Press Release:
Center for Wildlife Law at UNM School of Law
Institute of Public Law Closes its Doors

The Center for Wildlife Law, founded in 1990 with a vision of enhancing education, information, and analysis regarding wildlife law and policy, will close its doors on July 31, 2011 after 21 years at UNM School of Law’s Institute of Public Law. Ruth Musgrave, its director and founder (UNM SOL ’79), says that it remains the only national center devoted to wildlife law. “It is difficult to let the Center go at a time when wildlife law and policy is more important, and more in the public eye, than ever before. But we had a very good run and accomplished some great things.”

The Center is nationally known for its expertise in wildlife law. One of its longest running projects, the Wildlife Law News Quarterly, has been in publication since 1992, when attorneys for the various state fish and wildlife agencies requested a vehicle for staying up-to-date on wildlife developments. The “Wildlife Law News Weekly Alerts” were added as an online companion to the Quarterly in 2005. Wildlife Law News subscribers included state and federal fish and wildlife and natural resource agencies and their attorneys, law libraries and law firms, and nonprofit organizations. The last issues will go out this month.

CWL’s most successful project may be its award-winning youth program, “Wild Friends,” developed when the Center first opened. Wild Friends and its thousands of participating school students are responsible for the drafting, support and passage of 19 wildlife-related bills and memorials in the New Mexico Legislature. The Wild Friends have supported and testified on behalf of their legislation since 1992, and their record of success is the envy of many. The students’ efforts have received standing ovations from both the New Mexico House and Senate. Dignitaries such as U.S. Senator Tom Udall, NM Senate Majority Leader Tom Rutherford, State Land Commissioner Ray Powell and House Speaker Raymond Sanchez are honorary Wild Friends. “I fully expect that the next generation of leaders and lawmakers will include some former Wild Friends,” says Carolyn Byers, retired director of the program. The Wild Friends Program will live on under the Institute of Public Law’s new Regulatory Programs and Training Center, directed by Susan George.

The Center for Wildlife Law enjoyed a positive and productive relationship with stakeholders as diverse as state and provincial fish and wildlife agencies, local and national conservation groups, hunting and fishing groups, federal natural resource agencies, and natural resource litigators and policy makers. Over the years it received funding from equally diverse sources, such as the Federal Aid in Sportfish and Wildlife Grants Program, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, PNM Foundation, New Mexico Community Foundation, Humane Society of the United States, Defenders of Wildlife, Wilburforce Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and U.S. Geological Survey. Center staff were quoted in numerous media, such as Time Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, Chronicle of Higher Education, Field and Stream, the Albuquerque Journal and Tribune, and El Paso Times, and one of its books was featured by Jim Fowler on “Good Morning America.”

CWL attorneys Ruth Musgrave and Susan George taught courses in Wildlife Law as well as Biodiversity and the Law at the UNM Law School, and over the years many law students became interns, externs, volunteers and employees at CWL. The Center prided itself on providing opportunities for students with a passion for the field, and mentored several law students into careers in wildlife and natural resources law (it boasts one intern who now heads the Missouri Department of Natural Resources). CWL attorneys and staff served on boards of local, national and international wildlife and environmental organizations, as well as on water and resource advisory councils. Staff also spoke on wildlife issues before numerous organizations and professional associations. On their own time, they authored and co-authored book chapters, manuals, and articles, including editing a special issue of the Natural Resources Journal on wildlife issues.

Over two decades, the vision of the Center never wavered. Despite the controversial nature of many wildlife issues, CWL maintained a strong reputation for objective, thorough and high quality work. Despite its best efforts, however, since 9/11 and especially since the financial downturn, funding for the Center has dwindled, and the Center will finally shut down for good at the end of July. Dean Kevin Washburn is grateful for the work of Ruth Musgrave and grateful for the important service the Center has provided over the years. He is grateful to IPL staffers who have found a way for the Wild Friends program to continue.