger, Jean-Marie Haney, Kelly Kindscher, William Norris, Dale Zimmerman, and several anonymous reviewers. In addition, Sarah Johnson, a professional editor in Gila, NM, was hired to copyedit the publication. We hope you enjoy the papers and abstracts presented in these proceedings, and look forward to your participation in the second Natural History of the Gila Symposium, scheduled for Oct. 16–18, 2008, again on the Western New Mexico University campus in Silver City.

— Kelly Kindscher and William Norris, editors of the proceedings, on behalf of all steering committee members: Jack Carter, Trish Hurley, Kelly Kindscher, Reese Lolley, Patrice Mutchnick, William Norris, Peter Russell, Martha Schumann, Donna Stevens, and Art Telles